

Shropshire Library Strategy 2022-2027

Consultation Report
September 2022



Background

Shropshire Library Service operates through a network of twenty-one static libraries, a prison library, three mobile libraries, and digital and development services, which together provide access to library services in every market town and most parts of a very rural and sparsely populated county.

Eight of Shropshire's libraries are run as community libraries where other local councils and partners contribute to running costs for their local library services. In some locations libraries are co-located with Parish or Town Councils, the police or other community organisations. In other locations there are very active Friends of Library groups and library volunteers.

Shropshire Library Service is operating in a changing environment. Socio-economic changes such as decreasing public sector resources, impacts of the Covid-19 pandemic, and more recently rising energy and operating costs means there is a need to review current provision and plan for the future.

The draft Library Strategy 2022-2027 describes the changes the Library Service will make to be at the forefront of the council's future relationship with its residents, and how the service will work in partnership with others to deliver the county's priorities. It provides the policy and local context, the service offer and the role libraries play in local communities.

The strategy also sets out a vision, priorities for the coming years and key milestones including the development of a new approach to performance management and action to develop an implementation plan to ensure strategy delivery.

To obtain feedback on the draft Library Strategy 2022 to 2027 a consultation was undertaken by Shropshire Council with the aim of gathering feedback from a wide range of stakeholders and members of the public.

A survey was designed to try and find out more about people's views on a modern library service designed to meet customer needs. Questions covered:

- what people value most and main priorities;
- consideration of how libraries need to plan and prepare for the next 5 years; and
- service themes including mobile services, technology and self service options, partnerships, access and cost effectiveness.

Members of the public and stakeholders were encouraged to comment on the draft Library Strategy using an online survey (paper versions were also available) or through other options (email and postal addresses were shared). In addition engagement was undertaken with key stakeholders including community libraries and staff members. Most people chose to use the survey as their main means of response but other feedback methods have been incorporated, where possible into the results detailed in this report.

The consultation ran for 12 weeks from the 12th May to 3rd August 2022. Information was posted on Shropshire Council's Get Involved consultation pages, via the Council's newsroom and the engagement opportunity was advertised very widely through local stakeholder newsletters such as the Shropshire Association of Local Councils (SALC) and Shropshire Voluntary and Community Sector Assembly (VCSA). Library staff members also worked hard to raise awareness of the opportunity to provide feedback and local libraries offered paper copies of the survey and support for those less confident with online response methods. Information was also shared widely through local networks and partnership meetings.

The next page provides an overview of the response to the survey and the report details all the feedback received under key themes. As work progresses engagement will continue with staff and community libraries, and also with others as the draft Strategy is completed and moves towards implementation. The final strategy will be considered and agreed by Shropshire Council's Cabinet and published on the Council's website.

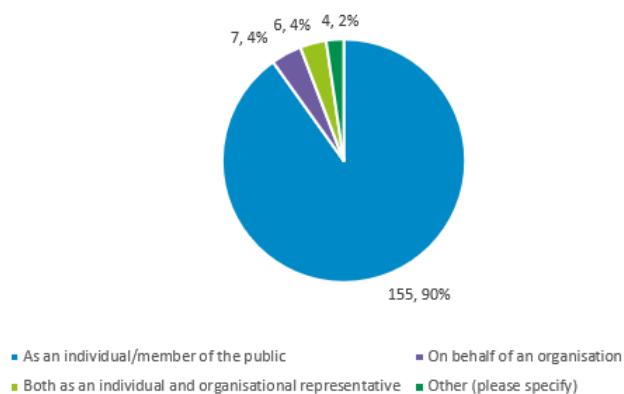
<https://www.shropshire.gov.uk/libraries/>

Community response

Between 12th May and 3rd August 176 people responded to the online survey. In addition, there were a small number of written responses to consider and some more detailed feedback from group sessions (e.g. workshop notes). Combined, the feedback has produced a valuable insight into the views of local people and stakeholders concerning library services and the Shropshire Library Strategy 2022 to 2027.

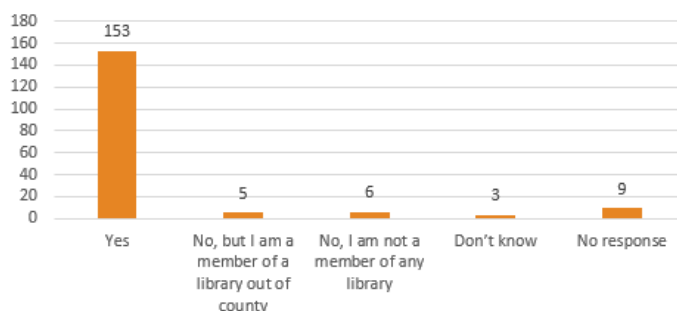
The chart below illustrates that most of the survey respondents are members of the public (90%) with the remainder responding on behalf of a group or local organisation or responding as both an individual and representative (some described their roles within other comments). Survey respondents representing local organisations included staff members, friends of library groups and town and parish councils. This input is extremely valuable and many comments demonstrated very well informed contributions.

Survey respondents by response type



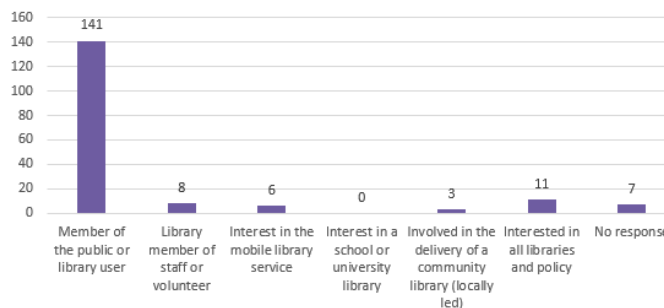
The survey respondents were asked if they were a member of Shropshire Libraries. 153 survey respondents selected 'yes' (87%). A good response from library users would be expected but it formed a higher proportion of the overall response than anticipated and needs to be considered as important contextual information. Library users have a strong interest in the Library Strategy and will be well connected to library communications but it is acknowledged that a wider range of public views may be helpful for future engagement, particularly any local, community based library engagement.

Survey respondents by membership



A survey question was also included to find out if survey respondents have other interests/roles in Shropshire Libraries.

Survey respondents interest/role in libraries



8 library volunteers, 6 people with an interest in mobile libraries and 3 involved in delivering community libraries responded; all supporting a wider range of experience and viewpoints.

Survey respondents were able to fill in an optional question set to determine characteristics (e.g. gender, age group, location and ethnicity). This data can help form an understanding of how representative feedback is of the wider community and whether additional engagement is required. Very few survey respondents chose to answer the optional question set. This makes it difficult to draw any meaningful findings from the results. The few who chose to respond live in locations across Shropshire and display different characteristics.

The needs of people with different characteristics are considered within Equalities, Social Inclusion and Health Impact Assessment (ESIHA). The survey included the question 'If you have any comments on diversity, equality or social impact that you'd like us to consider in the work on the Shropshire Library Strategy, please add them below.' The feedback is considered overleaf.

Understanding and assessing impact is an important part of any new strategy. When survey respondents were asked for any comments on diversity, equality or social inclusion impact, 38 people made comments. There were a few themes within those comments and they have been summarised in the table below. The most commonly mentioned issue (9 comments) was a concern that any reduction in face to face library contact, reduced opening times or a move towards digital services could lead to older people within communities becoming more socially and digitally excluded.

8 people commented on the need for services in rural areas and the need to support people on low incomes or people who are more likely to experience challenges in rural areas due to other characteristics such as language, lack of experience of the UK (refugees and others moving to the UK were mentioned). Comments highlighted the importance of social inclusion and the role libraries can play.

Three survey respondents commented on how important libraries are to children and families and referenced the particular importance for families on lower incomes.

There were a diverse range of comments under the other category although a few people highlighted their own health or auditory needs, emphasising the importance of these considerations within the design of buildings, spaces and services. A few comments complimented current library services and a few supported looking to the future and thinking differently about library services.

Theme	Count	%
Impact on elderly population (Lack of interaction, digitally excluded)	9	24
Considering the needs of rural and disadvantaged communities	8	21
Working across all cross sectors of the community	4	11
Working with families, children and young people	3	8
Location of Libraries	3	8
Other	11	29
Total	38	100

The example comments shown in the following box help provide a greater insight into views on social inclusion and diversity.

