Transforming neighbourhood services

Findings of the public consultation
November 2013

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Leicester
City Council

*This report provides a summary of the findings of the public consultation.
It includes information about:*

- *The issues and options under consideration;*
- *The method of consultation;*
- *The public response and views expressed;*
- *The decisions taken in light of what was learnt.*

BACKGROUND

Transforming neighbourhood services

The council currently provides a range of services through local buildings and locally based staff. These include libraries, community centres, adult learning classes and customer services. They all work together to try to ensure that wherever a customer approaches the council, that service is able to deal with queries about any of the other services.

The government is making substantial cuts to funding for local councils which means that we will not be able to continue to run services as we do now..

In order to meet this challenge, the council has chosen to undertake a participatory review of neighbourhood-based services, rather than imposing damaging, last minute cuts. The aim is to work with local people and communities to identify and assess options for the future delivery of libraries, community centres, adult skills and learning and neighbourhood-based customer services.

The types of option currently under consideration include standard efficiency measures (e.g. integration of front-of-house functions, co-location of staff in fewer buildings) plus more transformative measures (e.g. more say for community organisations and associations, development of more self-service transactions, focused outreach such as evening opening or home visits).

The first phase of the review is focused on gathering information about the assetsof the city's neighbourhoods, including the buildings used to support service delivery and the associations through which people come together, both formal organisations and informal networks.

Public consultation process

Between April and July 2013, the council invited partners, residents and community groups for their views about neighbourhood services. People and organisations were also invited to express their interest in getting involved in shaping neighbourhood services in their area.

Consultation closed on 17 July 2013.

CONSULTATION METHOD

Public comment

Hard copy questionnaires were distributed via libraries and other service-based channels. People were also given the option of completing the questionnaire online.

The topics addressed by the questionnaire included:

1. The importance of neighbourhood services;
2. Use of neighbourhood services;
3. What makes services accessible and helpful;
4. Willingness to be involved in shaping neighbourhood services in your area.

A copy of the questionnaire is appended.

The target audience was the citizens of Leicester.

RESPONSE AND VIEWS EXPRESSED

Response

In total there were 299 respondents:

- 103 (34%) responded online;
- 196 (66%) responded using the hard copy questionnaire

Of these:

- 218 are city residents
- 23 are members of a voluntary sector or other organisation
- 28 are members of council staff
- 30 are volunteers
- 52 made no declaration of their interest

