



Have your say

A summary report of the public feedback to the Hackney Council libraries' service review

June 2022



Contents



1. Introduction	3
2. Executive summary	4
3. How we engaged with residents and stakeholders	8
4. Feedback from library users	12
5. Feedback from library non-users	15
6. Council tenants and leaseholders	19
7. Businesses, cultural sector and community partners	21
8. Conversations with schools and young people	24
9. A snapshot of feedback from our focus groups	26

1. Introduction

We think there is an important role to play for libraries in our borough.

Our libraries' engagement aims to understand how libraries are currently used by Hackney residents and what changes they would like to see to ensure the buildings and services in them remain relevant and fit for the future – whether it's a quiet place to complete work, more cultural activities or easy access to other Council services.

The purpose of our consultation is to ensure that we better understand the variety of services the community would like to see their local library provide.

We are grateful to everyone who took part in our engagement over the summer of 2021 and made time to let us know how we can improve Hackney's libraries and what services they would like to see offered in the future. The response was phenomenal. It reached 8,450 residents and has provided important insight that will help shape our borough's libraries. There has not been a formal review in a long time and so this important research into the views from library users and non-users together with the review of how we operate, who our partners are, and how our finances are will provide us with a new vision to further improve services for local people.

Over the next few months we will be considering all the feedback we have received in order to develop our libraries' strategy. The new library strategy will make recommendations on how we can meet the needs of all our residents within the available resources over the next five to 10 years. We will be back in touch to share those proposals with you. This report provides a summary of all that residents have told us and will prove invaluable in ensuring that we build a thriving future for our libraries.

A sincere thank you again to local residents, schools, businesses and community organisations as well as Council officers and library staff who have engaged with us in such meaningful ways about our libraries.



A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'C.M. Kennedy', written in a cursive style.

Cllr Chris Kennedy
Cabinet member for health, adult social care,
voluntary sector and culture

2. Executive summary

Since April 2021, the libraries' service review has enabled the Council to develop important research into residents' experiences of Hackney's libraries.

This study was delivered based on evidence-based research and involved quantitative and qualitative data collection. The Our Libraries campaign, over the summer in 2021, and the ongoing involvement of library staff has provided important insight that will help shape the new libraries strategy in the future.

Looking to the future, residents of all ages and backgrounds have told us that they want to continue to visit their library to borrow books and to attend events. While the provision of a range of books, access to computers, WiFi and information should remain at the core of the libraries' services, local people take the view that libraries must have a broad remit as community hubs for lifelong learning, creativity, community wellbeing.

Residents tell us that the library is a unique public space and an expression of all our local communities. Regular library users have a passion for reading a wide range of diverse



and inclusive reading resources. Our libraries are valued for their extensive contribution towards the growth of a literate, empathetic and confident society. Feedback from the public indicates that local libraries should be a 'cultural community hub' that provide plenty of opportunities for reading for pleasure, taking part in cultural experiences and lifelong learning and that they are trusted spaces for relationships between residents and the Council. Residents have identified a strong need for quiet study space used by individuals of all ages, but



particularly young people and young adults, often due to the lack of quiet study space at home. There is a need by residents for access to computers, free to use WiFi, printers and digital skills support in order to carry out basic online tasks such as completing job applications, emailing family and friends, booking medical appointments, filling out official forms or transferring money abroad. Residents would like to have a range of library opening times that suit their needs, including extended hours into the evening.



“Libraries are a space for academic inquiry, a meeting point, affordable and easy to use.”



There are opportunities for libraries to provide affordable work and study space for those most in need. They are locations where services can reach out to target groups in a trusted and safe environment, a place to educate and inform, and a space where residents can interact.

Aspirations for our libraries are ambitious and go beyond what the library service can deliver on its own. The new library strategy will enable better partnership work with the community and local organisations, as well as with services across the Council to achieve better outcomes for our residents.

