

Shared Intelligence

# Achieving a sustainable library service for Wirral: results of an independent needs assessment

A report by Shared Intelligence

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# Executive Summary

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This report is intended to inform the development of a new sustainable model for Wirral's library service which operates at lower cost and with more impact. Our work was conducted in autumn 2016 looking at:

- Strategic alignment between the library service and the '20 pledges' in the Wirral Plan
- Geographic patterns of socioeconomic need
- Usage of the library service and how this compares with need.

We gathered additional data from over 75 stakeholders inside and outside the council through face to face meetings many held in Wirral libraries. We conducted this research against a backdrop of mounting pressure on local public services driven by increasing demands on health and social care coupled with the fast-approaching phase-out of revenue support grant. For Wirral Council, that has meant making £28m of spending reductions in 2016/17, and will require further reductions in 2017/18 and every year up to 2020 – by which time the council will need to have reduced spending by at least £129m.

As we conducted our research we encountered committed staff and volunteers and a service which makes a difference to lives across the borough and across the Council's strategic agenda. Although libraries for many are synonymous with books, the most notable impacts we saw came from services which use the resources of libraries as a means to social impact; help for jobseekers to learn skills, early years activities for parents and their children to learn together, and reading groups designed for hard-edged health and well-being outcomes. Among stakeholders there was acceptance of the need for change and enthusiasm for a service model more focussed on need and strategic outcomes.

Wirral's 2020 Vision is a plan for bringing about real change despite severe constraints. The council and its partners are focused on ensuring every child gets a good start in life, and that all older residents live well; raising skills and prosperity are seen as key to this. The 2020 Vision is underpinned by detailed plans and strategies and crystallised in the '20 Pledges'. When we mapped the strategic alignment between the library service and the 20 Pledges we identified seven Pledges to which libraries contribute most; older people living well, school readiness, young people ready for work, cultural participation, health and well-being, and joined up services. Our mapping exercise shows Wirral's libraries are already contributing significantly to these Pledges, but not always proactively.

Turning to socioeconomic need, although many stakeholders gave examples of social need being spread across the borough, the most notable pattern is the sheer concentration in the east of the borough. When we compared use with need we then saw two patterns. On the one hand when we looked just at books and reading, users of these aspects of the service are most often children and adults from the least deprived parts of the Wirral. However, when we looked at other forms of library use we saw a different picture. Some of the highest levels of visits per hour of opening, are in the most deprived areas, and libraries in those areas also see some of the highest levels of library computer use, WiFi use, and participation in adult and lifelong learning programmes hosted by libraries.

The reach of Wirral's libraries is substantial, with 1.2 million visits annually according to the latest national figures from CIPFA. Around 54,000 individuals (17% of residents) are recorded as having used Wirral libraries for book borrowing in 2015/16 and of these, 25,000 were under 18 - one third of Wirral's children and teenagers. Besides book borrowers, many more Wirral residents are using libraries for other purposes (accessing the internet, learning new skills, and attending activities and programmes). Although it is harder to obtain data on the number of people using libraries in these ways, the evidence suggests at least 25% of Wirral residents regularly use libraries and the true figure may well be higher.

However, the acute financial pressures faced by the council mean library hours and staffing have had to be reduced and staff are focused almost exclusively on day-to-day tasks rather than the service development and outreach which is essential to increased impact. Alongside this, a recent fall in visits is a warning that the value of the service could be permanently eroded unless a more strategic approach is put in place. Despite this, the sheer scale of use, the alignment with borough-wide priorities, and the fact libraries are used by all communities from the least to most deprived – indicates Wirral's libraries are a significant platform for meeting social outcomes on a very large scale. A high social-impact model of this kind is also in line with the Government's view of public libraries as set out in the Government's "Ambition for Libraries" published last December.

In our view the most significant barrier standing in the way of a more sustainable and impactful service is the size of the library network. Wirral's 24 branches are equivalent to one branch per 13,371 residents. This is more branches per capita than the national average and significantly more than the average among those library services which achieve the highest visit figures nationally. Our main report concludes by describing a new model for the library service which we believe would be sustainable – operating at a lower cost and achieving more impact. The model is predicated upon closing some libraries - retaining a network of between 14 and 16. This would give Wirral one library for every 20,000 to 23,000 residents. While the model would deliver savings, more fundamentally it would shift the balance to a higher ratio of staff to physical branches, and more volunteers in public facing roles. We see this shift as essential to creating a more sustainable and impactful service.

Within the new lower budget, a significant amount would be reallocated to fund outreach, service development, volunteer co-ordination, income generation and grant-winning – key ingredients of a higher impact service. There would also be scope for opening hours to be extended, and better aligned with needs. Self-service kiosks would be promoted more heavily. Opportunities are also likely to arise from the council's strategic asset review to upgrade or relocate libraries to locations where they will have greater impact. Buildings no longer required would be sold or transferred and have no subsequent role in relation to the library service. Clearly, decision-making around library closures is difficult, and subject to intense scrutiny. We have set out the logic behind our conclusions, and synthesised these into a set of criteria which could be used. Our model does not suggest any central libraries should close, but is based on central library services being focused on just one of the four central libraries, while services at other central libraries would be reduced.

This new model, while delivering a reduction in the controllable budget of at least 20%, would constitute a far more effective and impactful balance between physical locations and staff capacity. This in our view, will deliver a service in a stronger and more sustainable position to meet the needs of residents, the strategic priorities of the council, and the vision set out in "Ambition for Libraries".

# 1 Introduction

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- 1.1 Few people challenge the view that the needs of our communities around access to information, literacy, knowledge, well-being and learning are changing rapidly – or that how well we meet these needs as a society will impact on how fairly the opportunities of the coming decades will be spread.
- 1.2 Along with a handful of other institutions (schools, colleges, early years agencies, and public health professionals) public libraries are at the forefront of meeting these needs and this means libraries must continually adapt and re-focus their services to keep pace with the changing world their communities inhabit.
- 1.3 Coupled with this, the pressure on local public services continues to mount – manifesting as a twin-headed challenge of spiralling demands on health and social care combined with the phase out of revenue support grant by 2020. For Wirral Council, that has meant making £28m of spending reductions in the current year 2016/17, with further reductions of a similar magnitude needed in 2017/18 and every year up to 2020 – by which time the council will need to have reduced its spending by at least £129m.
- 1.4 Wirral's 2020 Vision is a plan for bringing about real change despite severe constraints. The council and its partners are focused on ensuring every child gets a good start in life – whereas now not all do – and that all older residents live well – whereas now, many are at risk of isolation. The drivers for both have been identified as tackling low skills and building prosperity for all residents. The headline goal of Wirral Council and its partners is not just about what can be achieved, “but in the manner in which we will deliver it” – this means working differently with communities, listening differently and using data and intelligence in more sophisticated ways.
- 1.5 Across the country, and around the world, public libraries are taking more active roles in meeting these same challenges through innovation, partnerships, and technology. It is true Wirral's libraries – like many others across the UK – have seen a fall in visits and this puts at risk their effectiveness and long-term value to the council. But because of the strong position from which they began, and the large number of people who still use Wirral libraries, the potential for large-scale impact remains.
- 1.6 Against this background a set of proposals relating to libraries were due to have been taken forward in the current financial year, but have been deferred pending further work on developing a new sustainable service model – and this study forms part of that.
- 1.7 Compared nationally Wirral library service spent slightly below the national average per resident in 2015/16 (although that average itself is reducing each year). Nonetheless, the continuing budget pressures mean it is imperative that the council can identify a model for operating the library service which can operate sustainably within a lower budget than now, and which delivers greater impact in return for whatever budget is set.
- 1.8 Public libraries on the Wirral and across the country, like all public services, must now achieve a state of continuous development to keep pace with needs. Yet, changes to public library services have consistently attracted a very high level of public interest, concern and scrutiny.

- 1.9 Much of that scrutiny focuses on the statutory duty contained in the Public Libraries and Museums Act 1964 which requires all first-tier English local authorities to provide “*comprehensive and efficient public Library Services for all persons desirous to make use thereof*”<sup>1</sup>. The Act provides no definition of ‘comprehensive and efficient’ but it does require local authorities to ‘*have regard to*’ three aspects of a library service; what is provided in terms of materials, resources and activities; what is done to encourage use by children and adults; and opportunities for co-operation with other agencies whose functions could take place in libraries.
- 1.10 This means that while libraries need to be continually adapting – often in significant ways, this must be done with transparency, integrity, and above all – based on the best available evidence.
- 1.11 This study was commissioned to provide the Council with a set of reasoned and well-researched recommendations to support the development of a sustainable future model for Wirral’s library service. Shared Intelligence were appointed in October 2016 and over a 12 week period undertook work to investigate the needs which the library meets, and to propose a new model which can meet the statutory duty and needs of residents and the council. Our study comprised a detailed needs assessment – looking in detail at the strategic alignment between the library service and the ‘20 pledges’ in the Wirral Plan, geographic patterns of socioeconomic need and use, and then comparing use of the library service with need.
- 1.12 The project reported to the Leader and Portfolio Holder for libraries, via the Customer Services Senior Manager and an officer from the council’s Transformation Team. Along with a number of requirements to gather data on needs and use, to seek input from stakeholders, and to consider wider best practice – we were also asked to give specific consideration to three documents:
- A local Inquiry into the Public Library Service Provided by Wirral Metropolitan Borough Council (DCMS, 2009) – often known as the ‘Charteris Report’
  - Libraries Deliver: Ambition for Public Libraries in England 2016 to 2021 (DCMS, 2016)
  - *Wirral Council Plan: A 2020 Vision* (Wirral Council, 2015) – which contains Wirral’s 20 Pledges

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<sup>1</sup> The statutory duty is contained in section 7 of the [Public Libraries and Museums Act 1964](#)

## 2 The Ambition for Libraries

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### The ambition for libraries nationally

- 2.1 Across the country library services face significant challenges – not least the pressure to operate within smaller budgets while increasing their impact.
- 2.2 Nationally, the Libraries Taskforce has been given a role by Government to set the overall ambition for public libraries and provide national direction for meeting these challenges. In December 2016 (as our research drew to a close) the Taskforce published their first major report [\*Libraries Deliver: Ambition for Public Libraries in England 2016-2021\*](#). It is the product of a year-long programme of research and engagement across the country to build an up to date picture of the role public libraries are now playing, and to set the direction for the coming five years. An important purpose of the report is to help central and local decision-makers understand how libraries contribute to wider strategic goals and how libraries can deliver the maximum possible impact in relation to their cost.
- 2.3 While it is true that libraries contribute in a myriad of ways, the Taskforce through their research have identified seven social outcomes to which libraries contribute the most:
- cultural and creative enrichment
  - increased reading and literacy
  - improved digital access and literacy
  - helping everyone achieve their full potential
  - healthier and happier lives
  - greater prosperity
  - stronger, more resilient communities
- Libraries Taskforce “*Ambition for Libraries*” (December 2016)
- 2.4 The Taskforce have also sought to illustrate how the typical public library offer contributes to these outcomes across all life stages from cradle to grave. This is captured in the diagram overleaf. It focuses on; services for children from computer coding to story times; opportunities and resources for lifelong learning and self-led study; support for entrepreneurs and jobseekers through business and Intellectual Property advice and job clubs; and services which encourage active ageing from home-readers to books on prescription.
- 2.5 This national vision for public libraries on one hand simply highlights what many libraries are already doing. But it also represents a challenge to the perceived rationale and purpose of libraries by shifting how the public and decision-makers view books and reading - from being the end in itself, to viewing the resources held by libraries as a means to ambitious social and economic goals which change lives and improve neighbourhoods.
- 2.6 If we take the Taskforce’s seven key outcomes as shorthand for the purpose of public libraries (with books and reading only a means to an end) then the role of Wirral’s public library service seems to return closer to what it was when Wirral’s first libraries opened a century and a half ago. The original Birkenhead library (long since gone) was one of England’s first modern public libraries and whose primary purpose was not to provide convenient places to borrow books. Rather, they were

intended to provide free access to knowledge and learning, in order that everyone should have a chance to develop life-skills and work-skills needed to succeed at a time of rapid economic change.

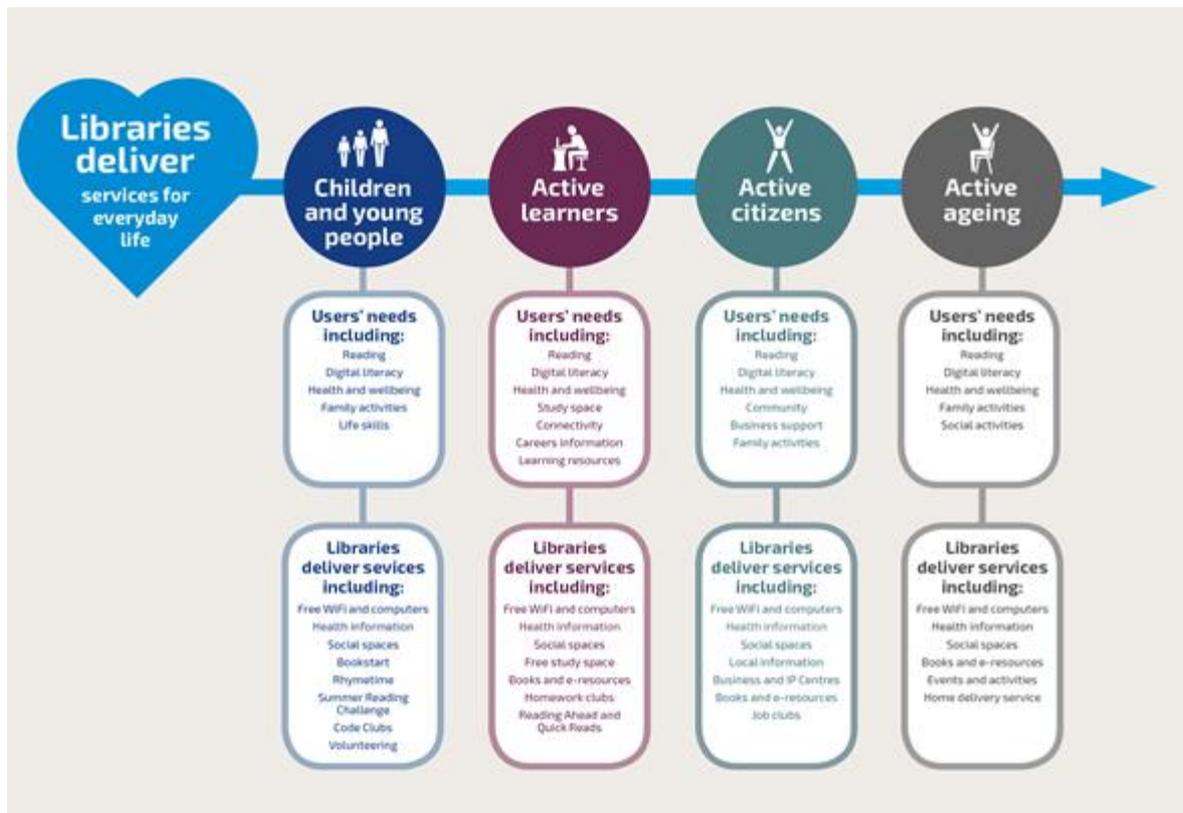


Figure 1 - Libraries Taskforce "Ambition for Libraries" (December 2016)

- 2.7 A growing number of library authorities have already moved to a public library service model which focuses first and foremost on social outcomes –linked directly to their own local statements of the strategic goals of the Council and other local partners (e.g. frameworks like Wirral's 20 pledges).
- 2.8 *What does this mean in practice? For those library services who are shifting their focus more firmly to social outcomes, the most notable difference is less about their physical resources and appearances, and all about how they use those resources – in particular the level of outreach, programme development, and direct targeting of need, which they prioritise. Many also have invested in their capacity to recruit, manage and retain volunteers and use volunteers for outreach rather than simply clerical tasks and meet-and-greet.*
- 2.9 Below are six snapshots from around the country of library services with initiatives or programmes which are aimed at increasing alignment of the library service with local strategic priorities. Most of these examples have been made possible by securing grant funding from Arts Council England, Big Lottery, the Carnegie UK Trust and others in order to develop and test new approaches which have then been expanded and adopted across each service.