N.B. Respondents were able to select more than one option (e.g. a person might be both a city resident and a member of a voluntary sector or other organisation).
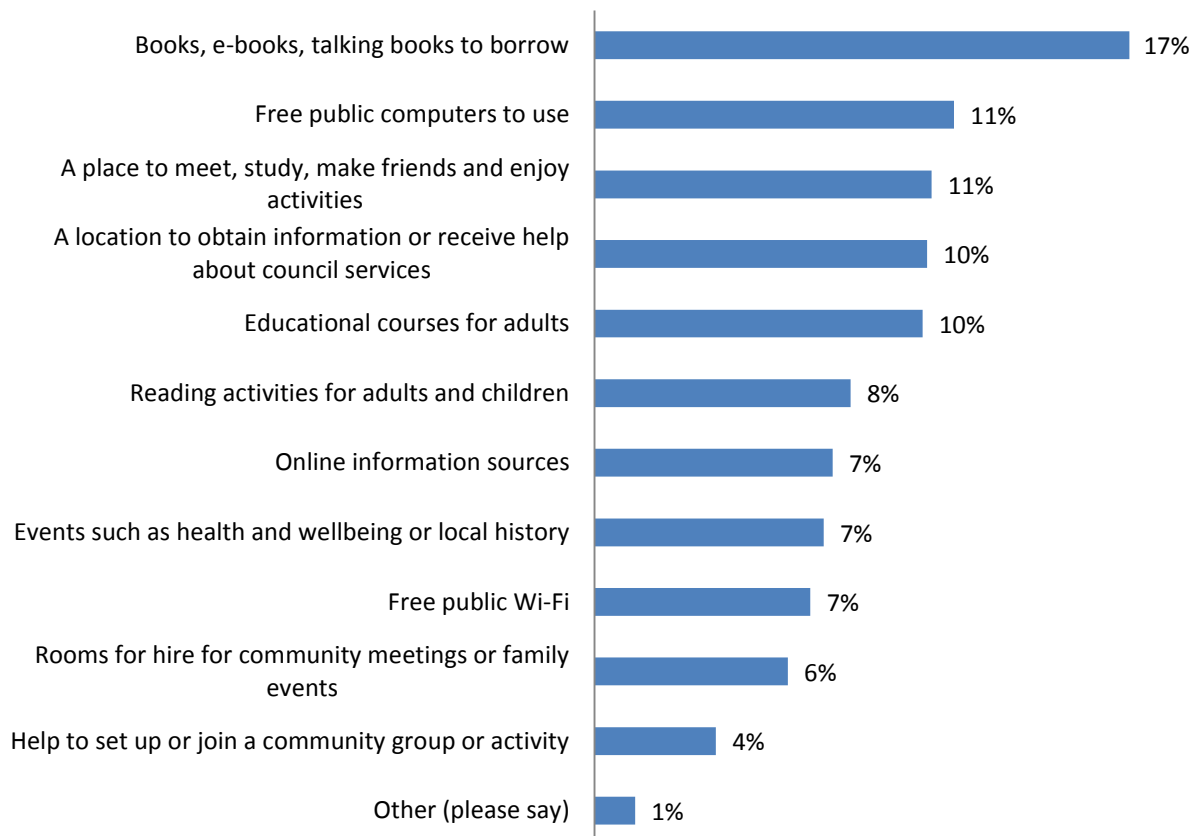
The area / neighbourhood relates to the following picture of the city:
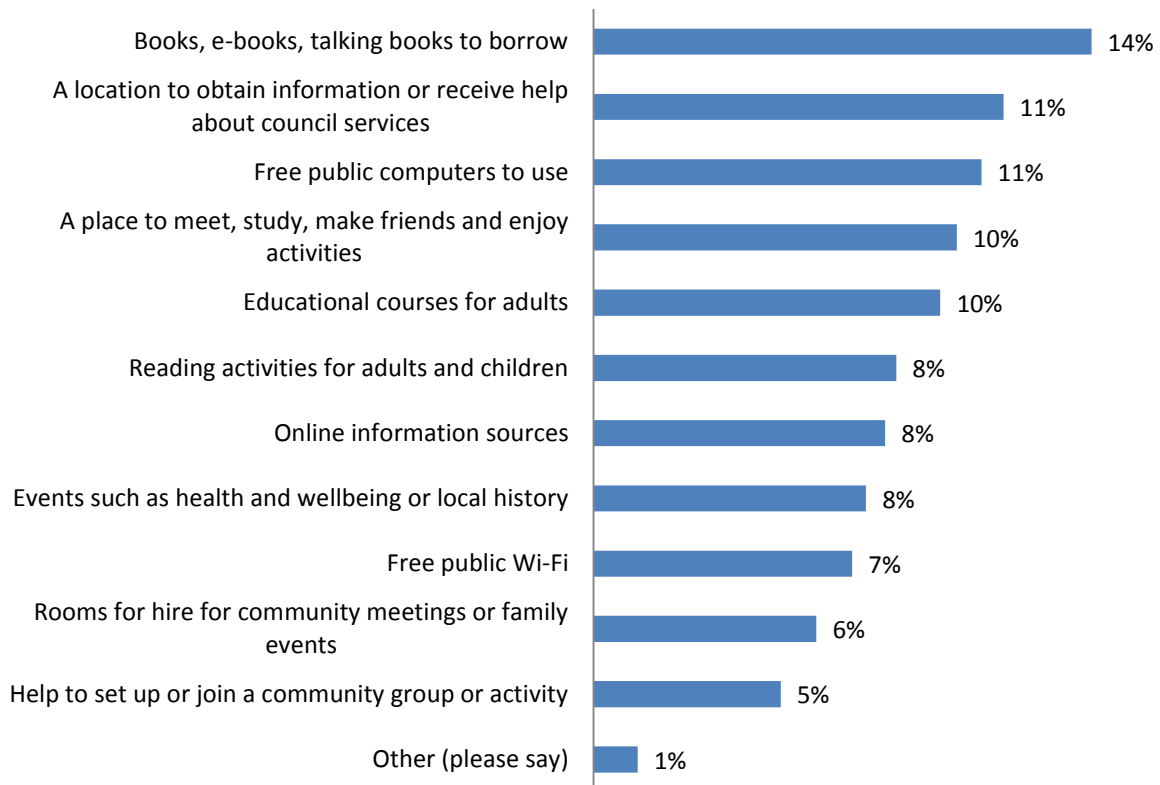
Views expressed – Service Importance

Respondents were invited to rank services in order of importance from 1 being the most important to 12 being the least. The top ranked service was books to borrow. This and the other rankings are shown in the figure below.

Most important services (ranked 1-4)

Service	Percentage
Books, e-books, talking books to borrow	17%
Free public computers to use	11%
A place to meet, study, make friends and enjoy activities	11%
A location to obtain information or receive help about council services	10%
Educational courses for adults	10%
Reading activities for adults and children	8%
Online information sources	7%
Events such as health and wellbeing or local history	7%
Free public Wi-Fi	7%
Rooms for hire for community meetings or family events	6%
Help to set up or join a community group or activity	4%
Other (please say)	1%

The above graph shows results for where respondents identified a single service as a priority. As a result of using a hard copy version of the questionnaire it was not possible to restrict people to selecting one service per priority i.e. some respondents identified a number of services as their most important ranked service. Taking into account these responses gives the following distribution:

Most important services (ranked 1-4)

Service	Percentage
Books, e-books, talking books to borrow	14%
A location to obtain information or receive help about council services	11%
Free public computers to use	11%
A place to meet, study, make friends and enjoy activities	10%
Educational courses for adults	10%
Reading activities for adults and children	8%
Online information sources	8%
Events such as health and wellbeing or local history	8%
Free public Wi-Fi	7%
Rooms for hire for community meetings or family events	6%
Help to set up or join a community group or activity	5%
Other (please say)	1%

