

What works to engage library non-users

Mixed-mode research report

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Glossary of Terms

Bayes Nets (BN) analysis: A statistical technique that helps us understand the relationships between different factors and how they might influence an outcome. In the context of this research, it is used to measure the association between the offering of different library services and the likelihood of visiting the library in the future.

Capability: In the context of library use, this refers to an individual's ability to use the library, including having the knowledge of library services, the skills to navigate the library, and the physical ability to access the library itself.

COM-B Model: A framework from behavioural science that helps us understand why people do or do not engage in certain behaviours. It looks at three key components: Capability, Opportunity, and Motivation.

Confidence Interval: A range of values that is likely to contain the true value of a population parameter, such as the percentage of people who find particular library services important.

Dependent variable: The outcome or result that we are trying to understand or predict. In this report, the dependent variable is the likelihood of someone visiting the library in the future.

Demographics: Characteristics of a population, such as age, gender, ethnicity, education level, and income.

Digital literacy: The ability to use technology and digital tools effectively, such as computers, the internet, and social media.

Enabler: A factor that makes it easier for someone to do something, like a convenient location or extended opening hours making it easier to visit the library.

Engagement: In the context of libraries, this refers to people actively using library services, such as borrowing books, attending events, or accessing online resources.

Frontline staff: The library staff who interact directly with the public, such as librarians or library assistants.

IMD quintile: A way of measuring deprivation in different areas of England. England is divided into five groups (quintiles), with the most deprived areas in the first quintile and the least deprived areas in the fifth quintile.

Independent variable: A factor that might influence or predict the outcome we are interested in. In this report, independent variables include things like the importance of different library services.

Intervention: A specific action or programme designed to change behaviour or achieve a desired outcome, such as a marketing campaign to increase library awareness or a new service to attract non-users.

Library non-user: Someone who has not visited a library or used any of its services, including online resources, within a specific timeframe. For this research, we considered the timeframe to be the past 12 months prior to participating.

MaxDiff analysis: A statistical technique that helps us understand the relative importance of different items, such as a list of barriers to library use.

Motivation: In the context of library use, this refers to an individual's desire or willingness to use the library, influenced by factors like personal interests, needs, and values.

Opportunity: In the context of library use, this refers to external factors that make it easier or harder to use the library, such as opening hours, location, transportation options, and the library environment.

Social grade: A system developed for the National Readership Survey (NRS) in the UK to classify people based on their occupation and socioeconomic status. The four main categories are:

AB: Higher and intermediate managerial, administrative, and professional occupations.

C1: Supervisory, clerical, and junior managerial, administrative, and professional occupations.

C2: Skilled manual occupations.

DE: Semi-skilled and unskilled manual occupations, unemployed, and state pensioners.

1 Executive Summary

1.1 Why we carried out the research

Public libraries in England offer a range of services and resources, centred on free access and loans of reading material but also including access to information, learning opportunities, and community spaces. The role and provision of these services have evolved over time, particularly in response to technological advancements and changing societal needs. However, library usage has been declining in recent years, prompting a need to better understand the factors that can influence engagement among those who do not currently use library services.

This research was commissioned by the Department for Culture, Media and Sport (DCMS) to examine the barriers and enablers of library engagement among non-users. The research sought to identify what prevents non-users from engaging with libraries and to explore potential approaches, services and offers that could encourage greater use. The findings can be used to inform national, regional and local action to address these challenges.

1.2 How we carried out the research

The research used a robust mixed-methods approach, combining both qualitative and quantitative data to provide a comprehensive understanding of the barriers and enablers of library engagement.

The core of the quantitative research involved a large-scale online random-probability survey with 4,243 library non-users aged 17+ across England. Participants were drawn from the Ipsos UK KnowledgePanel, ensuring a representative sample of individuals who had not used library services within the past 12 months. The survey data was then analysed using sophisticated statistical techniques, including MaxDiff analysis to uncover key barriers to library use and Bayes Nets analysis to identify potential enablers. Furthermore, the data was used to develop a segmentation of library non-users, providing a nuanced understanding of their diverse attitudes and preferences towards libraries.

The qualitative strand of the research involved a series of workshops with key stakeholders, including members of the DCMS Libraries Team, Heads of Library Services, and library branch managers. These workshops explored stakeholders' perspectives on the challenges faced by libraries, the needs of different user groups, and potential interventions to increase engagement. Additionally, an open-link survey of 589 frontline library staff, facilitated by Libraries Connected, provided further insights into the barriers and enablers of library use from those engaging directly with the public.

1.3 The profile of library non-users

Library non-users, who are defined as those who have not used library services within the 12 months prior to the time of the survey, make up 66% of the English population aged 17 and over. This presents a significant opportunity for libraries to expand their reach and impact.

Understanding how this group's demographic profile differs from those who currently use libraries is crucial for developing targeted services and outreach efforts.

One notable difference is gender distribution. While library non-users are evenly split between male and female (50% each), library users have a higher proportion of females (58% compared to 42% male). Age also plays a role, with library non-users having a slightly higher proportion of individuals aged 55 and older (40%) compared to library users (37%). This could reflect changing needs and priorities as people age, such as mobility challenges, different reading preferences, or a need for specialised services.

Employment status is another key difference. Library non-users are more likely to be working full-time (49%) compared with library users (40%), suggesting that time constraints and busy schedules may be significant barriers. Educational attainment also shows a clear distinction, with library non-users being less likely to hold a degree than library users (28% compared to 39%).

Finally, socioeconomic factors appear to influence library usage. Library non-users are less likely to fall into the AB social grade category (30%) compared to library users (35%). This suggests that libraries may need to consider the specific needs and challenges faced by individuals from different socioeconomic backgrounds when developing engagement strategies.

1.4 Existing barriers and enablers to library engagement

The research identified a range of factors influencing library engagement, categorised using the COM-B framework, which highlights the relationship between capability, opportunity, and motivation in shaping behaviour.

A lack of awareness about the full range of services offered by their local library is a significant capability barrier, particularly among younger age groups, graduates, and those from higher socioeconomic backgrounds. The MaxDiff analysis revealed that "not knowing what services/activities are offered beyond loaning physical books" was the third most significant barrier overall, scoring 53.1 on a 0-100 scale.

Opportunity barriers include inconvenient opening hours, which emerged as the most significant opportunity obstacle overall, scoring 41.8 on the MaxDiff scale. This barrier was particularly pronounced for parents or legal guardians, who were more likely than those without children to cite the library's opening hours as a barrier. Accessibility challenges, such as parking availability and cost, transportation options, and the physical accessibility of library buildings, can also hinder engagement, particularly for specific groups.

Many library non-users struggle to see how libraries fit into their modern lives, perceiving them as irrelevant in the digital age. This perception of irrelevance, coupled with a preference for owning physical books, and a belief that libraries offer outdated services, are key motivational barriers. The MaxDiff analysis revealed that "being able to access similar resources and services

elsewhere" was the most significant barrier overall, with a score of 70.7. The physical appearance and atmosphere of a library can also influence perceptions, with younger adults and people from ethnic minorities more likely to say that they are deterred by libraries that feel "tired and worn."

The research also identified several potential enablers, including comfortable and inviting spaces (cited by 38% of library non-users), extended opening hours (35% of respondents, particularly those who are employed), up-to-date book collections (34% of respondents, particularly older adults, graduates, and those with higher household incomes), access to technology (33% of respondents, especially young people and those from ethnic minority backgrounds), and dedicated work and study spaces (26% of respondents, with a strong appeal among young people and graduates). These findings suggest that while traditional library services remain important, libraries need to adapt to the evolving needs and preferences of library non-users by offering a more diverse range of services, including those that enhance convenience, connectivity, and community engagement.

1.5 A segmented view of library non-users

The research identified five distinct segments of library non-users, each with unique views towards libraries and preferences for services. These segments are:

The Armchair Supporters (24% of non-users): This segment expresses positive sentiments towards libraries, but their actual engagement remains limited, potentially due to practical barriers or a lack of personal relevance. They are more likely to be older, working full-time, living in the South of England, living in rural areas, from less deprived areas, and from higher socioeconomic backgrounds. Like the Disengaged segment, this group demonstrates a low likelihood of future library use.

Digital & Community Seekers (25% of non-users): This segment values libraries as community hubs and seeks greater digital integration and convenience in accessing services. They are more likely to be female, younger, from ethnic minority backgrounds, working full-time, graduates, parents, living in urban areas, and from less deprived areas when compared to overall non-users. This segment, while positive about libraries, remains somewhat uncertain about their future use, indicating a need for targeted outreach to bridge the gap between their perceptions and actions.

The Disengaged (23% of non-users): This segment shows a low awareness of local library offers and feels a lack of personal relevance, leading to their low engagement. They are more likely to be male, older, non-graduates, and from lower socioeconomic backgrounds. This group demonstrates a low likelihood of future library use, suggesting that focusing resources on other segments may be more likely to increase overall usage.

Dismissive Non-Users (9% of non-users): This segment is characterised by deeply negative perceptions of libraries and a strong resistance to engagement. They are more likely to be men,

younger, from lower socioeconomic backgrounds, and lack confidence in using the internet. Engaging this segment is likely to be challenging, and libraries may need to carefully consider whether a significant effort to convert this group's views is worthwhile.

The Enthusiastic Adopters (19% of non-users): This segment holds overwhelmingly positive attitudes towards libraries and shows the greatest potential for engagement. They are more likely to be women, not working full-time, graduates, and from higher socioeconomic backgrounds. This group represents a prime target for engagement, as they are the most likely to become active library users if their needs and expectations such as up-to-date books, dedicated workspaces, and comprehensive digital support, are met.

While core barriers to library use are consistent across segments, the strength of these barriers and the way in which they are experienced varies. This highlights the need for tailored approaches to engagement, recognising the unique needs and preferences of each segment. By focusing on segments with the greatest potential for engagement, such as the Enthusiastic Adopters and the Digital & Community Seekers, libraries can maximise their impact and ensure the long-term sustainability of their services.

1.6 Intervention development

Workshops with stakeholders including members of the DCMS Libraries Team, Heads of Library Services and branch managers generated ideas for interventions which could help support library engagement. During this process, six activity areas emerged including communications content; communications format and channel; staff and internal processes; internal and external space; communities, partners and groups; and outreach and events.

The interventions generated were prioritised based on stakeholder views on their potential impact and feasibility. This process identified a short-list of seven interventions with three of these prioritised for further exploration. This involved consideration of steps towards potential implementation including reflecting on the intervention rationale, target audience, potential impact, required activities and resources, feasibility considerations, implementation risks, and pilot execution strategies. These three potential interventions are summarised below:

- **Widening the library's reach through strategic social media engagement.** This involves going beyond simply promoting the library's existing social media channels and instead actively engaging with non-users on the platforms they already frequent. This could include partnering with relevant organisations, participating in online communities, and creating content tailored to the interests and needs of specific audience segments. The goal is to increase awareness of the library's diverse offerings and challenge outdated perceptions.
- **Transforming libraries into vibrant community hubs by hosting partner services.** By hosting services beyond more common library offerings, such as health clinics, early years programmes, or job fairs, this intervention seeks to increase library visibility, engage with

activities which might be meaningful to different non-user segments and attract new audiences. This strategy also aims to help address the perception that library use is inconvenient by providing the opportunity for individuals to engage in multiple activities during a single visit.

- **Reframing the library's value proposition to build resonance with non-users.** This requires developing targeted messaging that emphasises the library's relevance in the digital age, highlighting benefits such as sustainability, cost savings, and community connection. By tailoring messaging to the values and priorities of different segments, libraries can demonstrate their personal relevance and encourage re-engagement.

These interventions would need to be tailored to specific audiences, local demographics or segments where possible to facilitate implementation in practice and an implementation approach involving monitoring and adaptation would be required.

1.7 Conclusions

This research provides a comprehensive understanding of library non-users in England, exploring their demographics, perceptions of libraries, the barriers preventing their engagement, and the services or approaches that might entice them to use their local library in the future. The findings highlight a complex landscape of non-users, with a significant proportion disconnected from library services despite generally positive attitudes towards their role in the community.

The research highlights the need for a multi-faceted approach to engaging library non-users, recognising the diverse needs, preferences, and motivations of different segments. While core barriers, such as lack of awareness, inconvenient opening hours, and a perception of irrelevance in the digital age, are consistent across segments, the intensity of these barriers and the way in which they are experienced varies. This demonstrates the importance of tailoring interventions to specific audiences and local contexts.

The three priority interventions identified offer a promising starting point for libraries to engage non-users and secure them as part of their future. However, it is crucial to remember that no single intervention will provide a "silver bullet" to increasing library engagement. A combination of interventions, designed to tackle different barriers and tailored to specific segments and local needs will be the most effective.

Small-scale piloting of the proposed interventions is recommended to assess their feasibility, impact, and potential for wider adoption. By embracing a data-driven and audience-centric approach, libraries can develop and evaluate effective strategies. These strategies will attract new audiences, re-engage those who have drifted away, and ensure the long-term sustainability of these vital community assets.

2 Background

Libraries play an important and unique role in our society. Since the first purpose-built library¹ was established in 1857, they have sat at the heart of communities, sharing knowledge and information freely. The Public Libraries and Museums Act (1964) sets out the statutory duty for library authorities to provide a comprehensive and efficient library service for all persons who live, work or study in the area². The Department for Culture, Media and Sport (DCMS) is responsible for superintending this provision and promoting the improvement of the public library service provided. Individual councils are responsible for their funding and operations.

Over time, the roles and services of public libraries have evolved to reflect societal changes and technological advancements. As well as traditional book-lending, libraries now offer a wide range of diverse services including computer access, employment advice, children's activities, adult literacy support, and training courses. During the COVID-19 pandemic, libraries adapted and evolved further, providing invaluable support to keep communities connected and support the most vulnerable. This included running tablet lending schemes to those who were shielding, making phone calls to vulnerable library users, and delivering online events during lockdowns. These efforts underscore a common mission across libraries of improving people's lives and building better, stronger communities.

Research³ has consistently shown that libraries are valued by their users, reflected in high levels of satisfaction and loyalty. However, despite the value of libraries for users, the library sector has faced several long-term challenges to library engagement. DCMS participation data⁴ shows that engagement (physical or digital) across the cultural sectors – including libraries – saw a small increase in 2023/24 to 30% of adults when compared to 2022/23. However, there has been a long-term decline in library engagement over the last 20 years from a high of around 48%⁵. Whilst there is therefore scope to increase engagement, the extent of this is difficult to assess.

Key challenges faced by libraries have included:

- Reduced funding.
- The impact of COVID-19 on already declining engagement.

¹ <https://historicengland.org.uk/images-books/publications/iha-english-public-library-1850-1939/heag135-the-english-public-library-1850-1939-ih-a/>

² <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/guidance-on-libraries-as-a-statutory-service/libraries-as-a-statutory-service>

³ <https://www.suffolklibraries.co.uk/news/new-research-will-help-libraries-and-other-cultural-organisations-engage-with-new-customers>

⁴ <https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/participation-survey-2023-24-annual-publication/headline-findings-for-the-participation-survey-may-2023-to-march-2024>

⁵ <https://www.gov.uk/government/collections/sat--2#taking-part-adult-statistical-releases>

- Identifying how best to integrate the digital offer alongside physical services.
- The future role for libraries as digital content becomes more embedded in peoples' lives.

Research shows that the UK public spends a significant amount of leisure time consuming content. The ONS Time Use Study found that after sleeping and working, adults in the UK spend most of their daily time on average, watching television⁶. The way we consume content is also changing. The House of Commons Education Committee report, *Screen time: impacts on education and wellbeing*⁷ reported that extended screen times for children and teenagers is becoming a norm. Cited research suggests an increase of 52% in children's screen time between 2020 and 2022. Recent BARB data⁸ shows that streaming and social video content are the primary ways in which young people (16-34 years old) consume content, demonstrating a shift away from more traditional sources of entertainment.

Access to goods and services online has also become a norm. According to the ONS⁹, over a quarter of retail sales in Great Britain in 2022 took place online reflecting an upward trend in retail. Ipsos Iris data from 2023 further noted that 49 million people across the UK were accessing online retail sites in the UK each month, 98% of the online population¹⁰. These societal shifts set a challenging context for libraries with the online space a key competitor for time and ways in which to access services such as books and education.

In her independent review of English public libraries¹¹ published in January 2024, Baroness Sanderson highlighted further fundamental challenges. This included:

- The lack of recognition from government of the work done by libraries.
- Lack of awareness of the modern library offer amongst the public.
- Insufficient comprehensive data to gauge performance or support advocacy.
- Suggestions for a better sense of what the government wants to see from libraries.

The value of libraries and challenges facing the sector have also been the subject of debate in both the House of Lords and House of Commons¹². These challenges were also raised by

⁶<https://www.ons.gov.uk/peoplepopulationandcommunity/personalandhouseholdfinances/incomeandwealth/bulletins/timeuseintheuk/23septemberto1october2023>

⁷ <https://publications.parliament.uk/pa/cm5804/cmselect/cmeduc/118/summary.html>

⁸ MIND THE GAP - by Evan Shapiro - Media War & Peace

⁹ ONS - Retail sales, Great Britain, 2022

¹⁰ Webinar | Exploring Digital Retail: Unlocking the Online Opportunity | Ipsos iris

¹¹ <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/an-independent-review-of-english-public-libraries-report-and-government-reponse/an-independent-review-of-english-public-libraries>

¹² <https://hansard.parliament.uk/commons/2025-05-14/debates/DDC9EBAB-5C87-44A2-8E21-6F3E883ADF49/FutureOfPublicLibraries> (14 May 2025)

Minister for Creative Industries, Arts and Tourism, Chris Bryant alongside the publication of the qualitative research exploring barriers and enablers to library use¹³. This recent qualitative research conducted by Ipsos on behalf of DCMS applied the behavioural framework COM-B and identified barriers to engagement across the three COM-B factors:



The new research detailed within this report builds on these findings through a nationally representative survey of library non-users in England, providing robust insights into:

- Prevalence of barriers to library use.
- Which barriers to library use are the most and least important for people who do not engage with the library, and how these barriers interact?
- Which enablers are most strongly related to the likelihood of future library engagement?
- How do barriers and enablers to library use differ by subgroup (e.g., attitudinal or demographic)?

The research also brought together DCMS Libraries Team members, Heads of Library Services and branch managers from across England to generate potential interventions to overcome barriers to library engagement amongst non-users. This included exploration of potential interventions that could be prioritised by library services.

¹³ The report can be found at: https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/media/67220c4f4da1c0d41942a939/23-086091-01_Barriers_to_libraries_use_research_report.pdf

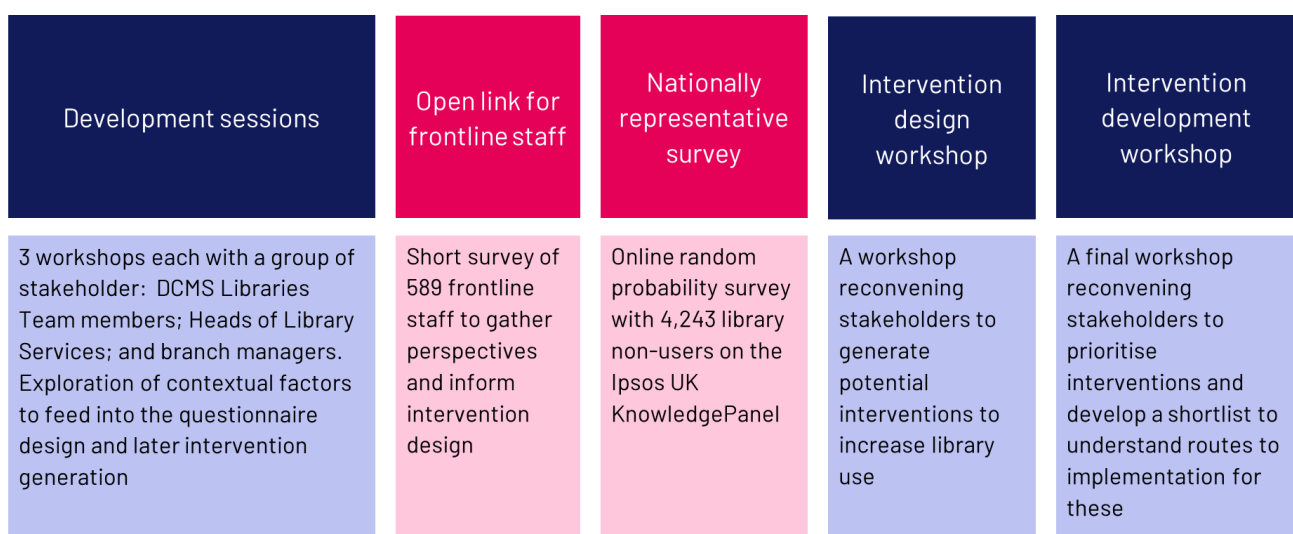
3 Methodology

This section outlines the research methods employed in this study and guides the reader on how to interpret the data presented in this report. Further details regarding the research methods and analytical techniques employed are provided in the Technical Appendix.