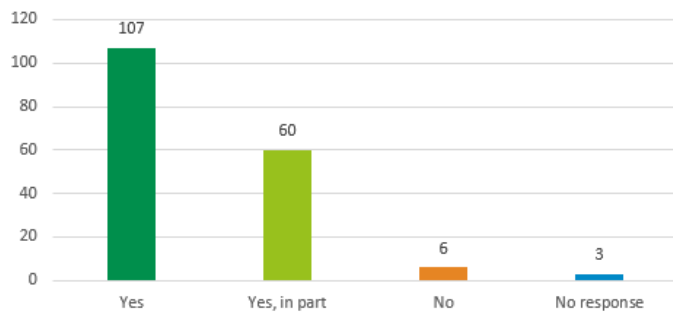
Example survey comments

- *“I believe that libraries are one of the very few places where people of all ages and backgrounds are welcome and able to mix together. This is very important and I believe Shropshire does well.”*
- *“In our library these are already addressed as much as they can on a limited budget. They are fantastic librarians and I have never seen such committed staff.”*
- *“Friends of Church Stretton Library is totally committed to being welcoming and inclusive to all people ... However, there are people living in poverty and others combating loneliness and isolation who the library could target and reach out to. Each community is different and needs appropriate targets.”*
- *“Libraries are open to all but they have to be near where people live and they have to be open regularly.”*
- *“For some library users, it's interaction with the staff that helps alleviate social isolation. Such users are often amongst the most disadvantaged. It's important not to lose that.”*
- *“Older people and/or those with additional needs are better served by humans rather than machines.”*
- *“The Strategy appears to meet the needs of equality, social inclusion and health impacts; but at the next stage it needs to understand the needs of local communities to ensure that certain groups i.e. older residents are not inadvertently disadvantaged.”*
- *“I think a lot of direction for help is directed towards those who do not work (mostly rightly so) but as stated above libraries are essential for my children to have access to books they would not otherwise have and free school holiday activities they would also not have (free activities are normally for non working parents or cost a lot - even £5 a child is too much for us). When I say we can not buy books and pay for out of school activities - we are a working family with a good average income but most of our income is on bills so we have a very tight budget, so please include working families when you talk about inclusion and equality.”*
- *“A real and sustained effort is needed to engage communities which, historically, are under-represented among library users: especially children in deprived areas.”*
- *“More proactivity in engaging with refugees and displaced people coming into our community, greater promotion of foreign language resources and closer collaboration with the Refugee Hubs which have been established in some of our towns.”*

Vision and Mission

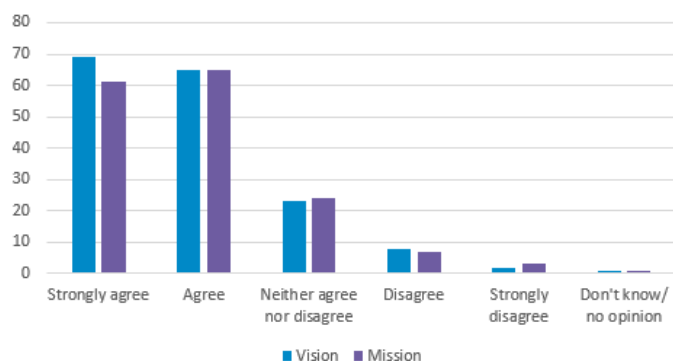
The public engagement designed to obtain views on the draft Shropshire Library Strategy 2022 to 2027 included a focus on whether the vision and mission set out within the draft reflect public opinion. To first check whether survey respondents had read the draft Strategy (and could therefore provide an informed view) they were asked if they had read the document in part or in full. The chart below shows the results.

Have you read the Draft Shropshire Library Strategy 2022-2027?



The response shows that most survey respondents (95% with the exception of 9 people) had read the draft strategy in part or in full. The following question asked for views on the vision and mission statement set out in the draft. The chart below shows the results.

What are your views on the draft vision and mission statement?



80% either agree or strongly agree with the draft vision (6% disagree or strongly disagree and the remainder had a neutral view or did not know). 78% either agree or strongly agree with the mission statement (6% disagree or strongly disagree and the remainder had a neutral view or did not know). The results suggest overall support.

Survey respondents were asked to add comments to explain their views on the vision and mission and 74 comments were added by the survey respondents. The table below displays some of the main themes included within the comments. Although most support the draft vision and mission there were some concerns.

22 people felt the aims were not achievable or lacked focus. Others were concerned about investment in libraries (and many called for more investment). Concerns about digitalisation and loss of staff were also a main theme. There appeared a general theme of fear within comments that Shropshire libraries would not have the financial support or investment needed to deliver services to the level people would like to see. The draft strategy itself did not reference specific service reductions/ cuts, but comments are likely to be influenced by the wider social and political landscape with some economic uncertainty following years of austerity and funding pressures experienced by local government.

Theme	Count	%
Concern - Unachievable aims/ lacks focus and realism	22	30
Concern- Reduction in staff and increased digitalisation	9	12
Concern - Potential closures of libraries/ reduced opening hours	2	3
Concern - Reduced accessibility (e.g. rural areas)	6	8
Need to invest in libraries for the communities they serve	15	20
General positive comments - agree with the proposal	3	4
General negative comments - disagree with the proposal	6	8
Other	11	15
Total	74	100

The next page explores the comments in more detail using examples and draws in comments from some of the other engagement feedback from the written responses and workshop discussions (key points and extracts are used to illustrate the feedback received).

The box below provides example comments from the 74 survey comments made concerning the draft strategy's vision and mission statement. There are some quite mixed views including some concerns that any reduction in library services could impact older people living in rural areas most significantly.

Example survey comments

- *"Does co-location really mean shutting branches?"*
- *"They are likely to be undermined by the financial crisis."*
- *"There's a discrepancy between your mission and vision, and your plans. Your plans suggest a narrowing of the service. Your plans for money saving, for example, lack the creativity to really improve matters for the libraries."*
- *"Please remember that the elderly population (high as stated in the strategy doc) need HUMAN interaction and not digital due to disability/loneliness/financial hardship etc."*
- *"Should this be 'all' people - I am resident but neither retired nor young and find that services are often geared towards these groups"*
- *"Reaching all parts of the rural community is a laudable aim; however many parts of the rural community have little or no access to public transport and, with advancing age, may be reluctant or unable to drive. The answer is of course better public transport to rural areas... Greater emphasis should perhaps be given to the role and provision of mobile libraries."*
- *"It is so much verbose corporate whitewash, time spent talking policy rather than really engaging on a daily basis, which is what counter staff do on a friendly, existing level now. Do not dilute the library service by trying to fulfil all needs across all areas and thereby actually satisfying fewer people."*
- *"Lord knows, we just need all library services to remain the same, a cyber attack would down all internet, we need the library as a constant service of accessible information. also for the communication it brings."*
- *"It is important that libraries adapt to changing times. Whilst they need to keep to original role in promoting reading they also need to become digital hubs to promote access to computers for those who cannot afford their own internet and social hubs for meetings and as sources of information...."*
- *"Please do not cut down on the issuing of books and encouraging people/children to borrow from the local library."*
- *"I think the libraries have huge potential and agree that they are essential to a modern, vibrant and thriving community."*

The feedback received through other engagement methods (including staff feedback) helps with understanding people's views on the vision and Shropshire Council's proposals for the future of library services. A summary is shown below with more extracts used later in the report.

Engagement responses - extracts

- *"A library is a safe place for adults and children to find health information including mental health, which in these difficult times is very important."*
- *"Libraries are key sites for adults and children to access books, DVDs and give access to online resources to those who do not have access at home. They offer talks and events and help with tutoring for the elderly."*
- *"The existing library service is extraordinary, incredibly diverse offerings from support groups, children's sessions, exam help, literacy support and good old-fashioned books! Ludlow Library is a very busy library. If you look on the notice board there are lots of meetings, events, helping people on laptops, advice from Shropshire Council staff."*
- *"The core role of libraries is clearly stated as a promoter of literacy, source of knowledge and key place for local events. A positive picture of what libraries do across communities is presented."*
- *"I broadly agree with the vision, mission and strategic priorities, especially collaborating with others (although we already do this with many different agencies). However, I am concerned that although it is important to encourage and empower people to use technology, it is equally important to recognise that many people are extremely reluctant to do so and feel marginalised when we try and 'force' a digital solution upon them and prefer to conduct their interactions/transactions with a person."*
- *"I completely agree with the vision for the future of libraries, I think it is essential that we become an integral part of the community and realise our full potential as 'more than just books'."*
- *"I like the vision and mission. The vision's relatively simple message is also powerful as we connect with people and help them to connect with others."*
- *"The vision is clear and the strategic priorities set out succinctly are focus for the future. The mission, in my opinion, is far too wordy."*
- *"They are vague and could be used to mean anything."*

There is strong support for the wider role libraries have in communities. Some comments reflected the survey comments with concerns that library services could be lost or reduced and more detail is covered in later sections of the report.

Strategy Content

The survey included a series of statements to try to test views on how satisfied people were with the draft document. The statements were:

- It is clear how the draft strategy fits into the wider policy context and links to national, regional and other local strategies.
- The draft strategy clearly sets out the library locations and library services currently delivered in Shropshire.
- The role library services play within our communities is robustly described.
- The opportunities for library services to more effectively meet local needs are set out within the draft document.
- As a strategy the draft reflects the needs of a range of library users (current and future) including members of the public, children and families, businesses etc.
- The strategic opportunities for increasing income and reducing subsidy are robust.