One fifth of respondents identified a range of **other** services of importance to them. These include:
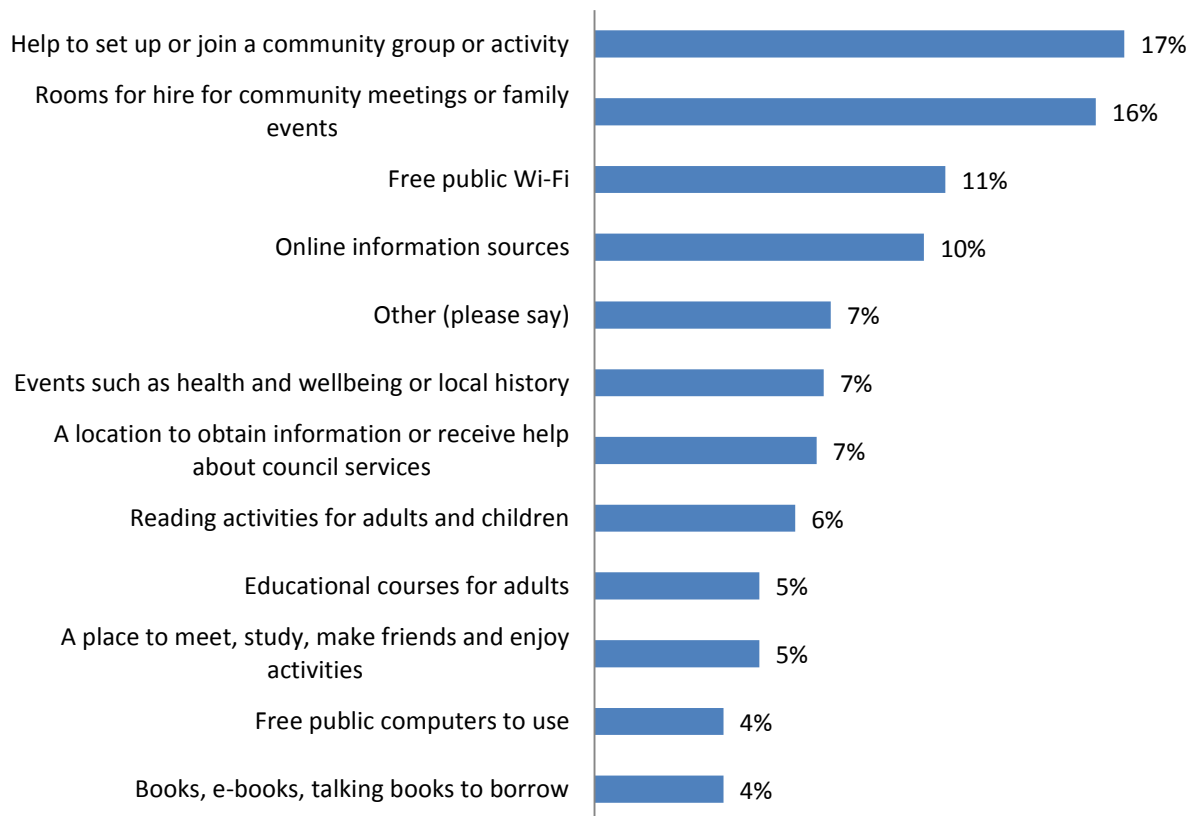
- Children's centres and youth centres
  - *"Positive activities and venues that can deliver social and personal development to children and young people aged 5-19 especially in more economically deprived neighbourhoods"*
- *"Education courses not just basics reading and maths. European languages, flower arranging, gardening, crafts etc."*
- *"Outdoor activities, especially on the park - festivals etc."*
- *"Someone tasked with actively trying to get people involved/making them aware what is available"*
- *"Welfare advice, help finding a job, somewhere to access general support"*
- *"A community bank to re-invest money back into the community instead of lining the pockets of bankers"*
- *"A cash machine which doesn't charge a fee on withdrawl"*
- *"Visiting speakers, poets, writers"*
- *"Occasional low level business or student meeting"*
- *"Debt information service"*
- *"Employment support, employment advice"*
- *"Meals for the elderly"*
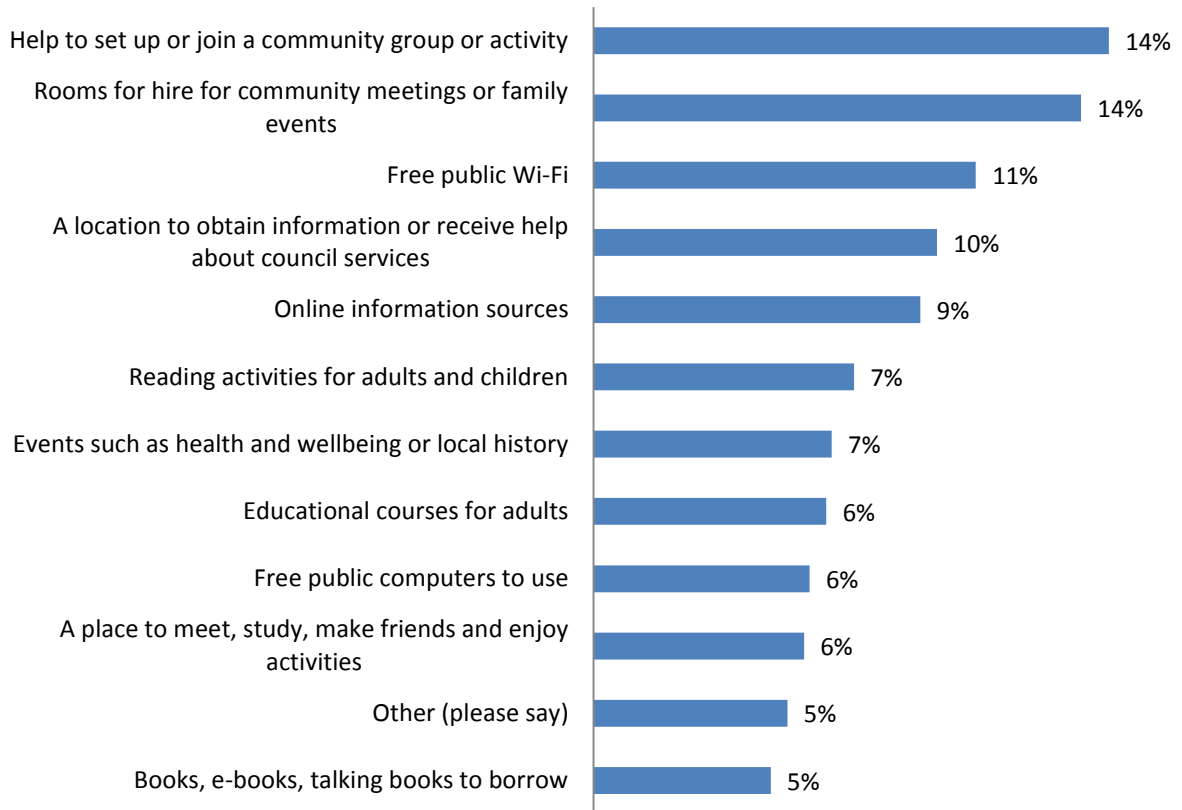
- *"Keep fit classes"*
- *"A coffee machine"*
- *"Local shops"*