Overall a positive response to the borough's libraries

Residents are 'overall satisfied' with the service when asked about the access to library buildings, availability and range of books, and knowledge and friendliness of staff. Regular library users visit the library three to four times per month to borrow books and browse, access children's books and activities and use the library for study or work space. Forty-two of Council tenants and leaseholders use library services at least once a year. Community groups and businesses valued the libraries and their role as community venues which provide a wide-ranging offer and access to digital resources.

Key findings

Top three reasons for all respondents to use libraries were:

1. Reading and literacy

2. Creative and cultural enrichment

3. Digital access and study/workspace



Access to good quality collections of books and reading materials

Books and reading material are still the most important thing about Hackney's libraries. Library users suggested making improvements to book stock by having a wider range of books, stocking books in more languages and with more popular titles.

Extended opening hours to library spaces

Adults as well as young people have stated they would like longer opening hours in the evening. Daytime, from 9am–5pm, were most popular, followed by evenings, 5pm–10pm, and weekends. Fewer people would like access in the mornings.

Improved digital access, support services and business needs

Respondents want improvements to internet speed and IT services at the libraries. Council tenants and leaseholders use the libraries for printing, photocopying and scanning, in addition to studying and bringing children there. Small businesses, community groups and freelancers value the availability and low cost access to digital resources and meeting rooms. The majority of business respondents would pay a value-for-money fee for a library membership to use meeting spaces that offer high speed WiFi and digital resources, quiet space, easy booking access and refreshments.

Libraries as culture and community hubs

All stakeholders were keen to attend more interactive, cultural events and arts exhibitions for children, young people and adults. Cultural organisations want to offer a variety of experiences that celebrate the cultural heritage of local people and reduce barriers to creative education. Library users of all ages wanted to make libraries community hubs and create more comfortable spaces to socialise and network. Provision of reasonably priced cafés and bookshops were also popular suggestions by residents.

Better communication and promotion of future library services

Residents want a reminder of services provided at libraries to encourage their use and suggested better promotion and use of notice boards outside of opening hours. The Council should promote campaigns via targeted newsletters for ethnically diverse groups and e-information to all residents on a regular basis. Non-users suggested having more cultural events including events with authors, artists and writers to bring in new people to the library.



3. How we engaged with residents and stakeholders

On 19th July 2021, Hackney Council launched Our Libraries, a review of Hackney library services to facilitate an extensive libraries conversation with residents and stakeholders to measure the satisfaction levels of the current service provision and identify the local needs and aspirations for the future of the libraries service.

The public engagement sought to better understand the way Hackney libraries are currently being used, what these groups value from the service, what is missing from the service, to understand the needs of those that don't visit, and to gain a localised understanding of how residents use libraries closest to them and what they want from their library in the future.

The primary way of hearing from Hackney residents has been through responses to surveys hosted on the Commonplace and Citizen Space websites, followed by focus groups and interviews with residents of all ages and backgrounds. Questions about library use were included in the Council's Housing Services full-scale tenant and leaseholder survey, carried out by Kwest Research from July 2021 to October 2021.

We asked all groups/respondents three questions:

How do you use libraries currently?

How can libraries have more impact on the wider scale?

How can we make our libraries better for current users and more inviting for non-users?

6,457

respondents took part in the Council tenants and leaseholders STAR survey. The majority of respondents were Council tenants.

Four surveys:

- Library users survey – 638 respondents
- Library non-users survey – 82 respondents
- Council tenants and leaseholders STAR survey 6,457 respondents
- Library partners survey – 31 respondents, a private survey sent to businesses and organisations

Seven public focus groups:

Thirty-one participants including Ageing Well, Connect Hackney, focus group with disabled residents, Afrikan Heritage Writers Group, library users and non-users, Council tenants.

Four interview series:

Twenty-one participants including young people, cultural sector organisations, LGBTIQ+ community and Orthodox Jewish community.