**Slough Libraries** are aligning with corporate priorities by making children and young people the strategic focus of their library service, given 60% of their usage relates to children. They are using this to plan the physical integration of other services who also seek to reach children and young people.

**North Somerset** libraries are meeting borough-wide health goals. As part of the Carnegie UK Trust's 'Library Lab' programme they are developing new services to support information literacy around nutrition, combined with community activities – focused especially on healthy eating and reducing obesity.

**Newcastle** libraries are leading the Council's efforts to become an 'open data' city where every possible type of data relating to the council and public services is shared – from the value of their social housing stock to their own website analytics. The aim is to engage the public and build trust. The library service has been fundamental to engaging the public in open data and enabling local people to make practical use of it.

**Essex** libraries are supporting strategic county-wide goals around families by transforming their early years literacy sessions. They are aligning story-times to Early Years Foundation Framework outcomes, and are working with a group of experts to develop a story-time model which has direct benefits for maternal mental health.

**Devon** libraries have a strategic partnership with Heart of the South West LEP which resulted in a Fab Lab in Exeter library (in partnership with the LEP and Exeter University) which promotes STEM qualifications to library users of all ages. It also helps the University staff and students connect better with the local community.

**Manchester** libraries delivered a 3-month 'Google Garage' with Google to run advice sessions for SMEs and start-ups on topics including marketing, selling overseas, and managing business data. The library service also provides ongoing free access to online learning from degree-level courses via Futurelearn to courses on running community groups via 'Community How To'.

## 3 Wirral libraries service current position

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### Overview of the service

- 3.1 Wirral Council's library network consists of 24 library branches across the Wirral (see map overleaf). Four of these are large 'Central' libraries offering a wide range of services including reference and ICT suites; three have within them multiple self-contained rooms and large amounts of floor space overall while one central library is smaller and located in a building along with a Wirral Council leisure centre. Two central libraries also contain a one-stop-shop<sup>2</sup>.
- 3.2 There are sixteen community libraries which vary in size and scale of services. Most community libraries are standalone sites with varying levels of services and activities although some are essentially rooms within larger buildings (schools, Children's Centres, and community centres). All sixteen have budget provision to be staffed and open 18 hours per week, but five have extended hours thanks to volunteer or partner-led provision. Some have opening hours similar to the larger libraries (30-40 hpw) while most are only open three days a week. Several community libraries have highly active library Friends groups who co-ordinate timetabled events, hold fundraising activities, and enable those libraries to open for additional hours beyond those where paid staff are scheduled.
- 3.3 Frontline staff are organised as four peripatetic teams serving different areas of the borough and individual staff members are assigned to different branches for each shift. As we discuss in more detail later, staffing generally is stretched and there are issues around the perceived purpose of frontline roles.
- 3.4 Four community libraries are formally merged with the one-stop-shop network. In these branches frontline staff carry out conventional library duties (checking loan items in/out, arranging group activities, handling returned items and reservations, assisting with public enquiries) but are also the first point of contact or triage for individuals wanting to use the one-stop-shop. Most of the merged libraries are open six days a week for 46 hours per week. Each has public access computers, and individual meeting rooms which are often used by other services and organisations for activities or public drop-ins. Merged library staff tend to spend more time behind their reception desks than their counterparts in community libraries to perform their triage role, and as a result organise and lead fewer group activities. Bebington central library is formally merged with the one-stop-shop service (open for 55 hours per week) and West Kirby library (open 51 hours) is based in The Concourse centre which also houses the one-stop-shop. Wirral libraries also run a housebound reader service which delivers books and other loan items to around 450 housebound users' homes.
- 3.5 ***Wirral's network of 24 branches is equivalent to one branch per 13,371 residents. This is a higher number of library branches per person (or fewer people per branch) than the national average and is one of the highest in the country. England-wide the average is only around one branch per 18,000 residents.***

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<sup>2</sup> Wirral's one-stop-shops are managed under the same senior management as libraries. They are face-to-face contact points where the public can receive specialist help with a range of more complex council and partner services, many of which are via a pre-booked appointment.



Figure 2 - map of Wirral libraries

- 3.6 With a few exceptions (e.g. recently refurbished Rock Ferry), the physical buildings have a catalogue of shortcomings. Some need investment and repair, many now have more space than can be used effectively, and some of the older libraries while being historically important buildings have very restrictive layouts compared to what is now considered an ideal public library layout. Some are also

facing away from local footfall or in poor footfall locations altogether (e.g. where the local retail geography has changed since a library was built).

## Recent budget reductions

- 3.7 The number of library branches has remained unchanged for many years, although budgets have been reduced incrementally over the past decade more significantly in recent years. The primary means of achieving these budget reductions has been by reducing opening hours across community libraries, which have in turn enabled a reduction in staffing numbers at the managerial and frontline levels. As we explain in more detail in the following sections, achieving further savings through more incremental reductions of this kind seems unsustainable.
- 3.8 Measures have been taken to mitigate the effect of budget reductions in several ways. Firstly, by supporting library Friends groups to play a bigger role, organising activities, and in some cases enabling libraries to be open outside of paid-staff hours. Secondly by having library staff recruit and manage more individual volunteers directly – again providing capacity for additional activities. Thirdly through partnership with other organisations and services – e.g. one (community library) branch is staffed by Children’s Services, and another which is co-located in a building with a local community charity (North Birkenhead Development Trust), paid-staff from that charity along with volunteers organise a range of library-based programmes and activities.
- 3.9 The library service has also introduced self-service kiosks which enable library users (providing they are members) to check lending items in and out. Take-up of the self-service kiosks varies from branch to branch, but a significant proportion of users still choose to ask a staff member to check their lending items in and out.
- 3.10 Alongside this, libraries also host many activities and programmes arranged and led by other services and organisations including; Wirral Adult Learning who run a large number of adult learning classes, The Reader Organisation who run therapeutic reading groups for adults, Involve Northwest who run employment support session for jobseekers, AgeUK who run digital skills sessions, and U3A who run reading and crafting groups.
- 3.11 Another significant change within the service has been the merger of the library service with the one-stop-shop service. This is now complete although it was a complex merger to carry through – and the result is a significant joining up of the library service with the council’s main face-to-face service for helping people with a range of complex enquiries about council and partner services including housing benefit applications, council tax and homelessness.
- 3.12 *Despite the involvement of volunteers and Friends groups, and valuable partnerships with other services and organisations, it is widely felt within the library service that staffing is stretched far beyond a sustainable level. Essentially staff are struggling in their attempt to service the same sized network as before, using the same working practices – when what is really needed is a new model and a restatement of purpose. Some staff spoke of being in limbo, and the situation seems to have created a culture in which activities such as outreach, organising activities, promoting services in areas of high need, and the creation of strong local partnerships – is seen as a luxury which staff pressure does not allow, or there is a belief that branch staff are no longer authorised to do these things.*

## Use of the service

- 3.13 Turning to library use, one of the most reliable sources of library use data are the national CIPFA library statistics to which almost all library authorities contribute annually, and which are then validated and compiled by CIPFA<sup>3</sup>. According to CIPFA library data in 2015/16 Wirral libraries achieved 1,243,317 face-to-face visits (for library purposes). This is equivalent to 3.87 visits per head of population which is just below the national average of 4 visits per capita and places Wirral 66th out of the 134 councils for whom data is available. However, it is also much lower than in 2014/15 when Wirral had a much higher figure of 1,676,984 visits, or 5.2 visits per capita (against an England average that year of 4.3) putting Wirral 28<sup>th</sup> out of 139 councils for whom data was available.

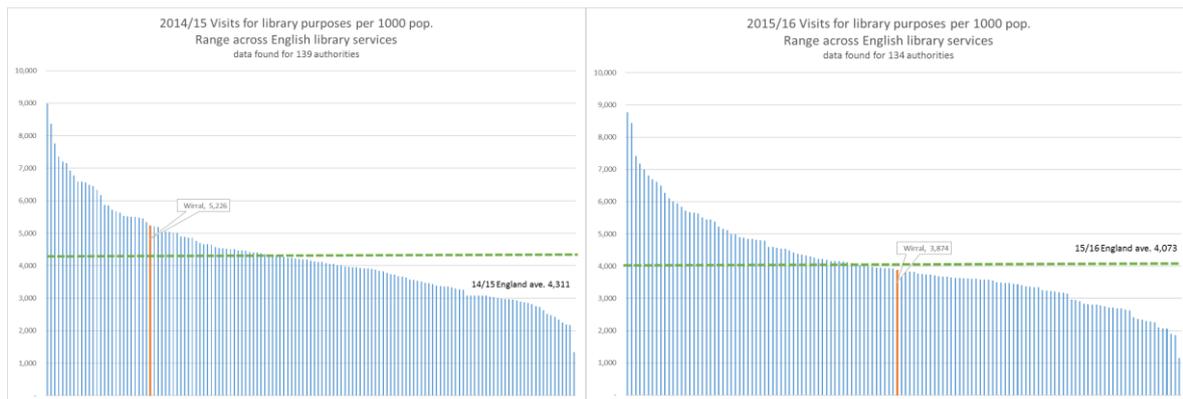


Figure 3 - Active borrowers per 1,000 pop. (Left: CIPFA 2014/15 Right: CIPFA 2015/16)

- 3.14 But how many people are actually using the library service? No library service we know of can records unique visitor numbers (i.e., how many individuals use the service rather than how many visits have been counted). At the very least this would require each visitor to swipe their membership card every visit. So, in terms of understanding how many individuals are using Wirral libraries we have to seek other data sources.
- 3.15 One useful source is Wirral's 2015 residents' survey conducted by Ipsos MORI in October 2015<sup>4</sup> (the same period as CIPFA's 2015/16 data). Residents were asked about library use as part of a much larger opinion survey. The results show that 63% of respondents claimed they had used a local library in the past 12 months, and 26% said they had used a library in the past one month. Respondents from Wirral West were more likely to say they had used a library in the past year.

<sup>3</sup> CIPFA is the Chartered Institute of Public Finance and Accountancy and specialises in collecting data from across local public services for use in decision-making.

<sup>4</sup> The 2015 residents' survey was a postal survey, using a random sample from the Royal Mail address file, out of 5,650 surveys issued, 1,207 recipients responded.

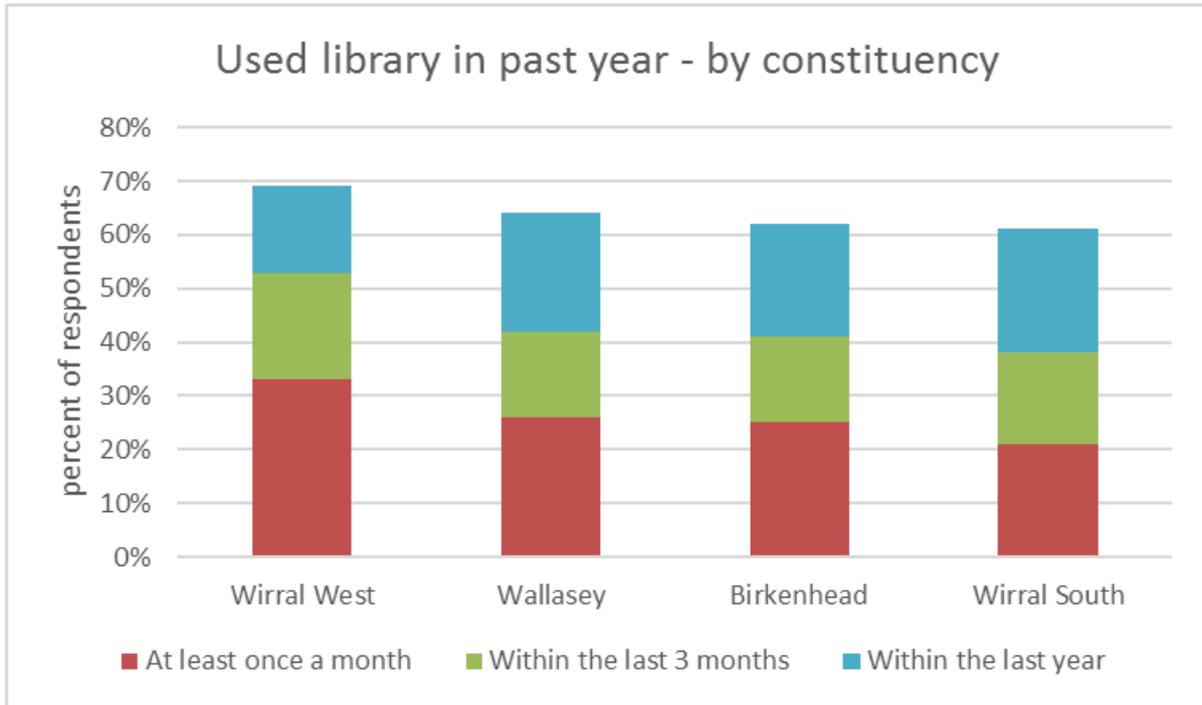


Figure 4 – Wirral Residents Survey 2015 responses – adapted from Ipsos MORI topline data

- 3.16 The residents' survey also indicates that those most likely to use their libraries are people living in households with children, and those who are social tenants (as opposed to private renters or owner occupiers). Adults aged 18-34 or over 65 are also most likely to use a library.
- 3.17 In terms of active borrowers we can be very sure of the number of individual borrowers. The number of people who were both registered library cardholders and who borrowed a book in 2015/16 was 54,167, equivalent to around 17% of the population. This is higher than the national average which is currently 13% (although down from Wirral's 2014/15 figure). We also know exactly how many books were borrowed - just over 1 million, equivalent to 3.2 items per resident; the same as the England average. Breaking down regular borrowers by age provides further insight into the age-profile of book-borrowers. Figure 5 below shows that the largest group of active borrowers were under 18s who account for 47% (25,219) of all 54,167 active borrowers<sup>5</sup>. This accounts for just over one in three of Wirral's 74,452 children and teenagers<sup>6</sup>.