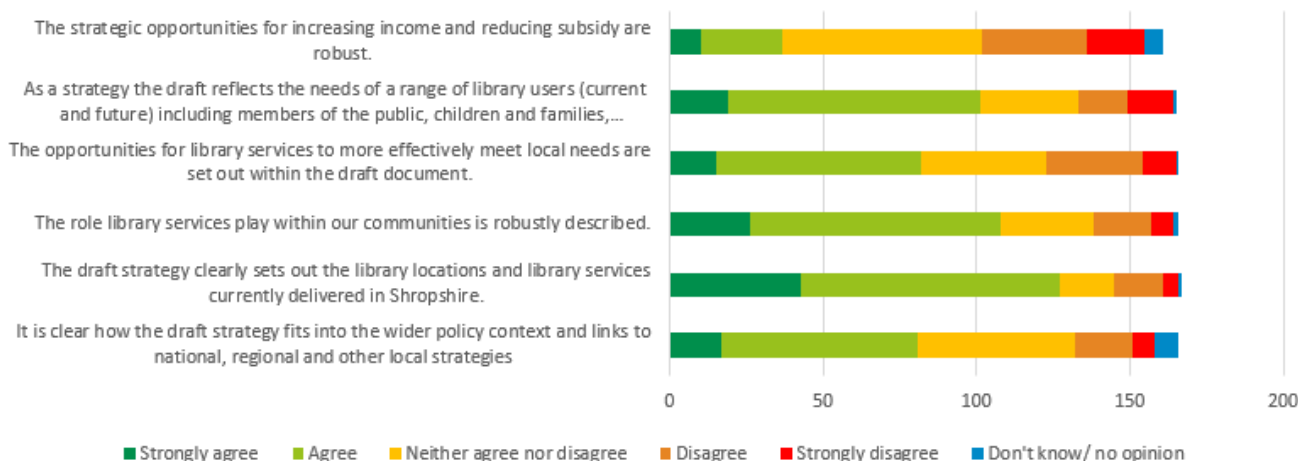
Survey respondents were asked to select whether they strongly agreed, agreed, neither agreed nor disagreed, disagreed or strongly disagreed (there was also a don't know option). The results show that people were satisfied/agreed that the library strategy clearly set out the library locations and services currently delivered, and that the role library services play within our communities is robustly described. There was a lower level of satisfaction with the way strategic opportunities for increasing income and reducing subsidy are set out.

53 people felt the strategic opportunities for increasing income and reducing subsidy could have been more robust. 42 people disagreed or strongly disagreed that the opportunities for library services to more effectively meet local needs are set out within the draft document. Although lower levels of disagreement (31 people) there were also some concerns that the draft does not reflect the needs of a range of library users (current and future) including members of the public, children and families, business etc. Content concerns related to financial sustainability, length and clarity or purpose featured within the engagement feedback and some examples are shown below.

Engagement responses - extracts

- *"I question what 'strategic priorities' are revealed when the library focus is to deliver a 'commercial' community service. I accept that libraries need to continue to be budget conscious, but a commercial operation is a very different one."*
- *"I think the breadth of the remit is unsustainable without more funding, better pay and more cross-service working."*
- *"...we need to ensure we have investment in our staff, equipment, resources and buildings."*
- *"Outlines the overall aims, but very wordy!..."*
- *"It is a very long document that I feel most people, customers and staff will fade through after about 20 pages. The ideas are mainly re-iterating points."*
- *"It is not very clear about what it is we are going to do. It also doesn't reflect the amazing work that our libraries are already doing."*

Views on the draft strategy content



There were 59 comments made to explain the reasons for views, and survey respondents were asked to explain if they had selected disagree or strongly disagree to any of the statements provided. The top theme to explain content concerns was that the draft strategy content does not include sufficient focus or achievable aims. Other comments highlight concerns over the way the draft strategy addresses funding opportunities, digitalisation and staffing levels.

Theme	Count	%
Concern - Lacks focus and clarity / unachievable aims	20	34
Concern- Reduction in staff and increased digitalisation	7	12
Concern - Ensure accessibility for all (e.g. rurality)	4	7
Concern – funding opportunities seem unrealistic	11	19
Need to invest in libraries for the communities they serve	4	7
General positive comments - agree with the proposal	2	3
General negative comments - disagree with the proposal	7	12
Other	4	7
Total	59	100

The comments include both concern that the strategy can be achieved and concerns for the future of individual libraries and mobile services. Comments include how important mobile library services are in rural areas.

The comments suggest a public expectation that libraries will face financial challenges. There is a recognition that the financial context Shropshire Council is working within is challenging and some comments touch on the lack of national investment in public services and libraries. Despite these concerns the comments show strong support for libraries and their importance within communities.

The comments suggesting disagreement with the strategy content are not really comments of direct disagreement with the whole strategy. They focus more on the importance of core and traditional library functions/services (e.g. books and children learning to read). The comments suggest reconsidering the wider remit of the strategy/ breadth and providing more focused attention on the sustainability of libraries within community locations (accessible to people living in rural areas and those who may be facing social isolation, disadvantage or digital exclusion).

Example survey comments are included in the box below to illustrate the main themes.

Example survey comments

- *“Much of this document is drafted in woolly and indistinct language and is short on detail as to how these services will be provided, where the finance will come from.”*
- *“The opportunities for increasing income seem to be based on hope and wishful thinking. Libraries need support from the public purse - that is why we pay taxes.”*
- *“Libraries should be a priority for government funding. They should be expanding, not declining. They should be properly funded as a marker of a civilised society.”*
- *“In the document you state: ‘To enable this, we will strive for investment in health and wellbeing resources, fit for purpose environments and trained professional staff’. However, the existing government has not mobilised a strategy to support community care and support services, consequently I am at a loss to understand how Shropshire Council will achieve this investment. I am concerned that the document reads well but faces huge challenges in achieving its aims.”*
- *“The draft does not set out specifically how it will raise income and reduce subsidies, just potential aspirations.”*
- *“I hope this will not lead to a closure of Harlescott Library. This serves an area of deprivation in Shrewsbury and is already co-located. People without cars can more easily access it than travelling to Shrewsbury town centre library.”*
- *“No mention of community libraries such as the Lantern and Bayston Hill.”*
- *“There is too much waffle and not enough actual statements on what the strategy means for my local library going forward (Pontesbury). I noticed recently that reservations have increased from 75p to £1.00 per book. We have a small community library - most, if not all, of my books are reservations - to increase the reservation fee merely taxes those who live outside of the urban areas which have the larger libraries.”*
- *“Mobile libraries are vital in rural communities”*
- *“The interconnections between various agencies are not clearly explained.”*
- *“Library services in Shropshire are fantastic. Your staff work really hard and are so efficient. Please, please protect the service.”*

Survey respondents were also asked for feedback on the strategic priorities and this is covered within the next section of the report.

Strategic priorities

The survey asked respondents to comment on the 6 priorities set out in the draft strategy:

1. Improved opportunities for reading, literacy, culture and creativity
2. Improved health and wellbeing of communities
3. Promote economic recovery and growth
4. Communities that are resilient and inclusive
5. Library services that are more innovative and sustainable
6. People are enabled to discover the digital world.

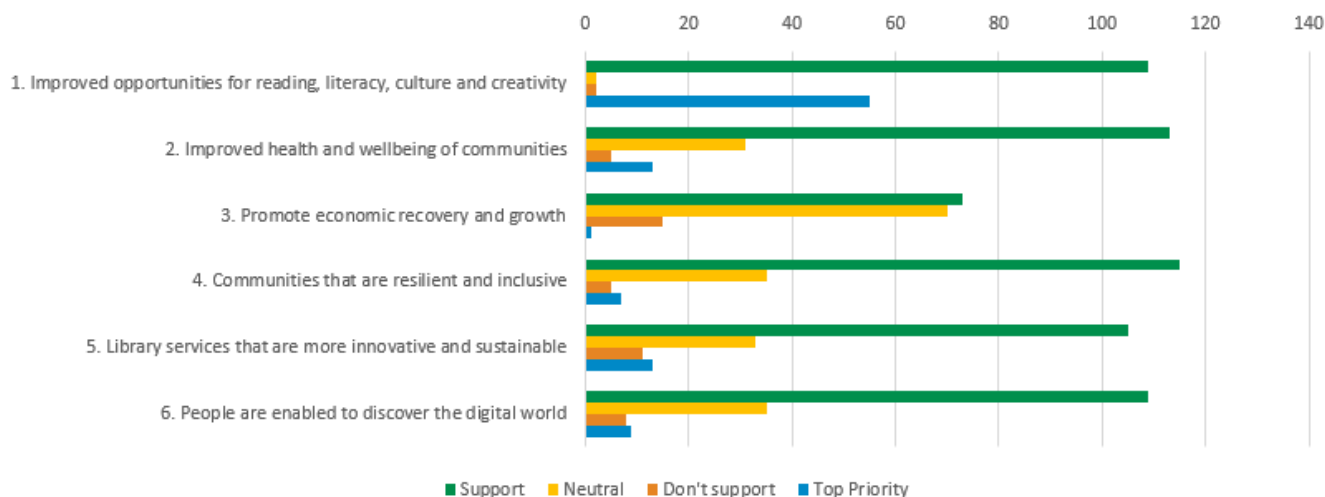
For each priority survey respondents were asked if they support, had a neutral view or don't support the priority. The results are shown in the chart below. The strongest level of support was shown for priority 4 (inclusive and resilient communities) followed by priority 2 (community health and wellbeing). Overall there were very high levels of support with no fewer than 73 survey respondents supporting each priority. The average level of support was 62% of survey respondents.

