

Transition community-managed libraries to an independent model

The Library Service network includes four Tier 4 community-managed libraries in Kingsclere, Lowford (also known as Bursledon), Milford-on-Sea and North Baddesley. These libraries are managed by community groups, run by volunteers and supported by a regular visit by a member of Library Service staff, alongside the provision of books, equipment and public Wi-Fi.

As set out in the Library Service Consultation, these libraries issue fewer items and have fewer members than other council-run libraries in Hampshire, including libraries recommended for closure elsewhere in this report. These four council supported community-managed libraries account for 0.5% of the active users and a similar number of issues of the Library Service. Although the running costs are currently shared with communities, and are therefore comparatively lower than Tier 3 libraries, Tier 4 libraries still cost the County Council approximately £49,000 per year to run in total. Further, the capacity of the Library Service to continue to support this model, particularly the weekly staff visits, buddy branch support and weekly delivery, will be negatively impacted by recommendations elsewhere in this report.

The consultation sought views on the proposal to withdraw support from these community-managed libraries and assist the community organisations to transition to an independent model, giving them greater autonomy to deliver services as they and local communities wish.

Figures 1 to 3, below, summarise the open consultation views regarding transitioning community-managed libraries to independent community libraries.

Figure 1 - Would you continue to use your local library if it was independent of the County Council and managed by the local community?

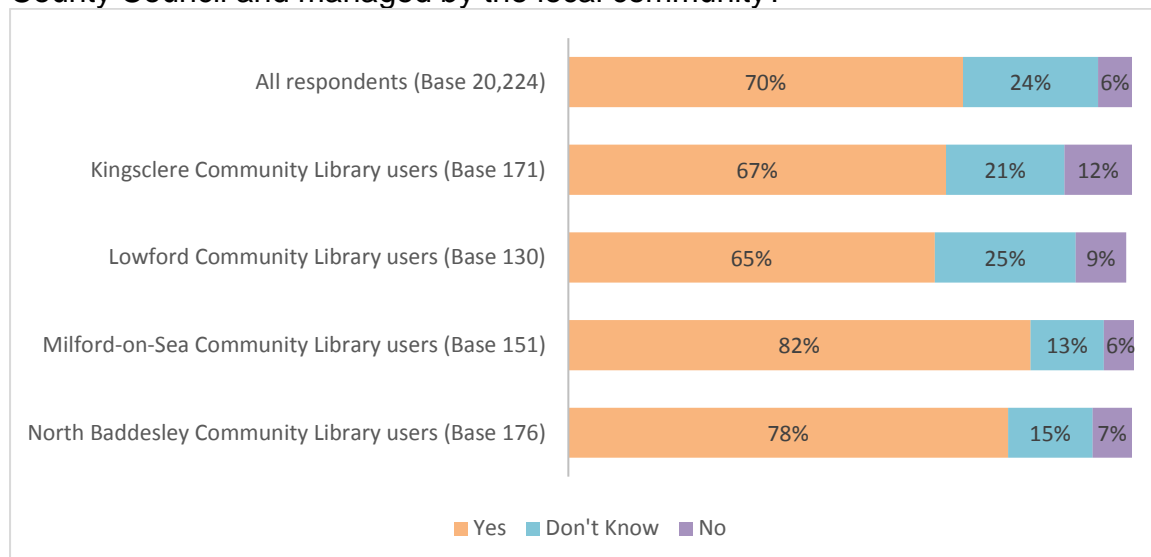


Figure 1 shows that the majority of respondents (70%), including the majority of community-managed library users, would continue to use their library if it was independent of the County Council and managed by the local community. However, the proportion of Kingsclere Community Library users who said that they would not (12%) was twice the consultation average (6%), with users of Lowford Community

Library (9%) and North Baddesley Community Library(7%) also being more likely to disagree than the consultation average.

Figure 2 - To what extent do you agree or disagree that an independent community-managed library model could meet the needs of the local community?

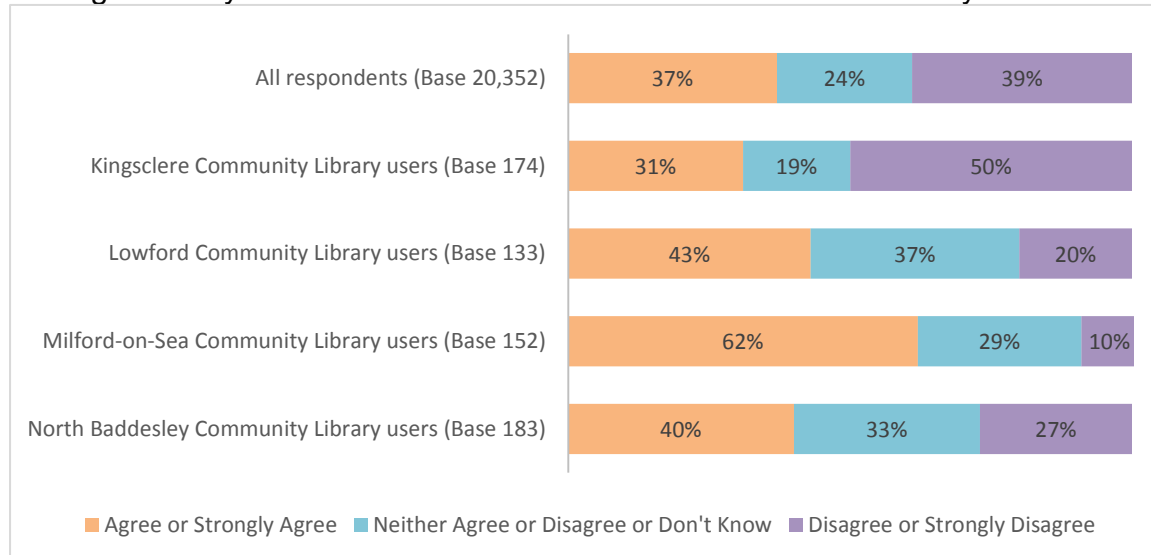


Figure 2 shows that, with the exception of Kingsclere Community Library users, users of Tier 4 community-managed libraries were more likely than the consultation average to feel that an independent community-managed library model could meet the needs of the local community.