<sup>5</sup> 25,219 is the number of members under-18 who have borrowed in the past year, while the total number of under-18 members is 29,310 – the difference being those members who have not borrowed a local item

<sup>6</sup> 0-19 population figure from *Wirral's Strategy for Children, Young People and Families* (2016)

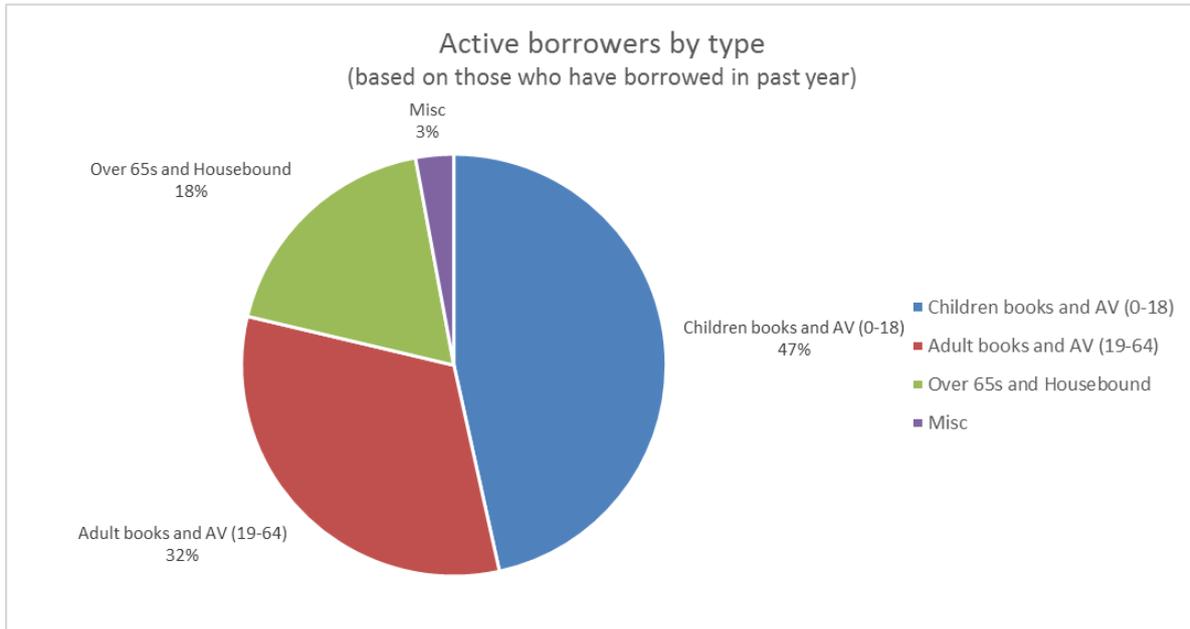


Figure 5 – Active borrowers by type

- 3.18 Data from Wirral libraries also shows there were 129,134 sessions on public access computers and four months' of WiFi data suggests a figure of around 430,000 library WiFi logins annually<sup>7</sup>.
- 3.19 Taking all this data together we can say with certainty that around 54,000 people (17% of the population) have visited a Wirral library. We know this because they borrowed a lending item. Of these, we also know 25,000 were children. We can also say with some certainty (based on data we come onto in subsequent sections) that in addition, many others are using libraries for purposes besides borrowing. We cannot say exactly how many that is but based on the residents' survey – this is between 26% and 63% of the population in total say they use the library service. By any comparison, we would therefore characterise Wirral's library service as a service which is engaging the community on a mass-scale.

### Setting the ambition for Wirral libraries – understanding needs and key areas of strategic alignment

- 3.20 *With 1.2 million visits annually, at least one in three children, and a quarter or more of the adult population are using libraries regularly, we believe there are no comparable public services with this scale of presence in people's lives on the Wirral (Children's Centres for example generate under 100,000 visits annually). As a platform for reaching people of all ages and backgrounds, including those most in need, Wirral's libraries are a significant and well-recognised institution. They can be used alongside other preventative interventions to present residents with opportunities which might assist them, and to encourage and support people to help one another. They are also a point of contact with people over which the council retains significant influence.*
- 3.21 This is the crux of the 'Ambition' report from the Library Taskforce. But whereas the Library Taskforce suggests a number of social outcomes which might apply in general terms across the country, Wirral Council must of course focus on specific local needs tied to its 20 Pledges.

<sup>7</sup> WiFi logins is based on a daily average of 1,176 logins across all branches for August-November 2016

Furthermore, even though libraries contribute to every one of the 20 Pledges, no modern local public service can be a Jack of all Trades. The value of libraries lies in their specific strengths and specialisms – supporting access to information, enabling literacy and the acquisition of knowledge and skills, promoting well-being and learning. The following sections reporting our findings about how in the Wirral, this would be achieved.

**3.22** *In summary, Wirral's libraries are a mass-scale platform for meeting social outcomes and for putting in place a prevention based approach on a population-wide scale. However, the recent fall in visits coupled with the fact that the capacity pressures mean staff are focused on managing day-to-day tasks rather than service development and outreach, is a warning that the value of the service could be permanently eroded unless a more strategic approach is put in place soon.*

## 4 Methodology used

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- 4.1 The intended product of this library needs assessment is a set of findings Wirral Council can use as the basis for creating a library service which is a more effective and impactful and operates at a significantly lower net cost than present. Our study began with two pieces of analysis; looking at the nature of socioeconomic needs in the Wirral and where it is located (we called this analysis 'geographic needs mapping') and alongside this we also gathered information about all the activities and services offered by the library service and assessed how these contribute to Wirral Council's strategic priorities (we called this analysis 'strategy mapping'). Taken together, these two pieces of analysis provided us with a picture of 'need'. The geographic mapping provided a picture of the physical location of need (in broad terms such as low skills, low income, child poverty, and social isolation), and the strategy mapping highlighted which of Wirral Council's borough-wide priorities (i.e. the council's articulation of need) the library service contributes to most.
- 4.2 Although we began this work before the Libraries Taskforce published the final version of its 'Ambition' report, the methods we have used for this study are very closely in line with the kinds of review process which the Taskforce recommends.
- 4.3 With an initial set of analyses, we then spoke to stakeholders from inside and outside the council to test our draft findings and to seek further relevant data. We deliberately chose to conduct most of our stakeholder meetings and discussions in Wirral libraries and this enabled us to see first-hand the relationship between needs, and the activities and services being offered.
- 4.4 This analysis was intended as a basis for exploring how the library service could meet the needs of the community more effectively and with more impact, and operate within a lower net budget, or in the terminology of the statutory duty - how the service could improve its 'efficiency'. Each stage of the needs assessment is summarised below. Alongside this we also looked in detail at service budget data for the current year and for recent years.
- 4.5 **Strategy Mapping:** [The Wirral Plan: 2020 Vision](#), is the council's centrepiece policy document and contains 20 strategic priorities the council has pledged to deliver with its partners by 2020. The pledges represent a synthesis of the issues the council judge as the most significant needs and priorities of the community. Each pledge is supported by an in-depth policy document or service strategy which describes in more detail how it will be delivered.
- 4.6 For our strategy mapping exercise we reviewed all activities and services offered by Wirral libraries including those listed online, on printed materials and the full activity rota provided to us by Wirral Council staff. We then mapped each activity or service offer against the individual Wirral Plan pledge which we felt that activity contributed most towards. The results of this exercise are summarised in para 6.4 and the full results are included as Appendix I to this report.
- 4.7 **Geographic Mapping of Data on Needs and Usage:** We used publicly available ONS data to produce heat maps of deprivation for the Wirral borough area delineated at LSOA (lower super output area) level. Maps like this are used routinely within the council but we wanted to ensure we had the latest indices of multiple deprivation (IMD) maps (based on 2015 data) and we wanted maps for IMD sub-

categories for skills deprivation, child deprivation, and older people deprivation – which we judged to be most relevant to libraries.

- 4.8 **Comparing need with use:** We then requested from the library service a set of maps showing how use relates to need. The simplest map to produce was of the percentage of people in each Wirral LSOA who had borrowed a book in the past 12 months - based on library lending records. We also requested similar maps for participants in the Summer Reading Challenge (the national libraries-based competition which aims to keep children reading books over the Summer holidays), for participants in library-based adult lifelong learning courses, and for users of Wirral's housebound readers service. We did use some measures of use for which unique user data was not available (overall footfall, ICT logins and WiFi logins) and for these we simply looked at use by branch.
- 4.9 **Testing of our initial analyses with stakeholders and further data gathering:** The final stage of our needs assessment (and the stage to which we devoted the most time) took place over four weeks from November to December and consisted of 25 meetings with around 75 stakeholders from Wirral Council and external organisations. These included members of Wirral's Cabinet and other elected members from all political groups, senior council officers, staff from the library service and TU Reps, library users and members of Friends groups, partner delivery organisations. As mentioned already, we took a deliberate decision to conduct the majority of stakeholder meetings in libraries. In the course of our research we were able to visit fourteen of Wirral's libraries across all parts of the borough.
- 4.10 The purpose of these meetings was to test our initial analyses on needs and strategic mapping and to ask stakeholders if they had further relevant data. In these meetings with stakeholders we followed a standard topic guide, though conversations inevitably evolved depending on who we were meeting, and as we carried out more meetings we began cross-referencing information from different stakeholders and testing for more detail.
- 4.11 We also spoke to the team of advisers from the company BWB who are undertaking a wider review of leisure and cultural services.
- 4.12 Unless otherwise stated, our analysis in the following sections incorporates comments and input from those stakeholder discussions.

## 5 Geographic mapping of need

- 5.1 The Wirral has a unique natural, human and economic geography. It is part of one of England's most vibrant city-region economies but the peninsula contains great contrasts. Birkenhead and Seacombe in the east are minutes from Liverpool by road, rail, and (famously) ferry. The east is urban and the economy is a microcosm of national economic history; while Cammell Laird is once again one of the worlds' cutting-edge ship-builders and fitters, much of Birkenhead's immense docks system is empty and awaits the start of a complex and long-planned regeneration scheme. West of the M53 is rural, coastal, and sparsely populated by comparison. In between golf courses and arable farmland, west Wirral is scattered with villages and small towns each with a distinct character.
- 5.2 Not surprisingly, there are some obvious socioeconomic patterns in the Wirral not least in terms of deprivation as the maps below show. Wirral has some of the most deprived and least deprived communities in the country. Figure 6 displays four heat maps using data from the Index of Multiple Deprivation (IMD) for lower super output areas across the borough showing; all-indicators, children and young people indicators, adult skills and deprivation for older people. The deeper red, the greater the level of deprivation.

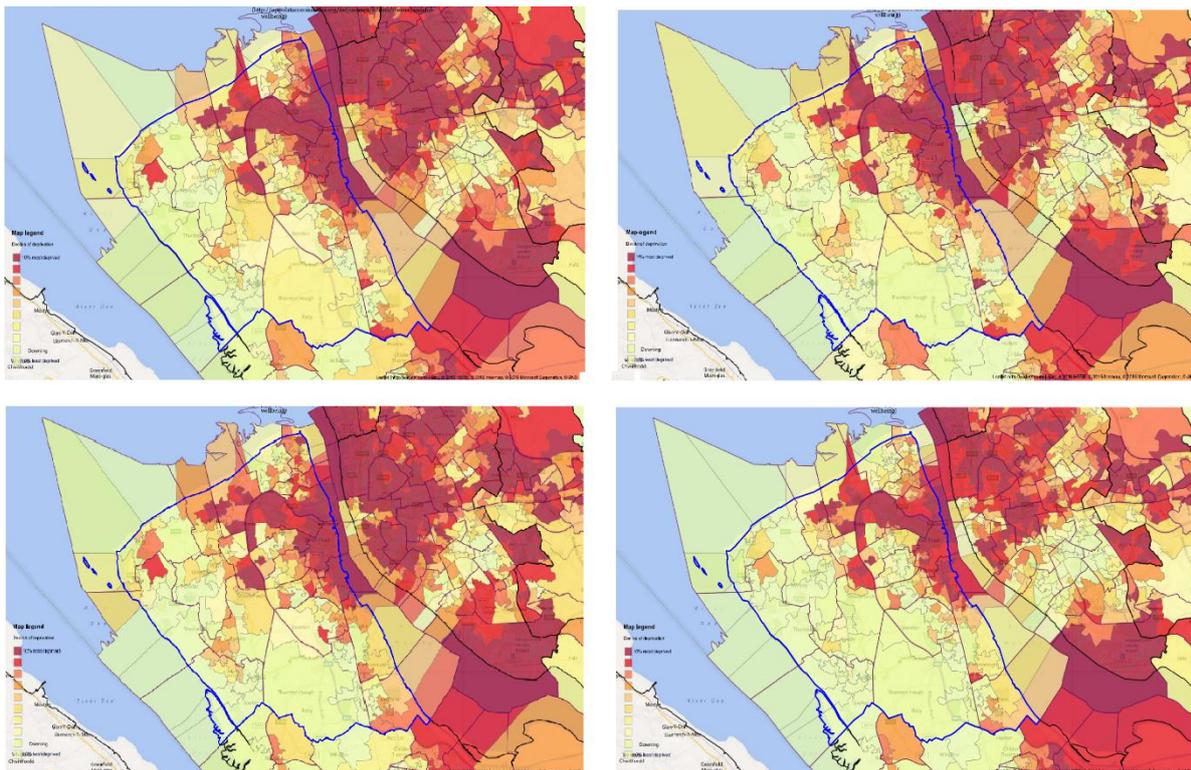


Figure 6 - IMD Deprivation (clockwise from top left: all IMD, children and young people, skills, older people)

- 5.3 Deprivation by all measures is concentrated in the east and north-east of the Wirral, along with pockets around West Kirby in the west, as well as Moreton, Bidston and Arrowe Park.
- 5.4 The Wirral 'loneliness map' (developed by AgeUK) displays the risk of loneliness and isolation for residents aged 65+. It shows a similar pattern to the deprivation maps above with loneliness

concentrated around Birkenhead. The map uses census data on marital status, self-reported health status, age, household size. This map is helpful as one of the issues raised most often in our stakeholder discussions was the extent libraries help prevent isolation and help people remain active and independent in old age. This map shows where that need is concentrated.