The engagement was promoted by:

- Promotion of the online and paper surveys in Hackney libraries and as part of National Libraries Week
- Articles in Hackney Today and Hackney Life
- Street promotion through the Hello Again, Hackney campaign
- Posters, flyers, banners and screensavers in Libraries and around the local area

- Promotion via Council social media channels and relevant e-newsletters, including through targeted, area-based social media ads
- Circulation of surveys through the Hackney Business Network
- Promotion to the Hackney Matters panel, Hackney CVS and other VCS networks
- Resident engagement at the Well Street Common Neighbourhood Community fun day, October 2021

We commissioned Immediate Theatre who led 17 creative workshops in seven primary schools to find out from 1,200 children and the librarians what they would like to see in their dream library.



Who took part in our survey

Respondents came from all ages and backgrounds. On Commonplace the highest percentage of respondents were on average aged 35–44, female, Hackney residents living in housing being bought on a mortgage or owned outright.

Joint information on Council tenants and leaseholders shows that residents of all ages and backgrounds responded to our survey. The majority of respondents on average were aged 55–64, female and from ethnically diverse backgrounds.





Some 1,200 Hackney school children took part in a contest to create a poem, poster or model to show how the borough's libraries could look like in the future and how they could be improved. Immediate Theatre provided fun and engaging workshops with schools as a way of getting feedback from pupils and teachers on their views on the future of Hackney's libraries.

The Immediate Theatre duo delivered 17 workshops across seven schools to interact with primary school pupils at key stage assemblies or alternatively visited individual classrooms to help the children and young people share what they know about their local library and help us come up with some good ideas for the future.



The characters of renowned library design consultant Professor Bookblast and dedicated librarian Sammy Shelvit generated excitement about the competition and activities. This allowed us to gain an insight into what the children enjoyed and would like to do in libraries. Teachers commented that the workshops had helped the children to not only engage with libraries, but also with reading in general.

Rushmore Primary School included the highest number of entries to claim a prize of a £150 voucher to buy books. Clapton Girls' Academy, also received a £150 voucher for the creativity shown by art and design students in Years 7 and 8 who crafted beautiful models of future libraries and took part in a focus group.

“It has been so inspiring to see our students quite literally bring to life their visions for their dream libraries, with amazing 3D models and artwork.”

Library Cozy and warm,
 In my creative new world
 Bright LED lights,
 Rightful trust,
 Amazing facts and artefacts,?!
 Ready to share all the information,
 You have now reached the end of your destination!

“Keep the lending of books and the encouragement of reading at the heart of all the other excellent activities proposed. Be a bastion of communal reading sustainability in a world of cheap book-buying.”



4. Feedback from library users

How do library users currently use the library?

On Commonplace, regular library users value the ease of access and location of their library, and visit 3–4 times per month to:

- **Borrow books and browse:** Users told us that they visit their favourite library because of the good range of physical books or the option to collect books reserved online
- **Access children’s books and activities**
- **Use the library for study or work space**

54%

over half of respondents had borrowed books in the last 3 years.

38%

of respondents access computers or printers at the library.

85%

of respondents do not visit the library for free WiFi, although those that responded were likely to have WiFi access at home.

25%

of respondents who do use the internet at the library were most likely to use it for ‘general browsing for information’.

40%

of respondents attend events at the library.

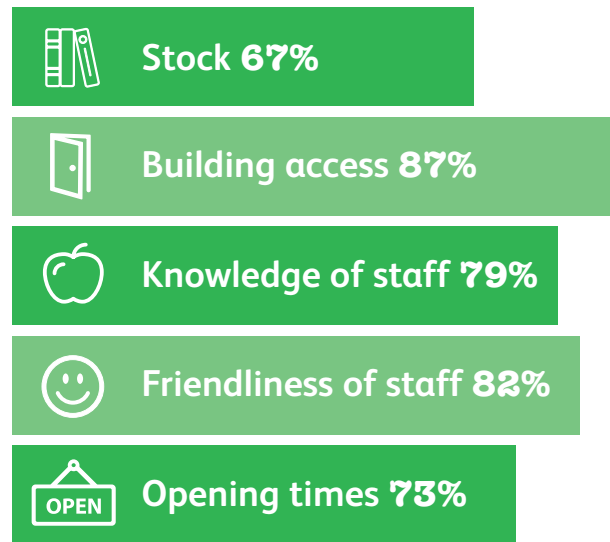
37%

of those who attend events were most likely to go to children and young people’s events.