Figure 3 - To what extent do you agree or disagree that if Tier Four libraries closed as a result of council support being withdrawn the needs of the community could be met by existing alternative library services?

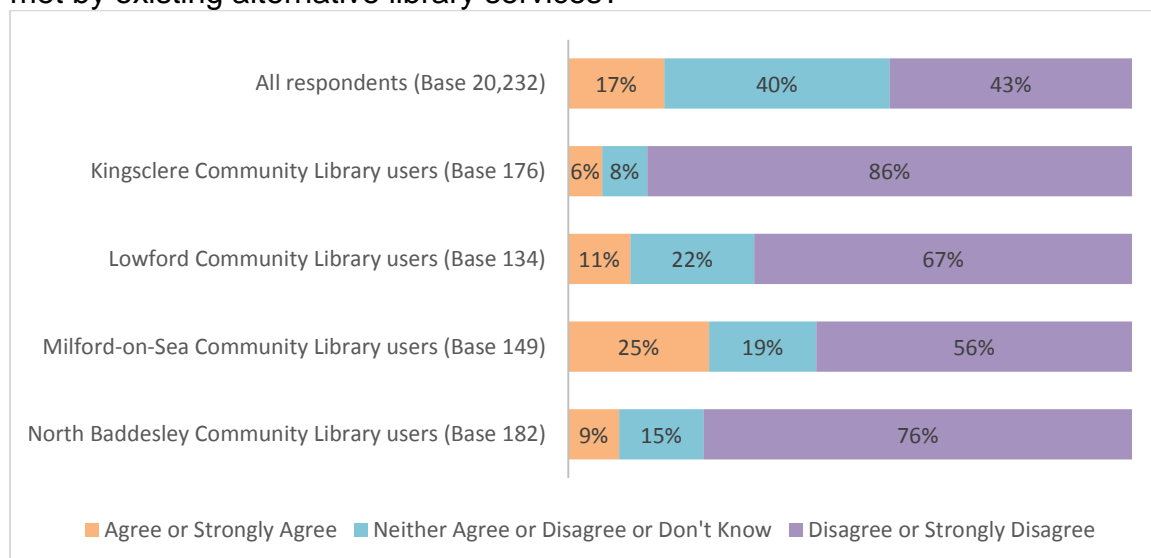


Figure 3 shows that if community-managed libraries were to close instead of transition to an independent model, the majority of respondents disagree or are

unsure that the needs of the community could be met by existing alternative library services.

The consultation also offered respondents the opportunity to comment on the impact of the proposals. These impacts are summarised in Appendix 2. The two most commonly cited impacts by community-managed library users were around the availability of resources (books, reservations and, in a few cases, Go-Online public access computers) and the accessibility of alternative library branches due to transport issues. Community-managed library users particularly valued having a library within walking distance, though it should be noted this is not the experience of the majority of Library Service users. When mentioning community impacts, community-managed library users referred to the library as being a social space, that it is a resource for the community, and that it could have a cultural impact on the area. These impacts are not dependent on being part of the Hampshire Library Network and supporting the community organisations to transition to an independent model would help secure the activities the community organisations are already carrying out to meet these community needs.

Meetings between Officers and partner organisations delivering community-managed libraries supported the view that the aspects of Hampshire's Library Service support most valued by partners and organisers are the refresh of stock and provision of a reservation service to provide a specific title for a customer. Any community group wanting to set up or transition to an independent community library, where a library or a community managed library is proposed for closure, will be invited to apply for a one off pump priming award through the existing Recreation and Heritage Community Fund towards the costs of transitioning into independent library models. Such awards would be individually assessed and would be expected to be less than £10,000.

To support independent community-managed libraries, the Library Service will extend the current group membership offer to include these new organisations. This will enable them to refresh their physical stock by accessing all items within the Hampshire Library Collection in an efficient community led manner which also allows service users to reserve specific items to be collected locally. As well as support from the Library Service, partners will be sign-posted to sources of funding and advice to support any equipment and training needs.

With the mitigation proposed, it is considered that the key impacts raised by community library organisations and their customers are addressed. Whilst concerns were raised about the loss of community facilities through the closure of these libraries, given the position that community-run libraries already pay their property costs and arrange their own staffing, there should be no reason why these services should need to close if the County Council withdraws its support. It is noted, however, that the withdrawal of the County Council's support means that these libraries would no longer be part of the County Council's statutory network. The mitigation suggested, together with the coverage of other local libraries (including the extension of Overton Library's opening hours) and wide range of digital and contactless services offered, means that the removal of these four libraries from the statutory service does not affect the County Council's position that a network of 40 council-run libraries remains comprehensive and efficient.