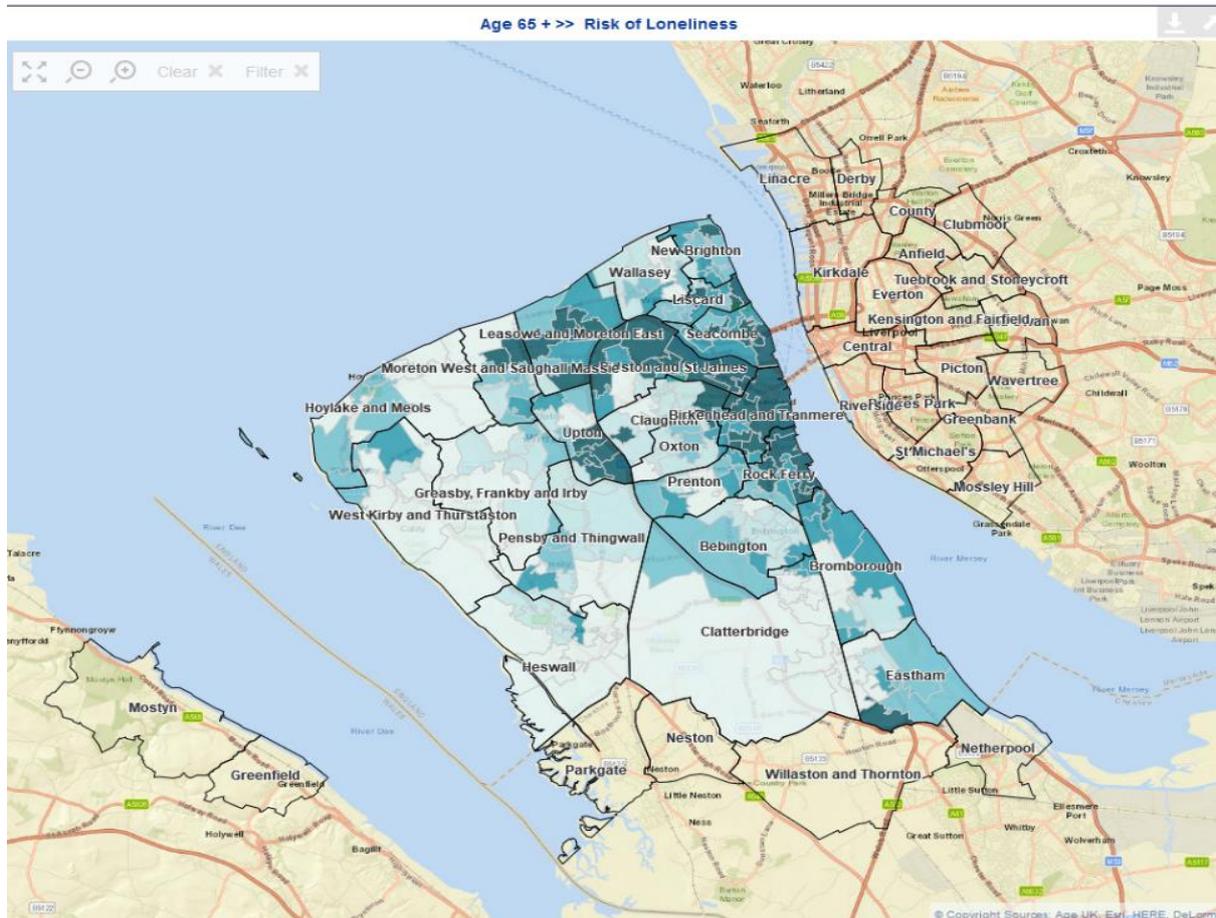


Figure 7 - Risk Map (Age UK Wirral)

5.5 *Although many stakeholders we spoke to gave examples of social need being spread across the peninsula, the sheer concentration of socioeconomic need around Birkenhead and out towards Leasowe is the most notable pattern. Several stakeholders also referred to a map of 'life expectancy by rail station' produced by Wirral CCG<sup>8</sup> showing male life expectancy along the train line from West Kirby to Hamilton Square reduces by one year at every stop from west to east, around a year per mile; a difference of 11 years in total.*

<sup>8</sup> The 'life expectancy by station' map was produced by NHS Wirral for the Wirral CCG 2013-16 Strategic Plan

## 6 Mapping strategic alignment

- 6.1 The Wirral Pledges are 20 strategic priorities the council and the Wirral Partnership have pledged jointly to deliver by 2020. The pledges come from a set of thematic and service specific strategies each of which details how the individual pledges will be delivered.
- 6.2 For our strategy mapping exercise we reviewed all activities and services offered by Wirral libraries including those listed online, on printed materials and the full activity rota provided to us by the library service. We then mapped each activity or service offer against whichever individual Wirral Plan pledge which we felt that activity contributed to most. The results of this exercise are summarised below and the full results are included as Appendix I to this report.
- 6.3 This exercise relied heavily on judgement about how to categorise activities, although we were assisted by written submissions from library staff who offered their own versions of this mapping based on their direct experience – against which we compared our results. It is also similar to previous strategy mapping carried out by Wirral Council officers. Furthermore, we tested the results of the strategy mapping in our discussions with stakeholders and the version shown in Figure 8 below incorporates changes from those discussions.
- 6.4 What this exercise shows is that while libraries contribute to a majority of the 20 Pledges, there are **seven pledges** highlighted green below which in our judgement the library service contributes significantly more. In other words, although the library service contributes to many strategic objectives, these seven areas are where the service earns its keep.

Wirral 20 Pledges	Existing library service contribution
<b>1. Older People Live well</b>	Multiple activities across the network including digital skills courses and groups, crafting sessions, 'Get Into Reading' groups – led by library service, The Reader Org, U3A, AgeUK, Royal British Legion
<b>2. Children are ready for school</b>	Very wide range of early years activities (music, stories, rhymetimes) different formats at different times for different age ranges, foreign languages, outreach to nurseries and reception classes, partnership activities with EY services – led by library staff, partners, Children's Centres, and volunteers
<b>3. Young people are ready for work and adulthood</b>	Learning buddy and homework help, class visits to libraries, foreign language lessons and support, careers advice, creative writing sessions, digital media-making and creation – led by library staff, partners
<b>4. Vulnerable children reach their full potential</b>	Leapfrog programme for 5-10 year olds who have witnessed DV – led by Involve
<b>5. Reduce child and family poverty</b>	Citizens advice drop-ins and triage service signposting a range of benefits and related advice.
<b>6. People with disabilities live independently</b>	Sign language courses, Connexions/Carer Connect advice for under25s with disabilities
<b>7. Zero tolerance to domestic violence</b>	Building Better Relationships programme for men who have used aggression against a partner – led by Merseyside Community Rehabilitation

<b>Wirral 20 Pledges</b>	<b>Existing library service contribution</b>
<b>8. Greater job opportunities in Wirral</b>	Nothing specific identified (library-based employment activities are focused on supply/jobseeker side)
<b>9. Workforce skills match business needs</b>	Wide range of activities and structured programmes for jobseekers (job clubs, advice sessions), Universal Skills online learning, volunteering opportunities, literacy-focused adult reading groups, wide range of Adult Learning courses in maths, English and ICT. Digital skills, digital literacy, and e-safety courses. Courses are run by Wirral Adult Learning, employment support by REMPLOY, Involve/Reach Out, and Career Connect
<b>10. Increase inward investment</b>	Nothing specific identified
<b>11. Thriving small businesses</b>	Nothing specific identified
<b>12. Vibrant tourism economy</b>	Face to face visitor information and advice delivered by staff
<b>13. Transport and technology and Infrastructure fit for the future</b>	Nothing specific identified
<b>14. Assets and buildings are fit for purpose for Wirral's businesses</b>	Nothing specific identified
<b>15. Leisure and cultural opportunities for all</b>	In addition to books and reading offer, very wide range of culture/leisure activities (local history/genealogy, foreign languages for adults, arts/crafting and making groups, board/table-top games, poetry and writing groups, film clubs). These groups are led by a combination of staff, volunteers, and other organisations. Libraries also distribute Wirral Passport
<b>16. Wirral residents live healthier lives</b>	Wide range of active and sedentary health-supporting activities (therapeutic reading for mental health, Ways to Recovery [rehab], breast-feeding advice, Tai Chi, circuit training, Fibromyalgia support, local Healthwatch). Most is free and led by partners or staff, some fitness classes are commercial.
<b>17. Community Services are joined up and accessible</b>	Main activity is One-Stop-Shop access points and point of access for other advice and guidance (CAB, Connexions). Libraries also provide access to elected representatives - Councillor surgeries, MP surgeries, Police, and meeting space for civic and community groups
<b>18. Good quality housing</b>	Nothing specific identified
<b>19. Wirral's Neighbourhoods are safe</b>	Monthly police surgeries and 'drop-ins'
<b>20. Attractive local environment for residents</b>	Local Ramblers society meetings

**Figure 8 - Seven of Wirral's 20 pledges to which the library service appears to contribute most**

6.5 These seven pledges are similar to the outcomes identified nationally by the Libraries Taskforce; but the main difference is they are directly aligned with Wirral's specific local goals. Furthermore, in contrast to the Taskforce's library outcomes, these are based on what Wirral libraries are doing already, whereas the Taskforce outcomes are based partly in the present, and are partly aspiration.

6.6 Using a similar process we then looked at the activities taking place at each branch (using published information and service activity rotas) to identify which pledges are being met where. In Figure 9 the libraries are shown in order of how many Pledges are covered by the activities on offer. We have also shown an estimate of the average of the IMD (index of multiple deprivation) scores for the area served by each branch. What is notable from the table is that while activities at the central libraries contribute across the seven Pledge areas, the coverage across the rest of the network is very variable.

Constituency	Branch	Older People Live well	Children are ready for school	Young people are ready for work and adulthood	Workforce skills match business needs	Leisure and cultural opportunities for all	Wirral residents live healthier lives	Community Services are joined up and accessible	IMD status (estimated)
Wirral South	Bebington Merged Central Lib	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	M
Wirral West	West Kirby Central Lib	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	M
Wallasey	Wallasey Central Lib	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	M
Birkenhead	Birkenhead Central Lib	X	X	X	X	X	X		H
Wallasey	Moreton Merged Lib	X	X		X	X	X	X	H
Wallasey	Seacombe Community Lib	X	X	X	X	X	X		H
Birkenhead	Rock Ferry Merged Lib			X	X	X	X	X	H
Wirral South	Heswall Merged Lib	X	X			X	X	X	L
Wirral West	Greasby Community Lib	X	X	X		X		X	L
Wirral West	Pensby Community Lib	X	X		X	X		X	L
Wirral South	Eastham Merged Lib		X			X	X	X	M
Birkenhead	Prenton Community Lib		X		X	X	X		L
Birkenhead	Beechwood Community Lib				X	X		X	H
Birkenhead	St James community Lib		X		X		X		H
Wirral West	Irby Community Lib	X				X		X	M
Wirral West	Woodchurch Community Lib		X	X					H
Wirral South	Bromborough Community Lib	X				X			M
Birkenhead	Ridgeway Community Lib						X	X	M
Wirral West	Hoyle Community Lib		X			X			M
Wirral West	Upton Community Lib		X			X			M
Wallasey	Wallasey Village Community Lib		X			X			L
Wallasey	Leasowe Community Lib	X							H
Wirral South	Higher Bebington Community Lib					X			L
Wirral South	New Ferry Community Lib								M

Figure 9 – summary of branch activities in terms of Pledges and level of deprivation

6.7 It is notable too that although three branches in areas with high IMD scores have activities which contribute across to least six of seven Pledges, there are four branches in high IMD areas which only offer activities which contribute to 1, 2, or 3 of the Pledges – these branches also have fewer activities overall. Figure 9 also shows that Rock Ferry (based on the information we have) appears to have no activities specifically for older people or early years despite being one of the areas of highest need for those groups. Whilst Woodchurch Library is adjacent to a Fender Primary School currently the only activities for children are school visits.

6.8 Figure 9 also highlights that in 8/24 libraries there appear to be no early years and pre-school activities - 'Children are ready for school' - yet we encountered a great deal of evidence suggesting these activities (we included here rhyme times, story times, music/singing, and library staff visits to other EY settings) are among the most popular activities and services of all. Seven of those eight libraries with no early years activities are in areas of high or moderate need.

## 7 Comparing need to use

7.1 Our next step was to compare the usage data with the needs mapping. We were aware of the weakness of over-reliance on book borrowing data to understand library use given that Wirral's libraries are used for many different purposes besides lending. However, the practical challenge we faced is that for many of Wirral's library activities and services, user data is not routinely captured on a borough-wide basis. We tried, for instance to obtain data about users of library computers which is a significant area of use, but the number of unique users is not captured, only total number of sessions. Similarly, no data is collected about where in the borough computer-users come from – only which branch they are in when they use a computer (which might not be where they live). There were also areas of library activity where some user data was collected but not borough-wide. One example of this was library-based early years reading and story sessions; although user data is collected for a handful of these sessions, borough-wide data collection does not take place.

### The density of book-borrowers is lowest around Birkenhead

7.2 Each time a book is borrowed from a library, the library user presents their library card (to staff, or to a self-service kiosk) and a record of the loan is generated on that user's account and this is all held on the library management system. This means that extremely accurate data exists about how many books have been borrowed and by whom. It also means we can create a very accurate map showing the extent that people in different parts of the borough are borrowing books. What our heatmap of book borrowers shows is that they are concentrated in the west, northeast, and southeast of the borough. In these parts of the borough, there are 42 lower super output areas (LSOAs) where between 13.5% and 23.5% of the population have borrowed at one book or more in the past 12 months. Around Birkenhead, the percentage of the population who have borrowed a book recently is lower, in 45 LSOAs it is only 2.7% to 7.5% of the population.