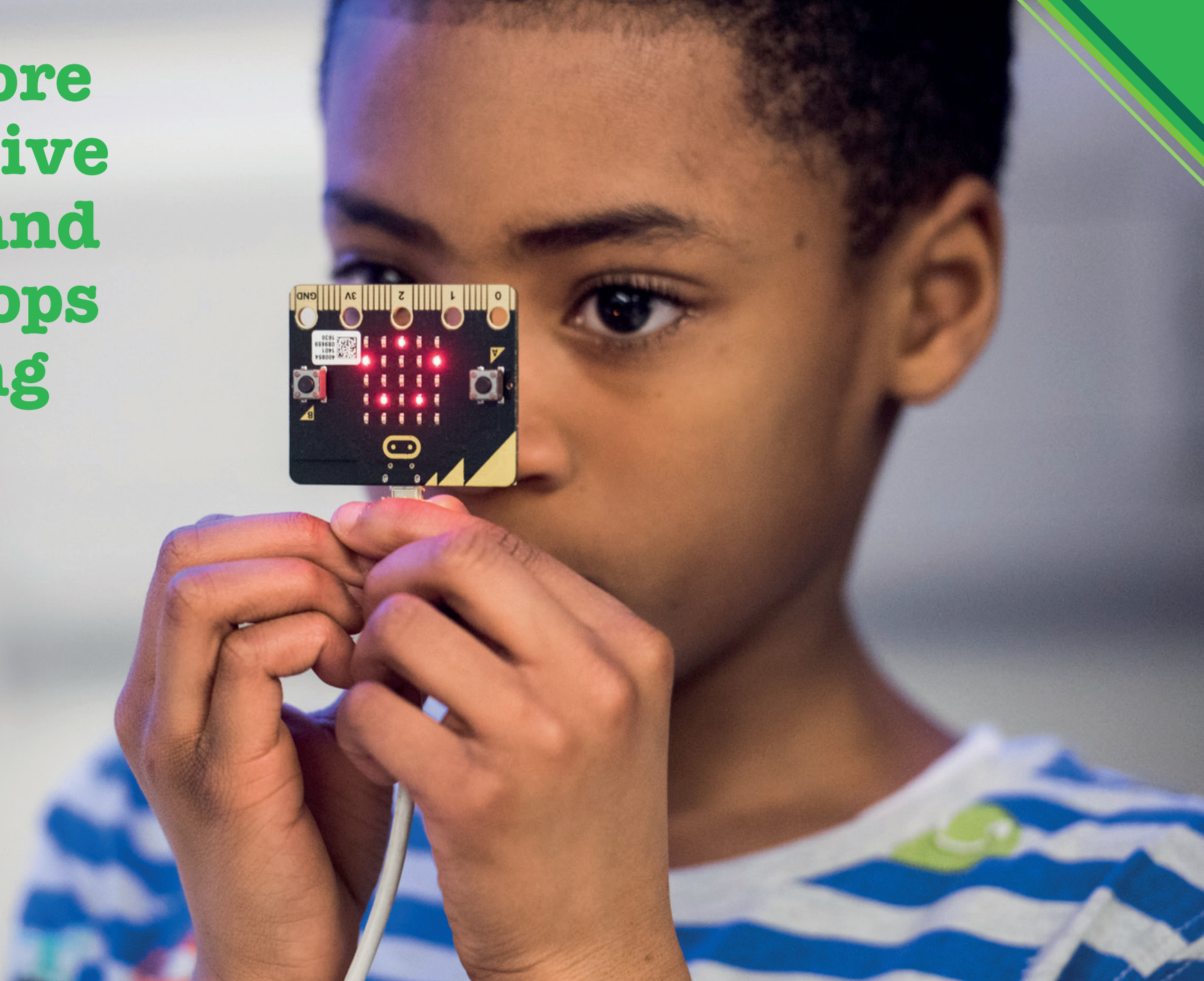
“More spaces with big rooms and loads of desk space; nicely lit; pleasantly warm; glass sound-proof wall and door; no food, no talking – totally self-policing.”