The following chart shows the distribution of services that were ranked as least important to respondents:

Least Important Services

Service	Percentage
Help to set up or join a community group or activity	17%
Rooms for hire for community meetings or family events	16%
Free public Wi-Fi	11%
Online information sources	10%
Other (please say)	7%
Events such as health and wellbeing or local history	7%
A location to obtain information or receive help about council services	7%
Reading activities for adults and children	6%
Educational courses for adults	5%
A place to meet, study, make friends and enjoy activities	5%
Free public computers to use	4%
Books, e-books, talking books to borrow	4%

As per for the information around most important service, taking into account those responses which grouped a number of different services to a single priority provides the following distribution:
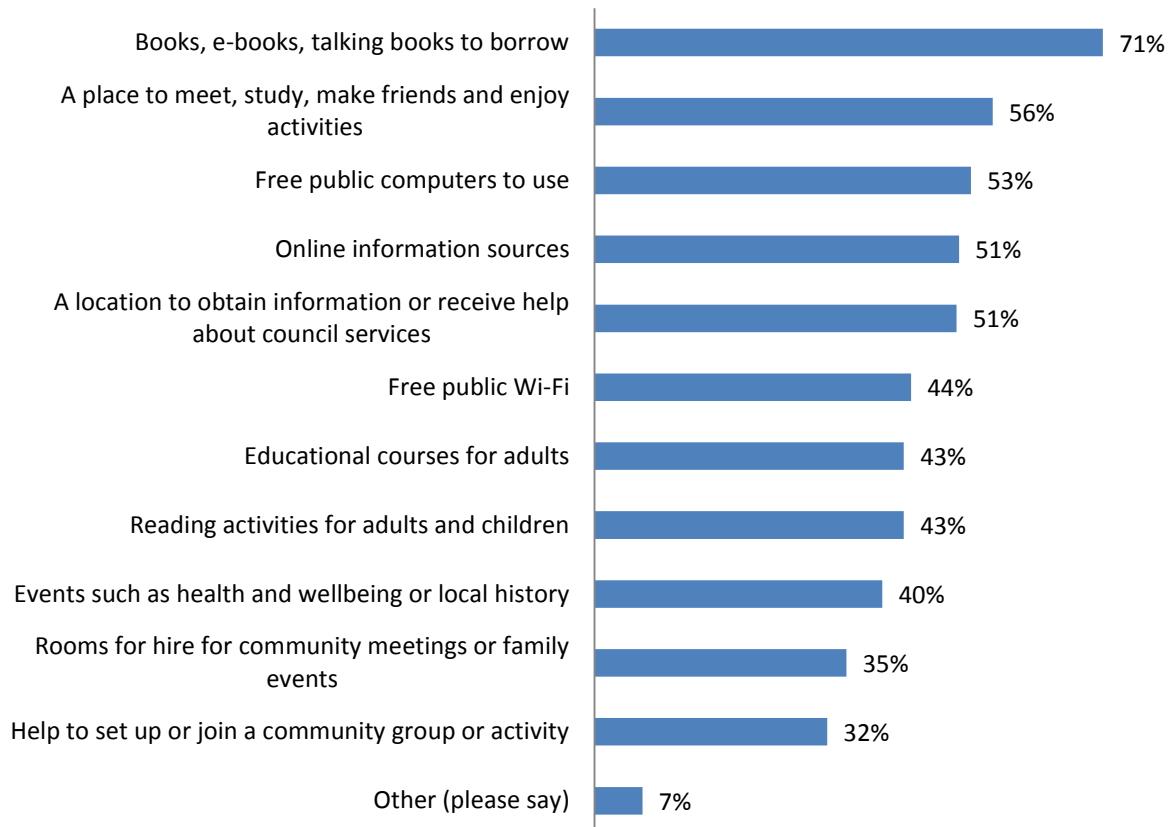
Least Important Services