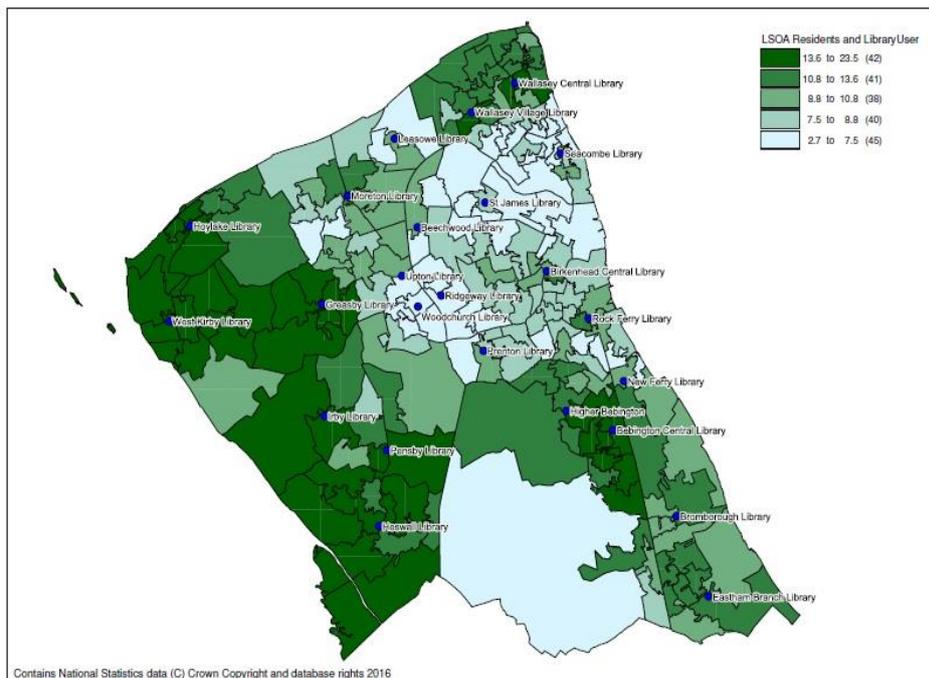


Figure 10 – Heat map of book borrowing across LSOAs

## Other forms of use show different patterns

7.3 However, as we look at other measures we see different patterns.

7.4 **Summer Reading Challenge** is a national scheme which encourages children to read by rewarding them if they read six books during the school summer holidays. The aim is to prevent children's reading ability sliding back over the summer break. Figure 11 below shows the location of households with children who took part in the challenge (based on data for 4,493 recorded participants). While the area around Birkenhead is still the lowest area of take-up, the areas around Beechwood and Leasowe libraries show as hotspots, despite being cooler for general borrowing.

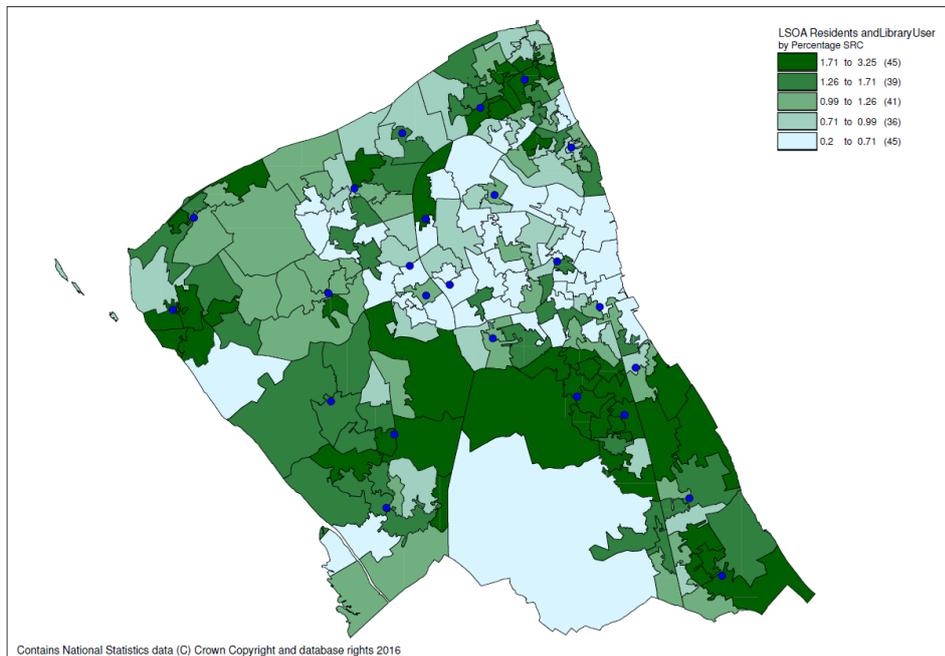


Figure 11 – Heat map of Summer Reading Challenge Participants

7.5 **Lifelong learning sessions** are run by Wirral Adult Learning in libraries across the library network. We were able to map postcodes of 491 learners. This was too small a dataset to produce a meaningful heat map, instead we asked council officers to create a dot map of those postcodes layered on top of the IMD deprivation heat map. Here we see far more overlap with areas of need including the most deprived areas. Interestingly however, there are also some areas of high deprivation with very few learners in our dataset.

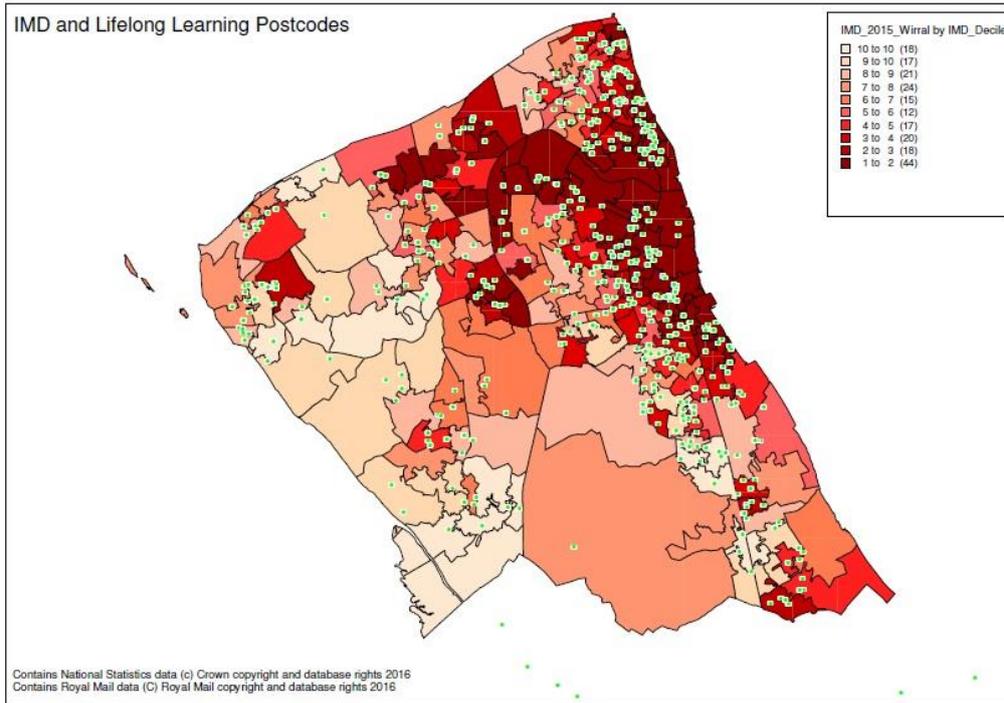


Figure 12 - Lifelong Learning users dot map, layered on deprivation heat map

The home reader service is provided to 442 library users and these are shown in Figure 13. This is the book delivery service for housebound, predominantly older residents. Here the map shows a wide spread of use, with, if anything, a weak clustering in the east of the borough.

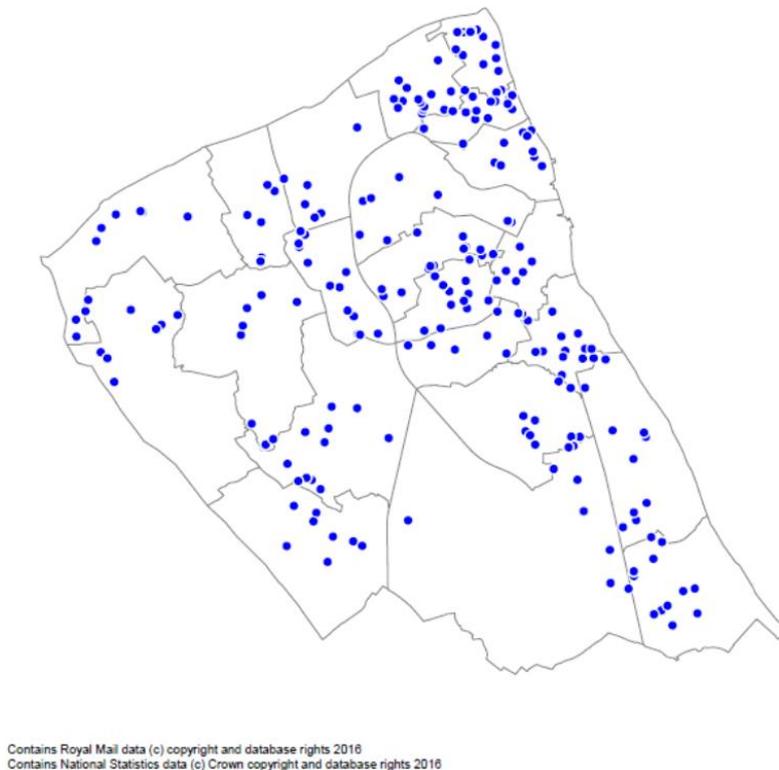


Figure 13 – Dot map of Home Reader Service users

7.6 **Library visits (footfall)** as we have explained already cannot be mapped in terms of where users come from, instead we can only show the branches where visits take place. In Figure 14 below we have adjusted the branch visit data to create a like-for-like comparison showing footfall per hour of opening based on current opening hours and using 2015/16 visit data. What this shows is that visit levels vary a great deal across the borough, but unlike book-borrowing the pattern is not as clearly east-west. The top five are West Kirby and Greasby (West Wirral), Wallasey Central (Wallasey), Rock Ferry (Birkenhead), Seacombe (Wallasey), and Bromborough (Wirral South). A similarly mixed pattern exists among the bottom five. (N.b. no visit data was available for New Ferry).

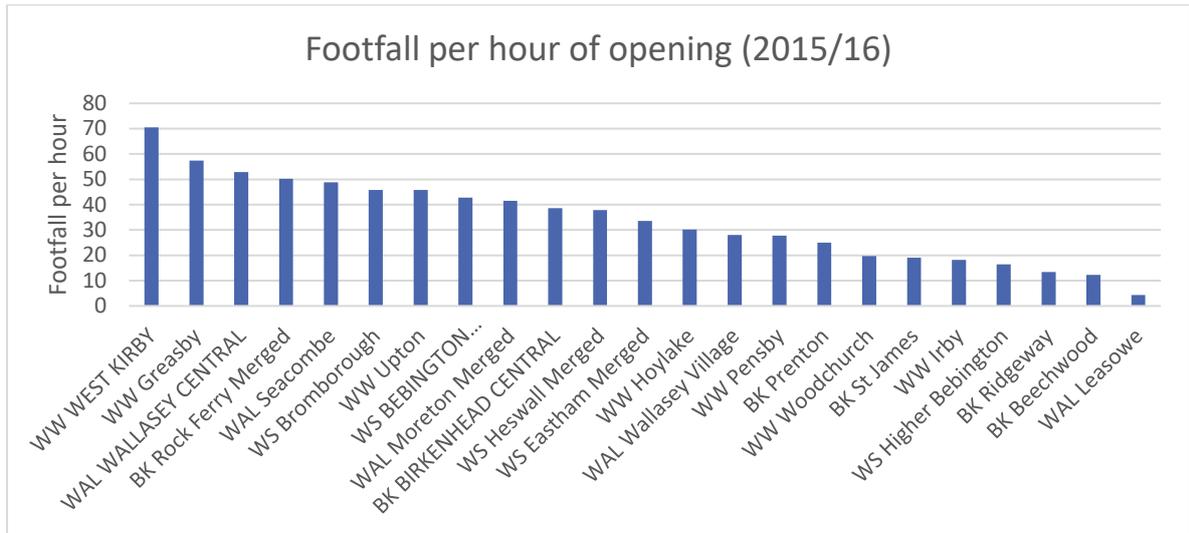


Figure 14 – Footfall per hour of opening (no data provided for New Ferry)

<sup>9</sup> Footfall per hours of opening: the service seeks to collect data on “visits for library purposes” but given that some library branches are in shared buildings this may still include some non-library related footfall.

7.7 **Public access computer use**, is another dataset where we cannot map individual users. But the library service was able to provide data on the number of session logins per branch. For Figure 15 we again adjusted the data to show sessions per hour of opening based on current opening hours. One pattern is that the top four locations are all in the east of the borough (Birkenhead, Wallasey, Seacombe and Rock Ferry). We also see that on a like-for-like basis, three community libraries have heavier usage than some central libraries (Seacombe, Rock Ferry, and Moreton).