3.1 Methodological overview

The research used a robust mixed-methods approach, combining qualitative and quantitative approaches to comprehensively assess the barriers and enablers influencing library non-users' engagement with library services.

Figure 3.1: Methodological approach to the research



The study commenced with a series of three workshops, one with each of the following groups:

- DCMS staff.
- Heads of library services.
- Library branch managers.

These workshops provided invaluable perspectives on the barriers and enablers of library use, informing the design of the subsequent survey questionnaire and later workshops focused on intervention approaches. Additionally, an open-link survey made available by Libraries Connected with 589 frontline library staff further enriched the understanding of staff perspectives, contributing to the development of the research materials.

The core of the quantitative research involved a large-scale online nationally representative survey of 4,243 library non-users (those who had not used library services within the past 12 months) across England aged 17+ using the Ipsos UK KnowledgePanel, Ipsos's online random

probability panel.¹⁴ The survey data was then analysed using sophisticated statistical techniques, including MaxDiff and Bayes Nets (BN) analysis to identify barriers and enablers to library use more comprehensively. Furthermore, the survey data was used to develop a segmentation of library non-users, providing a nuanced understanding of their diverse attitudes and preferences towards library use. Unless otherwise specified, differences between subgroups mentioned in this report are statistically significant.

To ensure a holistic understanding of the factors driving library engagement, the research design was guided by the COM-B model, a widely recognized framework in behavioural science. This model highlights the interplay of capability, opportunity, and motivation in shaping individual behaviour. Survey questions were carefully crafted to assess each of these components, providing a comprehensive picture of the complex interplay of factors influencing library engagement among non-users.

The qualitative strand of research involved three rounds of stakeholder workshops:

- **Development workshops:** with separate 2-hour face-to-face or online workshops held with members of the DCMS Libraries Team, Heads of Library services and branch managers. These workshops gathered stakeholder views towards key barriers and enablers to library use. They also gathered key contextual factors to help inform the survey design.
- **Intervention generation workshop:** bringing together all participants from the development workshops, for a 3-hour online session to share findings from the survey and generate a long-list of interventions to tackle key barriers identified in the survey.
- **Intervention development workshop:** bringing together all participants for a final 2.5-hour online workshop where three interventions were discussed in more detail to explore considerations for potential implementation.

Further details regarding the research methods and analytical techniques employed are provided in the Technical Appendix.

3.2 How to read this report

When reading the statistical data from the survey, where percentages in this report do not sum to 100, this may be due to computer rounding, multi-code questions or the exclusion of 'Don't know', 'Not applicable' and 'Prefer not to say' answers. All subgroup differences mentioned in the report are statistically significant unless otherwise stated. Where there are particularly relevant differences between groups, these have been highlighted. The report also contains more

¹⁴ You can learn more about the UK KnowledgePanel at the following: <https://www.ipsos.com/en-uk/uk-knowledgepanel>

technical statistical analysis including a MaxDiff analysis and a segmentation analysis. More details on how to interpret these are provided in the relevant chapters.

When considering the qualitative findings derived from the stakeholder workshops, it is important to bear in mind what a qualitative approach provides. Qualitative research is illustrative, detailed, and exploratory. It explores the range of perceptions and opinions of participants in detail, and it provides an insight into the key reasons underlying participants' views. Qualitative research cannot – and does not set out to be – representative of the wider population. We sampled stakeholder participants purposively to ensure inclusion across a range of regional, library type and population type areas. When analysing the data, we were not seeking to understand prevalence, but rather the values and experiences which underpin people's perceptions and opinions. The findings cannot be considered quantifiable as they are not drawn from a statistically representative sample. As such, the findings should not be treated as generalisable to all library stakeholders.

3.3 Applying COM-B

This research examines the prevalence of barriers and enablers to people's engagement with libraries. When examining human behaviour, it is important to account for different dimensions and the role each of these play in influencing people's attitudes and actions. To help us do this, we have used the COM-B model of behaviour change.

The COM-B behavioural framework was developed by Michie et al (2011)¹⁵ and provides a structure for understanding an individual's behaviour and the factors that influence this. Understanding the different influences that play a role in shaping a behaviour can help identify the types of interventions that could best support behaviour change.

There are three components within the COM-B framework. The initials 'COM' stand for these three components (capability, opportunity, and motivation) which all play a role in influencing behaviour (represented by the initial 'B'). These components are described below:

- **'Capability'** refers to a person's physical or psychological ability to engage in a specific behaviour. For example, an individual's capability to perform a behaviour could involve knowledge, skills, or physical attributes that are necessary to perform a specific behaviour, such as going to the library.
- **'Opportunity'** refers to the external factors that make certain behaviours possible or prompt them. This could be the environment, the social or cultural context, or the availability of necessary resources. For instance, a person might have the motivation and

¹⁵ Michie, S., van Stralen, M.M. & West, R. The behaviour change wheel: A new method for characterising and designing behaviour change interventions. *Implementation Sci* 6, 42 (2011). <https://doi.org/10.1186/1748-5908-6-42>

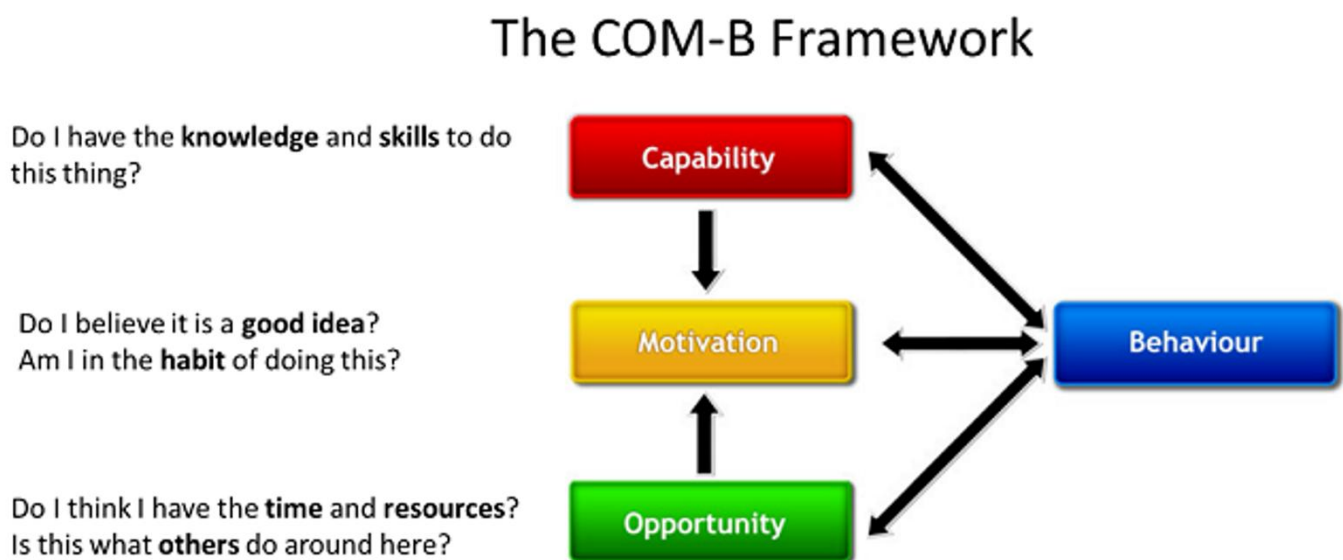
capability to perform a behaviour, but if they don't have access to a safe space to do so, the opportunity is lacking. In this model, opportunity is all about the conditions outside the individual that either enable or hinder the behaviour.

- **'Motivation'** factors are aspects which drive behaviours. This dimension of the COM-B model refers to how much a person wants to carry out a particular action and can be a deliberate choice or influenced by subconscious factors. Individual elements such as personal beliefs, feelings, habits, or expected rewards or punishments can all impact an individual's motivation to carry out a behaviour.

The COM-B model represents the observation that at any given moment, a particular behaviour will occur only when the person concerned has sufficient capability and opportunity to engage in the behaviour and is more motivated to enact that behaviour than competing behaviours.

Figure 3.2 illustrates the model including definitions of the entities involved and specification of the relationships between them.

Figure 3.2: The COM-B model of behaviour¹⁶



The COM-B framework was used to design and analyse this research on library non-users. Specifically, it informed the development of the survey questionnaires. This ensured that questions were designed to gather information about all three components of the model (Capability, Opportunity, Motivation) in relation to library use. It also provided a structure for analysing the collected data, which helped to understand how each of the three components influenced people's engagement (or lack of) with libraries.

¹⁶ Ibid.

3.4 Setting the context with library stakeholders

Stakeholders were asked to take part in an online workshop to provide contextual understanding of key factors shaping library engagement to support development of the survey questionnaire. Separate sessions were held with members of the DCMS Libraries Team, Heads of Library Services and library branch managers.

3.4.1 Library stakeholders reported key challenges faced by libraries which are key contexts to consider when seeking to increase library usage

Stakeholders explained that public libraries are currently facing many challenges including:

- **Data collection:** defining and collecting accurate user data is difficult. In particular, there is difficulty collecting reliable measurements like physical visits and actual service usage (e.g., book loans).
- **Financial constraints:** particularly driven by established local government funding models, financial constraints limit the resources available for promoting services and raising awareness, but also for book stock and opening hours. Therefore, libraries must find ways of increasing usage and expectations without being provided extra resource.
- **Societal changes:** combating low levels of awareness of the full range of library services and adapting to shifting demographics have impacted library usage. Stakeholder participants highlighted the competitive pressures libraries face from alternative services like streaming platforms. This emphasises the need to adapt to declining literacy rates and evolving usage patterns to redefine the library's role within the community.
- **Operational challenges:** Libraries face a range of operational challenges, including managing diverse user groups (e.g., rough sleepers and families), maintaining and upgrading often aging buildings, and relying heavily on volunteers. Limited staff training and outreach capacity further restrict libraries' ability to engage effectively with local communities. The varied nature of library structures, influenced by various public service models to community-managed operations, can lead to inconsistencies in service offerings. However, this diversity also reflects libraries' strength in responding to local community needs allowing libraries to tailor their services to the specific demographics, interests, and challenges of their communities.
- **Competition from alternative services:** use of alternative services such as purchasing books on Amazon competing with loaning books, is a barrier to library use and particularly prevalent among higher-income individuals. Engaging families can be challenging due to competing activities. In particular, capturing the interest of teenagers and younger demographics, who are often drawn to digital entertainment and social media, presents another significant hurdle.

3.4.2 Stakeholders reflected on who library users and non-users are

Stakeholders explained that defining "users" is not straightforward, with variations between active borrowers and those who visit the library without taking books out. There was agreement that key user demographics include older adults, individuals aged 18-25, students, parents with young children (especially under 5s), and women aged 25 and above. Stakeholder participants felt that library usage correlates with life stages and individual circumstances.

Differences in user groups between city and rural libraries were noted. For example, stakeholders observed that city libraries tended to have more transient user relationships. Rural libraries often foster closer, more personal connections with their users, typically skewing towards older demographics.

3.4.3 Thoughts on barriers and enablers to library usage

Stakeholders were shown the qualitative research findings¹⁷. They felt strongly that these findings resonated with their experiences and did not express surprise at the findings. They acknowledged the well-documented decline in library use and expressed concern that the identified barriers reflected a growing apathy towards libraries.

Stakeholders felt that barriers around misconceptions were the most significant, particularly with little understanding of what is offered at the library beyond loaning physical books. In response to this, they felt that raising awareness would be a key piece of work needed to increase library engagement and were keen to see if the survey reflected this hypothesis.

When considering potential enablers to support library engagement of non-users, stakeholder participants felt that libraries were already working towards some of these or had tried to tackle these previously. For example, participants explained that extended opening hours had been tried in some libraries but did not achieve the footfall desired.

3.4.4 Initial thoughts on ways to encourage engagement

Stakeholders initially identified several potential interventions to encourage library engagement by raising awareness:

- **Comprehensive communication:** raising awareness of the full range of library services among staff, volunteers, council stakeholders. This includes improved campaigns, highlighting positive experiences at the library, and leveraging word-of-mouth marketing.

¹⁷ Found at <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/barriers-to-library-use-qualitative-research-report>

- **Targeted promotion:** promoting services relevant to various life stages and tailoring messaging to specific user groups.
- **Improved navigation:** enhancing the promotion and accessibility of both physical and online offerings.

4 The profile of library non-users

4.1 Overall prevalence of library non-users

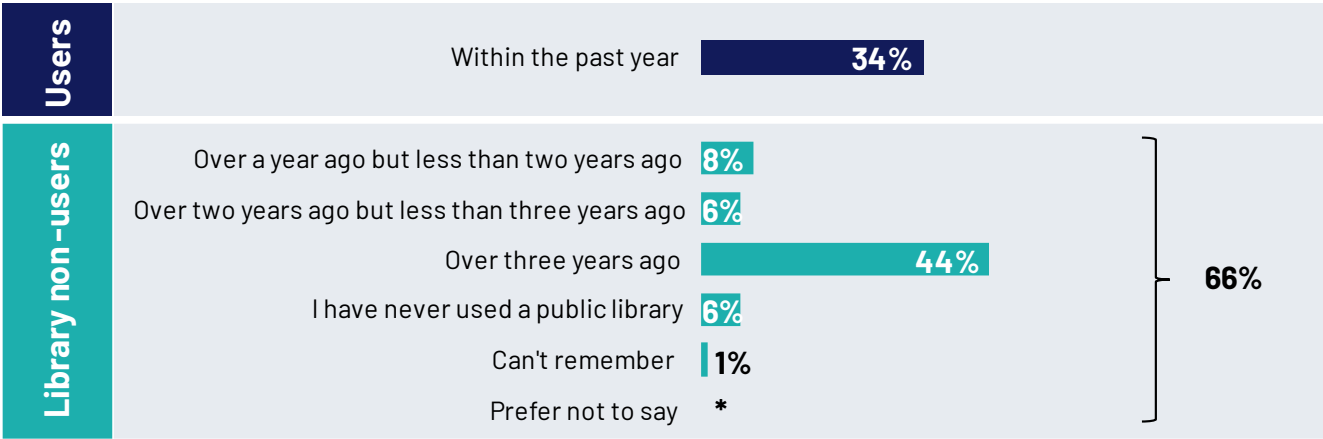
Library non-users constitute a significant portion of the English population, representing 66% compared to 34% who have used library services in the past year.

The online survey with library non-users revealed that 66% of respondents had not used a public library (physically or online) in the previous year or at any point in their lives. In contrast, 34% of respondents had used a library in the past year. These individuals, classified as "library users," were not included in the main survey for this research. For the purpose of this study, "library non-users" are defined as individuals who have not accessed local public library services within the 12 months preceding the survey date.

Focusing on library non-users, the survey found that a significant proportion (44%) had not accessed a public library in over three years (see Figure 4.1).

Of the remaining non-users, 8% had last used a library between one and two years prior, and 6% between two and three years prior. An equally small percentage (6%) had never used a library, and only 1% couldn't recall their last visit.

Figure 4.1: When respondents said they last used a public library



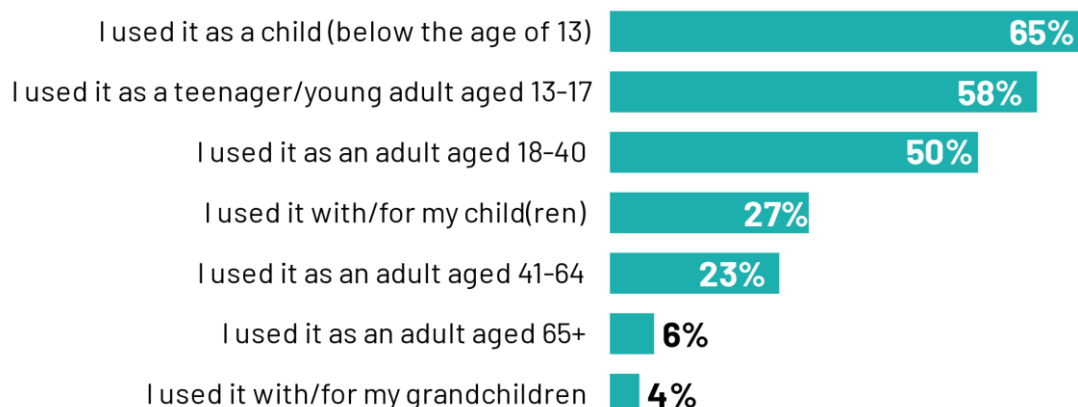
Base: 7252 (All UK adults, age 17+). *small base (7). Source: KnowledgePanel survey. Q1SCREENER. When did you last use a public library?

Individuals who reported not using a library in over three years were more likely than average to be male (48% compared to the average of 44%), aged 55 and older (48%) and of white ethnicities (including white minorities)(46%). They also tended to be working full-time (48%), non-

graduates (47%), parents (60% regardless of the child's age), and from social grade C1¹⁸ (46%). There were no differences across regions.

Figure 4.2 shows that most library non-users last used public library services when they were a child (65%), a teenager/young adult (58%) or as an adult below 40 years (50%). Around a third of non-users used library services with or for their child(ren) (27%).

Figure 4.2: Age of library non-users when they last used public library services



Base: 3885 (All library non-users, excluding those who have never used a public library). Source: KnowledgePanel survey. Q2. When in your life have you used public library services (either in-person or library services online)?

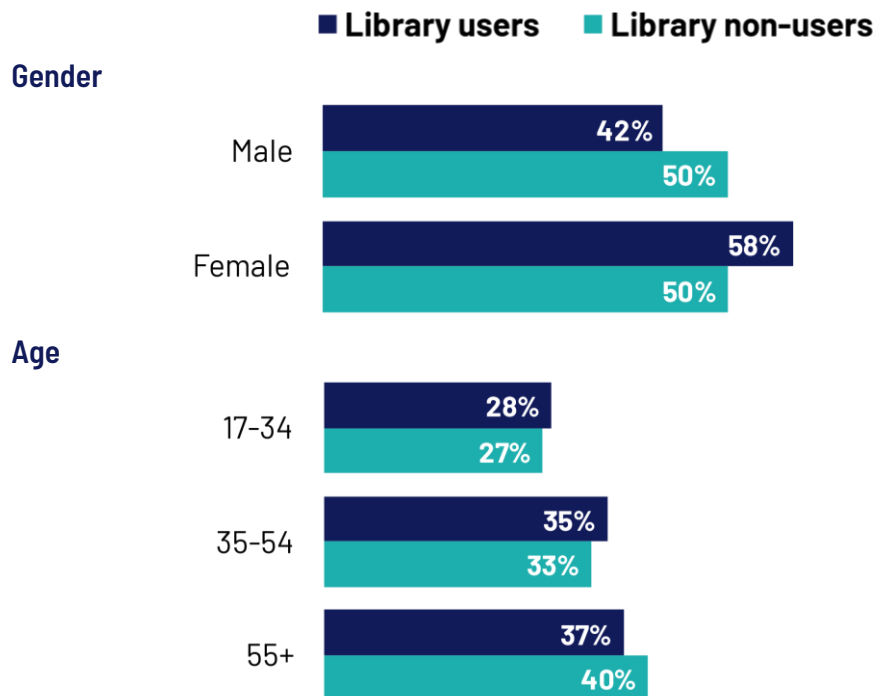
4.2 Demographics of library non-users vs users

This section further explores the demographic profile of library non-users in England, comparing their characteristics to those who have used library services within the past year.