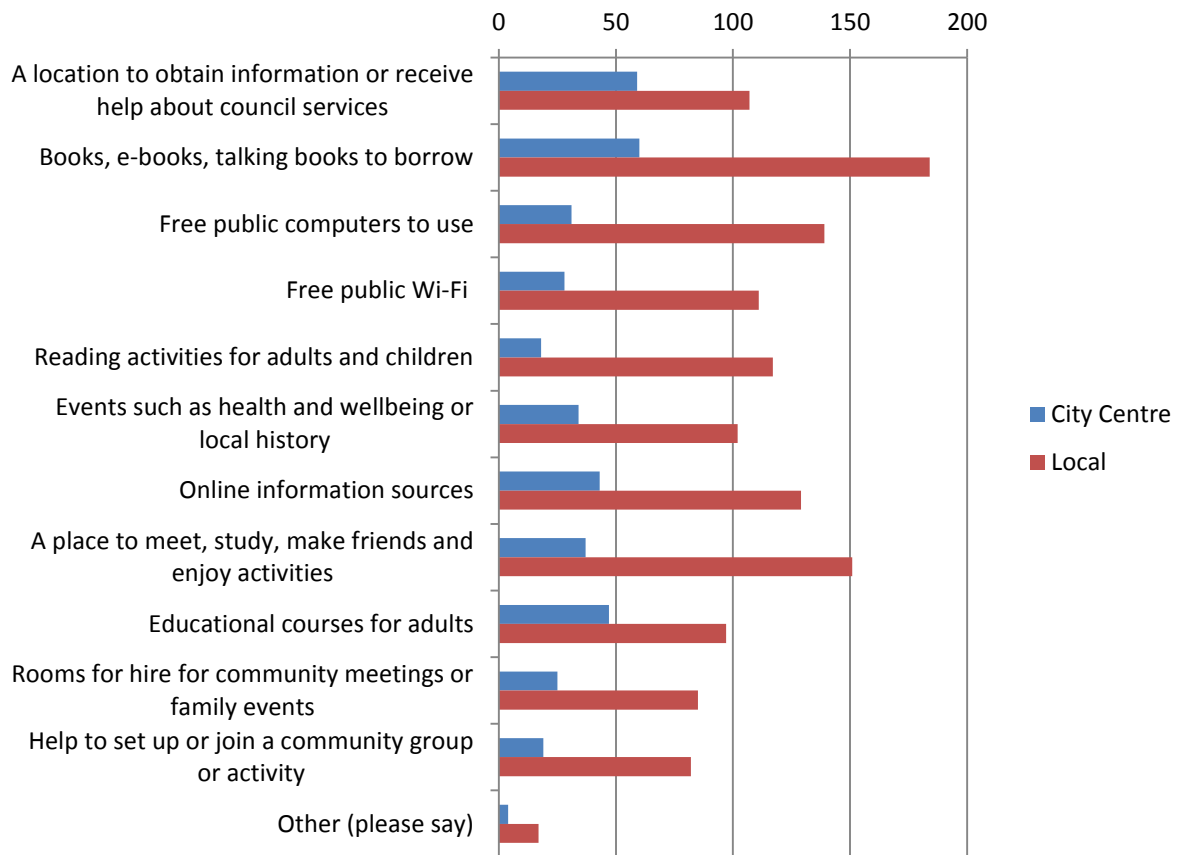| Service	Percentage
Help to set up or join a community group or activity	14%
Rooms for hire for community meetings or family events	14%
Free public Wi-Fi	11%
A location to obtain information or receive help about council services	10%
Online information sources	9%
Reading activities for adults and children	7%
Events such as health and wellbeing or local history	7%
Educational courses for adults	6%
Free public computers to use	6%
A place to meet, study, make friends and enjoy activities	6%
Other (please say)	5%
Books, e-books, talking books to borrow	5%

Views Expressed – Service Use

Not all respondents make use of the services currently on offer. As can be seen from the figure below, the most frequently used service was borrowing books.

Services used

Service	Percentage
Books, e-books, talking books to borrow	71%
A place to meet, study, make friends and enjoy activities	56%
Free public computers to use	53%
Online information sources	51%
A location to obtain information or receive help about council services	51%
Free public Wi-Fi	44%
Educational courses for adults	43%
Reading activities for adults and children	43%
Events such as health and wellbeing or local history	40%
Rooms for hire for community meetings or family events	35%
Help to set up or join a community group or activity	32%
Other (please say)	7%

Respondents were also invited to indicate whether the service used is accessed locally i.e. within their resident neighbourhood or in the city centre. These responses in the table below:

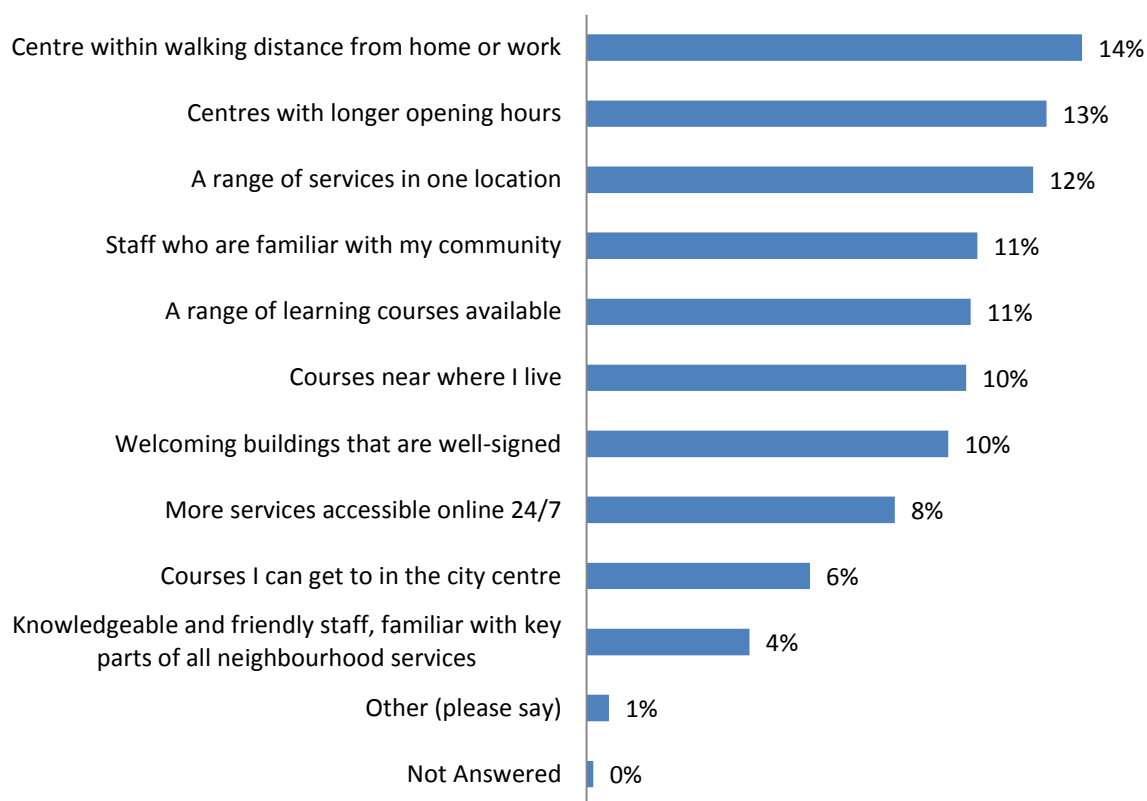# Service Use - Local Vs City Centre

Chart showing service use comparison between City Centre and Local, with the following categories:

- A location to obtain information or receive help about council services
- Books, e-books, talking books to borrow
- Free public computers to use
- Free public Wi-Fi
- Reading activities for adults and children
- Events such as health and wellbeing or local history
- Online information sources
- A place to meet, study, make friends and enjoy activities
- Educational courses for adults
- Rooms for hire for community meetings or family events
- Help to set up or join a community group or activity
- Other (please say)

Legend:
- City Centre
- Local

Views Expressed – Service Features

Respondents were asked to identify the most important considerations in making services accessible and helpful. From the options given, based on the number of people indicating a preference, a centre within walking distance of home or work was chosen most frequently. These and the other choices are shown in the figure below.

Most important features of accessible and helpful neighbourhood services

Feature	Percentage
Centre within walking distance from home or work	74%
Centres with longer opening hours	69%
A range of services in one location	67%
Staff who are familiar with my community	59%
A range of learning courses available	58%
Courses near where I live	57%
Welcoming buildings that are well-signed	54%
More services accessible online 24/7	46%
Courses I can get to in the city centre	33%
Knowledgeable and friendly staff, familiar with key parts of all neighbourhood services	24%
Other (please say)	3%
Not Answered	1%

This question was not limited to a single option however and on average people identified 6 categories that they felt important considerations. The following graph shows the percentage split of the number of times each option was selected:

Most important features of accessible and helpful neighbourhood services

Feature	Percentage
Centre within walking distance from home or work	14%
Centres with longer opening hours	13%
A range of services in one location	12%
Staff who are familiar with my community	11%
A range of learning courses available	11%
Courses near where I live	10%
Welcoming buildings that are well-signed	10%
More services accessible online 24/7	8%
Courses I can get to in the city centre	6%
Knowledgeable and friendly staff, familiar with key parts of all neighbourhood services	4%
Other (please say)	1%
Not Answered	0%

Respondents also identified a range of **other** features that they feel are important:

- *"Not necessarily longer opening hours, but hours to suit people who work full time office hours."*
- *"I work with disabled children, so access to toilet and changing facilities are always welcome."*
- *"Longer opening hours are extremely important, especially opening later in the day and evening."*
- *"Much better advertising of existing services. This should be done through neighbourhood centres, libraries, local radio, the LINK, local free papers. Almost no-one knows when or where our community meetings are. People living within a stone's throw do not know what is available in their neighbourhood centre. "More mobile services for elderly and disabled - library bus/information centre on wheels"*
- *"More funding/capacity for tenant and resident associations to provide local neighbourhood services. People want to access services in their own community/neighbourhood."*
- *"Well-advertised courses. I am shocked that the city organises and staffs excellent courses but fails to publicise them, with the result that many are cancelled."*

- *"Not necessarily longer hours but hours thatenable working people to use libraries etc."*
- *"More online access to information and services. If information is freely available, I will always opt for the self-service option."*
- *"Staff with deep knowledge of one area, not just passing me on to someone else."*
- *"It would be useful for libraries to open earlier in the morning and for pc access to be available earlier."*
- *"Disability friendly"*
- *"Local decision regarding environment, road, streets and lighting repairs and community safety"*
- *"Wide range of new reading material"*
- *"General items of topical interest, queens jubilee, royal wedding, Mrs Thatcher's funeral, books displayed on current topics add to lively 'in touch' atmosphere at the library"*
- *"GCSE's available in centres for adults"*
- *" "Should keep ladies day twice a week in the library e.g Tuesday afternoon and Monday or Thursday"*
- *"It would be nice if community centres have some cookery classes of different ethnic groups"*
- *"Librarians with good knowledge of books literature"*

Other concerns or wishes

Respondents were invited to put forward any other concerns or wishes for consideration. Approximately one thirds of respondents included something in this area (105 out of 299).