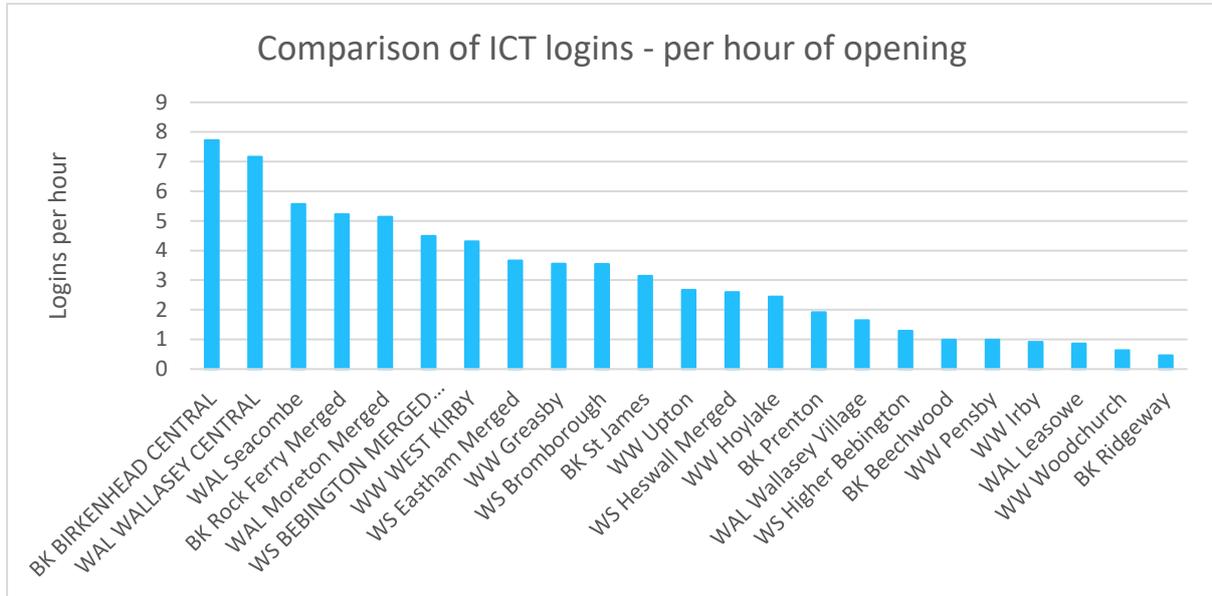


Figure 15 - Comparison of ICT logins - per hour of opening (no data provided for New Ferry)

7.8 **WiFi use per branch** was another dataset we were provided. WiFi was expanded in summer 2016 to all 24 branches using a new system. The data in Figure 16 is based on average numbers people using the branch WiFi during the first four months in which all branches had the new system operational August to November of 2016. We have also adjusted the data to show what the equivalent figures would be if all libraries were open the same number of hours. Here we see five branches at the top of the ranking which do not appear high on the other forms of use (Bromborough, Hoylake, Prenton, Pensby, and Woodchurch). We noted however, that WiFi was overhauled in summer 2016 as part of the DCMS Ministerial initiative to achieve 100% WiFi coverage in all libraries – and use patterns may still be emerging.

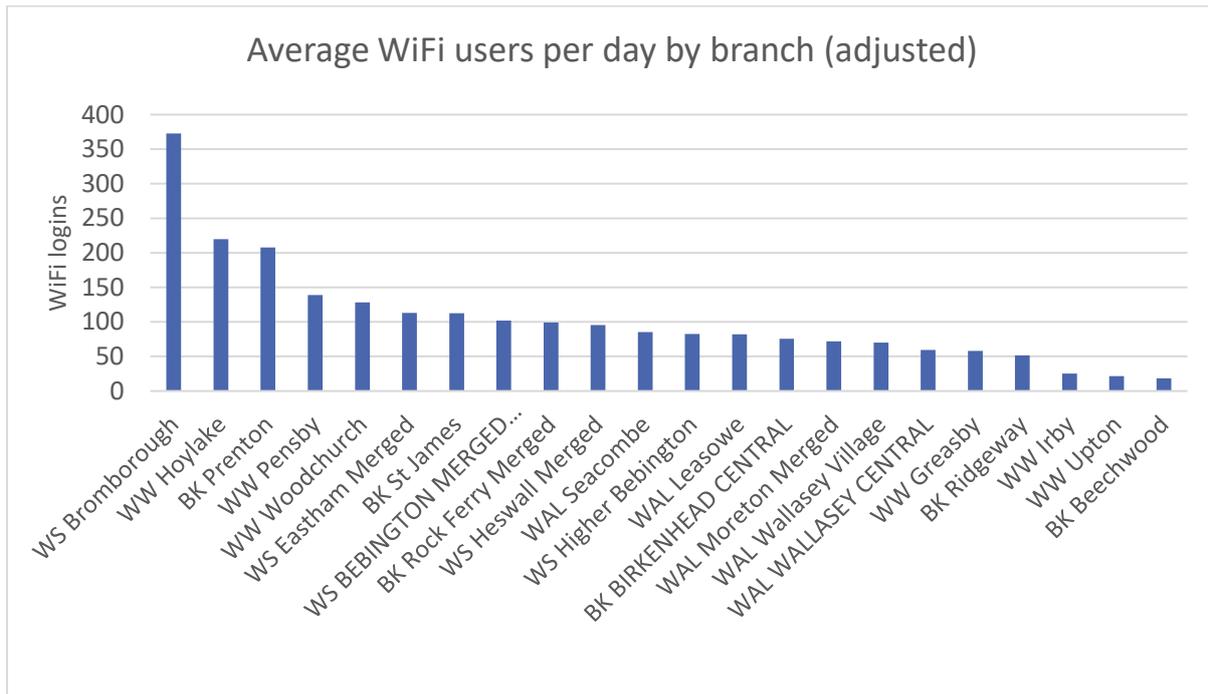


Figure 16 - Average Wi-Fi users per day (adjusted for opening hours and no data for New Ferry or W Kirby)

## What do these comparisons tell us?

- 7.9 These comparisons of use and need highlight two issues.
- 7.10 *In terms of books and reading, while the greatest social need (in terms of overall deprivation, low skills, child poverty, over 65s in need, and isolation) is concentrated in the east around Birkenhead– it is most often children and adults from the better-off parts of the Wirral who are using the service most for book-borrowing.*
- 7.11 *People from the more deprived parts of the borough are the most likely users of the library service for accessing lifelong learning. We also see that some of the highest levels of visits per hour of opening are in the most deprived areas, and that libraries in those areas are also seeing comparatively high levels of computer and WiFi use.*

## 8 Findings and significant issues

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- 8.1 This section synthesises our findings from the desk-based analysis, the discussions we had with stakeholders (who often provided further data for us to analyse), and our first-hand observations from visiting library branches.

### **A lower-cost and more needs-focused service seems impossible whilst also trying to sustain a network of 24 branches**

- 8.2 The central question for this study has been to consider how the library service can develop a new, lower cost and higher impact model. As part of our research we looked in detail at the current and previous years' budgets for Wirral libraries, including the proportions spent on staff versus other costs. We also took account of the evidence we encountered about staffing levels and staffing pressures, and the implications this has had on service development and outreach.
- 8.3 From this we came to the view that the most significant barrier to sustainable change is the size of the branch network. Whilst staffing levels have been reduced over the past three years, no branches have been closed.
- 8.4 *Even with opening hours reductions, staff capacity is stretched to a level which is unsustainable in terms of overall workload, proper planning and review, contingency for absence – and most importantly in terms of service development to keep pace with needs. Service development requires time, and it seems that time is not being invested; for example, we were struck by how few funding opportunities (from Arts Council England and others) had been sought despite these being relatively easy ways to secure pump-priming funding for service innovation.*
- 8.5 Hence our view that a lower cost model which actively contributes to the 20 Pledges is not possible whilst the service also attempts to sustain a network of 24 branches
- 8.6 We heard frustration from stakeholders about the reduction in branch opening hours. Some branches now have opening times which members of the public are unlikely to remember because they match no familiar pattern. Some stakeholders were frustrated that where branch hours had been reduced the shorter hours could have been aligned with peak times e.g. after school, or lunchtimes – yet there were examples where the opposite had happened.
- 8.7 Coupled with this are the issues already discussed around staffing pressures; a culture in which proactive activities are not pursued either for sheer lack of time, or a belief staff should not be spending their time on such activities. Another related issue to this is that some library partners along with library staff (most of whom are now peripatetic) now see it as far harder for the library service to build local networks within the communities around each branch.
- 8.8 Furthermore, despite the well-known sensitivities around library budgets nationally, we heard broad-based agreement from inside the council and outside, that the library service must deliver its share of savings, coupled with a desire to see the library service consolidate around a more impact and outcomes focused model. In this context we heard a common message from stakeholders of all kinds (council and library staff, Friends groups, service partners) that the branch network was now

too big for current staffing and resourcing levels. Understandably there were concerns about the fate of specific branches, and comments about the specific character of the smaller communities, but generally there was an acceptance that maintaining 24 branches with an ever smaller pool of staff was not in anyone's interests if the library service was to be able to deliver real social impact.

### The library service reaches a large number of people, but is reactive rather than needs focused

- 8.9 Despite the fall in use Wirral library service still reaches a very large number of residents in absolute terms, children in particular, and visit numbers are still healthy when compared nationally (this is because Wirral's ranking nationally had been high enough that even the significant fall only brings Wirral's figure down to the average). However, a common concern was that the library service is too passive. In other words residents who want to use libraries come through the doors, but the library service does too little to reach people who would benefit most and would enable the 20 Pledges to be met. This was coupled with concern that because of the effort which is now required simply to keep the basic service functioning the service has lost focus on social impact and its broader purpose.
- 8.10 We also saw and heard that many users still choose to ask staff to check their loan items in and out (rather than use self-serve), and more generally the staffing effort appears geared towards responding to those who ask for assistance rather than promoting services to those who might benefit (from services which support health, learning, early years development etc.). We felt this was particularly apparent in the OSS merged libraries.
- 8.11 There was enthusiasm to see library services change, consolidate and re-focus more clearly on outcomes, and a willingness from others to help the library service increase impact (from partner organisations, volunteers, and Friends groups).

### Although libraries contribute to the Pledges this needs to be planned and measured

- 8.12 It was frustrating to encounter a number of activities and services which have clear potential to contribute to the 20 Pledges but where there was little data to enable us to delve into the impact they are making. There were several areas of existing activity where we could see from other plans, strategies, and evidence that libraries are already meeting some of Wirral's most complex social needs. Yet this approach seems to lack a consistency and rigour. For example:

<p><b>School readiness:</b> There is a significant attainment gap for children from Wirral's most deprived wards and for those on free school meals (FSM), which overlaps with areas</p>	<p><b>Evidence:</b> National evidence shows high quality under 5s programmes produce cognitive gains particularly for disadvantaged children - but key factors are quality, adherence to curriculum and intensity/regularity.<sup>11</sup></p> <p><b>Library offer:</b> Library early years offer is open-access and focused on EY Foundation Stage areas of language, social development,</p>
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<sup>11</sup> Key messages from evidence reviews including "Improving school readiness – creating a better start for London" Public Health England 2015

<p>where school readiness is weakest and where fewest families take up EY services.<sup>10</sup></p>	<p>and literacy. However, Wirral formats vary from very informal to highly planned and pedagogy-based, there is no organised targeting of those most in need, and no data gathered on outcomes (e.g. regularity of participation).</p>
<p><b>Loneliness and digital exclusion:</b> Up to 25,000 of Wirral's over 65s are thought to be at risk of isolation and while the internet can alleviate isolation and while two-thirds of over 65s regularly use email, half have still never used an online government service or paid a bill online.<sup>12</sup></p>	<p><b>Evidence:</b> National research into digital champions programmes<sup>13</sup> has found up to 83% of participants gain more positive perception of the internet and 42% find it easier to keep in touch with family. Wirral Public Health also found that group over 65s activities achieve better outcomes than one-to-one interventions.</p> <p><b>Library offer:</b> Structured classes for beginners and novices, and walk-in digital assistance to support information literacy. Partners including AgeUK also deliver digital exclusion support in libraries. However – there is little targeting or data gathering on who takes part, progression rates/outcomes, or referral routes.</p>

## Partnership working, volunteering, and Friends groups

- 8.19 In some branches there are now volunteer days when volunteers run the library all day. This has not been without issues. Because volunteers are not trained to same level as staff they can create additional burdens for staff. There are also seemingly unnecessary restrictions on what volunteers can do which means that already-stretched paid staff often find 'to do lists' from volunteers of tasks those volunteers could easily have done but are not allowed to.
- 8.20 Partnerships between the library and organisations such as the North Birkenhead Development Trust mean that on those days when the library is closed, staff from the Trust open the space and run lifelong learning activities.
- 8.21 We were struck by the many stakeholders who wanted to use the library service to channel the capacity and energy from those communities with more resources, to those with less. Friends groups were particularly concerned about this as were community organisations – often referring specifically to the potential for a west to east transfer of skills capacity and social capital. Some cited previous projects which they said proved that people on the Wirral already do this in co-ordinated ways, and could do similar through libraries too<sup>14</sup>.

<sup>10</sup> Taken from Wirral's strategy for children young people and families

<sup>12</sup> AgeUK Wirral, and OFCOM Media Literacy Tracker

<sup>13</sup> Evaluation of 'Digital Unite' – a programme using digital tutors and champions to support over 65s

<sup>14</sup> The project we heard referred to specifically was the Life Expectancy Wirral Initiative. This was a partnership between Wirral Council and local churches. An evaluation identified that in terms of social return on investment the initiative generated five times the value of what had been spent to deliver it.

## Library buildings

- 8.22 Almost all the library buildings are in need of some form of investment and refurbishment, and a few have serious shortcomings such as inflexible layouts, poor footfall locations, or redundant spaces which cannot easily be used. Some buildings which have the most problems, are also in areas which (by any measure) have the highest levels of need. At the same time, the council is engaged in a major review of property assets which is intended to lead to a highly proactive shake-up of the property portfolio – in which the council is looking for better/higher value holdings. This seems an obvious opportunity for improvements to be made to the library estate if there is close liaison with the property assets review. Additionally there may be opportunity for freeing the service from the burden of resourcing a building where alternative accommodation could better support delivery against key strategic priorities.

## Capacity for change

- 8.23 Many staff referred to the merger of libraries and one-stop-shops as evidence the service can deliver complex change. However, we also saw in this the potential for tension between the proactive aims of a library service seeking to increase impact and intervene early, and the more transactional aims of one-stop-shops.

## Seacombe Library as a prototype for the future – to reach and be reached

- 8.24 During our study we found that in a great many ways Seacombe Library provides a tangible example of what a more impact-orientated library service would look like. We visited the library on two separate occasions. We know that book-borrowing is low at Seacombe, yet the library on both occasions was abuzz with activity. During one visit, we saw: a children's pre-school literacy session was in progress, Reach Out were running advice and guidance sessions for over 30s, a reading group for adults with serious mental health issues was taking place, a Connexions advisor was seeing walk-in visitors, and a British Sign Language class was gathered around a table in another corner. In addition, people were using PCs for internet access and receiving assistance where needed from a volunteer.
- 8.25 Partner agencies told us they value Seacombe as a venue because they know it is a great location to reach their target groups, and for their target groups to reach them. This was especially true for employment support partners who value neutral venues which are perceived as separate from the DWP system. This is despite only being open on two weekdays plus Saturday mornings, despite the fact the building and equipment need a lick of paint (e.g. 'Pentium4' PCs are still in use), and despite the fact the main entrance faces away from local footfall. Yet it is in an area of high need, and during the hours it is open footfall and PC use are among the highest in the borough.