While the gender distribution among library non-users is evenly split between male and female (50% each), library users have a higher proportion of females (58% female vs. 42% male). Age also plays some role in library usage, with library non-users having a slightly higher proportion of individuals aged 55 and older (40% compared to 37% of library users). See Figure 4.3.

¹⁸ Social grade is a common demographic classification system used in the UK to categorise individuals based on their occupation and socioeconomic status. The categories used in this report are defined as below:

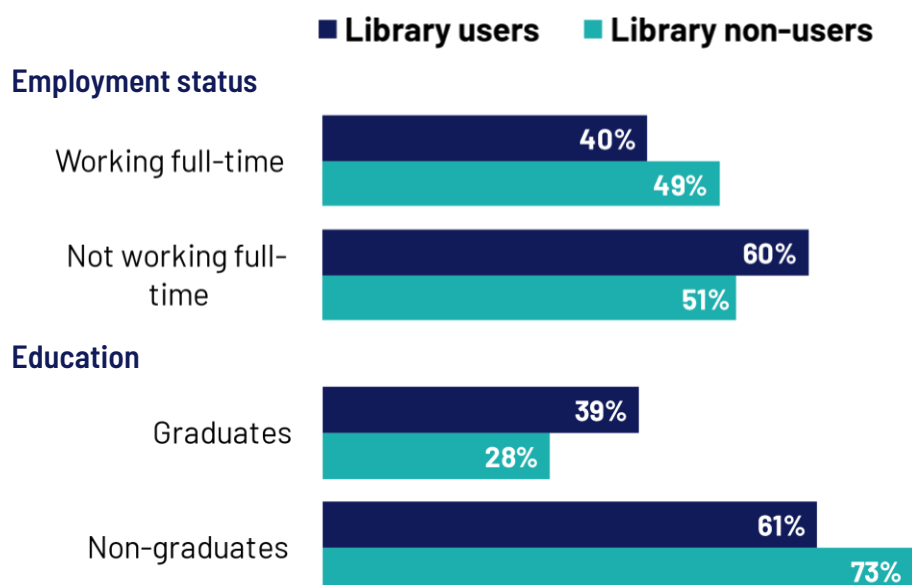
- AB: Higher and intermediate managerial, administrative, and professional occupations.
- C1: Supervisory, clerical, and junior managerial, administrative, and professional occupations.
- C2: Skilled manual occupations.
- DE: Semi-skilled and unskilled manual occupations, unemployed, and state pensioners.

Figure 4.3: Percentage of library non-users and users by gender and age

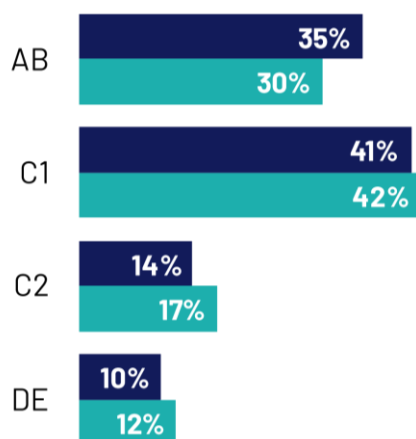
Base: All who have not used a library in the past year (4243). Source: KnowledgePanel survey.

Employment status is another key differentiator, with library non-users being more likely to be working full-time (49% compared to 40% of library users) while educational attainment also shows a clear distinction, with library non-users being less likely to hold a degree than library users (28% compared to 39%).

Finally, socio-economic factors appear to influence library usage, with library non-users being less likely to fall into the AB social grade category (30% compared to 35% of library users). See Figure 4.4.

Figure 4.4: Percentage of library users and non-users by employment status, education and socio-economic factors

Social grade



Base: All who have not used a library in the past year (4243). Source: KnowledgePanel survey.

5 Awareness and general perceptions of libraries among library non-users

5.1 Awareness of libraries and library services

A high proportion of library non-users said they were aware of their local library's physical location.

Approximately 81% of library non-users said they knew the exact location of their local library. These were more likely than average to be women (84%), individuals over 45 years old (with percentages growing from 84% in the 45-54 age group to 89% for those over 75), white ethnicities (83%), non-full-time workers (85%), grandparents (86%), people with children aged 12-15 (87%), those living in the South of England (83%), and countryside dwellers (86%).

In contrast, a smaller proportion (9%) indicated knowing the general area of their local library but not its exact location. This trend was more pronounced among younger individuals (17% of 17-24 year-olds and 14% of 25-34 year-olds), graduates (10%), non-grandparents (10%), and those residing in London (12%). By comparison, a similar proportion of non-users (10%) were likely to say they were unsure of the library's whereabouts. Men (12%), 25-34-year-olds (15%), full-time workers (12%), those with household incomes earning £100,000+ annually (14%), and North East residents (15%) were more likely than average to say they were unsure of the library's location.

Most respondents agreed that it was easy to get to their local library from where they lived.

Eighty-five per cent of respondents said they find it easy to get to their local library from where they live (5% said it was difficult). The most prevalent mode of transport selected to travel to a local library was walking (45%), followed by car (41%) and public transport (10%). Very few said they would cycle (2%) or get a taxi (1%).

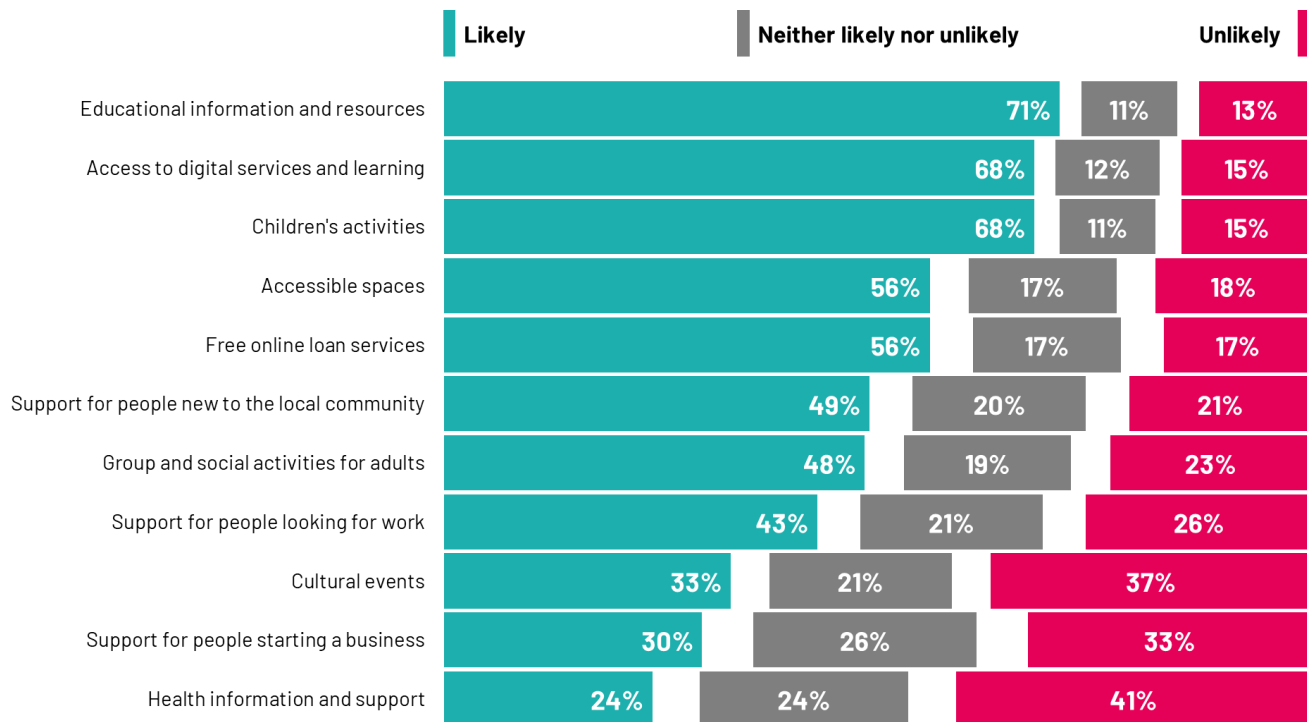
However, respondents reported a lack of familiarity with the types of services offered at their local library.

Most library non-users (58%) indicated they are unfamiliar with library services beyond borrowing physical books. In contrast, 42% of non-users reported familiarity with a wider range of library services. Regarding online services specifically, a significantly smaller proportion of library non-users were familiar with these. Only 16% reported familiarity with their local libraries' online services, compared to 83% who were unfamiliar with them.

Respondents were also shown a list of various services and asked how likely they thought it was that their local library offered each service. Figure 5.1 shows that library non-users commonly perceive local libraries as institutions that offer educational information and resources, with 71% holding this view. They also frequently saw libraries as sources of access to digital services

and learning (68%), and providers of children's activities (68%). On the other hand, libraries were less commonly associated by non-users with offering health information and support (mentioned by 24%), assistance for starting a business (30%), or hosting cultural events (33%).

Figure 5.1: Perceived likelihood that local library offers following services



Base: All who have not used a library in the past year (4243). Source: KnowledgePanel Survey, Q9.
Thinking beyond the loaning of physical books, how likely or unlikely do you think it is that your local public library offers each of these services?

A majority (56%) of library non-users believe their local library offers free online loan services where levels of awareness vary by different demographics. These individuals are more likely to be women (59%), aged 55+ (57%), working full-time (59%), graduates (66%), living in the South of England (59%), and from the AB social grade (64%). Furthermore, those who have used a library within the past three years (but more than a year ago) were also more likely than average to believe their library offers free online services. Sixty-eight per cent of those who last used a library between one and two years ago, and 64% of those who last used a library between two and three years ago holding this belief.

Overall, 17% said that they think their local library is unlikely to offer free online loan services. Men were more likely than average to say this (19%), as were those aged 25-34 (22%), those who have a child aged 5-11 (23%), those living in urban areas (18%), those had never used the library (29%) and those who were not likely to visit the library services in the near future (22%).

5.2 Perceptions of libraries and library services

Library non-users generally hold positive views of the library offering and environment. They value services like comfortable spaces, accessibility, updated collections, workspaces, and staff support, particularly women, older adults, and those from higher socioeconomic backgrounds.

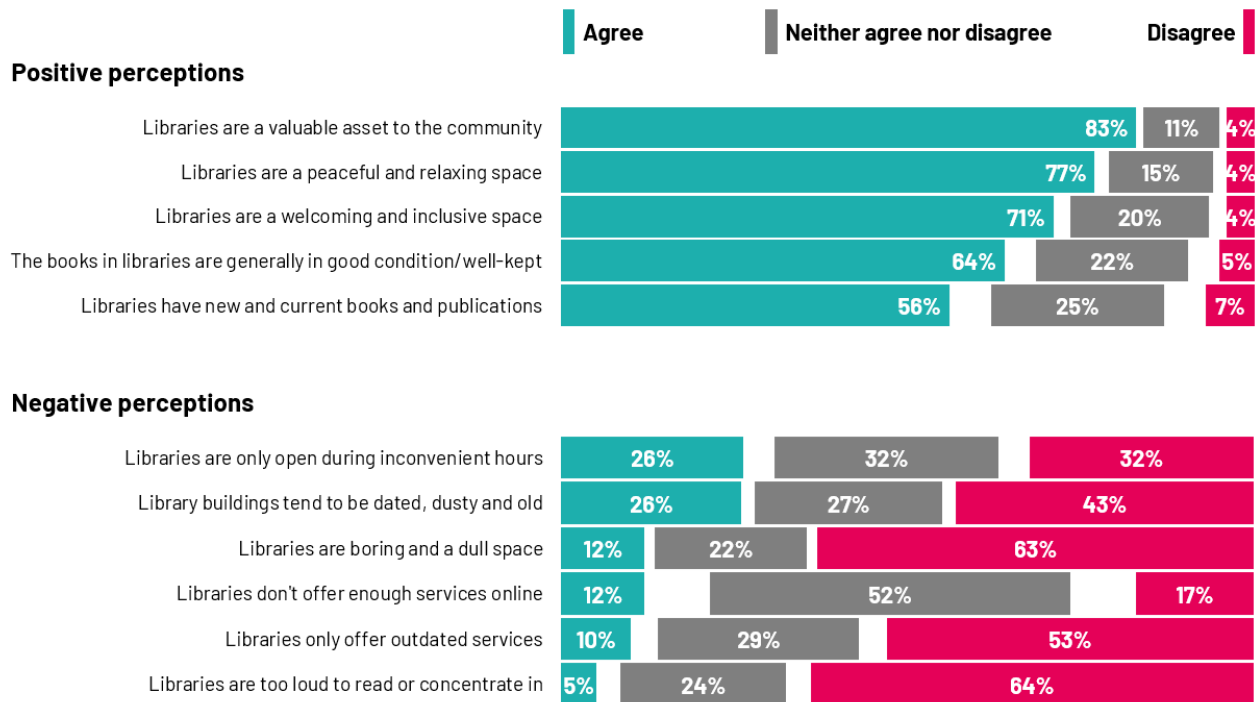
Respondents were presented with a range of positive and negative statements about libraries and asked whether they agreed or disagreed with each. Most library non-users agreed with the statements that libraries are an asset to the community (83% agreed vs 4% who disagreed), they are peaceful and relaxing (77% vs 4% who disagreed), and a welcoming and inclusive space (71% vs 4% who disagreed). Around three in five also agreed that libraries have new and current books and publications (56% vs 7% who disagreed) and that books in libraries are generally in good condition/well-kept (64% vs 5% who disagreed).

Just over half (53%) of respondents disagreed with the statement that libraries only offer outdated services, whilst 10% agreed. An even higher proportion disagreed with the statements that libraries are boring and dull spaces (63%), whilst 12% agreed. They also disagreed more with the statement the libraries are too loud to read or concentrate in (64% disagreed vs 5% who agreed).

Library non-users were slightly more mixed with the statement that libraries tend to be dated, dusty and old with 43% saying they disagreed. However, 26% said they agreed while 27% said they neither agree nor disagree.

However, there was less certainty regarding practical aspects like opening hours and online services.

Views were also mixed regarding perceptions of libraries only being open during inconvenient hours with a quarter saying they agreed (26%), a third saying they disagreed (32%) and another third (32%) saying they neither agreed nor disagreed. More than half of respondents said they neither agreed or disagreed with the statement that libraries don't offer enough services online (52% said neither, whereas 12% agreed and 17% disagreed).

Figure 5.2: General perceptions about public libraries among library non-users

Base: All who have not used a library in the past year (4243). Source: KnowledgePanel survey. Q10.

To what extent do you agree or disagree with each of the following statements about public libraries in general?

Most library non-users say a range of services are important for libraries to offer, especially comfortable and accessible spaces, up-to-date books, dedicated work areas, and staff support, with this sentiment often stronger among women, older adults, and those from higher socioeconomic backgrounds

Figure 5.2 shows that when library non-users were asked how important or unimportant they thought it was for their local library to offer several library services. Even if they did not personally use them, most considered these services to be important, at least to some degree.

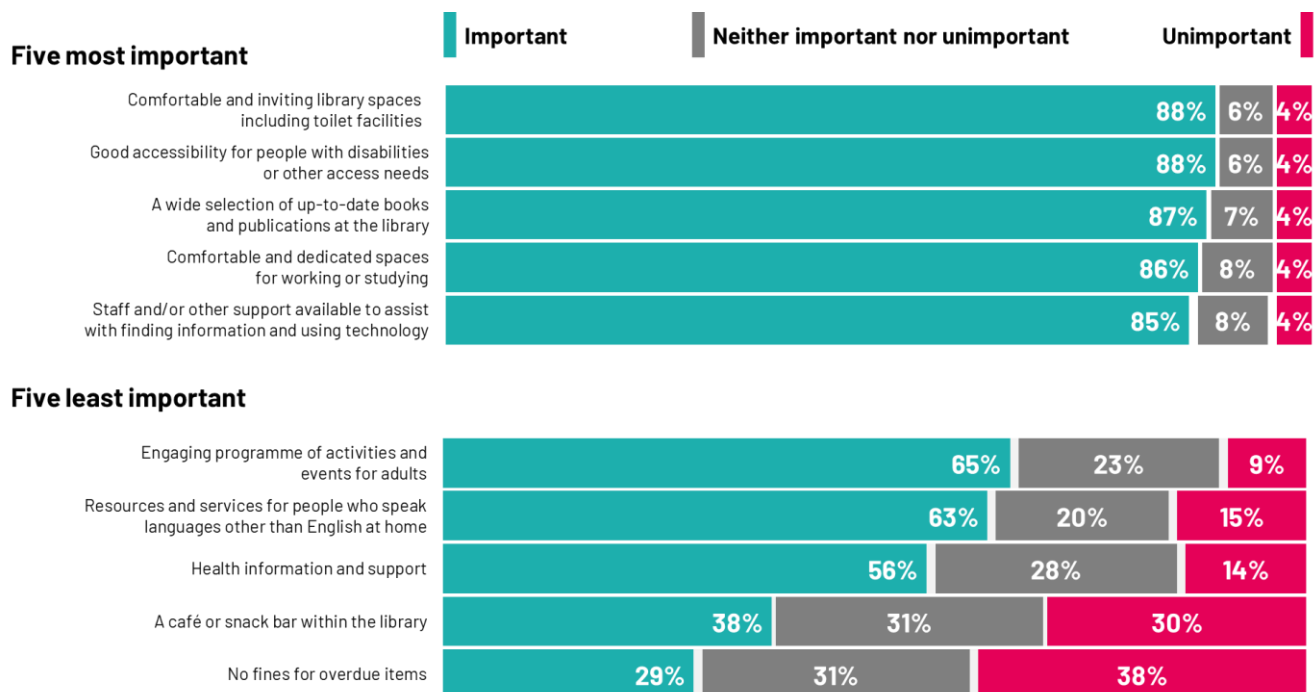
The only exception was 'no fines for overdue items', where almost two in five library non-users said this was unimportant (38%), compared to approximately a third who said this was important (29%) or neither (31%). This view varied by household income. Those in the lowest-income households (up to £25,000 annually) were more likely than average to say that no fines for overdue items was important (34% vs 29% average). In contrast, the highest income households (£52,000 up to £99,999, and £100,000+) were more likely than average to say that no fines for overdue items was fairly or very unimportant (46% and 52% respectively, vs 38% average).

Comfortable and inviting library spaces, including toilet facilities, were considered important by 88% of respondents. This was particularly pronounced among certain demographics including: women (89%), individuals aged 55+ (91%), grandparents (91%), parents with children aged 12 to 15 (92%), residents in the South East (91%) and those in AB (91%) and C1 (90%) social grades. Those who had used the library relatively recently (over a year ago) but less than two years ago (94%)

and over three years ago (90%), were also more likely to emphasise the importance of comfortable spaces.