The word cloud below is based on the combined text from all of these responses. It gives greater prominence to words that appear more frequently.

The kinds of things that people raised fall into a number of broad areas.

Public service

Many respondents raised points that highlight the important part played by neighbourhood services in supporting civic health and promoting social and economic inclusion.

The importance of a local centre and facilities that don't require a car to access was felt to have a range of benefits including:

- Providing various groups, of different ages, with somewhere to meet, socialise, access information and help, etc.
- A quiet, calm place to study
- A safeguard against anti-social behaviour, local tensions and the segregation of communities

Public access to computers, Internet and 'real people' who can help you to use them was felt to be vital, especially as so many transactions, including benefit claims and job applications, now take place on line. Particular groups that were seen to be in need of this kind of provision include young families, disabled people and the elderly.

One respondent felt that their concerns were in danger of being overlooked and that the balance between contributions and benefit in the public service offer was not right:

"Whilst full council tax payers like myself receive reduced services, those who do not contribute or will soon contribute a very small amount, receive access to all services such as family support, community activities in the day time when those who pay most towards the services are at work"

Another argued that city residents should be given priority over those from the county when it comes to city based services. A third highlighted that noise pollution is a big problem in Westcotes.

Specific things people would like to see retained

Appeals were made to retain certain features of the current service offer, including access to books and reading and the opportunities that this provides to learn and broaden skills:

"Even in this age of technology, it would be criminal to lose the pleasure of books"

In one or two cases, particular groups and facilities were mentioned by name, including Saffron Neighbourhood Management Board, New Parks Library and

Belgrave library, these and some general points around retaining services received were:

"I would really like if we could get funding to help the Saffron Management Board to keep running ,this has helped get a lot of things for local people which they would not have had if it wasn't for the board"

"The librarians at the new parks provide an excellent & essential service with a smile. I am concerned that not having had a pay rise for six years, some maybe tempted to look elsewhere for gainful employ & important roles will be left to few and far between volunteers."

"A security backup for the employees due to unruly teenagers. New Parks library is an excellent resource for young children for homework and generally for adult information. Generally friendly and helpful staff."

"Visiting New Parks library, I prefer to my own libraries at Ratby or Glenfield. A much more stimulating environment, very helpful & friendly staff, a much wider mix of people, to notice what they are all doing. At present I am very lonely and going to the library has provided essential contact and communication with all the services provided. I go to New Parks leisure centre daily, so the library visit can be combined with these activities."

"Libraries can be the centre of the community, they are important to teach our children to fand and use them, so they can pass it on. As an older person it is important for me as I love reading, but the meeting of other older people in the library is always fun. The staff always talk to you and ask how you are. Help to choose books and find new authors. To come home with a good book is brilliant."

"Staff are the important part of neighbourhood centre, being able to talk to a person instead of a computer is very important"

"It help the young one get to know the older people in the area and understand how they can help each other to make safe and happy for all ages from young children to OAPs"

"All efforts to retain local libraries with books as well as a resource are extremely important as too many hubs have gone (churches, post offices). Older people love their libraries. Children with no space to study at home love library. Staff as signing posts to information are as important as a sign posts."

"I rely on local library in Evington for easy access and helpful, friendly staff"

"It is important that the local library services remain open (ie, Evington library) and also that the facilities in Evington Park are well maintained."

"My concerns are about library closures. We visit evington library regularly, love the friendly personal attention we get. It is very important indeed for us."

"Services that bring a wide range of people together have the added value of promoting social cohesion and fending off isolation and lonliness"

<u>Improving performance and ideas for doing more with less</u>

Several respondents indicated that there was room for improvement in terms of the promotion of neighbourhood services and that, in some cases, the council needs to do more to train and manage the performance of its own staff in order to prevent 'gatekeeping' and attitudes that make it difficult or unappealing for people to access services. Regular mystery shopper visits were also advocated.

In terms of doing more with less, a range of ideas were put forward:

"I believe there are a number of community buildings which currently have kitchen/catering facilities - it would be great if these could be made available or hired out to people looking to start food businesses, as it's very difficult to find suitable places at the moment, and I know the kitchens aren't used throughout the whole of the opening hours in many places."

"If opening hours are reduced there should still be some evening/ weekend times for people who work and children at school to be able to access so maybe reduce daytime hours first."

"Putting more services into Libraries so that they become a '1 stop shop' where you can get information and help about Council Services as well as the Books and Computers already provided."

"Why does the council pay full RRP for books, when often titles are available greatly reduced online. What about bulk online ordering/delivery?"

"I think that libraries can provide a lot more than they already do and combine many services in one place.

"For example, my local library provides free wifi, computer access and some reading events for adults and children. The building is large, warm and welcoming. However, it closes at the latest 7pm only three out of the seven days it is open and I feel that it could do more to utilise the potential it has. With a bit of reorganisation of the space certain areas could be rented out for community meetings in the evenings and activities and for adult learning groups. In addition, later hours would allow residents to utilise the use of the computers and research facilities of the library.

I think Leicester Libraries in general could also benefit from linking with Leicester Museums, hosting small travelling exhibitions and talks touring around all community libraries and not just restricted to the city centre. This will encourage cross-communication to people who may have never thought to visit the Leicester Museums or do not even know what they can offer. Many children in suburbs of Leicester have never been to the city centre but all are within access to their local library."