## 9 Conclusions and recommendations

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### **A service with a 20% lower budget is possible, geared towards higher impact but with fewer libraries, and a higher ratio of staff to branches**

- 9.1 *Our headline conclusion is that we estimate the library service could achieve a reduction of the controllable budget by 20% and deliver a service with greater impact on the 20 Pledges and on the greatest areas of need . This would be achieved by closing some libraries and retaining 14–16, meaning Wirral would have one library for every 20,000 to 23,000 residents. While the model would deliver savings, more fundamentally it would shift the balance to a higher ratio of staff to physical branches, and more volunteers in public facing roles. We see this shift as essential to creating a more sustainable and impactful service.*
- 9.2 *The rebalancing we envisage would require a significant proportion of the new lower budget to be reallocated to resource service development and social impact activities. These new functions might also be resourced through changes made as part of the wider *leisure and culture review*. These functions would include the development of high social impact programmes, outreach, volunteer co-ordination, income and grant generation, and other new elements of a higher impact library service model. In addition to a higher ratio of staff to branches this could also enable the remaining libraries to increase hours, and align hours better with needs.*
- 9.3 In the service model we envisage, no central libraries would close, but the full range of services would be focused on just one of the four central libraries where services would be expanded. At the other central libraries services such as reference would end, and overall public floor space would be reduced in other ways (for example by moving children’s areas into or adjacent to the main public area) which would enable net savings. There may also be opportunities arising from the council’s strategic asset review to upgrade or relocate libraries to locations where they will have greater impact.
- 9.4 This model of a smaller central library exists already in the form of West Kirby Central Library. Additional volunteers would be recruited across all branches. Self-service kiosks would be more heavily promoted and users would be actively encouraged to use them<sup>15</sup>.
- 9.5 A network of 14-16 libraries would be the basis for a service which has capacity to be proactive rather than reactive and aligned with the strategic goals and needs of residents in the borough. The budget headroom this would create, would enable the service to operate with clearer strategic purpose, and better planning and measurement of impact.
- 9.6 Across the service there would sufficient staff (and/or volunteers) to plan and deliver high quality and evidence-based programming geared towards need and social impact. The most intensive activity would be focused on areas with high levels of need.

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<sup>15</sup> Experience from other authorities is that it is hard to encourage individuals to use self-service kiosks for the first time, but once they have used them a handful of times they continue using them without further prompting.

- 9.7 *The reallocation of a proportion of the new lower budget (after savings have been taken) to new functions is the **key mechanism** by which the library service will be able to increase impact, meet the needs of the most deprived communities, and cement the crucial shift towards a clearer focus on the seven Pledges.*
- 9.8 Clearly, if this reallocation were not made the savings could be greater, and/or the extent of library closures could be less. But without this reallocation and investment in new posts and functions to deliver increased impact the service in our view will be on a path of decreasing impact, and diminishing value – in this respect the CIPFA data on library visits are a warning. In other words, just to meet the statutory duty, Wirral Council would still find itself funding a service likely costing well over £1 million a year, but that expenditure would deliver little or nothing towards the Pledges, towards meeting social needs, or towards the kind of innovation and change of mindset to which all of Wirral’s services must now contribute towards.

### Rationale for our conclusions

- 9.9 By many measures Wirral’s library service compares well nationally. Despite the recent fall, visits are still around the national average and Wirral has a comparatively large number of active borrowers many of whom are children and teenagers. Many people from deprived backgrounds are using the service especially to access digital knowledge and develop new skills.
- 9.10 *But Wirral’s library service must change rapidly. It must do this to implement a share of the spending reductions the council must make between now and 2020, and to increase its impact within a community which is changing fast in terms of how learning and information are accessed. For Wirral libraries, this means the Pledges which crystallise needs locally; older people living well, school readiness, young people ready for work, cultural participation, health and well-being, and joined up services. Seen in these terms the library service seems in a precarious state. While its activities and services are aligned with the big socio-economic priorities of Wirral Council, there is little conscious targeting of those services. Not only that but recent changes in the service have reduced capacity to plan and deliver the kinds of services which reach and impact upon deprived communities, and the service risks retrenching into a reactive model dominated by book-lending.*
- 9.11 The capacity of staff to deliver the bare minimum day-to-day service is severely stretched, meaning there is currently little or no capacity for service development or implementation of any significant change. It is likely that the significant and rapid fall in visits is related to the reduction in staffing and the effect this has had on opening hours and programming. This in turn has put at risk the value the library service offers as a platform for delivery – although given this has happened only in the past 24 months, we do not see it as irreparable.
- 9.12 The potential does exist to do more, within a smaller budget. This requires an explicit decision to focus resources on the communities most in need, and on the aspects of the service which will help those communities and which most closely align to the 20 Pledges. It will also require a major reallocation of resources from keeping all 24 branches open, to focusing on a smaller network – and significant increases to the ratio of staff to physical branches.

## How many branches does an effective service need?

- 9.13 There is no formula for calculating the 'optimum' number of library branches per capita. What we can do is make comparisons with other library services. We believe it is particularly useful to consider those which achieve the highest levels of visits per capita – which gives some measure of reach and impact. As it stands Wirral has one library for every 13,345 residents. This is higher than the national average for England which was one branch per 18,045 people in 2015/16. Not only that but those library services elsewhere which achieve the highest visitor numbers, tend to have significantly fewer libraries per resident than Wirral. As Figure 17 shows, many of the library services which achieve the highest levels of visits per capita (over 5,000 visits per 1,000 pop.) have one library per 20,000 or more residents. We also know from other analysis we have conducted into CIPFA data that these same services are also more likely to have 'bucked' recent trends more generally and seen increases across several metrics of use and impact.

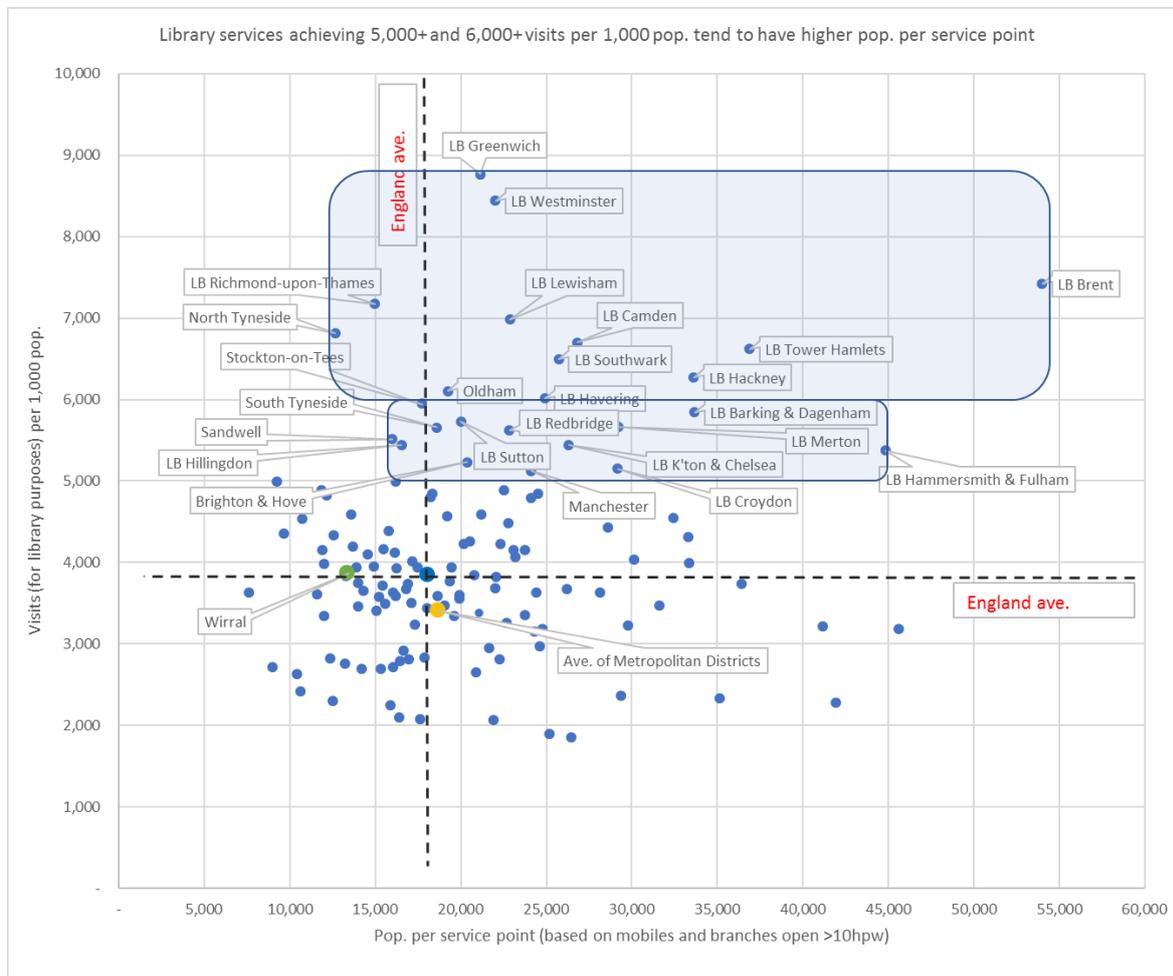


Figure 17 - National comparison of population per library 'service point' Source CIPFA 2015/16

- 9.14 *Having considered this data, alongside the budget figures for Wirral's library service, we suggest that if Wirral had between 14 – 16 library branches instead of 24 it would be able to achieve savings of around 20% and at the same time, reinvest in a new higher impact approach. This would equate to one library for every 20,000 to 23,000 residents and more importantly it would achieve a more effective and impactful balance between physical locations and staff capacity.*

- 9.15 Many library services with the highest visit levels are in densely populated urban areas (in London particularly) and not good comparators for the Wirral. However, there are some shown in the figure above which have similar characteristics to the Wirral:
- **Oldham library service** has over 6,100 visits per 1,000 pop. and one library for every 19,233 residents and serves a population of contrasts from the edge of Greater Manchester out to Saddleworth and the Peak District National Park.
  - **Stockton-on-Tees library service** achieves around 6,000 visits per 1,000 pop. and has one library for every 17,709 residents. Stockton has a very mixed population with 28% of residents living in areas which are among the most deprived in England, while an identical proportion live in areas classed as some of England's most affluent communities.
  - **Havering library service** also has 6,000 visits per 1,000 pop. and one library for every 24,910 residents. Havering is also split between its north-east communities of villages on the London fringe, and Rainham and Romford in the south which of the borough which are urban, formerly dominated by docks and car manufacturing and demographically very similar to Birkenhead.
- 9.16 This is not simply about the amount of resources available to each service; these three services have very different budgets, one is higher and two are lower than Wirral's was in the same year. Based on 2015/16 data<sup>16</sup>, Havering's library budget equated to £12.34 per resident, Oldham spent £24.43 per resident, Stockton spent £13.17 per resident – and for comparison Wirral spent a total of £13.44 per resident. The England average was £14.08 per resident.

### Mobilising Friends and volunteer groups

- 9.17 From areas with skilled volunteers and high levels of social capital we heard a willingness among Friends groups and volunteers to support libraries in their areas and adopt a greater role in the day-to-day management of local libraries.
- 9.18 This provides an open opportunity to work closer with Friends groups. Friends groups were concerned at the disparity and inequality in the ability of communities to self-organise – the clearest example being that libraries in deprived parts of the borough are least likely to have Friends groups. Not only might it be more difficult to recruit volunteers in these areas, but the capacity of volunteers to deliver high impact activities may require more attention or require professional staff to deliver them. As we have mentioned already, this concern extended to a willingness among Friends groups to work with the Council and other partners to help support communities with less social capital and fewer skill and resources.
- 9.19 Our model assumes some libraries could become branches where volunteers are the main public face of the service every day they are open. Branches in some areas, whether in their current location, or collocated with other existing council services - such as community centres - could remain within the library network and within scope of the strategic aims of the council and its partners, but with volunteers as the primary public face. This would enable the capacity of the

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<sup>16</sup> Using the column "Total Revenue Expenditure per 1,000 pop. (152)", CIPFA 2015/16 data

Friends and volunteer groups to contribute directly to the library service with their time, skills, and resources – and will contribute significantly towards savings.

- 9.20 However, this type of approach will also require a structured high quality volunteering programme to recruit and manage volunteers.

## Buildings and Physical Assets

- 9.21 The strategic assets review creates a clear chance for the library service to commence an active watching brief for opportunities to improve the remaining library estate – with options kept under constant review for improving existing buildings (e.g. linked to nearby developments) and/or for re-locating library branches within communities to higher impact locations with higher footfall, better access, and better floorplans. Buildings no longer required would either be sold commercially or transferred for community use and have no further role in relation to the library service. Preparatory work would need to be done prior to closures to avoid prolonged vacancies which might blight an area and/or cost the council fees in security and upkeep.

## Criteria for decision-making on closures

- 9.22 Decision-making around library closures is clearly difficult, and subject to intense scrutiny. Above all such decisions must be based on the best evidence, especially evidence of need. Nonetheless, as we have set out, we do not consider it possible to deliver a sustainable model within a lower budget while attempting to maintain a network of 24 sites. So how might these difficult decisions on closures be approached? Our findings around alignment of library services to the 20 Pledges, patterns of need and use, and our description of a new model in paragraphs 9.1 – 9.9, provide the logic behind the conclusions we have reached. These can be used as a set of criteria which synthesise our conclusions into matrix as follows:

Criteria	Which scores higher?
<b>NEEDS</b>	
<b>Index of multiple deprivation</b>	More deprived
<b>Distance to nearest library</b>	Greatest distance
<b>USE</b>	
<b>Footfall per hour of opening</b>	Highest number
<b>Book loans per hour of opening</b>	Highest number
<b>Combined ICT and WiFi sessions per hour of opening</b>	Highest number
<b>ALIGNMENT WITH PLEDGES</b>	
<b>Timetabled activities per opening hour</b>	Highest number
<b>Volunteers and Friends</b>	Most active

Figure 18 - Criteria for decision making on closures

- 9.23 We have specifically not included the quality or suitability of library buildings – because we do not think this indicates either need, or degree of alignment with the 20 Pledges. If a library in poor quality building scores highly then the priority will be to seek opportunities to improve the building, or move to a better premises in the same area.
- 9.24 As with any process which uses criteria in this way, there must still be a final sense checking, and we would imagine some form of wider consultation. There are bound to be other factors too which these criteria do not capture. This means that the final decisions cannot be arrived at through a purely mechanical process – but we would expect it to provide a clear guide and logical rationale.