There were very small numbers of survey respondents who don't support the priorities but 15 people expressed that they do not support priority 3 to promote economic recovery and growth. A high number of people (70) felt neutral about this priority. 11 people do not support library services being more innovative and sustainable. The views and reasons for not supporting priorities were explored more in the comments obtained.

In addition to support or lack of support, survey respondents were asked to clarify which priority they consider the most important. The priority most frequently chosen (by 55 survey respondents) was priority 1 'Improved opportunities for reading, literacy, culture and creativity.' The joint second top choices with 13 people each were priorities 2 and 5. The survey asked people to explain their selections and 62 comments were provided. There were some common themes within the comments and these are shown in the table below. The comments featured similar themes to those gathered when people were asked about the vision and mission. Concerns about digitalisation and self-service were most commonly mentioned. Comments are explored more on the next page.

Theme	Count	%
Concern - Need to focus on core library services	9	15
Concern- Reduction in staff and increased digitalisation	12	19
Concern – Reduction in library sites and opening hours	6	10
Need more detail / do not understand the priorities	7	11
Libraries are a community asset that must be supported and promoted	8	13
General positive comments - agree with the priorities	9	15
General negative comments - disagree with the priorities	8	13
Other	3	5
Total	62	100

Views on the priorities



The comments suggest that the priorities may be difficult to achieve in the context of limited public resources/ local government funding. There are concerns that too many priorities, across a broad spectrum of issues could be unachievable and that more focus may be required. Some example comments are provided in the box below to better illustrate the feedback received.

Example survey comments

- *“Libraries are not political entities so how can they support “economic recovery and growth”? Too ambitious.”*
- *“I think there are too many aims some of which in my opinion are not the role of libraries. I understand the need for an integrated approach, value for money etc. but (no. 2) are library staff to become social workers? Surely the promotion of recovery and economic growth (3) is a job for government at all levels. Libraries need to be sustainable; innovation may help that or - done badly - may hinder it.”*
- *“If innovation means less contact time with staff, in terms of use of self service kiosks, I do not support that.”*
- *“A library is useless without books and if not open regularly and if not reachable on foot easily.”*
- *“It is important that a more traditional library offer is maintained (both in person and digitally) alongside adaptations to better meet the broader needs of people in modern life.”*
- *“Don’t push everything online. Not everyone can access online services due to cost, ability, rurality, age and disability. A physical presence is vital.”*
- *“If you make libraries centre of communities people will come. Having just moved to the area, nothing I’ve seen invites me to the libraries, unlike other community groups.”*
- *“For the library to be inviting to a wider range of the local community (men, teenagers, foreign residents for examples), staff members who are skilled and available need to be available. I fear that an outcome of the strategy will be to reduce the face-to-face contact with professional library staff.”*
- *“Church Stretton library already achieves your 6 priorities. If it isn’t broken don’t fix it.”*
- *“Digital access is increasingly important.”*
- *“I want books to read, books to inform, books to entertain, to make me laugh, cry, teach me about life, people, make me feel less isolated, especially when we have our freedoms curtailed. The Library and staff here have done this so well since we moved here in January.”*

Library staff members were asked if they supported the vision, mission and strategic priorities set out in the draft strategy. 68% agree and 13% disagree (others did not comment). Although most were keen to do what they could to support local communities, and could see some opportunities for expanding their offer to best respond to the needs of library users, many were very concerned that they were already finding it difficult to resource libraries effectively within existing budgets. Some commented that they already feel over worked and would struggle to take on additional responsibilities.

Others expressed concerns that the wide range of priorities would be difficult to achieve without input from experts or significant staff training. The concerns were expressed in a very practical way and many asked for more detail of what would be expected and for more clarity of plans/proposals.

Examples are included below and more comments are included in later sections of this report.

Engagement responses - extracts

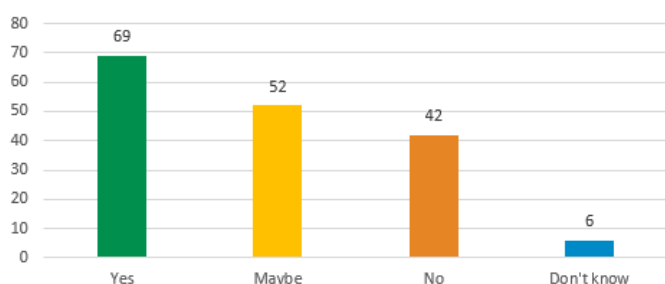
- *“The priorities seem to have a very positive focus on local communities and how libraries can continue to help.”*
- *“On the whole I agree with the above. I think working with external services is essential for the future of libraries. My only concern is that this doesn’t dilute essence of what libraries are all about and that as a service we don’t end up wearing too many different hats.”*
- *“I agree with them, I think they are suitable and fitting for what the public needs from libraries going forward but I think the breadth of the remit is unsustainable without more funding...”*
- *“Libraries are a safe place for people to come and with the coming hardships, a place to keep warm when they can’t afford their heating bills, or are worried about paying their electric bills.”*
- *“... there is an urgent need for more experienced and adequately trained staff throughout the county in order for us to be able to achieve anywhere near the range and level of strategic priorities outlined in the draft strategy.”*

New technology and digital services was a theme included within the draft strategy and picked out as a theme to explore within the survey responses. This was considered an important issue for members of the public and staff and a range of views were represented. These are summarised in on the next page.

New technology

The draft Shropshire Library Strategy 2022 to 2027 includes opportunities to extend new technologies within libraries, including self-service facilities. To explore this issue further the survey asked: 'Would you make use of self-service facilities if they were provided in your local library?' The chart below shows the response. 39% agree that they would use self-service facilities, 30% answered 'maybe' and 24% said 'no' (the remainder didn't know or did not respond). Overall this suggests a level of uncertainty but more support than those who would be reluctant to use the new technology. Recognising that comments can provide greater insight into people's views and concerns, an open comment box was also included.

Would you make use of self-service facilities if they were provided in your local library?



84 of the 176 survey respondents provided a written comment on new technologies, suggesting that it is a topic that was of interest to people. The comments show that more people have concerns about new technologies and self-service options than those who are excited by the opportunities. 64 of the 84 comments included elements of concern. The table below summarises the main themes.

Theme	Count	%
Concern – Reduces the interaction with library staff/ people	38	45
Concern – Some users may be unable to use/put off by new technologies	10	12
Concern – Need the experience and expertise of librarians	7	8
Concern – Need to consider poor Wi-Fi and improve current facilities	7	8
Positive – Could increase flexibility / opening hours of libraries	9	11
General positive comments	5	6
General negative comments	2	2
Other	6	7
Total	84	100

The example comments below, from the survey and other engagement feedback help to highlight people's views but the top concerns are loss of personal interaction and exclusion of people without digital skills.