Which services are library users satisfied with?

The majority of library users said they are satisfied with library services.



“Offer more interactive events and workshops for young people.”



How can we make our libraries better?

What would encourage you to go to your library in the future?

Top four answers were:

16%

A wider range of books and other stock.

10%

More arts exhibitions and creative activities for all ages.

10%

Coffee shop or bookshop on site.

9%

Availability of a printer, photocopier and scanner.

Residents made the following suggestions to improve libraries:

1. Books

- More books
- Stock popular titles
- Stock books in more languages
- Make book lending the priority
- Share staff recommendations

2. Events

- More events, clubs and groups
- Author talks, music performances, crafts for adults

3. Service improvement

- Suggestions for improvements to library services such as coffee shops, comfortable seating, community hubs, musical instrument Libraries

4. Better communication

- Improved communication, including better digital communication
- Advertise opening hours better, share more about the services offered

“A larger programme of literacy related activities and support services would be worthwhile.”

“Encouraging greater use of libraries as social and learning spaces and the opportunity to buy refreshments.”

“With both me and my partner now working from home it would be good to have a space I could book now and then to work out of the house and make video calls without disturbing other users.”



5. Feedback from library non-users

Why non-users don't visit the library

Non-users thought book lending was the primary service offered by libraries. But, non-users said the primary reason they did not visit libraries was because they have 'access to a computer, tablet or phone at home or work'.



If you have not accessed a Hackney library service in the last three years, please tell us why? Top eight answers were:

21%

I have access to a computer, tablet or phone at home or work.

9%

I don't have time.

11%

I tend to buy the books, CDs, DVDs that I am interested in.

5%

Inconvenient loan periods, fines and lack of sufficient book options.

11%

I pay for subscription services e.g. Netflix, Amazon, Virgin.

4%

The impact of COVID-19 and library closures has prevented me from visiting.

9%

I read online or use an e-reader e.g. iPad, Kindle.

4%

Personal decisions to not access libraries.



**“I feel epic
when I read.”**

What would encourage you to go to your library in the future?

Top seven reasons:

10%

More arts exhibitions and creative activities for all ages.

10%

Coffee shop or bookshop on site.

8%

Availability of a printer, photocopier and scanner.

“I would like to meet more of my neighbours and interact with the community more – if the libraries had events and exhibitions that could help with that and meet people from different professions, different life experiences.”

8%

Events for children, adults and the community.

7%

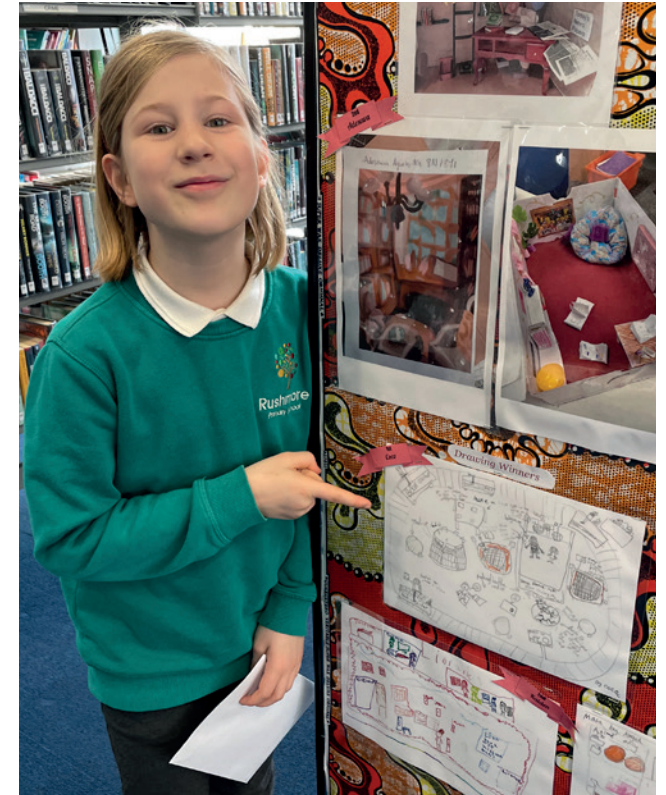
Provision of health and wellbeing activities and information.