Good accessibility for people with disabilities or other access needs was equally important (88%), with similar demographic trends: women (91%), those aged 55+ (91%), grandparents (91%), parents with children aged 12 to 15 (93%), residents in the South East (92%) and those in social grade C1 (90%). Again, those who had used the library less than 2 years ago (but more than a year ago) (94%) and more than 3 years ago (89%) were more likely to rate this service as important.

Figure 5.3: Level of importance library non-users think their local library should offer several services, even if they do not personally use them.



Base: All who have not used a library in the past year (4243). Source KnowledgePanel survey, Q.
How important or unimportant do you think it is for your local library to offer each of the following, even if you don't personally use them?

A wide selection of up-to-date books and publications at the library was valued by 86% of library non-users. This was particularly evident among women (90%), individuals aged 55+ (90%), grandparents (91%), parents with children aged 12 to 15 (93%), residents in the South West (91%) and those in the AB (91%) and C1 (90%) social grades. Similarly, those who had used the library less than 2 years ago (but more than a year ago) (93%) and more than 3 years ago (89%) were more likely than average to rate this service as important.

Comfortable and dedicated spaces for working or studying were considered important by 86% of respondents. This preference was more pronounced among women (87%), individuals aged 55+ (88%), grandparents (88%), and those in the AB social grade (89%). Those who had used the library less than 2 years ago (but more than a year ago) (92%) and more than 3 years ago (87%) were also more likely to emphasise the importance of dedicated workspaces. Finally, London

residents placed a higher value than average (90% said this was important vs 86% average) on this service, while the North East placed a lower value than average (8% said this was unimportant vs 4% average).

Finally, staff and/or other support available to assist with finding information and using technology was considered important by 85% of library non-users. This service was particularly important for women (88%), individuals aged 55+ (91%), grandparents (89%), those in the AB (88%) and C1 (87%) social grades and those who had used the library less than 2 years ago (but more than a year ago) (91%) and more than 3 years ago (88%).

This chapter has provided a comprehensive overview of library non-users in England, exploring general awareness about libraries and their services in addition to overall perceptions of libraries. While awareness of specific library services beyond book lending remains limited, non-users generally hold positive views of libraries, recognising their value as community assets and welcoming spaces. However, there is a clear disconnect between these positive perceptions and actual engagement with library services. The following chapter will dig deeper into this disconnect, examining the specific barriers that prevent library non-users from using library services.

6 Barriers to library engagement

This chapter explores the barriers preventing people from using library services. It draws on insights from a Maximum Difference Scaling (MaxDiff) analysis, a technique that helps us understand which barriers are most important to people who do not use libraries. By examining the relative importance of 25 potential barriers, identified through previous research and consultation with library staff, we gain a nuanced understanding of what is preventing people from using library services.

Using the COM-B framework, these barriers can be grouped into three main **themes**, demonstrating the role that different factors play in shaping library engagement.

- **Capability:** This theme focuses on knowledge and skills related to library use. The analysis revealed that a lack of awareness about the range of services offered beyond physical book lending is a significant barrier for many non-users.
- **Opportunity:** This theme encompasses external factors that enable or hinder library use. Inconvenient opening hours emerged as a prominent opportunity barrier, particularly for those with busy schedules or work commitments.
- **Motivation:** This theme explores personal reasons for or against using libraries. The ability to access similar resources and services elsewhere, such as online or in bookshops, was identified as a major motivational barrier, highlighting the need for libraries to demonstrate their unique value proposition.

The following sections delve deeper into each of these barrier themes, exploring the specific concerns and perceptions that contribute to library non-use. By understanding the nuances of these barriers, libraries can develop more effective strategies to attract new audiences and re-engage those who have drifted away.

6.1 Using a MaxDiff analysis to understand barriers to library use

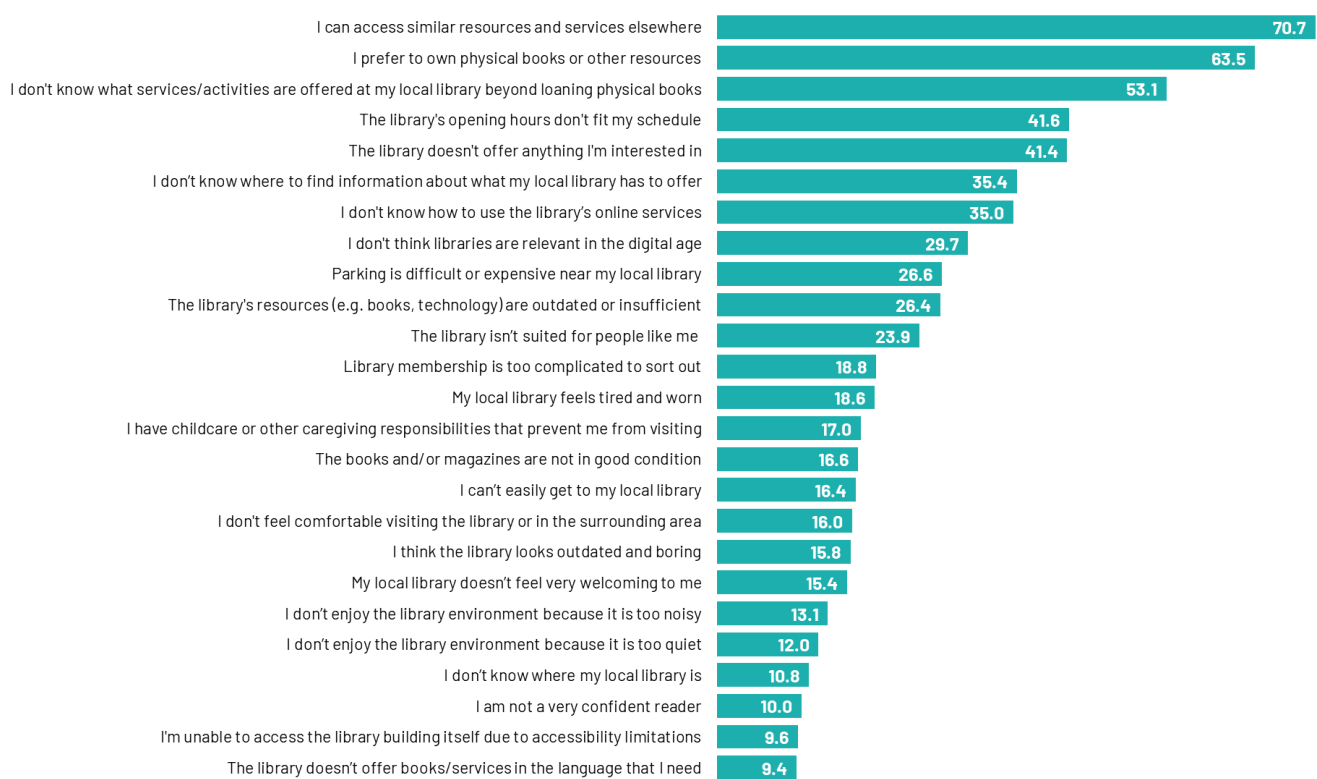
To understand what is preventing people from using libraries, we asked survey participants who have not used a library in the past year to compare different reasons. They were asked to choose which were the biggest and smallest barriers for them personally. They were presented with a list of 25 possible barriers, which were developed based on previous Ipsos qualitative research with library non-users as well as conversations with library staff. These barriers covered a range of topics, from not knowing what services libraries offer to finding the library environment unappealing. By asking people to make these comparisons, we were able to identify which barriers are seen as most important overall and whether certain barriers are more likely to divide opinion among the public.

MaxDiff scores run from 0-100 which reflect the probability of a barrier being chosen, given a set of alternative items. For example, if a barrier has a score of 70 this means that this barrier has a

70% likelihood of being selected from the list. A more detailed explanation of this method is provided in the Technical Appendix.

Figure 6.1 presents the ranking order of all the listed barriers (not accounting for which theme they sit in). As can be seen, being able to access similar resources and services from elsewhere is the barrier with the highest score (70.7). This means that this barrier has a 70.7% likelihood of being chosen overall by library non-users. This barrier was followed by preferring to own physical books or other resources (63.5) and not knowing what services/activities are offered (53.1). While looking at the scores overall is useful, we get a more nuanced picture of these barriers when evaluated through the three COM-B themes (capability, opportunity and motivation) as explained above.

Figure 6.1: MaxDiff scores of all listed barriers



Base: All who have not used a library in the past year and completed the MaxDiff (4011)

6.2 Capability barriers: lack of awareness about library services

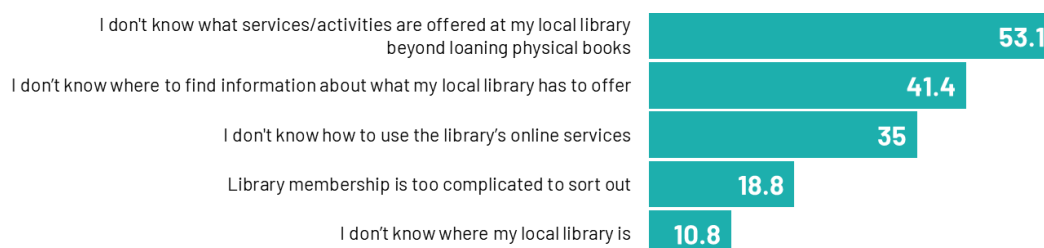
Many people are unaware of the wide range of services libraries offer beyond borrowing books, and this lack of awareness is a major barrier to library use, especially for certain groups like graduates and those in more affluent areas.

A lack of awareness about the range of services and activities offered by libraries emerged as a significant barrier to engagement. The MaxDiff analysis revealed that not knowing what services and activities are offered beyond physical book lending was one of the most important

obstacles (53.1). This was followed by not knowing where to find information about what their local library has to offer (41.4).

Library membership being difficult to sort out and not knowing where the local library is, however, were demonstrated to be relatively weak barriers with scores of 18.8 and 10.8 respectively suggesting that these factors are not likely to be key in driving future engagement.

Figure 6.2: Capability barriers MaxDiff importance scores



Base: All who have not used a library in the past year and completed the MaxDiff (4011).

Not knowing what services/activities are offered beyond loaning physical books was revealed to be more significant for those aged between 55-64 (with a score of 56.8 compared to 53.1 overall), graduates (56.8), people in the least deprived IMD quintile (55.6) and those within the AB social grade (55.4).

This lack of awareness aligns with the findings from the survey of 598 frontline library staff. They consistently reported a widespread public perception of libraries as primarily places to borrow physical books. Staff expressed concern that many people remain unaware of the diverse range of resources and services available, including digital offerings, community programmes, and technology support. One staff member aptly summarised this sentiment, stating,

"Not enough people know about what libraries offer and that it is a free service."

This sentiment was echoed by another respondent who stated a major barrier is:

"Not understanding or realising the extent of our offer."

The lack of awareness extends to the full range of services offered:

"Many people are unaware of the full range of services we offer."

6.3 Opportunity barriers: library accessibility

Inconvenient opening hours are a major barrier to library use, especially for busy individuals like parents, those with full-time jobs, and younger adults. This highlights the need for libraries to offer more flexible hours that align with people's lives.

Accessibility emerged as a significant obstacle to library engagement, with a range of factors impacting library non-users' ability to conveniently access library services. The analysis reveals that library opening hours were the most significant obstacle within this theme (41.6). This barrier was even more pronounced for parents or legal guardians, who were more likely than those without children to cite the library's opening hours as a barrier (49 compared with 44.1 for non-parents). This barrier also had a higher score amongst those aged 17-34 (46.1) and those aged 35-54 (47.5), those working full-time (49.4 compared to 33.9 not working full-time) and graduates (48).

Inconvenient opening hours was followed by finding parking difficult or expensive (with a score of 26.6), childcare or caregiving responsibilities prevent them from using the library (17), not being able to easily get to the local library (16.4) and being unable to access the library itself (9.6). While being unable to access the library itself received a low score amongst library non-users overall, it was also not seen as statistically significant for those who say they have a health condition or disability that limits one's daily activities – perhaps signifying a belief that libraries are already made to be accessible on the whole.

Figure 6.3: Accessibility barriers: MaxDiff importance scores



Base: All who have not used a library in the past year and completed the MaxDiff (4011).

These findings align with the perspectives shared within the frontline library staff survey. Inconvenient opening hours, particularly for those employed during standard business hours, was frequently cited as a major obstacle. Limited evening and weekend options were seen as exacerbating this issue, with several staff members emphasising the need for more flexible hours to accommodate working individuals. One respondent stated,

"Inconvenient opening hours for working people."

Another echoed this sentiment, calling for

"Opening hours that suit all potential customers".

Beyond opening hours, library closures, distances, inadequate public transportation, and lack of parking were also presented as substantial barriers for potential users by staff. One staff member highlighted the challenge posed by library closures, stating,

"Many local libraries have closed, and city libraries remain. Difficulty of access to the city centre."

6.4 Motivation barriers

Motivation barriers were the largest group and can be broken down into three subthemes: Personal relevance or preferences, general perceptions about libraries and perceptions about library environments.

6.4.1 Motivation barriers: personal relevance or preferences

The ability to access similar resources and services elsewhere, particularly online or in bookshops, is the most significant barrier to library use, especially for those with higher incomes, graduates, and individuals from more affluent areas, highlighting the challenge libraries face in demonstrating their unique value in a world of readily available alternatives.

Among these barriers, being able to access similar resources and services elsewhere (e.g. online or from bookshops) was by far the most important barrier (not just within this theme but also overall) with a score of 70.7. This barrier was even more prominent amongst higher socioeconomic groups – for example, those who have a household income above £100,000 per year (78.6), graduates (76.2), those in the least deprived IMD quantile (75.1) and those within the AB social grade category (76.5).

Preference to own physical books or other resources came a close second in terms of importance (63.5) and demonstrated similar higher levels of importance amongst higher socioeconomic groups, followed by libraries not offering anything of interest (41.4), libraries not suited for people like me (23.9), not being a confident reader (10) and not offering books/services in languages that I need (9.4).

Figure 6.4: Motivation barriers about personal relevance or preferences: Max Diff importance scores



Base: All who have not used a library in the past year and completed the MaxDiff (4011).

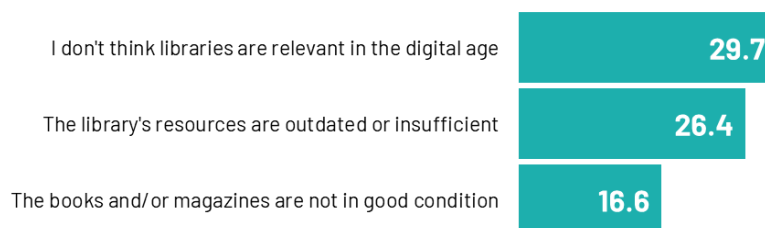
6.4.2 Motivation barriers: perceptions about libraries

Many library non-users, particularly men and those confident with technology, perceive libraries as irrelevant in the digital age, highlighting the need for libraries to adapt and showcase their unique value in a world dominated by online resources.

Non-users' perceptions of libraries, particularly their relevance in today's digital world, emerged as another significant motivational barrier. The analysis revealed that respondents considered the perceived irrelevance of libraries in the digital age (29.7) a more significant barrier than concerns about outdated or insufficient resources (26.4) or the condition of books and magazines (16.6). This suggests that for many non-users, the core challenge lies in seeing how libraries fit into their modern lives, where information and entertainment are readily available through digital channels.

In addition, library non-users who were completely unfamiliar with their local library's online services were more likely than those with a lot of familiarity to agree with the statement 'I don't think libraries are relevant in the digital age' (not at all familiar with online services, 29.5, vs very familiar, 23). This difference suggests that non-users are more likely to think that libraries are irrelevant, rather than relevant, in the digital age, when they are less familiar with the online services local libraries have to offer.

Figure 6.5: Motivation barriers about perceptions of libraries: Max Diff importance scores



Base: All who have not used a library in the past year and completed the MaxDiff (4011).

Men were more likely than women to perceive libraries as irrelevant in the digital age, scoring 32.7 compared to 27 for women. This was also more likely to be a more significant barrier amongst those who say they are confident when it comes to using the internet compared with those who say they are not confident (29.9 vs. 22.9). Additionally, this was more significant among those who have never used a local library before (34.2).

The rise of online services and the ease of accessing information online was a challenge mentioned by front-line staff members as well. One respondent stressed the libraries,

“Need to remain relevant”.

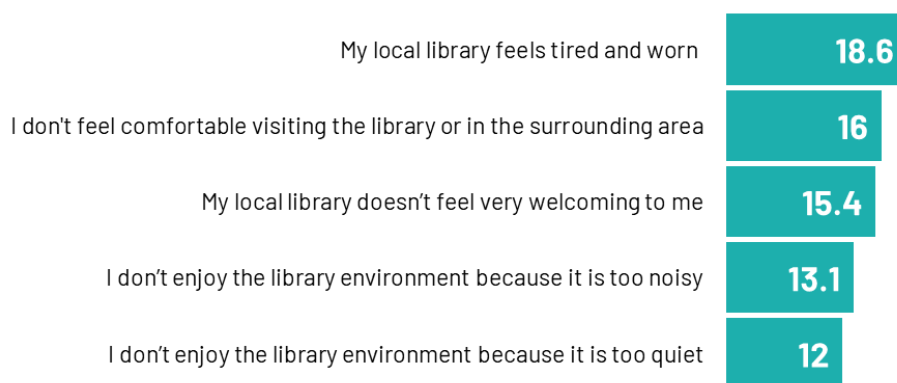
This relevance requires libraries to embrace technology, develop digital skills, and offer services that cater to the needs of digital natives. The increasing popularity of online booksellers like Amazon, and online ebooks, also poses a challenge, as noted by a respondent. This competition highlights the need for libraries to highlight their unique offerings.

6.4.3 Motivation Barriers: Perceptions about library environments

For some library non-users, particularly younger adults and ethnic minorities, the perception of libraries as "tired and worn" is a barrier to engagement, highlighting the need for investment in modern and appealing library spaces.

While less prominent than other motivational barriers, perceptions of the library environment still play a role in shaping non-users' decisions. The MaxDiff analysis revealed that respondents found the perception of their local library as "tired and worn" (scoring 18.6) to be more significant than feeling uncomfortable in the library or surrounding area (16) or the library not feeling welcoming (15.4). This suggests that the physical appearance and atmosphere of the library can influence perceptions of its overall appeal.

Figure 6.6: Motivation barriers about perceptions of library environments: Max Diff importance scores



Base: All who have not used a library in the past year and completed the MaxDiff (4011).

Younger age groups (17-34), ethnic minorities, and residents of London were more likely than the overall sample of non-users to perceive their local libraries as tired and worn, with 20.7, 21.1, and 21.1 scores expressing this sentiment, respectively. This finding is further underscored by feedback from frontline library staff, who recognise the impact of long-term underinvestment on library environments. As one staff member highlighted, outdated infrastructure, limited resources and an inability to keep pace with evolving community needs can create legitimate barriers to engagement.

Concerns about noise levels, while mentioned, were rated as less significant. The library environment not being enjoyable because it's too noisy (13.1) or too quiet (12) were both less important barriers compared to the library feeling tired and worn suggesting that while noise levels can be a factor, the overall aesthetic and atmosphere of the library may play a more prominent role in shaping perceptions.