Example survey comments

- *“Notwithstanding the enormous benefits associated with social interaction with friendly and knowledgeable staff - a purely self-service environment just compounds the feelings of isolation already felt by many.”*
- *“Technology cannot replace the importance of human interaction especially when loneliness has been raised as a huge issue affecting the health of our nation.”*
- *“Self-service feeds in to the isolation agenda. It is an easy and lazy cop out to reduce staffing. Digital inclusion classes for the elderly and coding for kids lessons.”*
- *“Self serve cannot recommend a book, or start a conversation with a lonely, or lost person.”*
- *“I don't use self service machines in shops. I have lived in an area where self service machines were introduced into libraries. There was an instant breakdown in communication with the public, a lack of knowledge of individual customer needs and the loss of friendly community interaction.”*
- *“I would use the facilities but human contact is vital too.”*
- *“May not be ideal for some of the main users of the library at present.”*
- *“... The librarians make the library what it is and in our community, the librarians are very helpful and well liked. They always make the effort to pass the time of day and I think it is very important for this to continue, especially for the elderly and/or lonely who might not see or speak to anyone else on any particular day.... The computers in our library are very old and the software outdated. Covid has shown us that those children without access to digital technology at home are at a disadvantage. Libraries could have a big influence on the future of such children if up to date computers/Wi-Fi were available for them to use in their library.”*
- *“Also need to consider poor Wi-Fi coverage in parts of North Shropshire.”*
- *“The existing technology e.g. self service machines often do not work.”*
- *“I am a technophobe.”*

Engagement responses - extracts

Library staff comments

- *"I can support it if technology will not be used at the expense of the library staff."*
- *"I feel that a self-service machine would not free up my role, as within the rural setting customers' needs are staff communication and staff engagement and time."*
- *"We also need to invest in technology so we are relevant to our users and local community so they will come to us for printing - we need wi-fi printing, laminating and colour photocopying in all branches so it is a consistent offer across the county. 3-D printing would be a bonus too."*
- *"Self-checkouts: there will be a large number of our customers that will not enjoy using a self-service machine over speaking to a human being - not only is a chance for social interaction and the opportunity to boost someone's mood but it's also an opportunity to discuss what else we can do for them as a service further. Often the over counter conversations we have with people when we're issuing books is the time when we are promoting our events, our IT lessons or the digital services available to name but a few. To rely on self-service would reduce this transfer of information and impede the use of other services."*

Other stakeholder feedback

- *"No one is keen to go down this route. The Strategy Review talks about staff being the most valued element of the library service.... This would be a retrograde step and, as each machine costs some thousands of pounds, not a good use of public money at the present time."*
- *"Develop other ways of providing digital support, not just for older customers who have trouble using their laptops or phones. Re-jig the 'café area' at Pontesbury Pavilion and possibly use it as an internet café to attract younger, professional people, and promote an informal homework club."*
- *"Fund a wi-fi printer. Often members of the community have phones, i-pads, laptops etc but no printer. There is a particular need at the moment to print off travel documents e.g. boarding passes, COVID certificates, receipts and invoices."*
- *"The use of digital media is not the same as one-to-one contact with staff who help people with not just changing books, but also all other facilities. For Ludlow library to become more 'online' would be a great loss."*
- *"Library users may not be confident to use, or have access to internet/digital media, and the library is a place to enable access and, provide or signpost, assistance."*

The feedback from members of the public, library stakeholders and library staff is very well aligned with similar concerns about the risk of digitalisation meaning the loss of personal interaction and support. However, the concerns are more directed towards self-service options than other opportunities for new technology.

The comments don't generally oppose new technology, they just identify the risks of new technology potentially increasing the risk of people becoming digitally excluded and reducing social interactions. There are concerns that an assumption could be made that machines can replace staff. If risks can be managed and mitigated then it is possible that the opportunities of new technology can be realised.

Some of the comments highlight the opportunities that social contact within libraries can offer. There are comments that when people are borrowing a book from a library there is an opportunity to promote other services and support on offer and signpost people to support.

Some of the comments start to touch on ideas for technology in libraries. A few comments highlight a demand for printing and copying services within libraries. Other comments highlight opportunities to offer digital skills training/ support and some suggest that libraries could form an important location for children and their families or older people who cannot afford to purchase digital technology and equipment themselves (maybe just owning a mobile phone) but could make use of an offer within libraries where laptops or other devices could be used for some tasks (internet café type services).



Partnerships

Partnerships features as a theme within the draft Shropshire Library Strategy and this was reflected within the survey questions. The Local Government Association (LGA) has said libraries should be “Increasing impact, by working in partnership with other agencies in the public, private and voluntary sectors”. There are already examples within Shropshire of libraries with shared spaces and partnership approaches to delivering support to communities from library buildings but the survey sought to find out more about other activities or partnership services that could be offered within local libraries. The question received a big response with 105 comments. The table below summarises the themes from the comments.

Theme	Count	%
Focus on the core business of the library rather than partnership working	8	8
Activities for children and young people	10	10
Citizen’s Advice, benefits support and public sector services etc.	18	17
Advice and support for healthier lifestyle/ social prescribing, health checks	5	5
Climate change/ sustainability support	2	2
Lifelong learning and education	15	14
Social activities and clubs	15	14
Libraries already support the local community in this way	12	11
Increased opening hours	10	10
Other	10	10
Total	105	100

The top suggestion for partnership services and activities was Citizen’s Advice services, benefits advice and public sector services. Lifelong learning and education, and social activities and clubs were the next most commonly mentioned themes. Arts and cultural opportunities were also suggested.

The comments highlight that most people recognise the role libraries can play within communities beyond core services and how they could host support services offered by partner organisations. However a small number (8 comments) would like libraries to focus on the core service rather than a wider offer. Some suggest that extending library opening times would be important action and others highlight the partnership services and activities already in place.

Example comments from the survey feedback on partnership services and activities are included below with more on the following page covering staff and stakeholder feedback.

Example survey comments

- *“I like it as a place to borrow books.”*
- *“There are a wide range already offered at our local library with a good Friends Group arranging functions and activities and a very keen librarian.”*
- *“More writers evenings with readings. Poetry events.”*
- *“More use of the space in the evenings, e.g. with local interest groups being able to meet.”*
- *“Better computers and better opening hours.”*
- *“Regular BSL sessions/workshops/videos. Regular LGBTQ support group. Visible, clear advice on how we as individuals can help to tackle the climate crisis using up to date, science-informed data.”*
- *“Advice on carbon reduction initiatives for residents.”*
- *“As there are no longer children’s centres, perhaps a way to introduce something for younger children to access...toys etc.”*
- *“Mental health support and other health and wellbeing services to take pressure away from the GPs and ambulance services.”*
- *“One-stop shop role for public and other local authority services.”*
- *“Our library staff are already very proactive and arrange talks and activities in the library for various age groups. I would like to see experts visiting our library to give one to one advice to individuals as well as to give talks on topics such as how to claim benefits, how to access social housing, advice on retirement and pensions, how to access adult social care, family budgeting in these difficult times, etc.”*
- *“IT literacy support for those who require it to access services e.g. Universal Credit.”*
- *“With the huge rise in cost of living more people are going to be struggling to manage their finances and heat their homes. Those who are not computer literate will struggle to access benefits. I would like to see advisors coming at least once a month to Church Stretton, to give advice to people struggling with these issues.”*

Engagement responses - extracts

Library staff comments

- *“Love the idea of freeing up staff time to work on partner projects and events.”*
- *“I like the focus on working with external community partners..”*
- *“I like the concept of ‘community cohesion’ and getting other services involved with the library service.”*
- *“Expanding outreach and working with local partners is always going to be a good idea. It is imperative we are a part of our communities and known locally as a multi-layered supportive service and only by engaging with them and combining our skills will we achieve this. Some locations in particular need us to be so much more than a library, A community living room is such a well used phrase but is actually a powerful concept.*
- *“Partners are going to be extremely important in some areas - for example, we simply do not have the knowledge to be providing health and wellbeing but many do. Libraries should be hosting drop in clinics for COVID vaccinations or for routine screenings of diseases, hosting events that encourage the spread of important and reliable information whilst also promoting our health books and helping people with navigating the NHS app, make GP appointments and navigate digital health information...”*
- *“...digital volunteers are a great asset to the library services. Building on this and expanding our offering of courses and assistance will be crucial - especially in a county with such an elderly population that struggles with new technology more than others...”*
- *“Moveable shelves will facilitate creation of new performance and community areas for a wide range of stuff.”*
- *“...we are always striving to improve people's health and wellbeing, providing safe spaces and contact with other people. We are already big supporters of recycling and borrowing books is one of the oldest. We are inclusive and diverse, and offer help to those who need it and signpost if we can't help, we run events and activities for children and adults alike, providing a warm and welcoming space to come and enjoy, without the fear of spending money or being made to feel uncomfortable, it is a place for all.”*

Overall, comments from library staff suggest a strong desire to extend partnerships and to work within the community to provide support through an extended service and activity offer.

Other stakeholder feedback

- *“Targeting groups who could benefit most is a real challenge. It may be that having a film club or homework club might encourage secondary students to use the library, or similarly, young families with Storytime/reading sessions and author visits. These are ‘soft’ suggestions and FOPL is already trying with a programme of school visits. Direct liaison with CAMHs and Children’s Services might be possible in the future.”*
- *“There’s a need to review opening times to attract those who currently can’t access the library except in the evenings or at weekends. The general feeling was that staff hours would need to be increased and, if this wasn’t possible within budget constraints, could hours be shifted to provide library access from 6pm, say once a week?”*
- *“The existing library service is extraordinary, incredibly diverse offerings from support groups, children’s sessions, exam help, literacy support and good old-fashioned books!”*
- *“Ludlow Library is a very busy library. If you look on the full notice board there are lots of meetings, events, helping people on laptops, advice from Shropshire council staff. The archives for the museum are all under the same roof as the library.”*

Stakeholder feedback also supports the draft strategy aim of partnerships between libraries and other public, private and voluntary sector partnerships. Private sector partnerships were briefly mentioned in some of the feedback collected (e.g. business support information could be provided through libraries and there could be opportunities for small businesses to sell to the community using libraries as a venue). However, the main focus within comments was on public and voluntary sector support and some highlighted the importance of free support (recognising the economic challenges people are facing).