## An outcomes and needs-orientated service

- 9.25 We have explained how we identified seven of the 20 Pledges to which libraries contribute most, and where the library service earns its keep; skills, adult literacy and school readiness, tackling isolation, and supporting health and well-being. But we have also have explained that this contribution is not as structured, planned or measurable as it could be or needs to be.
- 9.26 We were asked to consider possible models for assessing the social value of the service to use in future cost benefit analyses and provide evidence of contributions to the 20 Pledges. What we suggest is an outcomes framework based specifically on the seven Pledges which we have identified. This would align library activities with the specific goals and actions which sit beneath the Pledges as follows:

Pledge	Action	Library outcome
Older people living well	Promote schemes and initiatives to encourage older residents to be physically and mentally healthy	Use outreach to increase visits by residents aged over 65 and from LSOAs rated high risk of loneliness
Children ready for school	Close the gap in readiness for school for disadvantaged children	Attract more under 5s and their parents to early years reading groups and have more attend 3+ consecutive weeks
Young people ready for work and adulthood	To close the inequalities gap in attainment between those young people in receipt of free school meals and their peers	Increased participation (via school partnerships) in Summer Reading Challenge and other structured literacy activities by FSM children
Workforce skills match business needs	Skills provision more responsive to local employer and economic growth priorities	Co-ordinate skills and learning offer with local businesses and use MOOCs to respond rapidly to changing skills priorities
Leisure and cultural opportunities for all	Develop, promote and support good referral pathways between GPs and sports, leisure, social and physical activities	Increase therapeutic referrals (via GPs) to library-based social and reading activities using Books on Prescription as a prototype pathway
Wirral residents live healthier lives	Developing a comprehensive information and advice offer for local people	Integrate library resources into local health information offer e.g. Books on Prescription and Shelf Help, Macmillan Information Points, food and cookery collections, access to online CBT for depression
Community services are joined up and accessible	Designing services around residents not the organisations which provide them	Number of One Stop Shop users signposted back (post appointment) to library resources/ activities which enable them to help themselves

Figure 19 - Seven pledges, outcomes framework

## Different service models for different parts of the borough

- 9.27 Shifting the focus of the library service more towards social impact is a major undertaking, although the gain in our view is worth the effort. But this still leaves a second challenge for a borough like Wirral which serves very different communities – can the library service operate differently in different parts of the borough? Many of the stakeholders we spoke to suggested the service needed to be geographically differentiated in some way – but this may be too much to take on at once. Instead we suggest that while the goal is a service which focuses more on social impact *and* which is geographically differentiated – it might be more realistic to leave geographic differentiation for a second stage of change.
- 9.28 If we think of there being four possible models as shown below, we suggest the immediate goal should be to move from the bottom right square to the top right square. Then after a period of consolidation, the next step would be to move to the top left square.

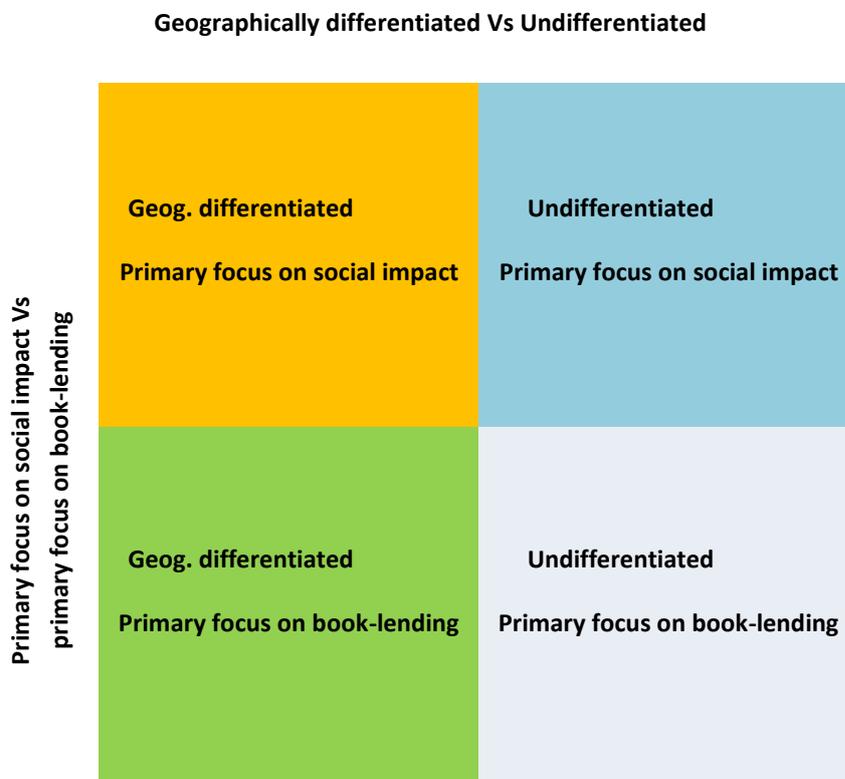


Figure 20 - Primary focus on social-impact vs. primary focus on book-lending

## Other Issues

### Trusts/Mutuals:

- 9.30 We heard interest from partners and staff in the possibility of creating a public sector spin-out in the form of a library-specific staff-led Mutual or Trust. For the four English library services who have gone down this route so far, it has provided new opportunities and leadership has been invigorated. At the same time however, it has also brought new challenges related to creating substantial new enterprises in a tough financial climate.
- 9.31 We are also aware that nationally, support is available via several Government routes to support library services looking to explore this route.
- 9.32 However, the four library mutuals established in England to date (York, Suffolk, Devon and Nottinghamshire) have all taken up to two years from conception to going live, and our understanding is that this kind of prolonged timescale is not feasible because of the urgency to find savings for 2016/17; a twin-track approach however, might be possible.

### Quick wins:

- 9.33 There were a host of lower-level house-keeping issues we encountered which taken together could help improve the impact and cost-benefit of the service quickly. These include:
- A more proactive approach to securing Arts Council England grant-funding for strategic development projects, such grants (some up to £250k) could provide much-needed investment to help test out new approaches or create elements of the new service model.
  - Improving communication about the service offer especially to disadvantaged groups – either directly or via intermediary agencies – would enable the service to increase its impact relatively quickly in terms of number of high needs families reached and supported.
  - Ensuring specific approaches around early years, older people, literacy, and adult skills are evidence based (presently too many activities are not based on proven models and/or lack consistency in delivery) – again this could help increase impact and build reputation with partners for whom it is important to demonstrate evidence-based approaches either to build partnerships or secure commissioning budgets.
  - Improving data capture especially on issues which provide evidence of the extent libraries are contributing to the Pledges. For example this could include data on: whether families taking part in early years activities come from the most deprived parts of the borough, and the numbers taking part; where participants in adult learning programmes come from, their skills levels when they start, and any evidence of progression or employment success; the number of older people who come from areas identified as areas with the highest risk of isolation.

# Appendix I

Wirral 20 Pledges to the community and residents	Direct Library Service Contribution	Notes: (frequency; hours; % of total opening times; volunteer run / resourced)
<b>People: “Wirral is a place where the vulnerable are safe and protected, every child gets a good start in life and older residents are respected and valued”.</b>		
1. Older People Live well	Skills <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Age UK IT group</li> <li>• Age UK IT courses</li> <li>• Age UK art classes</li> <li>• U3A self-led craft group</li> <li>• U3A reading groups</li> <li>• U3A German language</li> <li>• U3A art group</li> <li>• U3A craft group</li> </ul> Social activities <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Fortnightly knitting groups for older people</li> </ul>	U3A = University of the Third-Age
2. Children are ready for school	For parents <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Breast feeding clinic - weekly</li> </ul> Storytimes, rhymetimes and play <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Storytime</li> <li>• Bounce and Rhyme</li> <li>• Story-shaker</li> <li>• Wallabies craft and play</li> <li>• Moo-moo music for babies and under-5's</li> <li>• Orchard Stories and staff (GMEYC)</li> <li>• Hummingbirds sing-a-long (GMEYC)</li> <li>• Smudge Group (GMEYC)</li> <li>• Weekly Little Chicks</li> <li>• 'Lavender Daisy &amp; Little Ladybirds'</li> </ul>	GMEYC = Ganney Meadows Early Years Centre

Wirral 20 Pledges to the community and residents	Direct Library Service Contribution	Notes: (frequency; hours; % of total opening times; volunteer run / resourced)
	Nursery and Reception support <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Prenton Prep nursery</li> <li>• Fender Reception and Yr 1 support</li> <li>• St Michaels Reception monthly</li> <li>• Seacombe Chipmunks</li> <li>• Spanish for tots</li> <li>• Under-5 storytime</li> <li>• After school storytime</li> </ul>	
<b>3.</b> Young people are ready for work and adulthood	Reading and literacy <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Literacy buddies</li> <li>• Children’s creative writing</li> </ul> Other support and advice <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Learning buddies</li> <li>• Connexions service</li> <li>• Monthly Media Monkeys</li> <li>• Weekly French lessons</li> <li>• Spanish for kids</li> </ul>	
<b>4.</b> Vulnerable children reach their full potential		
<b>5.</b> Reduce child and family poverty	(Overlap with several services listed under pledge 17 “Community Services are joined up and accessible”)	
<b>6.</b> People with disabilities live independently	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• LLL sign language / British Sign Language courses</li> <li>• Connexions service for those with disabilities aged &lt;25</li> </ul>	
<b>7.</b> Zero tolerance to domestic violence	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Monthly women’s reading group</li> <li>• Involve Northwest Leapfrog Scheme (for child witnesses of DV)</li> <li>• ‘Building Better Relationships’ (for male perpetrators of DV)*</li> </ul>	*see Wirral domestic abuse JSNA p16

Wirral 20 Pledges to the community and residents	Direct Library Service Contribution	Notes: (frequency; hours; % of total opening times; volunteer run / resourced)
<b>Business: "Wirral is a place where employers want to invest and businesses thrive".</b>		
8. Greater job opportunities in Wirral	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Library volunteering programmess</li> <li>• REMPLOY weekly sessions</li> <li>• Weekly Involve/Reach Out job club</li> <li>• Adult career connect</li> </ul>	
9. Workforce skills match business needs	<p>Literacy</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Monthly reading groups for adults</li> </ul> <p>Numeracy</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• LLL Maths skills 1-3</li> <li>• LLL improve your maths</li> </ul> <p>Languages</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• LLL Awards in English Skills</li> <li>• LLL improve your English</li> <li>• LLL British Sign Language</li> <li>• Weekly Spanish lessons</li> <li>• Beginners French</li> </ul> <p>ICT</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• LLL Next Steps Computers</li> <li>• LLL easy steps computers</li> <li>• LLL IT skills for work assessment</li> <li>• Weekly computer classes</li> <li>• Weekly computer groups</li> </ul> <p>Other skills</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Foster carer training (e-safety)</li> <li>• LLL Functional Skills</li> </ul>	
10. Increase inward investment		

Wirral 20 Pledges to the community and residents	Direct Library Service Contribution	Notes: (frequency; hours; % of total opening times; volunteer run / resourced)
11. Thriving small businesses		
12. Vibrant tourism economy		
13. Transport and technology and Infrastructure fit for the future	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>IT safety classes</li> </ul>	
14. Assets and buildings are fit for purpose for Wirral’s businesses		

Wirral 20 Pledges to the community and residents	Direct Library Service Contribution	Notes: (frequency; hours; % of total opening times; volunteer run / resourced)
<b>Environment: “Wirral has an attractive and sustainable environment, where good health and an excellent quality of life is enjoyed by everyone that lives here”.</b>		
15. Leisure and cultural opportunities for all	Writing and literature <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Jean Hignett literature group</li> <li>Riverside monthly writers group</li> <li>Creative writing group</li> <li>Weekly poetry and literature group</li> <li>Monthly crime reading group</li> <li>Veronica’s reading group</li> <li>Mayer Reading group</li> </ul> Crafts and Making <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Tapestry group</li> </ul>	

Wirral 20 Pledges to the community and residents	Direct Library Service Contribution	Notes: (frequency; hours; % of total opening times; volunteer run / resourced)
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Crafty chatter</li> <li>• Monthly / weekly 'Yarn bombing'</li> <li>• Fortnightly 'get crafty'</li> <li>• Fortnightly 'In Stitches'</li> <li>• Fortnightly 'knit and natter'</li> </ul> <p>Visual arts</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Painters group</li> <li>• Weekly art group</li> <li>• Wallasey Arts group</li> </ul> <p>Film and cinema</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Film Club</li> </ul> <p>History and Genealogy</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Friends History Group</li> <li>• History society</li> <li>• Family History / ancestry research helpdesk service</li> </ul> <p>Social / games activities</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Weekly Coffee Club</li> <li>• Bridge</li> <li>• Fortnightly Scrabble</li> <li>• Adult Colouring group</li> </ul>	
<p><b>16.</b> Wirral residents live healthier lives</p>	<p>Mental health</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 'Get Into Reading' (GIR) outreach service - for those with / to preventatively address - mental health issues</li> <li>• Book at breakfast (GIR)</li> </ul> <p>Physical health</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Circuit training</li> <li>• Monthly Fibromalgia support group</li> <li>• Local Ramblers society meetings</li> </ul> <p>Wellbeing</p>	

Wirral 20 Pledges to the community and residents	Direct Library Service Contribution	Notes: (frequency; hours; % of total opening times; volunteer run / resourced)
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Weekly Tai Chi classes</li> <li>• Health and Wellbeing Week (~30 activities across the network – reading, crafts, social, physical activities)</li> <li>• Wirral ways to recovery partner led groups</li> <li>• Health Watch</li> </ul>	
17. Community Services are joined up and accessible	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Councillor surgeries</li> <li>• MP surgeries</li> <li>• Friends committee meetings / events</li> <li>• Citizens Advice Bureau drop-in</li> <li>• Connexions service drop-in</li> <li>• Involve Northwest advice services</li> <li>• Royal British Legion drop-in</li> </ul>	
18. Good quality housing		
19. Wirral's Neighbourhoods are safe	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Monthly police surgeries</li> <li>• Police drop-ins</li> </ul>	
20. Attractive local environment for residents		

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