7 Enablers to library engagement

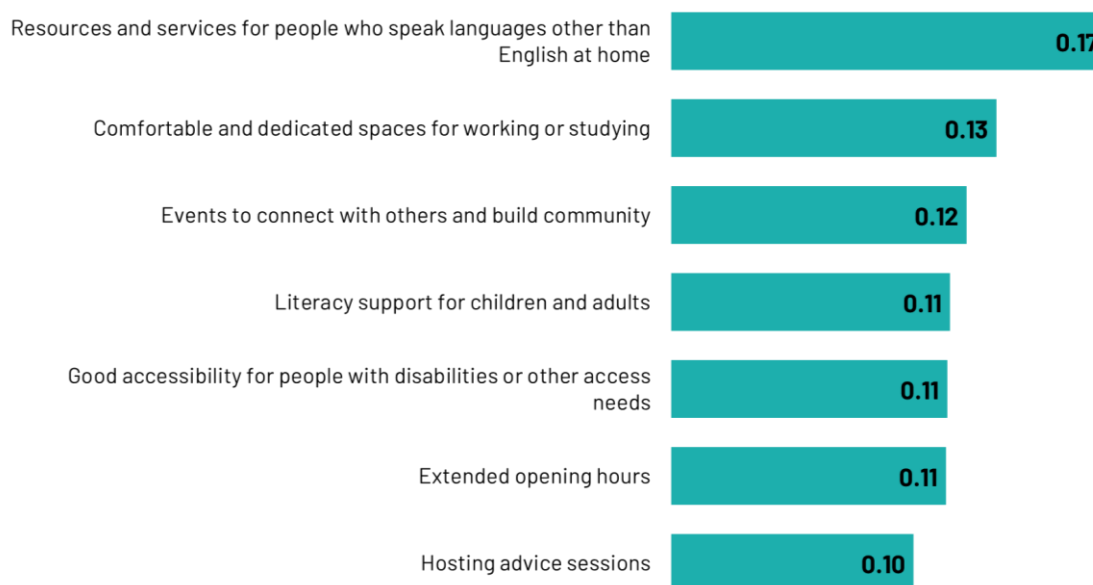
Understanding the factors that encourage library non-users to re-engage with their local libraries is crucial for expanding their reach and impact. The survey provides valuable data on specific services and offerings that would most effectively encourage library non-users to return to their local libraries. By identifying these "enablers", libraries can tailor their services and outreach efforts to better meet the needs and preferences of their communities.

7.1 The relationship between the importance of services and the likelihood of using a library in the future

While many library services are viewed as important, the statistical analysis suggests that no single service has a strong impact on increasing the likelihood of future library visits.

To understand which services might be most effective in attracting library non-users, we used a statistical technique called Bayes Nets. This analysis explored the relationship between how important people rated different library services (on a scale of 1 to 5) and how likely they were to visit a library in the next 3-5 years (on a scale of 1 to 10). It is important to note that this analysis does not prove that simply offering a service will directly cause someone to visit the library. Instead, it highlights which services are associated with a higher likelihood of future visits.

Figure 7.1: Importance of Library Services vs. Likelihood of Future Visits (IBN analysis)



Base: All who have not used a library in the past year (4243).

The analysis revealed that while many services showed a positive link with the likelihood of visiting, the strength of this connection was relatively weak for any single service. For example, the most impactful driver, "Resources, such as books/magazines, and services for people who speak languages other than English at home," only showed a projected increase of 0.17 points on the 10-point likelihood scale for each point increase on the 5-point importance scale.

This pattern of small impacts could be due to a few factors. First, because this survey focused on library non-users, there might be a lack of awareness about the range of services libraries offer. Second, many respondents rated various services as important, yet most were still unlikely to visit a library soon. This suggests that simply knowing a service exists might not be enough to overcome other barriers to library use.

To gain a more nuanced understanding, we also asked respondents directly if specific services would make them more likely to use their local library. These findings, which provide more direct insights into potential motivators, are discussed in the next section.

7.2 The most popular enablers of library engagement

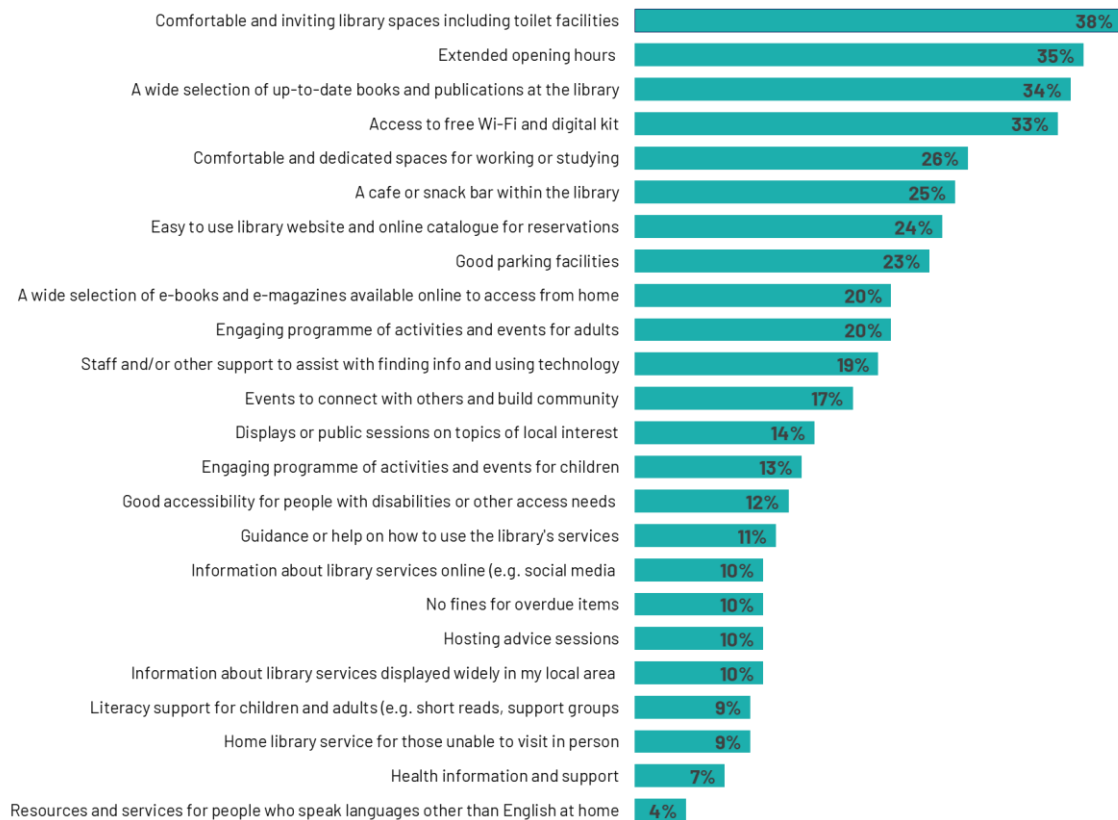
The most popular potential enablers for library non-users include comfortable spaces, extended opening hours, up-to-date book collections, access to technology, and dedicated work and study areas.

Library non-users were asked to choose up to five services that would most encourage them to use their local library in the near future. The largest portion of library non-users (38%) pointed to the importance of **comfortable and inviting spaces**. This demonstrates that a library's physical environment plays a key role in attracting potential patrons.

Over half (52%) of young people aged 17-24 selected having comfortable and inviting spaces as a motivating factor, highlighting the potential of appealing spaces to attract younger library users. Just over two in five (42%) of older adults (aged 65-74) also emphasised the importance of comfortable spaces while women (41%) were slightly more likely than men (36%) to prioritise comfortable spaces. Those who had used the library most recently (between 1-2 years ago) were more likely to select this service (44%) compared to those who last used the library more than two years ago.

The second most frequently cited service that would encourage people to use their local library was **extended opening hours**, such as evenings and weekends. This was mentioned by 35% of respondents suggesting that aligning library hours with the demands of modern life is crucial for attracting potential users.

The appeal of extended opening hours was particularly strong among those most likely to be in work. Individuals aged 35-54 were notably more likely to select this service (43%) compared to the overall average (35%). The link between work and a desire for extended library hours is directly evident, with 45% of full-time workers choosing this potential service compared to 25% of those not working full-time. Graduates (44%) were more likely than non-graduates (32%) to favour extended hours, as were those in higher income households (45% of those earning £52,000 or more annually compared to 30% of those earning less).

Figure 7.2: Services cited by library non-users that could encourage their library use

Base: All who have not used a library in the past year (4243).

Parents were more likely than non-parents to select this enabler (45% vs. 39%), with a particular emphasis from those with children aged 12–15 (49%). This could indicate that parents, particularly those with teenagers, face challenges in accessing libraries during standard hours due to their family responsibilities. Individuals who expressed a likelihood of visiting the library in the next 3–5 years were also more likely to be drawn in by extended opening hours (41%). This contrasts with those who were unsure about future visits (35%) or unlikely to visit (33%), suggesting that convenient hours are a significant factor in encouraging future engagement.

A wide selection of **up-to-date books and publications** at the library was mentioned by 34% of respondents as a key factor that would encourage them to use their local library. Older individuals, particularly those aged 75 and above, were more likely to be enticed by a wide selection of up-to-date books and publications (39% compared to 34% overall). This preference was also evident among graduates (39% compared to 33% of non-graduates) and those with higher household incomes, specifically those earning between £52,000 and £99,999 annually (39%).

Having a wide selection of up-to-date books and publications was particularly popular among individuals who are not parents of a child aged 15 or below (46% compared to 28% of parents). Geographic location also played a role, with those in rural areas more likely to value a wide selection of books and publications compared to urban library non-users (38% versus 33%).

Similarly, individuals residing in the two least deprived IMD quintiles were more likely to select this factor compared to those in the two most deprived quintiles (39% versus 30%). Lastly, those who indicated they were likely or unsure about visiting the library in the next 3-5 years were more likely to be drawn in by this offering compared to those who expressed an unlikelihood of visiting (38% versus 31%).

Access to **free Wi-Fi and digital kit**, such as public computers and printers, was highlighted by 33% of respondents as a factor that would encourage them to use their local library. Young people, aged 17-24, were significantly more likely to be motivated by free Wi-Fi and digital kit compared to other age groups (48% versus 33% overall). This highlights the crucial role libraries play in meeting the digital needs of younger generations. This service also resonated more strongly with individuals from ethnic minority backgrounds compared to those from non-ethnic minority backgrounds (39% versus 32%). Furthermore, those in more urban areas were slightly more likely to value this offering compared to those in rural areas (34% versus 29%).

Comfortable and dedicated spaces for working or studying emerged as the fifth most cited draw for potential library users mentioned by 26%. Most notably, more than half 53% of 17-24 year olds selected this as a factor that would encourage them to use their local library.

A preference for dedicated work and study areas was also evident among graduates (30% compared to 25% of non-graduates) and those in higher income households, with 33% of those earning £100,000 or more per year selecting this service. Library non-users who are not parents of a child aged 15 and below were also more likely to be enticed by dedicated work and study spaces compared to those who are parents (47% versus 28%). Geographically, individuals in London expressed a greater preference for this offering compared to other regions in England (36%). However, there was no statistically significant difference between urban and rural areas overall. Those who last used the library over two years ago but less than three years ago were also more likely than other library non-users to be drawn in by dedicated work and study spaces (32%).

7.3 Other services with potential impact for specific groups

Other services resonate more strongly with specific demographic groups, such as social spaces for younger individuals, accessibility features for older adults and parking facilities for those in rural areas.

While the services mentioned above were mentioned most often, others resonated more strongly with specific demographics of the non-library user population, highlighting the importance of a tailored approach to library services.

For younger individuals (aged 17-34), the social aspect of libraries appears particularly appealing. Although a **café or snack bar** was mentioned by 25% overall, it held a particular appeal for this age group, with 31% highlighting its importance. This, coupled with the popularity

of comfortable and inviting spaces mentioned in the previous section, suggests that incorporating social spaces within libraries could be a key factor in attracting younger users.

Several services resonated particularly strongly with older adults, particularly those aged 65 and above. **Good parking facilities**, while mentioned by 23% overall, were particularly important for this group (29%). Staff support for finding information and using technology was mentioned by 19% overall. However, it was significantly more important to older library non-users, with 38% of those aged 75 and above and 28% of those aged 65-74 highlighting its value. Twenty-two per cent of those aged 75+ mentioned **good accessibility** for people with disabilities or other access needs compared with 12% overall. **Guidance on using library services** was also particularly important to older library non-users, with 17% of those aged 65 and above mentioning it compared to 11% overall. Good accessibility for people with disabilities or other access needs was a key need for 35% of respondents who reported having a health condition that limits their daily activities by "a lot".

Services geared towards families and young children also saw increased interest among specific demographics. An engaging **programme of activities and events for children** resonated strongly with parents, with 31% of those with a child aged 15 or younger mentioning it. This appeal was even more pronounced among parents of children aged 0-4 (43%). Similarly, literacy support for children was particularly relevant to parents of young children, with 19% of those with children aged 0-4 mentioning it compared to 9% overall. This demonstrates the potential importance of libraries as welcoming spaces for families and as key players in early childhood development.

An **easy-to-use website and online catalogue** were valued by 24% of respondents. This service was particularly appealing to men (27% compared to 22% of women) and those living in the least deprived IMD quintiles (27% compared to 21% in the most deprived areas), suggesting a potential link between digital literacy and socioeconomic factors. Furthermore, **good parking facilities** were also favoured by those in rural areas (29% compared to 22% in urban areas).

Resources and services for speakers of languages other than English was mentioned by only 4% of all respondents. This figure rose to 11% among those from ethnic minority backgrounds showing how libraries have an opportunity to better serve the needs of diverse linguistic communities.

Lastly, graduates were more likely than non-graduates to express interest in an engaging **programme of activities and events for adults** (27% versus 17%).

These findings resonate with the qualitative research from the *Barriers to Library Use report*, which identified several key enablers of library engagement¹⁹. Participants in the qualitative study highlighted the importance of positive past experiences, particularly those associated with a welcoming atmosphere and friendly staff interactions.

The research also emphasised the value of the 'library experience' itself. Participants who enjoyed the atmosphere and staff interactions during visits carried out as part of the research expressed a desire to return. Additionally, the qualitative research pointed to the library's role as a community space, offering a range of services beyond book borrowing, as a potential draw for non-users. This was coupled with the survey research from this study that shows the importance of creating a positive and engaging library environment that caters to diverse needs and interests.

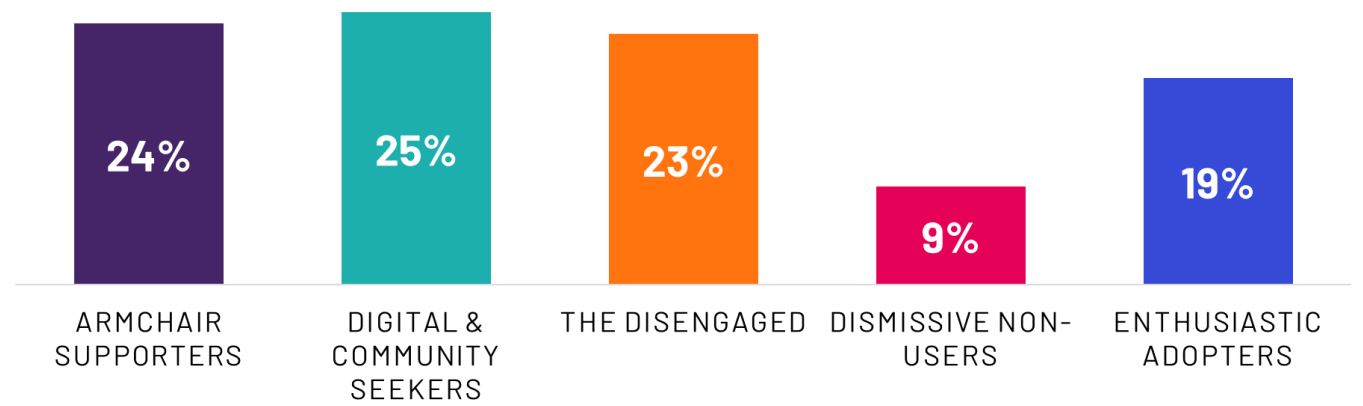
¹⁹ Department for Digital, Culture, Media & Sport. (2024). *Barriers to library use – qualitative research report*. London: UK Government.
https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/media/67220c4f4da1c0d41942a939/23-086091-01_Barriers_to_libraries_use_research_report.pdf

8 A segmented view of library non-users

8.1 Library non-users as five segmented groups

This chapter investigates the diverse landscape of library non-users. It explores the distinct segments that emerged from the survey data and the unique barriers and enablers that shape their relationship with library services. The segments were created through a statistical technique combining demographic analysis, attitudinal differences and behavioural insights, highlighting respondent perceptions of libraries, their preferred modes of accessing information and entertainment and their likelihood of future engagement with library services.

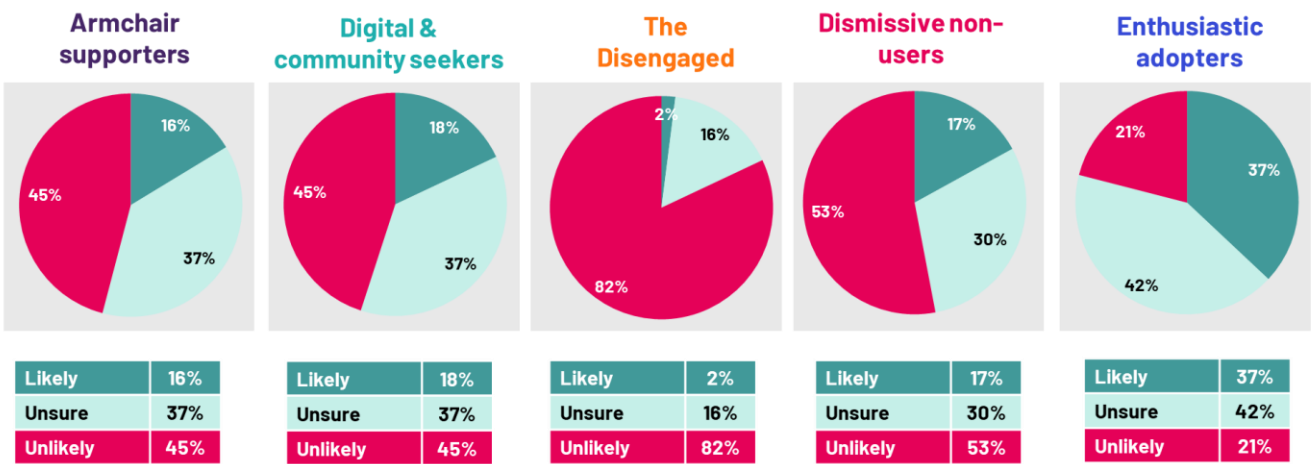
Figure 8.1: The five segments of library non-users



Base: All who have not used a library in the past year and part of segmentation analysis (3946).

Figure 8.2 illustrates the varying levels of likelihood among the segments to use their local library in the next 3-5 years. While this anticipated behaviour played a role in defining the segments, it's important to remember that targeted interventions could potentially shift these future usage patterns.

Figure 8.2: Likelihood of using public library within next 3-5 years by segment



Base: All who have not used a library in the past year and part of segmentation analysis (3946).

Each segment is accompanied by a pen portrait (shown within the blue box in each segment section), providing a vivid illustration of a typical individual within that group based on their demographics and attitudes towards libraries from the survey data.

8.1.1 The Armchair Supporters

The Armchair Supporters, comprising 24% of library non-users, express positive sentiments towards libraries but their actual engagement remains limited, potentially due to practical barriers.

Segment overview

This segment, making up 24% of library non-users, express strong positive sentiments towards libraries, although their actual engagement with library services remains limited.

What are their attitudes towards library services?

They firmly believe in the value of libraries as welcoming, peaceful, and valuable community resources, rejecting any notion of libraries as outdated or irrelevant. However, when asked about their personal likelihood to use library services in the future they say they are uncertain or not likely at all to use it. However, they also don't identify with behavioural cues that favour library services (such as engaging with digital skills or community events). This discrepancy between attitude and behaviour suggests that while they hold an idealised view of libraries, practical barriers may prevent them from translating their positive perceptions into action.

Who are they?