Pontesbury Library is an example of a community library in Shropshire and this featured within the information gathered through the engagement. The library is based in a community building with a strong volunteer group. There is a focus on sustainability and net zero. There are strong partnership links with public sector services (e.g. health and education) and a focus on drawing in external funding by making connections to local and national programmes.

Partnership working was also a theme touched on when people were asked what they like best about the draft strategy.

Mobile library services

The feedback gathered through the engagement on the draft library strategy included many comments on the rural nature of Shropshire and concerns for people unable to travel to access services. Rural social isolation was a strong theme throughout. Linked to this issue a question was included in the survey (but not picked up as a topic for conversation in the stakeholder and staff engagement exercises) on mobile library services. There were 95 comments in response to the question ‘The strategy sets out the rural nature of the county and access issues, core to the mobile library service model. Do you have any comments to make on mobile services?’ The table below summarises the main themes from the 95

Theme	Count	%
Mobile services are invaluable and need to continue	27	28
Provides accessibility for elderly and rural communities	31	33
Need to advertise the service more widely	11	12
Need to have a sufficient amount and regular time at each location	8	8
Expensive and impractical to run	5	5
Variety of books needs to be improved	2	2
Don't use the service	5	5
Other	6	6
Total	95	100

A large proportion of the comments (approximately 61%) highlighted how essential mobile library services are in rural communities and for elderly people in particular.

The remaining comments were more mixed. Some commented that they don't use the service or it is expensive to run. Others suggested ways that the service could be improved with more time at each location and a greater investment in marketing. Like the previous question on community partnerships, there may be opportunities for the mobile library service in the same way, extending its already valuable service within rural communities. The example comments are helpful in illustrating the points made and how people feel about mobile library services in Shropshire (see the following blue box).

Example survey comments

- *“Expand, don't reduce them.”*
- *“Essential as public transport is non existent and older people cannot often drive anymore or afford fuel e.g. my mum who is 88 and loves to read but needs large print.”*
- *“I think the mobile services are crucial is this rural area especially given the amount of elderly residents.”*
- *“A mobile service is a very valuable facility, reaching right into the community and acquiring intimate knowledge of individual needs to compensate for lack of materials available on each visit to a venue.”*
- *“In a rural community with a high proportion of elderly residents and children, the continuing presence of a mobile library service is an essential part of our community. Many less mobile residents rely on its continued presence for their general well being.”*
- *“Essential to many small communities and also isolated areas. With public transport in Shropshire as dire as it is, and with an ageing population sometimes unable to drive, the mobile service may be a lifeline to many, and perhaps needs to be publicised more as well as enhancing and extending its services.”*
- *“Consider locations and van set up to help people with poor mobility make use of mobile libraries.”*
- *“Mobile services are very useful in remote areas, but they are generally only available for a very limited time (typically 3 hours a week) which make them not accessible for many people.”*
- *“In a rural county like Shropshire you should be increasing these set and not reducing them. Spend the money you use on buying self service machines and get the mobiles back in the communities where they are needed.”*
- *“Mobile services are great, I remember the library lorry coming to my school (Brewood, so quite rural) and it was brilliant! It gives the opportunity for those in rural areas to have the access that we do in towns.”*
- *“Not sure if my local one runs still, they need to be advertised more.”*

The comments highlight how much mobile library services are valued by the survey respondents and members of the public.

Library user feedback

The public engagement survey sought to understand how library services make a difference to individuals. A question was included which read 'How does your local library/ or the library services you use, make a difference to you?' This question received the highest number of comments of all the open questions asked within the survey. 126 of the 176 survey respondents took the time to add a comment. The answers to this question will be important for informing the draft strategy but they will also be important to library staff members and volunteers who work to provide library services and support to people within their communities. The table below summarises the themes from the comments.

Theme	Count	%
It does not make a difference	9	7
Community hub/ provides services in the local area	18	14
Social interaction / wellbeing	8	6
Borrow and read books, research, information, etc	42	33
Activities for families / children	22	17
Free activity/ makes reading and learning affordable	10	8
Safe and friendly place	10	8
Other	7	6
Totals	126	100

9 people said that their local library didn't make a difference to them, but the remaining 117 provided their views of how the library service makes a difference in their lives. The most commonly mentioned theme (33%) was the core library services: the ability to borrow and read books, undertake research, access information etc. The second top theme (17%) was the provision for families and children and the third most commonly mentioned benefit was the role the library plays as a community hub (14%).

The example comments are helpful in really explaining the difference people feel libraries make to them and their family. For this more personal question the comments are a better way of interpreting the feedback and how people view their local library services.

Example survey comments

- *"I use the schools library service and appreciate the expertise of those working there."*
- *"It provides good activities for children."*
- *"Computer facilities for family history research with volunteers. Meeting place for educational/cultural and local groups."*
- *"It is an important knowledge and information centre for me."*
- *"Access to a wide range of books that I could not otherwise afford to read. Benefits to mental health and work/life balance."*
- *"A book hub. Information to local services. A safe place to stay. Communication."*
- *"Not only the availability of books but a social interaction with other users."*
- *"I'm a member of my local library book club. A member for over ten years it has widened my reading considerably."*
- *"It is an invaluable service of knowledge and of leisure opportunity. The whole ethos of the library is friendly, welcoming, combating isolation. The chance to swap knowledge of literature with staff, being greeted so warmly, is so much better than in a huge impersonal venue. there are special events, exercise opportunities, exhibitions... And mainly it supplies a vast range of books to me."*
- *"I visit regularly to take out and return books. I meet and talk to other people when I am there. I can use the photocopier/printer if I wish. There are talks and events arranged regularly and various groups I can join e.g. knit and natter, local history, creative writing, poetry, yoga, etc. There are author visits and I can use a library computer."*
- *"Every day I feel the effects of the library in my life. I go to writers lab, books aloud, borrow books most weeks, enter the competitions and talk about the library to friends and family. I've been attending a local library since I was a toddler. It's crucial to keep our libraries going and I don't understand people who have to own everything and buy from despicable places like Amazon. I love the library because it's nurtured my reading habits, taught me more than I can measure and connected me to people when I've felt lost. They have a tiny carbon footprint, and these days, that's more important than ever. Their systems are based on trust, which is noble. They shouldn't have to be 'sustainable'. They earn their value just by being in existence."*

Positive feedback

Survey respondents and other stakeholders were asked what they like about the draft Shropshire Library Strategy 2022 to 2027. This builds on the previous feedback asking about priorities and gives a clear indication of the strengths of the draft and the elements that people are most supportive of. There were 56 comments within the survey and more feedback from the engagement meetings, workshops and stakeholder responses.

The table below shows that there a small proportion of people do not like the draft strategy and didn't have anything they like about it (15 of the 56 comments responding to the question). The remaining 41 comments suggested positives and the top theme was the emphasis on the needs of communities/rural communities. This was followed by a commitment to working with libraries to deliver the strategy and the emphasis on partnership working to support health and wellbeing within the community. 5 people described the strategy as aspirational.

Theme	Count	%
No / Nothing / Don't like the strategy	15	27
Aspirational	5	9
Considers the needs of the communities it serves (e.g. rural communities)	9	16
Commitment to continue with existing libraries	7	13
Introduction of new technologies	2	4
Partnership working - supporting health and wellbeing	6	11
Other	12	21
Total	56	100

Example survey comments

- *"It's not about closing libraries - which appears to be the common strategy, so thank you."*
- *"The description of the make up of the geography and population of the county, clarifying broad needs. And if over 60s love their library and are the greatest users, is that not an invaluable service to people who need nearby contact and pastimes and information?"*
- *"You are aware of the needs of the community."*
- *"I firmly support the need to improve peoples' physical and mental health, that is, if they want to do so. I also like the idea of improving literacy and research skills across all ages."*

- *"Commitment to retaining physical libraries in smaller towns is great."*
- *"Commitment to retain libraries in market towns and enhance them to better support the community."*
- *"I like the links to health and wellbeing, to literacy for all, including those with learning disabilities, and on the importance of the environment."*

The comments suggest that many members of the public expected to see proposed cuts to local library services within the draft strategy. Although not referenced within stakeholder comments the staff member feedback also highlighted what employees like best about the draft.