"I would like the bigger libraries that are well stocked to be open longer even if that means reductions have to be made"

"I would use health and well being: exercise for the older person to help maintain or develop flexibility of movement and muscle tone. If available close by and during the day rather than evenings."

"It is beneficial to people and society, any services requested and provided but there must be supervision to ensure that people who use them are given the right environment to make the most of it. Undesirable members of society, drunks, beggars and bullies should be warned and barred from these facilities. At the moment there is a big problem and staff dont do anything. Mobile phones should be switched off and calls taken out of the premises."

"I'd like Highfields Library to be open on Sunday (at least half a day) and have some after school clubs (like the crafting available during the holidays)"

"More play activities for children aged between 5-6 years in the school holidays, and if the library get full still we should have spaces left who really want to do the play activities - playschemes. To keep more activities for ladies who are housewife to come out, build confidence make new friends do lots of activities in the library - short courses - something to get going"

"Would love to have the local library (highfields library) to open at 9am as it saves me a journey later on in the day as I'm in the area. I am sure mums dropping children off to school would appreciate this time change as well"

"Good quality printing + photocopying services. Courses that offer potential work experience, paid volunteering which can help enhance to find a right fixed job opportunity. Interactive activities for adults 18-24 year olds"

""I think that libraries can provide a lot more than they already do and combine many services in one place.

For example, my local library provides free wifi, computer access and some reading events for adults and children. The building is large, warm and welcoming. However, it closes at the latest 7pm only three out of the seven days it is open and I feel that it could do more to utilise the potential it has. With a bit of

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Libraries are a fantastic opportunity for the community to congregate and I think in general they are being overlooked in the UK as a central point for communities. The services they could offer can be greatly improved at little cost or effort, they are often in large buildings and in community central areas with easy access and friendly staff. More should be done to take advantage of them and move them forward as excellent hubs of information, learning and the socialisation of communities."

CONCLUSIONS

Views about neighbourhood services

The following are some key points drawn from the analysis of responses:

- The results represent a city wide picture and these results may differ when results from a specific area are considered
- Respondents view a social element to accessing the services as most important (meet friends and ask and receive advice), in addition to borrowing books and using computers.
- Respondents view the community service elements (help to set up or join a community group and rooms for hire for community meetings or family events) as of least importance
- Use of public wi-fi and online information sources appear to be not as important as may have been perceived. This is also apparent in the responses received
- There appears to be a strong feeling that accessing services locally rather than in the city centre is preferred. There was no standout service use in the city centre compared to locally
- There appears to be a strong preference on accessibility towards services being within walking distance, opened for longer and services co-located. A one stop shop available after working hours
- There is a theme of service users not inclined towards online usage, however due to the questions asked it is not possible to draw the reasons for this

Expressions of interest in further participation

183 of the 299 respondents left a name. Of these, 128 left an email address, 136 left a telephone number, and 182 left a postcode. Analysis of this information shows that there is interest in further participation across all neighbourhoods as described in the following table:

Area / Neighbourhood	No of respondents
Central	17
East	70
North East	20
North West	14
South	27
West	24
Out of City	6
Not Recognised	4
Not Answered	117

Decisions taken

From September 2013, local people and communities will be invited to consider initial proposals for a core offer, including what this might mean for buildings and staffing in their area. This information will be used in putting together the initial proposals.

The first round of public workshops will take place the South of the city, before moving on to other neighbourhoods.

Additional efforts will be made to raise awareness through local channels in order to further increase levels of participation.

Appendix 1 – Questionnaire

If you prefer, you can complete this form online at www.leicester.gov.uk/tns

1. Which neighbourhood services are important to you? Please rank these services in order of priority – with 1 being the most important. Also tell us whether you currently use them.

	Order of priority (1 to 12)	Do you use this service? (Y/N)	If you use the service, please indicate whether Locally or in the CityCentre (L or CC)
A location to obtain information or receive help about council services			
Books, e-books, talking books to borrow			
Free public computers to use			
Free public Wi-Fi			
Reading activities for adults and children			
Events such as health and wellbeing or local history			
Online information sources			
A place to meet, study, make friends and enjoy activities			
Educational courses with qualification			
Rooms for hire for community meetings or family events			
Help to set up or join a community group or activity			
Other (please say)			

2. What are the most important considerations in making neighbourhood services accessible and helpful?

	Tick here
Centres with longer opening hours	
A range of services in one location	
More services accessible online 24/7	
Centre within walking distance from home or work	
Knowledgeable and friendly staff, familiar with key parts of all neighbourhood services	
Staff who are familiar with my community	
Welcoming buildings that are well-signed	
A range of learning courses available	
Courses near where I live	
Courses I can get to in the city centre	

Other (please say)	

3. Do you have any other concerns or wishes that you would like us to consider?

4. Please fill out your details below if you would like to be involved in shaping neighbourhood services in your area.

Please tick all that apply

I am :

☐   a city resident

☐   a member of a voluntary sector or other organisation

☐   a member of council staff

☐   a volunteer

Name: …………………………………………………………………………………………….

Post Code: …………………………………………………………………………………….

Telephone number: …………………………………………………………………………

Email: ……………………………………………………………………………………………..

5. Thank you

Thank you for completing the transforming neighbourhood services questionnaire. Please return it to a City Council Library or City Council Community Centre.

The information gathered from this survey will be used to help plan services for the future.