Examining their demographic characteristics provides further insight. They are more likely to be the following compared to other library non-users:

- Older (70% over 45 compared to 40% overall).
- Not working full-time (57% compared to 50% overall).
- Live in the South of England than average (57% compared to 52% overall).
- Live in a rural area than average (22% compared to 19% overall).
- From the least deprived areas of England (49% come from the 2 least deprived IMD quintiles compared to 40% overall).
- AB social grade than average (31% compared to 27% overall).

This profile suggests that this group may have the time and resources to engage with libraries but lack the impetus to do so. They may not see library services as directly addressing their current needs or interests. Their uncertainty about future library use (37% unsure compared to 31% overall) further highlights this disconnect. They are also more likely to report ease of access

to their local library (84% compared to 77% overall). This suggests that practical barriers such as location or transport are less likely to be factors hindering their engagement.

Who is a typical 'Armchair Supporter'?

Meet Margaret. She's a 66-year-old living in a quiet village in the South of England. Margaret has always thought libraries are wonderful places, full of books and a sense of peace. She believes they're vital for the community, especially for children and older folks. However, Margaret herself hasn't been to the library in ages. She's busy with volunteering and her own hobbies, and while she thinks libraries are great in theory, she doesn't feel a personal need to use them. She's got books at home, and if she needs information, she'll usually just look it up online. Margaret supports libraries from afar, but she's not planning to visit one anytime soon.

8.1.2 Digital & Community Seekers

The Digital & Community Seekers, comprising 25% of library non-users, value libraries as community hubs but seek greater digital integration and convenience in accessing services.

Segment overview

This segment, making up 25% of library non-users, stands out for their strong belief in the potential of libraries to deliver valuable services. They hold a positive view seeing libraries as inclusive, community-oriented institutions, placing significant value on their role in the community. However, they also express a desire for libraries to embrace digital advancements and innovative service models. Digital & Community Seekers, often younger and working full-time, may find their current lifestyles at odds with traditional library use. A compelling digital offer and the ability to access services from their phone or laptop, could bridge this gap, making libraries more appealing to their needs.

What are their attitudes towards library services?

This segment's vision for the library of the future centres around a blend of digital and physical services. They place high importance on digitally driven offerings such as online information resources and user-friendly websites. Furthermore, they are particularly drawn to potential offerings such as extended opening hours and home library options, indicating their need for greater flexibility and convenience in accessing library services.

Who are they?

The Digital & Community Seekers are more likely to be:

- Female (57% compared to 42% of library non-users).
- Younger (54% under 45 compared to 42% overall).
- From an ethnic minority background (18% compared to 11% overall).

- Working full time (55% compared to 49% overall).
- Graduates (34% compared to 27% overall).
- Parents (24% compared to 18% overall).
- Living in an urban area (85% compared to 81% overall).
- From the least deprived areas (45% come from the 2 most deprived IMD quintiles compared to 40% overall).

This demographic profile suggests that this group may be composed of individuals who are comfortable with technology, leading busy lives, and seeking library services that can seamlessly integrate with their lifestyles. Their preference for digital services, coupled with their interest in extended hours and home library options, suggests a desire for services that are accessible, convenient, and tailored to their needs.

While this segment expresses a strong belief in the potential of libraries, they remain somewhat uncertain about their likelihood of future library use (37% say they are unsure of using library services in the near future compared to 31% overall). This uncertainty highlights a potential gap between their positive perceptions of libraries and their actual engagement with library services.

Who is a typical 'Digital and Community Seeker'?

Meet Aisha. She's a 35-year-old working mum who lives in a city. Aisha is tech-savvy and always on the go, juggling work, family, and social commitments. She believes libraries are important for the community but hasn't used one in a while because they don't quite fit her busy lifestyle. She'd love to see libraries offer more online resources and services, like a user-friendly website for browsing and reserving books or even a home delivery option. Extended opening hours would also be a big help, as she often struggles to make it during the day. Aisha sees the potential for libraries to be vibrant community hubs, but she needs them to be more accessible and digitally integrated to fit into her modern life.

8.1.3 The Disengaged

The Disengaged segment, representing 23% of library non-users, believe libraries do not have personal relevance in their lives and display a lack of awareness regarding library services, leading to their low engagement.

Segment overview

This segment represents a significant portion of the population (23% of library non-users) who are unlikely to engage with library services in the near future. While they demonstrate a basic understanding of libraries as potential community assets, their overall sentiment remains lukewarm and ambivalent. This suggests that while they might not actively oppose libraries, they do not view them as personally relevant or necessary in their lives.

What are their attitudes towards library services?

Several factors contribute to this segment's detachment from library services. First, they exhibit a lack of personal identification with library-related behaviours. Things such as borrowing books, attending events, or seeking information within a library setting do not resonate with their current lifestyle or habits. Second, they may already use alternative methods of accessing information and entertainment, potentially through digital platforms, personal networks, or other avenues.

Who are they?

The demographic profile of this group suggests that factors like age, education level, and socioeconomic background might play a role in shaping their perceptions and usage of libraries. The Disengaged are more likely to be:

- Male (59% compared to 40% of the overall population).
- Older (65% over 45 compared to 40% overall).
- Non-graduates (80% compared to 71% overall).
- From the C2 social grade (19% compared to 15% overall).

Furthermore, their past behaviour may reinforce their disengagement. They are more likely to have last used a library more than 3 years ago (78% compared to 68% of other library non-users) and are significantly less likely to express an intention to use a library in the next 3-5 years (82% compared to 51% overall). This indicates a sustained pattern of non-engagement through past and future interaction with library services.

Additionally, this segment shows a higher than average unfamiliarity with the range of services offered by libraries (71% compared to 58% overall). This lack of awareness regarding the evolving role of libraries, beyond traditional book lending, may further contribute to their disengagement.

Who is a typical 'Disengaged'?

Meet David. He's in his late 50s, works as an electrician, and hasn't stepped foot in a library for years. He's not against libraries, he just doesn't see how they fit into his life. David gets his news online, catches up with mates at the pub, and if he needs information, he'll usually just ask a friend or family member. He vaguely remembers using libraries as a kid, but he's not really sure what they offer these days. He figures they're mainly for students or people who don't have computers at home. David's not a big reader, and if he does fancy a book, he'll just pop into a shop on the high street or buy one online. To him, libraries just seem a bit irrelevant to his day-to-day life.

8.1.4 Dismissive Non-Users

The Dismissive Non-Users, while a smaller segment (9%), are characterised by deeply negative perceptions of libraries and a strong resistance to engagement.

Segment overview

This segment, while smaller in size (9% of library non-users), represents a distinct group characterised by deeply negative perceptions of libraries. They are extremely unlikely to utilise library services and hold decidedly pessimistic views towards libraries as community assets or welcoming spaces. This group consistently rates almost every aspect of library services – from physical amenities to digital support – as unimportant. Their self-descriptions, attitudes, and behaviours suggest a fundamental disconnect from those who view libraries in either an ambivalent or positive light.

What are their attitudes towards library services?

Several factors contribute to this segment's resistance to library engagement. First, they hold a strong disbelief in the value of libraries, rejecting the notion that libraries can be valuable, inclusive, or beneficial to the community or themselves. This scepticism could stem from a combination of factors, such as a lack of awareness of modern library offerings and a preference for alternative avenues of accessing information and entertainment.

Who are they?

This group are more likely than other library non-users to be the following:

- Men (63% compared to 35% of the overall population).
- Aged 25-34 years old than average (31% compared to 17% overall).
- DE social grade (15% compared to 10% overall).
- Lack confidence in using the internet (9% compared to 4% overall).

Furthermore, their past behaviour reinforces their resistance. They are more likely to have never used a library (18% compared to 9% overall) and say they are unfamiliar with the services offered (67% compared to 58% overall). Who is a typical 'Dismissive Non-User'?

Meet Liam. He's a young man in his late 20s, works in retail, and has never really seen the point of libraries. He thinks they're outdated and boring, full of dusty old books that nobody reads anymore. Liam gets all his information and entertainment online, and he's not interested in community events or activities. He's a bit unsure about using computers for more technical things, so he wouldn't go to the library for that either. It would be very difficult to find a way to engage Liam with his local library. He has a very negative view of libraries, and it would take a lot to change his mind.

8.1.5 The Enthusiastic Adopters

The Enthusiastic Adopters, representing 19% of library non-users, hold overwhelmingly positive attitudes towards libraries

Segment overview

This segment, representing 19% of library non-users, stands out for their overwhelmingly positive attitude towards libraries. They strongly believe in the value of libraries as inclusive and welcoming community spaces, consistently endorsing statements about the library's positive attributes. This group clearly understands and appreciates the diverse range of services that a library can offer.

What are their attitudes towards library services?

The Enthusiastic Adopters place high importance on both traditional and modern library services. They value access to up-to-date books, dedicated workspaces, and comprehensive digital support, as well as extended amenities and services. Their appreciation for quiet spaces for reading and learning aligns with their positive association with these activities.

Who are they?

The demographic profile of this segment further distinguishes them as they are more likely to be each of the following:

- Women (63% compared to 36% of the overall population).
- Not be working full-time (54% compared to 50% overall).
- Graduates (32% compared to 27% overall).
- AB social grade (31% compared to 27% overall).

This group may be composed of individuals with the time and inclination to engage with library services, who also value education and personal enrichment.

While this group are not currently regular library users, they are the most likely segment to become engaged patrons in the future (37% stating they will use a library in the next 3-5 years compared to 17% overall). However, their future use is contingent on libraries continuing to meet their expectations for modern services and resources.

Who is a typical 'Enthusiastic Adopter'?

Meet Sarah. She's a retired teacher in her early 60s who loves to learn new things. Sarah has always valued libraries and sees them as welcoming spaces for reading and learning. Whilst not a current library user, based on previous experiences, she appreciates the quiet atmosphere and the helpful staff. Sarah is keen to see libraries offer a mix of traditional and modern services, like up-to-date book collections, comfortable workspaces, and good digital support. She's excited about the potential for libraries to

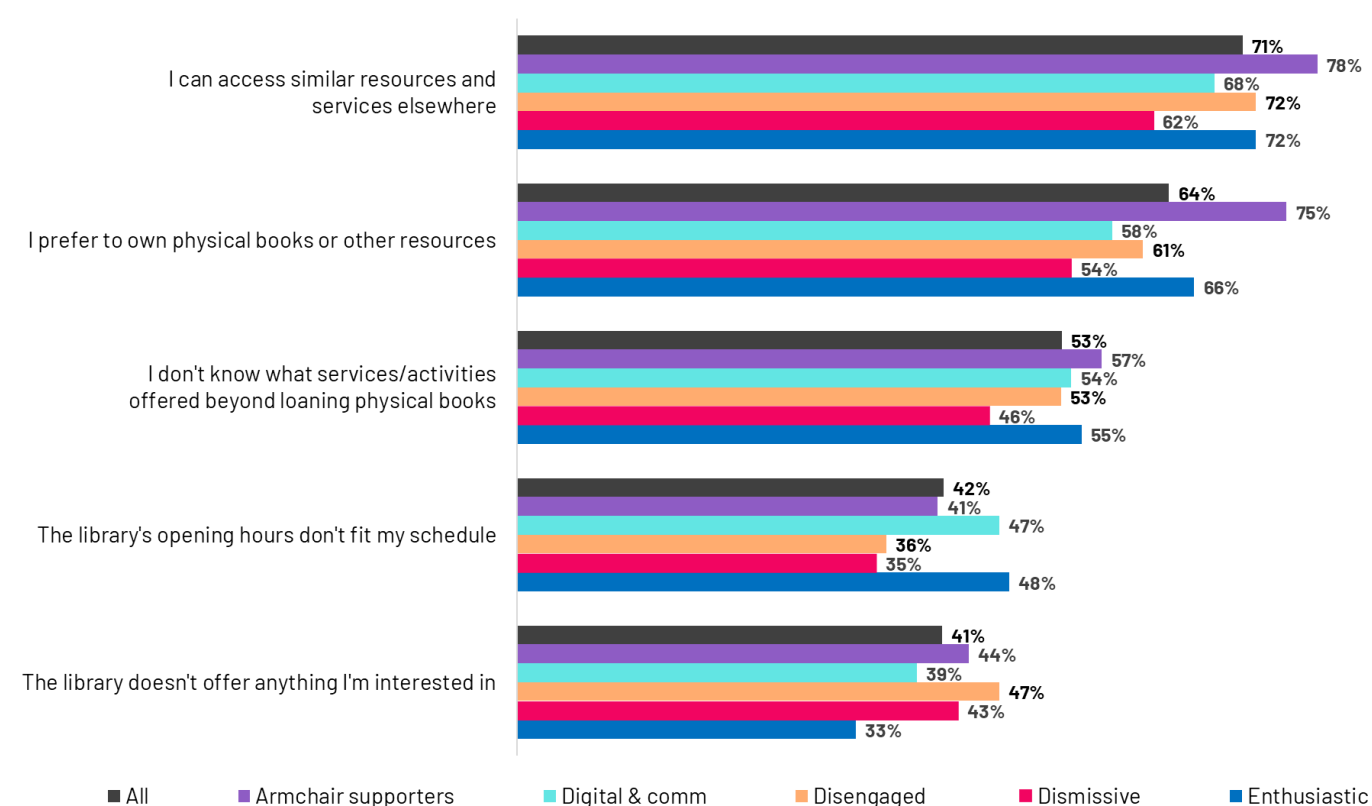
host interesting events and activities. Sarah may potentially become a regular library user again, especially if libraries continue to offer a diverse range of services and resources that cater to her interests.

8.2 The five segments and the barriers that prevent them from using library services

The analysis reveals that while the top barriers to library use are similar across segments, the intensity of each barrier varies considerably, highlighting the need for tailored approaches.

The MaxDiff analysis, which explores the relative impact of various barriers to library use, reveals nuanced perspectives among the five segments of library non-users. While the top five barriers are similar across segments, the intensity of each barrier varies considerably.

Figure 8.3: Key barriers to library use by segmentation



Base: All who have not used a library in the past year and part of segmentation analysis (3946).

While **"accessing services and resources elsewhere"** is the most prominent barrier overall (with a score of 71), it is most pronounced among the Armchair Supporters (78) and least pronounced among Dismissive Non-users (62). Armchair Supporters also show the highest score for the barrier **"I prefer to own my own physical books and materials"** (75 compared to 64 overall). This indicates that personal preferences, particularly a desire for ownership, strongly influence their decision to avoid library services. Conversely, Dismissive Non-users score lowest on this barrier, potentially reflecting a lack of interest in reading services offered by libraries.

The barrier **"not knowing what services and activities libraries offer beyond loaning books"** shows more consistent levels across the segments, slightly higher among Armchair Supporters

and slightly lower among Dismissive non-users. This could be attributed to differing reasons: Armchair Supporters may be familiar with services but find them unnecessary for them personally. Meanwhile Dismissive Non-users have a general disinterest in the types of services libraries offer.

Greater variation emerges when considering "**the library's opening hours**" as a barrier. This is more significant for Enthusiastic Non-users and Digital & Community Seekers, perhaps demonstrating they have busier schedules. It is less important for the Dismissive and Disengaged segments, who are less inclined to use libraries regardless.

Finally, the barrier "**the library doesn't offer anything I'm interested in**" is most pronounced for the Disengaged, Armchair Supporters, and Dismissive Non-users. However, it is less significant for Enthusiastic Non-users (33 compared to 41 overall), highlighting their potential for re-engagement if libraries can effectively demonstrate the relevance of their services to them.

The potential enablers to attract each segment to use their library

Attracting each segment to libraries requires tailored approaches, with Armchair Supporters responding to comfortable spaces and diverse collections, Digital & Community Seekers seeking convenience and connectivity, Enthusiastic Adopters drawn to engaging events, Disengaged individuals needing practical support such as parking, and Dismissive Non-users remaining a significant challenge.

When looking at the potential enablers there are distinct preferences among the five segments, emphasising the importance of understanding specific motivators to develop targeted engagement strategies.

Figure 8.4: Services with strongest potential to encourage library use by segment

Base: All who have not used a library in the past year and part of segmentation analysis (3946).

Examining the potential enablers, specifically focusing on the five services most likely to encourage library use, reveals distinct preferences among the five segments of library non-users. While the overall ranking of these enablers remains relatively consistent, the level of support for each service varies considerably across segments.

Armchair Supporters demonstrate a strong preference for comfortable and inviting library spaces, with 45% indicating this as a motivating factor to use their library compared to 38% overall. They also express a strong preference for a wide selection of up-to-date books and publications (47% compared to 34% overall) and easy-to-use online resources (33% compared to 24% overall), highlighting the importance of both physical and digital resources for this group. Armchair Supporters also show a greater interest in displays or public sessions on topics of local interest (18% compared to 14% overall).

The **Digital & Community Seekers** are particularly drawn to services that enhance connectivity and convenience. Extended opening hours resonate strongly with this segment (43% compared to 35% overall) while free Wi-Fi and digital kit is also a key enabler for this group (37% compared to 33% overall). The presence of a café or snack bar also holds a strong appeal for this segment (34% compared to 25% overall). Furthermore, both engaging programmes of activities and events for adults (25% compared to 20% overall) and events to connect with others and build community (21% compared to 17% overall) are significant draws for this segment.

The **Disengaged** segment, characterised by a lack of connection to libraries, finds good parking facilities particularly appealing (29% compared to 23% overall), while, perhaps unsurprisingly, none of the potential services were statistically significant for the **Dismissive Non-users**.

Enthusiastic Adopters, who possibly demonstrate the greatest potential for re-engagement, are particularly motivated by engaging programmes of activities and events for adults (31% compared to 20% overall) and events to connect with others and build community (26% compared to 17% overall). Additionally, this segment shows a greater concern for accessibility, with 15% indicating that good accessibility for people with disabilities or other access needs would encourage them to use the library, compared to 12% overall.

These findings highlight the diverse needs and preferences of library non-users, emphasising the importance of a tailored approach to offered services and outreach. Understanding the specific motivators for each segment, can help libraries develop targeted strategies to attract and re-engage those who have drifted away.

8.3 What this means for engaging library non-users

This segmentation analysis presents a diverse landscape of library non-users, each with unique needs, perceptions, and motivations. Understanding the nuances amongst these segmentations can serve to develop targeted strategies to engage these individuals and maximise the impact of library services.

The Enthusiastic Adopters segment perhaps presents the most promising opportunity for re-engagement. Their overwhelmingly positive attitudes towards libraries, coupled with their openness to both traditional and modern services, suggest that they may be primed to become active library users. The Digital & Community Seekers also hold significant potential, particularly if libraries can successfully bridge the gap between their positive perceptions and their current limited engagement. This segment's desire for digital integration, convenience, and flexible access suggests that a strong online presence and innovative services could be key to attracting them.

While the Armchair Supporters express positive sentiments towards libraries, their lack of personal relevance and access to alternative sources of information and entertainment present a challenge. Engaging this segment may require a more nuanced approach, demonstrating the unique value of libraries and tailoring services to their specific needs and interests.

The Disengaged segment, with their lack of personal connection to libraries and limited awareness of services, would require a more fundamental shift in perceptions. Outreach efforts would need to focus on raising awareness of what libraries have to offer, particularly those services that align with their lifestyle and interests.

Lastly, the Dismissive Non-Users pose the most significant challenge. While understanding their reasons for disengagement could provide valuable insights for refining library services and

messaging to address broader concerns it may be more strategic to focus resources on other segments with greater potential for re-engagement.

9 Potential interventions to engage library non-users

Stakeholders, including members of the DCMS Libraries Team, Heads of Library Services and library branch managers, participated in an online workshop to help generate possible interventions to engage library non-users. Previous DCMS research has found that a range of interventions could be successful in reducing barriers to engagement in the arts and culture²⁰.