Staff feedback

- *"I feel that it is very positive and inspiring."*
- *"It was good to hear from the initial draft Library Strategy consultation (Oct/Nov 2019), that 80% of the survey responses rated Shropshire Libraries as either 'Good' or 'Very good', and that most customers viewed the library staff as the most important aspect of the service."*
- *"I like the emphasis on collaboration with other agencies and organisations as it encourages people into libraries who may not realise the variety of things Libraries have to offer."*
- *"The list of what libraries deliver as vital parts of a community service is clear. The fact that Shropshire Libraries delivers so much when your research shows that our current level of expenditure is lower than national average should be praised. It is also noted what a vital role the library service played in helping the community during Covid lockdowns, including staff volunteering and being re-deployed..."*
- *"I like the fact we are targeting groups that do not traditionally engage with our libraries but would probably benefit most from our services."*
- *"I like the ethos of it, I like the thinking, the direction and the theory, the vision for what a library could and should be. I like that it acknowledges the need for upgraded facilities, I like the theory of automating what can be automated, and shifting basic transactions to self service, and positioning ourselves to be facilitators. It all makes sense to me and is consistent with my observations of how the service is evolving."*

Gaps and Concerns

To balance the question within the survey covering what people like best about the draft strategy, survey respondents were also asked if there is anything they don't like about the draft or anything they considered to be a gap. This question was also asked of staff members. Survey respondents made 76 comments. The table below shows that the most commonly mentioned issue was a fear that the strategy is not clear enough or too vague and lacking in detail. There are some underlying fears that the aim may be to reduce funding and save money. This was also a theme within comments and some of the requests for detail are to provide reassurance. Some of the messages have been highlighted within other sections in the report including concerns over digitalisation.

Theme	Count	%
The strategy is vague / needs more detail / not clear	35	46
Concern that the overall aim is to cut services to save money	14	18
Concern over digitalisation and social exclusion	9	12
Promote libraries and the traditional services they offer	10	13
How will this generate income / sufficiency	3	4
Other	5	7
Total	76	100

Example survey comments

- *“There’s a sense that the council are reluctant to spend more money on a resource which you’ve proven to be incredibly beneficial to the local community. There’s a lack of creativity in the report. We all know that council money has been misspent so it feels like a kick in the teeth when great services like the library and Acton Scott farm are at risk as a result.”*
- *“We need to do more to promote this resource before it is lost due to underfunding of local services.”*
- *“Think you are trying to make your service sound good and justified when in reality you are cutting back the basic core service that you should be providing. The quality of books has dramatically dropped in the past few years and seems to be focused on the taste of whoever is choosing the books.”*

- *“It doesn’t recognise what libraries have already done and are currently doing.”*
- *“Bit vague in terms of what actually is going to be done, but perhaps, as said earlier, this will come as the strategy is developed and suggestions arrive.”*
- *“Using more technology can save costs, but remember it will exclude some groups of existing and potential users.”*
- *“That the concerns of smaller libraries don’t seem to be addressed.”*
- *“You do not talk about books.”*
- *“It is so repetitive and verbose, one gets swamped by it.”*

Feedback on the draft was also provided by staff members and stakeholders through other engagement methods.

Engagement responses - extracts

- *“It feels woolly in places...”*
- *“Unfortunately, the strategy remains quite vague in terms of what will be expected of Library Assistants.”*
- *“Economic Growth is a huge red herring. We can never even hope to keep up with the standard of hardware, connectivity, software that a nascent business would need.”*
- *“I think too much emphasis is being placed on self-issue machines. I think they can work well in libraries, but it seems like the draft is placing very high expectations on them and (from previous experience) I’m not convinced that it will work that well in practice. I find it hard to see how it will free up staff as we deal with a wide variety of ‘frontline transactions’, not just issuing and discharging books.”*
- *“Staff busy spreading themselves too thinly between a variety of non-traditional tasks leaves the original purpose of libraries to become second place, a risk of losing and alienating the traditional library customers who visit and use our services for borrowing books and using the IT services. We should still make this our priority whilst offering other initiatives.”*
- *“The promise of innovation with technological advancements can only be achieved through investment and in the current climate, I don’t see where money for that is going to come from.”*

Income generation

The feedback received throughout the engagement included a theme around income generation and cost reduction. This features in the draft strategy and there is a recognition of the need to work towards sustainability within library finances. A question within the survey read 'It's more important than ever to consider new ways of delivering services to reduce costs and generate new sources of income. The strategy outlines the opportunities already considered, but do you have any suggestions that could lead to more sustainable services, cost reduction or income generation?' 81 comments were made and more feedback was obtained through the other methods of engagement and from staff members.

The table below summarises the main messages within the comments. Some are not income generating or cost reduction suggestions. For example 10% suggested libraries should not be expected to make a profit or be self funding and a further 7% called for investment into libraries. Suggestions covered longer opening hours, increased use of volunteers, increasing council tax, subscriptions and sponsorship etc.

Theme	Count	%
Increase council tax/ spend council tax more effectively	11	14
Subscription/ Sponsorship	7	9
Improved opening hours to meet customers needs	6	7
Improved use of volunteers/ unpaid workers	4	5
Use of facilities by external/ partner organisations	18	22
Investment in Libraries to make them fit for the future	6	7
Libraries should not be expected to make profits/ be self-funding	10	12
Book sales/donations	7	9
Other	12	15
Total	81	100

Example survey comments

- "A library should not be generating income it is not a business it should be a service that meets the needs of the community."
- "Libraries are the heart of communities and should not be about generating income. Their value lies far beyond monetary value."

- *"The economic/business approach to running libraries is concerning, they are not commercial enterprises but rather a public service."*
- *"I am aware that we live in a world of commerce, where profits are the main goal, but libraries should not be about profit, but about people, we already pay more than enough in council tax to provide us with our wonderful library service, the council needs to stop wasting our money on ridiculous pet projects, your shopping centres are a very good example of where you guys choose to waste our money by the millions."*
- *"I honestly believe that our library in Bishop's Castle would not survive any further cuts to our service. Shropshire Council has a very effective, widely-used and encompassing service in the libraries that they need to pay more attention to as we are excellent value for money...."*
- *"Make better use of library opening hours. Between 5 and 6 our library is virtually empty, but I'm sure there are some activities that could use the space at that time."*
- *"Use of library space in the evenings for events and library takes a % of income/entry fee, marriage venue, sponsorship from local firms, use for national govt like DWP to run sessions for job hunters, cloud printing...free internet, somewhere to get tea/coffee (for a small charge). Work in partnership with volunteer groups to put some evening and weekend activities/events which would draw people in who perhaps might not use the library otherwise."*
- *"Income generation: offer children's birthday parties with a story teller and nursery rhymes. Young children love that."*
- *"Where the building is suitable I see no reason why evening classes cannot be used to generate cash."*
- *"Our library support group helps to generate income. In this present economic climate I fail to see how you can reduce costs."*
- *In Church Stretton, the staffing of the VIC by Friends of Church Stretton Library volunteers is an excellent example of supporting the local economy as well as increasing income. Having a Visitor Information Centre open 6 days draws more visitors into town...Additional income is also generated for the library service by the sale of souvenirs, maps, guides...."*

The survey comments highlight that many people do not believe libraries should be income generating and there are some fears expressed that a focus on income could detract from libraries offering support to those on lower incomes and those in most need for support with literacy. Others suggest a wide range of methods for attracting more people into libraries, through expanding the service offer and including charged for service offers.

The feedback from staff members and other stakeholders covers similar themes and some examples are shown below.

Engagement responses - extracts

Library staff comments

- *“The library is essentially a free service - it needs to be free for everyone to use and borrow with no fines, so there is no economic barrier.”*
- *“...I strongly believe that the council as a service should be ensuring the county has sufficient funding from central government. Also generating income is probably only taking income from another place, if we sell tourist souvenir stock, the museum loses the sale. If we put on music and plays, the theatre loses?”*
- *“We are constantly under-represented in the press. We need a Library Stories Officer to collect and distribute good news to press and customers.”*
- *“More sustainable retail in libraries. Leather bookmarks, jute bags, children’s reading bags, book themed gifts. (Bifold doors, a proper coffee machine and outside tables too if I’m allowed to dream!)”*
- *“Gift shop geared towards showcasing local talent, such as local authors and illustrators.”*
- *“Although it would take a large investment to begin with an initiative to install solar panels on all library buildings so they can become more sustainable and sell power back to the grid would be a great investment in the future. You need to speculate to accumulate but I am not sure there is much to speculate with at the moment.”*
- *“Smaller scale things like toy libraries and computer games libraries that customers pay a small fee for can be set up with donations and then provide a small steady income. Opening up libraries for music events in the evening and charging a small fee could generate revenue, run along the lines of Get It Loud In Libraries <http://getitloudinlibraries.com/toolkit>”*
- *“If we are to treat the Library Service as a business the PR and Marketing should be on the Borrower and what they want and need, not on what the library thinks they need.”*

Some library staff called for greater management control to enable them to try income generation projects and for the ability to retain income and re-invest it. Others suggested modern, outfitted flexible spaces to allow them to try a range of partnership projects and uses of the space.

Other stakeholder feedback

- *“There’s a need to review opening times to attract those who currently can’t access the library except in the evenings or at weekends. The general feeling was that staff hours would need to be increased and, if this wasn’t possible within budget constraints, could hours be shifted..”*
- *“Evening opening to attract young people, working families as part of a campaign to advertise what libraries offer.”*
- *“It may be that having a film club or homework club might encourage secondary students to use the library, or similarly, young families with Story Time/ reading sessions and author visits.”*
- *“...offer talks and events and help with tutoring for the elderly. Our library offers wi-fi access and printing.”*

The feedback overall is similar to the survey feedback. Suggestions from staff and stakeholders focus on a range of approaches including:

- Reducing expenditure (e.g. energy generation).
- Using library space and buildings to generate income.
- Extending opening and attracting more people into libraries through advertising.
- Directly delivering paid for services/ activities and events.
- Partnering with businesses/ other services to extend the range of activities and events on offer or include a retail offer.

Other suggestions, perhaps less focused on income generation, are included in the next section under 'other comments'.



Other comments

In all surveys and engagement it is important to listen and offer the opportunity for people to add comments that don't necessarily relate to the main research themes. This can often be the place for some of the best ideas or an opportunity for people to raise questions or suggestions that haven't previously been considered. Whether innovative ideas emerge or not, the 'other comments' opportunity often leads people to repeat previous comments or summarise what really matters most to them. 26 survey respondents added comments at the end of their survey response and staff members and stakeholders also added ideas, views and useful feedback.

The table below shows the other comments grouped under key headings and themes but the example comments shown provide a clearer indication of the feedback received. Many people provided an overview of their thoughts, whether they like the draft strategy, dislike it/have concerns and their general sense of the most important way forward for Shropshire libraries (whether calling for more investment or suggesting libraries form as community hubs).

Theme	Count	%
Need to continue to invest in Library infrastructure and facilities	8	31
Supportive of / Like the strategy	3	12
Do not support / dislike the strategy	4	15
Concerns re locations and closures/ changes to opening	3	12
Make libraries community hubs	2	8
Other	6	23
Total	26	100

Example survey comments

- *“As a civilised country we must retain our libraries.”*
- *“Library services are to me a marker of civilisation and social awareness of our communities.”*
- *“The strategy should explain openly the financial savings required by the council for each year.”*
- *“Please keep our libraries as accessible as possible, they are most important to the community and peoples lives. Thank you.”*

- *“If SC is serious about improving life outcomes, bring back the music and drama library, bring back the reference library. Stock more books and employ more qualified librarians and pay them properly. Have libraries open for longer hours. Hold art exhibitions.”*
- *“You mention the need to improve 'literacy' and I fully agree that this is vital for both recreational use and for the development of a modern workforce. However, such a workforce also needs numeracy and numerical skills are often sadly lacking in England. Perhaps there could be some way of enhancing numeracy in 'fun' ways, especially for children, in small groups in the same ways that poetry, drama, etc. are encouraged.”*
- *“We would like to see the re-introduction of the Shropshire Library Network where representatives from the branches met to see how each were improving their facilities and to discuss ways to improve communication across the service. Any reduction of service within the county would be a retrograde step now and in the future.”*
- *“Thank you for the opportunity to comment.”*
- *“On the whole you are doing a very good job.”*
- *“I will support libraries to my dying day! I support the strategy and believe it can deliver to younger groups but it will require a lot of faith and commitment from staff and the community.”*

The public feedback includes some main messages (including messages of support) and some focused requests such as the re-introduction of the Shropshire Library Network. Other feedback from staff and library stakeholders is included on the next page.



Many of the comments start to touch on the question 'what will happen next?' Some of the staff comments called for more detailed information about how their work may change and how new priorities would be defined and implemented. The comments from both staff and library stakeholders highlight commitment to reaching out to the wider community through marketing, the Shropshire Local service or through extending the library offer to support more people. There is recognition that some changes will not be easy to implement within current resources and that partnership working and sharing ideas and good practice will be important.

Engagement responses - extracts

Library staff comments

- *"There is a lot of information on what our future library service might deliver however I am not at all clear on what this will look like on the ground, in terms of staffing, opening hours, library location etc..."*
- *"I feel we 'miss a trick' with our marketing strategy. We need to make sure that the whole county realises what they have in regard to access to a professionally run, non-judgemental, neutral space and all encompassing service. This includes more partners and the decision-makers of our overall funding.."*
- *"...many people just don't realise what we offer in libraries unless they actively go looking for it themselves or have already signed up to receive library emails etc. We need a marketing strategy to ensure we reach a much wider audience, especially the 18-30 age group you'd like to target. Reading is having a renaissance with young people due to social media sites such as BookTok on TikTok and we need to ensure we are capitalising on this enthusiasm."*
- *"I think it will help keep libraries relevant and at the heart of things, and this can only be good. It's encouraging to see that borrowing books remains a key reason why people visit the library but I think it would be great to boost the amount of people visiting for other reasons too, such as access to digital support, groups, events, drop-in advice from other organisations, Shropshire Local etc. I agree that it's a good aim to 'balance the needs of our 'traditional users alongside the needs of other library users'."*
- *"The evidence base in the strategy proves that the population is aging in Shropshire. The working age is increasing. We need a trained and experienced, reliable force of staff. Paid and therefore putting the earned wages back into the local economy."*

Other stakeholder feedback

- "Targeting groups who could benefit most is a real challenge."
- "The existing library service is extraordinary, incredibly diverse offerings from support groups, children's sessions, exam help, literacy support and good old-fashioned books!"
- "A library is a safe place for adults and children to find health information including mental health, which in these difficult times is very important."
- "Base Shropshire Local within libraries to enhance what they offer and make access for communities easier and continuous."
- "...share good practice across all libraries – we can learn from each other and possibly share resources cost-effectively e.g. speakers, events."

Pontesbury Library representatives made some suggestions under the strategy feedback including:

- Shuttle bus to bring people in to Pontesbury Library
- Evening opening to attract young people, working families as part of a campaign to advertise what libraries offer.
- Wi-fi printer
- Re-establish a network across libraries, Library Friends and partner organisations.

The aim includes transport for people who are most isolated geographically or due to personal circumstances. Other suggestions include additional support for school children who could benefit more from the support libraries can offer.

All the suggestions and comments are helpful and can be used to inform the next stages of work as changes are considered, the final strategy is confirmed/agreed and work begins to focus on implementation and delivery plans.



Summary

The responses to the draft Library Strategy 2022 to 2027 consultation were very helpful and despite some concerns, including fears over lack of library investment, most comments were supportive of the draft strategy and its focus on meeting community needs.



Engagement: Between 12th May and 3rd August 176 people responded to the engagement survey and staff members and stakeholders also provided views through other engagement methods. 87% of survey respondents have membership of Shropshire Libraries.



Vision and Mission: There is overall support for the draft strategy vision and mission statement. 80% either agree or strongly agree with the draft vision and 78% either agree or strongly agree with the mission statement. 6% disagree with both.



Content: Overall people were satisfied and agreed that the library strategy clearly set out the library locations and services currently delivered, and that the role library services can and will play within our communities. There was a lower level of satisfaction with the way strategic opportunities for increasing income and reducing subsidy are set out and comments highlight concerns whether the strategy can be realised. Some requested greater clarity and detail.



Priorities: Overall there is widespread support for the 6 priorities but comments express concerns about library reductions. 15 people don't support the priority promoting economic growth and recovery. Reasons include a need to focus on a core library offer and views that services should be free to users and support those on low incomes.



Technology: When asked about self-service option 39% agree that they would use self-service facilities, 30% answered 'maybe' and 24% said 'no' (the remainder didn't know or didn't respond). The comments highlight considerable fear of losing social interactions with staff rather than opposition to technology itself. There are strong views on the value of libraries in combatting digital exclusion, social isolation and loneliness.



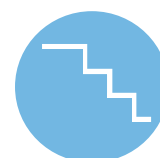
Partnerships and mobile services: There was support across all stakeholder groups for new opportunities to extend community partnerships and opportunities, using libraries to best service local communities. Survey respondents overall expressed how much they value mobile library services and their role within very rural communities.



Positive feedback: 126 of the 176 survey respondents commented on how much library services mean to them. Positive feedback on the draft strategy included the absence of suggested service losses and the focus on meeting the needs of rural communities.



Gaps and concerns: Many concerns related to self-service, digitalisation and fears that library services will find income generation distracts them from their main purpose and ability to support and reach members of the community in most need of assistance. Despite this a range of ideas and opportunities were suggested.



Next steps: Many thanks to all those involved in the engagement for sharing their views and ideas. The feedback will inform a final draft strategy for approval by Shropshire Council's Cabinet.

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