Stakeholders generated potential interventions based on the three key barriers to emerge from the quantitative survey

Stakeholders generated potential intervention ideas for three barriers identified in the quantitative survey (shown below alongside their related COM-B factor, in no particular order):

- Lack of awareness of the full range of library offerings and outdated perceptions (capability barrier).
- Lack of personal relevance and availability of services elsewhere (motivation barrier).
- Accessibility challenges including opening hours and parking (opportunity barrier).

To support creative thinking, stakeholders were encouraged to consider potential interventions without worrying about implementation constraints. Stakeholders were loosely guided by the theory of change framework when thinking about what would be needed for implementation.

As discussed earlier, these three barriers to library engagement played an important role for each of the library non-user segments, underscoring their significance and the need for interventions to focus on these whilst taking a targeted approach. With this in mind, each group were asked to think broadly about each barrier and were allocated a segment (excluding the Dismissive Non-Users) to consider what tailoring could look like. The Dismissive Non-users hold negative views of libraries suggesting that they are extremely unlikely to be shifted into library users. Therefore, intervention design has not focused on trying to appeal to this group.

²⁰ https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/media/67bd8a6e44ceb49381213bef/What_works_accessibility_to_culture_accessible.pdf

When generating the interventions, six activity categories emerged

Interventions across the barriers tended to fall into the following activity categories shown below. Not every category was identified as important for each barrier.



Below we summarise the interventions generated for each barrier by activity category.

Table 9.1: Overview of potential interventions developed for barrier 1: lack of awareness of the full range of library offerings and outdated perceptions (capability barrier)

Activity category	Rationale	Interventions generated
Communication content	Communications will be central to raising awareness.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Emphasising basic messages (e.g., the library and digital borrowing is free and users can borrow books from any library in a council area in which they live, work or study). ▪ Focusing on new messages which could appeal to non-users. ▪ Highlighting the wide range of services provided by libraries (e.g. the digital/online library services for e-books, e-audiobooks, and e-magazines, and mobile library services). ▪ Framing messages in a way which nudge²¹ non-users to start using the library by creating a sense that others like them are already using the library. ▪ For example, communications could outline the percentage of residents who attended the library in the last year.
Communication format and channel	As non-users are not engaging with the library, thinking about	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Advertising with other local services (e.g., adult learning centres, local health charities, village halls, GPs) or alternative places relevant to libraries (e.g., book, technology or grocery shops).

²¹ Within behavioural science, nudge theory is where subtle changes to contexts/messages may influence behaviour. One aspect of this is social norming which could include informing people that many of their peers are already using the library, thereby encouraging them to also use the library. <https://thedecisionlab.com/reference-guide/psychology/nudge-theory>

Activity category	Rationale	Interventions generated
	how to reach non-users away from the library.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Connecting via social media community pages. ▪ National campaigns to encourage library use, local poster campaigns (e.g., at bus stops or GPs). ▪ Local mail-drops (e.g. at new housing estates). ▪ Within local publications, highlighting where the library is and the services offered there.
Staff and internal processes	Updating internal processes could help ensure that libraries provide the best service ahead of or whilst engaging new users.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Ensuring online library information is accurate. ▪ Building relationships with library or council communications colleagues to support sharing messages. ▪ Mentoring and upskilling staff to enhance the customer service provided. ▪ Hiring specific staff or dedicating staff time to raising awareness.
Internal and external space	Additions or improvements could be made to the internal and external space of libraries to help entice new users in.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Ensuring the front of the library/ street view is appealing through digital entrance screens which promote events. ▪ Having large windows to show what is going on inside the library and eye-catching window displays. ▪ Having clear signage. ▪ Hosting other services within the library space.

Activity category	Rationale	Interventions generated
Communities, partners and groups	Connecting with diverse groups to reach those with low awareness of library services.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Finding new users through linking with schools, health centres, and churches. ▪ Focusing on other groups locally who could utilise the library. ▪ Linking up with existing community groups locally. ▪ Building partnerships with other local services, e.g., family hubs, nurseries, and care homes, to bring additional groups of people into library services who may not already be using them.
Outreach and events	Previous experiences of using outreach and events to reach non-users had been successful.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Outreach at busy local locations (e.g., market stalls, school gates). ▪ Participating in wider events and cultural activities (e.g., linking up with museum events or engaging with community debates). ▪ Holding library 'taster' events to expose non-users to the library offer.

Table 9.2: Overview of potential interventions developed for barrier 2: lack of personal relevance and availability of services elsewhere (motivation barrier)

Activity category	Rationale	Interventions generated
Communication content	Awareness raising was viewed as strongly linked to personal relevance specifically where low relevance might be driven by lack of knowledge about library offerings.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Emphasising basic messages (e.g., the library and digital borrowing is free, access to Wi-Fi and printing). ▪ Focusing on new messages which could appeal to non-users (e.g., a sustainability option, cost savings that could be made by borrowing books rather than purchasing them). ▪ Highlighting the wide range of services (e.g. digital/online library services for e-books, e-audiobooks, and e-magazines, local and family history searches, maps, and driving test support). ▪ Making the library environment familiar before people come to the library (e.g., through an online 360-degree tour of the library). ▪ Promote the library as a way to connect locally.
Communication format and channel	Communication channels were identified as important in helping to raise awareness of potential personal relevance, particularly when engaging with long term non-users.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Connecting with non-users through social media and explaining what to expect when attending the library. ▪ Highlighting community aspects. ▪ Sharing impact stories more widely.

Activity category	Rationale	Interventions generated
		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Conducting a targeted email campaign. ▪ Utilising local champions and advocates to demonstrate relevance. ▪ A poster campaign, e.g., putting up posters in GP surgeries or in local schools.
Staff and internal processes	Internal processes could help facilitate non-users in finding relevance at the library, particularly to ensure that the full breadth of services is displayed.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Mentoring and upskilling staff between library services to enhance the level and breadth of customer service provided. ▪ Promoting a challenge to staff internally to increase the number of issues they take each month. ▪ Utilising staff expertise to create curated collections of books. ▪ Hiring staff who reflect the local population.
Internal and external space	The internal and external library space could be utilised in ways which could entice new users in.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Hosting other services within the library space, hosting a range of events (e.g., author meet and greets) and community activities or events which may not typically be associated with the library (e.g. bands). ▪ Holding taster events to encourage non-users to see how the library might be suitable for them. ▪ Re-imagining the library space to ensure it is widely accessible to different groups (e.g. creating quiet times and time slots for louder users).

Activity category	Rationale	Interventions generated
		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Keeping displays up to date and linking displays to themes.
Communities, partners and groups	Connecting with groups could help raise awareness of relevance among non-users.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Asking locals to feed back about what would be useful to promote. ▪ Creating initiatives for new members (e.g., working with leisure centres to offer a free gym session with a book issue). ▪ Working with local communities to co-design communications and iterating the library offer to create more relevance. ▪ Focusing on wider community involvement including outreach with a range of local groups. ▪ Holding mainstream events and hosting events, such as baby showers and speed dating.

Table 9.3: Overview of potential interventions developed for barrier 3: accessibility challenges, including opening hours and parking (opportunity barrier)

Activity category	Rationale	Interventions generated
Communication content	Awareness raising around how to engage with the library could be helpful in reducing the sense of accessibility challenges.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Promoting messages which may overcome accessibility barriers (e.g., no fines and opening hours). ▪ Clear signage to highlight where the library is. ▪ Communicating messages which tackle misperceptions about libraries. ▪ Promote the idea that visiting the library can be quick. ▪ Focus on reducing accessibility barriers for specific groups (e.g., sharing clear guidelines on public transport, particularly highlighting free travel for pensioners and children, and after school events for children).
Communication content	There is a lack of awareness of the online library offer and library services provided virtually could help address accessibility challenges.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Promoting the digital offer widely. ▪ Highlighting the time and money saved through this offer.
Internal and external space	A driver of accessibility challenges related to getting to and parking at the library in order to access library services.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Discussing parking charges with the council to identify if amends can be made. ▪ Providing free parking when attending a library event. ▪ Taking out a book, or after certain times (e.g., after 3pm).

Activity category	Rationale	Interventions generated
		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Creating an annual pass for the carpark which could mean it is a cost effective way of accessing books. ▪ Creating an incentive for getting to the library without using a car. ▪ Highlighting nearby parking options.
Staff and internal processes	Some changes could be made to library operation to provide services in a way which supports accessibility challenges for non-users.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Amending opening hours (e.g., staying open late on certain days). ▪ Providing a home book delivery service, tailoring time slots for groups of people (e.g., quiet times and family hours). ▪ Hosting other services within the library building to bring new users in, conducting outreach (e.g. pop-ups at community events). ▪ Having low or no-staffed hours where residents can access basic library services and click and collect services.
Outreach and events	A series of events could help support non-users facing accessibility challenges to engage with the library.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Putting on shorter events, as many people lead busy lives and may not have time for longer events and putting on hybrid events, so that people can attend virtually from home. For example, online events were previously successfully offered for sessions such as rhyme-time during the COVID-19 pandemic.

10 Priority interventions explored

Prioritising potential interventions

Three rounds of prioritisation took place with stakeholders to identify a short-list of interventions based on two factors: expected **impact** of the intervention in engaging non-users and **feasibility** considerations. Across the wide range of initial intervention suggestions generated above, seven were viewed to have potentially high impact and high feasibility.

Overview of seven interventions which were viewed as having high impact and high feasibility.

Intervention	Example activities
Widening the library reach by seeking to engage non-users through social media channels.	Creating social media accounts (where needed) and thinking strategically about how best to use social media to reach non-users. This could include consideration of the types of messages and content shared (e.g., demos of how to use online services), as well as thinking strategically about organisations/ social media accounts to engage with to reach non-user groups.
Increasing awareness and promoting the core functions and benefits of library services through broader promotion targeted at non-users.	Establishing primary basic messages to communicate (e.g. the library and digital borrowing is free) and identifying where to promote these so that non-users see them.
Reaching non-users by sharing information through new routes, such as advocates (e.g. young volunteers) and alternative channels (e.g. estate agents, GPs, social prescribers).	Identifying how non-users spend their leisure time, building partnerships and relationships with other services locally, and recruiting and managing dedicated volunteers to become library advocates.
Encouraging non-users to re-engage with the library by increasing their understanding of why utilising libraries is beneficial (e.g. sustainability, money saving) and targeting these messages to specific groups.	Developing messages around unique selling points of libraries including messages that 'disrupt' existing perceptions of the library. This would also involve identifying the best placed routes to share these messages, for example, with other local services, targeted outreach and wider engagement e.g. radio campaigns.

Intervention	Example activities
Enhancing the reach of library services through outreach and physical promotion e.g. using physical environments other than the library such as pop-ups.	Establishing relationships with local services, identifying the most appropriate places and timings to support outreach and identifying alternative non-user groups, e.g. truckers, who may be able to utilise library services.
Bringing non-users to the library space through hosting other services or working with partners to utilise library space (e.g., health, breakfast clubs, early years).	Identifying target audience segments and understanding what hosting opportunities could bring them into the library space, building strategic partnerships with service providers, and contacting community groups to promote available spaces and hosting opportunities. This would also need to involve the development of policies for hosting.
Making the library site more inviting to non-users by thinking about the design of spaces; the best ways of designing both smaller and bigger library spaces, physical feel, outside and inside.	Identifying local groups of non-users and establishing whether physical barriers exist for their engagement, consider how to draw non-users in through the external look and feel (e.g. inviting window displays), re-arranging library spaces to suit different audiences (e.g. creating larger spaces for open conversations), having fewer books on display and showcasing other activities that the library has.

These seven interventions were viewed as potentially impactful and feasible to implement, however, each would need further development and consideration to be ready for implementation. These potential interventions were taken through a further prioritisation process which resulted in identification of three approaches taken forward for further exploration. A full description of the prioritisation process is provided in the appendix.

The three interventions (listed below, in no particular order) taken forwards for further exploration were:

1. Widening the library reach by seeking to engage non-users through social media channels
2. Bringing non-users to the library space through hosting other services or working with partners to use library space (e.g., health, breakfast clubs, early years)
3. Encouraging non-users to re-engage with the library by increasing their understanding of why using libraries is beneficial (e.g. sustainability, money saving) and targeting these messages to specific groups.

Stakeholders were split into groups and asked to develop one of these prioritised interventions by considering what would be needed to move this intervention towards implementation. Facilitators borrowed from the theory of change framework to help guide participants in their thinking and help understand different factors which would likely impact implementation (an explanation of a theory of change framework can be found in the appendix). These discussions have been used to inform the intervention overviews provided below.

Considerations across all three interventions explored

Across all three interventions explored, there are key considerations that are useful to reflect on:

Targeting

As detailed in Chapter 8, it is clear that barriers to library engagement are similar across segments, underpinning the important role that they play. However, the strength of these and how they are experienced varies, highlighting the importance of a targeted approach. The three interventions described below focus on tackling these core barriers but would need to be tailored to specific audiences, local demographics or segments where possible to facilitate implementation in practice. For example, tailoring for the segments could look like:

- **For The Disengaged:** awareness raising of library services which are not necessarily associated with typical library behaviours (book borrowing, events, obtaining information) or promoting the online offer as a convenient and free way of accessing online entertainment.
- **For Digital & Community Seekers:** awareness raising of the online offer and other technical services which show the library as a modern space and demonstrate ways of engaging with library services outside of traditional working hours.
- **For Enthusiastic Adopters:** this group do carry out library related behaviours e.g., reading but are not using libraries for this. Reminding this group of the library offerings could re-engage them. This could include reminding them of modern facilities and spaces including up to date books, quiet working spaces, and digital support.
- **For Armchair Supporters:** raising awareness of the full range of library services to cultivate personal appeal or promoting the online offer as a convenient way of accessing resources online. Careful framing of messages is likely to be particularly important for this group for example reflecting on the community value of the library could be a useful approach.
- **For Dismissive Non-users:** a small proportion of library non-users, this group are extremely unlikely to be shifted into library users. Therefore, focusing efforts on the other segments as priorities should be considered.

Resources to support interventions

Across each intervention staff time was identified as a key resource. Stakeholders observed that additional or redirected time would be needed to focus on intervention activities. This led to mentions of the availability of staff time for these tasks within existing staff and volunteer capacity or, any potential requirement for additional funding to support increased staff time. When reflecting on any additional funding required, stakeholders highlighted the impact that budgetary constraints would likely have on this.

Challenges

Finally, it is useful to acknowledge the social landscape in which these interventions will be implemented, as this context presents its own set of challenges. This includes an online environment that is evolving at pace and continues to compete with library services. It is further important to note that whilst each intervention is designed to tackle a particular barrier, no one intervention will provide a 'magic bullet' to increasing library engagement and a combination of barriers designed to tackle different barriers is likely to be needed.

Priority intervention overviews

Intervention 1: Widening the library reach by seeking to engage non-users through social media channels

What is the intervention rationale?

This intervention seeks to address a core capability barrier; **lack of awareness of the library offering and outdated perceptions**. Communications will play a key role in addressing this barrier.

This intervention focuses on using social media as a way to widen the library reach by increasing awareness of services and sharing information that challenges perceptions that libraries are not relevant in the digital age. This intervention encourages libraries to think strategically about how to use social media to develop reach, rather than using social media only as a promotional tool. A key focus of this intervention would be identifying ways to reach non-user social media feeds.

This intervention could also help address the **motivational barrier regarding lack of personal relevance** by highlighting services or messages that increase resonance.

What is the potential impact or outcome of this intervention?

This intervention aims to increase the number of people engaging with the library which could include visiting the library, becoming members, and attending events. By engaging non-users via social media and building their awareness of relevant library offers, the intervention seeks

to build a stronger connection between the library and the people it serves. The intervention may support positive habit building, fostering regular and repeat visits, and support residents to feel connected to the local community.

Stakeholders felt that this intervention could reach a large number of non-users with some noting previous experience of increased social media engagement leading to positive results. In the longer-term this intervention could contribute to broader societal goals where libraries play a key role. For example, improving literacy rates, digital skills development, and community well-being.

Who does the intervention target?

This intervention could work across segments and demographics but might be particularly impactful for Enthusiastic Adopters and Armchair Supporters. Both of these segments express an openness to engaging with libraries; content that reminds them of the library offer and helps them engage in the personal relevance of this could appeal.

Strategies could be tailored to specific audiences, and using a range of social media platforms could help obtain breadth across demographics. For example, by considering multiple social media platforms and connecting with specific online communities where library non-users may be engaging (such as local parents' pages), a detailed social media strategy could reach and remind many non-users of the library offer.

What activities will be involved?

- Development of content strategy and resources to generate key messages reflecting on format (text, image, video) and tone.
- Reflecting the survey findings, potential messages could focus on aspects of libraries identified by non-users as having potential appeal including comfortable spaces, extended opening hours, up-to-date book collections, access to technology, and dedicated work and study areas.
- Identifying suitable staff, making clear responsibilities for social media management and collaborating with social media experts (e.g., in regional and national teams or within partner organisations).
- Thinking strategically about how to expand the reach of posts. This could include following community groups, getting other accounts to share or repost library content, looking at trends and linking libraries to these.

What resources will be needed?

Staff are the key resource required for this intervention; they would need dedicated time to focus on social media content generation, strategy and managing the online presence (e.g.,

online interaction with relevant organisations), as well as the skills to use social media as a promotional tool effectively.

There will be roles for local staff (bringing local knowledge) as well as regional and national communications teams to provide specialist support and share existing collateral.

This intervention also requires access to social media accounts for libraries and could involve access to design tools like Canva and equipment like 360 cameras to enhance content creation.

What are key considerations for feasibility?

Positive views towards feasibility were supported by the potential for using pre-existing materials (e.g., videos, posts) to help save implementation time and cost, such as sharing BorrowBox's 'how to' videos. There were also suggestions that sharing best practice could help share social media collateral and insights both regionally and nationally.

However, there are key challenges impacting feasibility regarding having dedicated staff or enough staff resource to create and monitor social content. This intervention would also require responsible staff to stay up to date with the changing online landscape and emerging social media platforms to stay relevant.

Variables to be considered across libraries include:

- The need to reflect variations in service delivery and geographical location, most likely requiring library-specific or localised tailoring. Depending on the information being shared on social media this could require tailoring based on available services, operating hours, and accessibility factors like public transportation.
- The need to tailor to local populations to ensure relevance to the specific needs and interests of diverse local communities.

This intervention **assumes** that there will be resource to implement this intervention, and that staff are willing to extend their reach and embrace new approaches. It assumes that the current libraries offer will be appealing to the target audience. It also assumes that local libraries hold and have access to relevant social media accounts and that non-users will have a degree of digital literacy, potentially overlooking barriers related to tech skills and access.

What are the risks involved in implementation?

- Financial constraints could hinder the effectiveness of this intervention resulting in limited staff time.
- Disparities in library offerings across the county could lead to unmet customer expectations, particularly if content portrays services or resources that are not uniformly available, where content is not created at bespoke local or regional levels.

- An increase in negative comments or feedback on social media could necessitate additional resource allocation for management and response.
- Seeking to engage non-users via social media means a reliance on social media platform algorithms. This could expose a visibility risk where libraries continue posting content, but it is not shown widely on people's feeds, therefore impacting potential reach.

What would pilot execution look like?

Below is a suggested route to implementation for this intervention which builds on stakeholder insights. It provides a starting point to inform the creation of a piloting plan, outlining key considerations for inclusion and further development.

1. Develop content strategy and resources

- Develop engaging and relatable content using a fun tone to resonate with audiences. This includes video tours and experiential content showcasing library services
- Tailor content for various social media platforms to reach diverse demographic groups.
- Work with social media experts at local, regional or national level for content refinement and strategy enhancement.
- Identify and engage local partners to share posts etc.

2. Identify suitable staff and allocate roles

- Work with local staff to develop content that reflects community-specific interests and needs.
- Train and brief staff on social media strategy and tips for effective engagement and management.

3. Implementation

- Launch a trial content strategy at one or two libraries at a local level.
- This will involve sharing posts that cover a range of messages and content styles (e.g., text, photo, video) and engaging with partners or relevant groups and organisations to encourage online interaction and wider exposure.

4. Monitoring and assessment using the following metrics:

Identify metrics and activities to monitor and assess the implementation and impact of the intervention. Consider appropriateness of, and ways to collect the following types of metrics (as further details on page 76 and 77):

- Increases in overall library users and active users.
- Social media metrics.
- Monitoring partnerships and aligning to partner metrics.

- Gathering feedback from key parties.
- Create a plan to regularly review the pilot, capturing learnings to refine strategies based on feedback and obstacles identified during the piloting to support wider roll-out.

Intervention 2: Bringing non-users to the library space through hosting other services or working with partners to utilise library space (e.g., health, breakfast clubs, early years)

What is the intervention rationale?

This intervention aims to address a **capability barrier** relating to the **lack of awareness of the library offering and outdated perceptions**, through inviting external organisations (e.g. health clubs or services, breakfast clubs, early years programmes) to make use of library space. This in turn, should attract new audiences to the library, challenge misconceptions about libraries, and ultimately increase footfall and service usage. Strategic partnerships could be formed with organisations that align with the library's goals and target non-user demographics, such as health-related services, educational workshops, community groups, and job fairs.

This intervention also addresses **opportunity barriers** by **making the library more accessible to those with other commitments**. By providing additional services, non-users can engage in multiple activities during a single visit, thus maximising time efficiency and travel convenience by centralising multiple tasks in one location.

What is the potential impact and outcomes of this intervention?

This intervention could lead to a wider and more diverse range of people using the library. It could help raise the profile of the library as a community hub. This intervention could also help challenge misconceptions about libraries by exposing partnering service users to the full range of services available at the library and shift the focus beyond book loaning. Through this exposure, customers could be encouraged to explore and utilise a wider variety of library services, leading to broader community benefits.

Who does the intervention target?

This intervention can be used across segments and demographics but may be particularly useful for segments such as the Disengaged and Digital & Community Seekers who cite opening hours as a barrier to library use and both value convenience; here they may be

encouraged to use the library space for another activity that is a part of their usual schedule and be exposed to the wider library offer.

Tailoring to the local population will be important, with local libraries using detailed knowledge to focus on identifying relevant community-specific events and partnerships. Understanding local needs and preferences, and maintaining flexibility in supporting diverse space usage, will be crucial.

What activities will be involved?

- Identifying key target audience segments and understanding what hosting opportunities could bring them into the library space.
- Building strategic partnerships with specific service providers, exploring collaborations with relevant local services, and cross-promotion between relevant services. This could include collaborations with health-focused organisations, early years programmes, or community groups. Focusing on developing partnerships with relevant local services who have client groups who might pair well with the regular library users and who may not already be using library services.
- Contacting community groups to promote available spaces and hosting opportunities, supported by social media promotion highlighting the library as a potential community hub.
- Identifying optimal timings for when to host activities based on target audience preferences and analysing existing user demographics to identify and engage underserved populations could maximise the initiative's impact.
- Investing in technology and identifying gaps in current service offerings could further enhance the library's appeal as a space for organisations and groups to use.
- Developing clear and consistent policies for space hire and associated charges.
- Ensuring compliance with fire safety, health, and safety regulations, and conducting thorough risk assessments.

What resources will be needed?

Staffing will play a key role with the need for adequate staffing, dedicated staff time and staff training for organising, liaising, and hosting other services. Staff time for the development of clear guidelines for timings, suitable audiences, space usage, and a charging policy will also be important.

Staff time would be required to facilitate hosting a new service and amending the library space as needed for the hosted service, which, if needed, could incur a cost to the library. Funding may also be required to ensure suitability of spaces with appropriate furniture, technology, and access to amenities like toilets and refreshments, where needed in addition to existing library facilities.

Council buy-in and support, potentially including data provision to help inform partnerships and adherence to sponsorship/hire guidelines would be important in encouraging use of the library space. This intervention would require significant buy-in from partners and facilitation of joint promotional efforts.

Resource sharing and thematic initiatives could be coordinated at regional levels on common opportunities, with broader marketing efforts within the region including securing buy-in from partner organisations.

At a national level standardised programmes could be developed that are adaptable to different areas, driven by national data and high-level partnerships with major organisations, such as partnering with the NHS to provide health checks in libraries or partnering with the Jobcentre to support sign-ups.

What are key considerations for feasibility?

The intervention was viewed as feasible where the local area has well established connections to other local services, however participants acknowledged a feasibility challenge around giving up library space and the admin time required to initially set up this intervention. There were also concerns regarding hire charge amounts and the feasibility of charging.

Variables to be considered across libraries include:

- The size and nature of available space within libraries could influence the types of activities that can be accommodated, as could the times these spaces are accessible.
- Geographic location, including factors like transport links and local competition for similar services, could influence demand and accessibility.
- The availability of parking could influence accessibility and affordability of the library space for different groups.
- Ability to offer access to facilities like toilets and refreshments, building security, and overall accessibility for target audiences could also be important variables to consider.

This intervention **assumes** that there will be resource to implement this intervention, there is adequate space at libraries, and that staff are willing to extend their reach and embrace new approaches.

What are the risks involved in implementation?

- A lack of buy-in from senior leadership on both the library side and hosted partner side could create roadblocks. Similarly, a lack of staff buy-in or enthusiasm could hinder success.
- Potential suitable partner clients may not wish to host services at the library site, which could mean there is lower uptake than anticipated. Low uptake might require

adjustments and iterations to the offer or to partnerships. This could mean that less relevant partnerships are formed.

- The risk of overpromising and under-delivering or negative experiences for certain groups could damage the library's reputation.
- Maintaining a consistent level of service across different libraries might prove challenging.
- There could be a risk of customer clashes or negative impact on the library's physical appearance and kerb appeal. Ethical constraints might necessitate turning away certain groups.
- Organisations may not need or want to use the library space in the long-term which could impact sustainability of the intervention.

What would pilot execution look like?

Below is a suggested route to implementation for this intervention which builds on stakeholder insights. It provides a starting point to inform the creation of a piloting plan, outlining key considerations for inclusion and further development.

1. Identify and engage partners

- Identify potential partners: reach out to local relevant community organisations such as health clubs, early years programmes, and educational workshops that align with library goals.
- Generate clear terms: formulate agreements outlining responsibilities, timing, and space utilisation.
- Joint promotional activities: collaborate with partners for cross-promotional efforts and community engagement. This could include consideration of a launch event to introduce the library as a location for the activity.

2. Train staff and prepare space

- Staff training: assign and where required, train staff to manage partnerships and events, ensuring they are equipped to assist hosted services.
- Flexible space arrangement: prepare adaptable spaces with appropriate furniture and technology to accommodate various activities.
- Consider any budget requirements: develop a financial plan covering potential costs for modifications and service setup if needed and/or pilot approach in libraries where additional budget would not be required.

3. Implementation

- Create a schedule to track hosted activities and consider how to engage clients from host partners whilst in the library.

- Feedback mechanism: implement feedback systems to receive input from both partners, those attending hosted events and library goers.

4. Monitoring and assessment using the following metrics:

Identify metrics and activities to monitor and assess the implementation and impact of the intervention. Consider appropriateness of, and ways to collect the following types of metrics (as further details on page 76 and 77:

- Increases in overall library users and active users.
- Social media metrics.
- Monitoring partnerships and aligning to partner metrics.
- Gathering feedback from key parties.
- Create a plan to regularly review the pilot, capturing learnings to refine strategies based on feedback and obstacles identified during the piloting to support wider roll-out.

Intervention 3: Encouraging non-users to re-engage with the library by increasing understanding of why utilising libraries makes sense (e.g. sustainability, money saving) and targeting these messages to specific groups

What is the intervention rationale?

This intervention seeks to address a core **motivational barrier: lack of personal relevance**. This intervention aims to explore different ways to position why people should use the library (e.g. sustainability, money saving) and how to target these messages. This would involve thinking about different ways to promote and position the library to 'disrupt' current perceptions.

What is the potential impact and outcomes of this intervention?

This intervention could lead to increased foot traffic and visibility for libraries and services, which could help to demonstrate their value to the community.

More broadly attracting more users to the library could contribute to the library's long-term sustainability and relevance, raising its profile and demonstrating its positive impact on literacy, digital literacy, language skills, and mental well-being. For example, by engaging more people, this intervention could help combat loneliness and increase book borrowing (physical and online). By thinking creatively about partnerships for sharing messages, this

intervention could support the goals of partner organisations and align with local priorities whilst expanding the reach of libraries.

Who does the intervention target?

This intervention could be used across segments and demographics; the key to success will be identification of ways to position or promote the library offer that chime with groups of interest.

Digital & Community Seekers, Enthusiastic Adopters, and Armchair Supporters may be primary segments to target with this intervention because each see the potential in library services, but don't see the personal relevance. Each segment participates in library related activities, such as reading, studying and enjoy the convenience of accessing resources online but do not use the library for these activities. Strategically positioning messages related to how the library facilitates these contexts alongside reasons to use the library that chime with personal values could engage these segments.

What activities will be involved?

- Developing messages to focus on unique selling points, such as messages that resonate with personal values (e.g., sustainability), that highlight a key benefit of using library services (e.g., money-saving within the content of cost-of-living) and promoting these through clear and simple messaging. This could also include highlighting surprising facts about library offerings, such as access to music editing software for teens, which could challenge perceptions.
- Identify routes to sharing these messages. For example:
 - Building relationships with local services such as community hubs, food banks, schools and colleges, and registrar services to reach a wide audience and attract a range of demographics.
 - Targeted outreach to engage young people as advocates, potentially utilising merchandise like stickers to promote the campaign.
 - Radio campaigns, alongside social media strategies like TikTok challenges or Facebook groups tailored to specific age groups.
 - Informal "chatting stands" at relevant locations to highlight the benefits of library services.
- Utilising staff who reflect the target audience's identity and prioritising activities based on local audience understanding.

What resources will be needed?

Staff time will play a key role in delivery of this intervention. This will include collaboration between library staff, management teams and potentially council communications teams contributing to development of key messages. Time will be needed to develop clear and simple core messages, consistently conveyed across all platforms to disrupt perceptions of libraries whilst accurately representing library offerings.

To promote these messages consideration could be given to the potential use of paid social media posts, adverts or partnering with relevant online communities or influencers to expand reach and target specific audience segments, such as parenting communities, e.g. through Mumsnet.

There will be roles for local staff (bringing local knowledge) as well as regional and national communications teams to provide specialist support.

This intervention also requires access to social media accounts for the libraries and could require access to design tools like Canva and equipment like 360 cameras to enhance content creation.

What are key considerations for feasibility?

Stakeholders felt that this approach could work well but would require specific targeting of messages towards locally identified key demographics and segments of non-users, which could require significant resource inputs. Staff time will be needed for implementation with time to develop content as well as identify and lead initiatives to promote messages.

Variables to be considered across libraries include:

- The availability of adequately trained staff and the existence of volunteer management groups able to support this intervention could be important variables to consider.
- Resident demographics, including language barriers and specific community needs, and location, particularly in rural areas where physical access to libraries might be limited, will necessitate tailored approaches and outreach methods. Utilising tools like the census and indices of multiple deprivation could help provide valuable insights into local demographics and potential areas of need.

This intervention **assumes** that there will be resource to implement this intervention, and that staff are willing to extend their reach and embrace new approaches. It assumes that the current libraries offer will be appealing to the target audience. It also assumes that local libraries hold and have access to relevant social media accounts and that non-users will have a degree of digital literacy, potentially overlooking barriers related to tech skills and access.

What are the risks involved in implementation?

- Expectations about increased engagement and positive outcomes might not be met, leading to wasted time and resources focused on individuals who are not receptive to the library's offerings.
- Chosen approaches could alienate existing library users, creating further challenges.
- Focusing resources heavily on one channel, such as social media, without achieving the desired results could strain limited budgets and create a sense of frustration.

What would pilot execution look like?

Below is a suggested route to implementation for this intervention which builds on stakeholder insights. It provides a starting point to inform the creation of a piloting plan, outlining key considerations for inclusion and further development.

1. Develop messages and create an outreach strategy

- Collaborate with library staff and communications teams to develop concise, impactful messages focusing on library benefits (e.g., sustainability, cost savings).
- Consider targeting and tailoring messages for relevant demographics using local insight and knowledge.
- Launch targeted outreach efforts using social media posts, ads, advocates and partnerships with both online and offline communities, focusing on specific segments like parenting groups.

2. Train staff and acquire access to relevant media platforms

- Allocate staff time for training on using social media, crafting effective messages, building connections with offline and online partners and collaboration with partners.
- Use trained volunteers and leverage local knowledge to tailor approaches to community needs.
- Acquire (if needed) access to necessary online platforms and develop a communications strategy for dissemination of messages online.

3. Identify local partners and engagement strategies

- Initiate partnerships with local services such as community hubs and schools to expand routes to sharing messages more widely.
- Engage young people as advocates using promotional items like stickers.
- Set up "chatting stands" in library foyers for informal engagement.

4. Monitoring and assessment using the following metrics:

Identify metrics and activities to monitor and assess the implementation and impact of the intervention. Consider appropriateness of, and ways to collect the following types of metrics (as further details below):

- Increases in overall library users and active users.
- Social media metrics.
- Monitoring partnerships and aligning to partner metrics.
- Gathering feedback from key parties.
- Create a plan to regularly review the pilot, capturing learnings to refine strategies based on feedback and obstacles identified during the piloting to support wider roll-out.

How can we measure the impact of interventions?

Across stakeholder discussions a range of ideas were generated for how the impact of interventions could be measured. As highlighted during early workshops, metrics and data collection may vary across libraries and this may present a challenge to measuring the impact of interventions. However, stakeholder discussions suggest that several approaches could be taken to monitoring the impact of interventions – these are summarised below. Stakeholders noted that this could be done locally or regionally, and could require additional resource for example, staff time to carry out monitoring activities and potentially investment in additional technology for monitoring. A theory of change could be employed to help structure understanding of intended or anticipated outputs and outcomes²². The following approaches will be important to consider when tailoring and choosing the most appropriate and feasible ways to measure the impact of interventions:

Increases in overall library users and active users which could be measured by:

- Changes in visitor numbers (physical and online), membership numbers or book loans (physical and online).
- Tracking participation rates in library initiatives, such as summer reading programmes.

Social media metrics. Where using social media, using metrics provided by social media analytics to provide insights into online engagement and reach. This could include metrics such as likes, unique users, and shares, could be analysed, potentially utilising tools like Google Insights.

²² The Government's Magenta Book outlines evaluating using a Theory of Change: <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/the-magenta-book>

Monitoring partnerships and aligning to partner metrics. Where working with partners metrics could involve:

- Monitoring the diversity of partnerships.
- Utilising metrics consistent with partner organisations to facilitate collaborative evaluation and exploring the potential to utilise relevant partner metrics.
- Tracking unsolicited inquiries from organisations (e.g., space hire inquiries).

Gathering feedback from key parties. This could include online and offline surveys, interviews or focus groups that explore key aspects of the intervention process and impact amongst:

- Library staff and volunteers.
- New users.
- Existing users (to explore perspectives on an initiative's impact).
- Stakeholders e.g., partner organisations.

11 Summary and conclusions

This research provides a comprehensive understanding of library non-users in England, exploring their demographics, perceptions of libraries, the barriers preventing their engagement and what services might entice them to use their local library in the future. The findings highlight a complex landscape of non-users, with a significant portion disconnected from library services despite generally having positive attitudes towards their role in the community.

Library non-users generally hold positive views of libraries, seeing them as valuable community assets and welcoming spaces. However, as the research data shows, this does not necessarily translate into active engagement. Whilst the survey found that there are potential enablers to engage library non-users (e.g., comfortable spaces, extended opening hours, up-to-date book collections, access to technology, and dedicated work and study areas) a number of strong barriers emerged. Using the COM-B approach, we can identify three key themes acting as barriers to engagement.

Capability: A lack of awareness about the range of services offered.

Opportunity: Fitting library use within the daily lives of library non-users

Motivation: Personal preferences and perceptions of libraries in the digital age

The research identifies five distinct segments of library non-users, each with unique views towards libraries and preferences. Whilst core barriers are consistent across segments, the strength of these, and way in which they are experienced varies.

Armchair Supporters: Who express positive sentiments, but their actual engagement remains limited

Digital & Community Seekers: Who value libraries as community hubs but seek greater digital integration and convenience.

The Disengaged: Who lack personal relevance and awareness of library services.

Dismissive Non-Users: Who are characterised by deeply negative perceptions of libraries. and strong resistance to engagement.

The Enthusiastic Adopters: Who hold overwhelmingly positive attitudes towards libraries and show the greatest potential for re-engagement.

Top barriers to library use are similar across these segments, although the intensity of each barrier varies considerably. The presence of common barriers across segments is strategically beneficial for libraries, suggesting that there are core factors to address to encourage library use. However, as there is no magic bullet intervention that will engage library non-users with

library services, it will be essential when implementing any interventions to consider how they can best be tailored and targeted to segments of non-users and local populations according to their needs.

Potential interventions were developed focusing on the three thematic barriers identified (capability – a lack of awareness about the range of services offered; opportunity – fitting library use within the daily lives of library non-users; and motivation – personal preferences and perceptions of libraries in the digital age). Stakeholders prioritised three interventions which are summarised below. It is important to reflect that whilst this research has focused on three standalone interventions, no one intervention will provide a ‘magic bullet’ to increasing library engagement and a combination of interventions designed to tackle different barriers is likely to be needed. Behaviour change interventions are known to be most effective when they are delivered as part of a wider behaviour change programme and sequencing should be considered to maximise the impact of interventions.

Intervention 1: Using social media to increase awareness of services and share information that challenges library perceptions and builds personal relevance should focus on going where non-users already are online. For example, this could involve pushing out content and interacting/making connections with the social media presence of relevant organisations/groups, rather than solely focusing on boosting the library's own social media channels.

Intervention 2: Hosting other services or working with partners to utilise library space (e.g., health, breakfast clubs, early years). Bringing people into the library environment would increase awareness of the library offer, challenge library perceptions and help mitigate convenience barriers by making engagement more convenient.

Intervention 3: Thinking about different ways to position why people should use the library (e.g. sustainability, money saving) and how to target these messages. Targeting would support people in identifying ways in which the library offers something personally relevant.

For each of these interventions it will be important to consider the role for local, regional and national library involvement. Whilst it is clear that interventions need to be tailored to the local context, regional and national support will be essential to share materials, expertise and best practice, and securing the buy-in of relevant partnership organisations. Furthermore, as discussed in the segmentations chapter, it is crucial to prioritise outreach efforts towards segments most likely to engage with library services. Focusing on segments like Dismissive Non-Users, who demonstrate the lowest likelihood of engagement, could lead to an inefficient use of limited resources.

These interventions offer significant potential to boost library engagement by tackling key barriers. Next steps are pivotal to maximising their efficacy in bringing about real-world impact.

First, carrying out an assessment of each intervention at a local library service level to determine the readiness of individual library branches to implement the interventions, based on available resources, appetite, feasibility and target impacts and outcomes. This would also include assessing investment requirements for implementing the intervention and weighing the potential benefits against other organisational priorities. This assessment could inform resource allocation decisions and guide the prioritisation of next steps for implementation.

Following this, a phased approach to implementation could be adopted, starting with small-scale piloting of potential interventions at local branches to assess feasibility and impact. Sharing best practices and lessons learned across different library branches and regions could facilitate wider adoption and adaptation.

Bringing together insights from the quantitative survey findings with potential interventions to tackle key barriers to engagement, this report provides a starting point for libraries to re-engage non-users and secure them as part of their future.

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