7%

More learning and education activities in the library.

7%

A wider range of books and stock.



How can we make our libraries better?



“Promoting libraries more because until I saw one Hello Hackney sign, I didn’t know anything about them.”

Residents made the following suggestions to improve libraries:



Better communication

- Promote libraries more
- More information about services



Better facilities and building improvement

- Improvements to quality and cleanliness of facilities
- Building upgrades



Children, babies and toddlers services

- More children’s books
- More activities



Books

- A more diverse book stock
- A better selection of books

6. Council tenants and leaseholders

Key findings

42%

of Council tenants and leaseholders use library services at least once a year.

39%

of Council tenants had borrowed books in the last three years.

15%

of Council tenants and leaseholders had used computers and the internet for 'general browsing for information'.

15%

of Council tenants and leaseholders used the space to use printers, photocopiers or scanners and for 'studying'.

Conclusions

- Council tenants were more likely to access printers, photocopiers and scanners or use the library to study.
- Council leaseholders were more likely to bring children to the library.
- Council tenants were more likely to use computers and internet than Council leaseholders.





“More engaging activities for under 5s.”

7. Businesses, cultural sector and community partners

Our partners survey received 31 responses from self-employed people, voluntary workers, not-for-profit groups, charities, commercial businesses, educational institutions and public departments. Just over half of respondents were microbusinesses employing less than 10 staff.

52%

of respondents had used or worked with Hackney libraries.

67%

rated their experience working with the library as good.

55%

of all respondents would work with the library service in the future.

Community groups and businesses valued the libraries and their role as a non-judgemental community venue, being able to provide a wide-ranging offer and access to digital resources and they valued the ethos of the service.

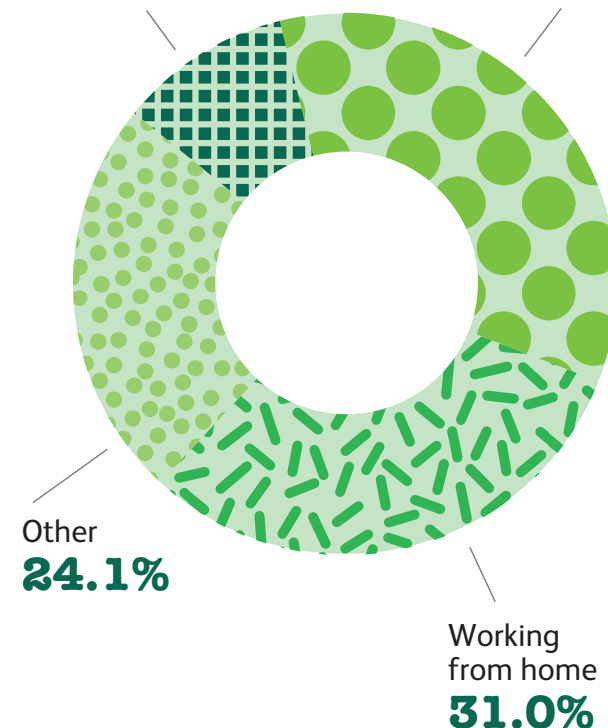
“Well, libraries are storehouses of knowledge, information and culture and they can also be a place that engenders a sense of community and belonging.”

They commented that if they were to make financial contributions to hire space or co-locate services in libraries, the cost would need to be low.

Respondents' current business premises:

Shared workspace or studio
10.3%

Own premises, office, shop or studio
34.5%



They commented that there are few affordable community meeting spaces in Hackney. The highest number of respondents 48.5% said they could offer services for residents in libraries such as arts services, adult community groups, volunteering support, children outreach and schools support. Freelancers and self-employed people valued libraries as spaces to network for business needs and tackle isolation for those working from home.

“Making library spaces available after hours for community organisations to meet for things like AGMs could be useful.”

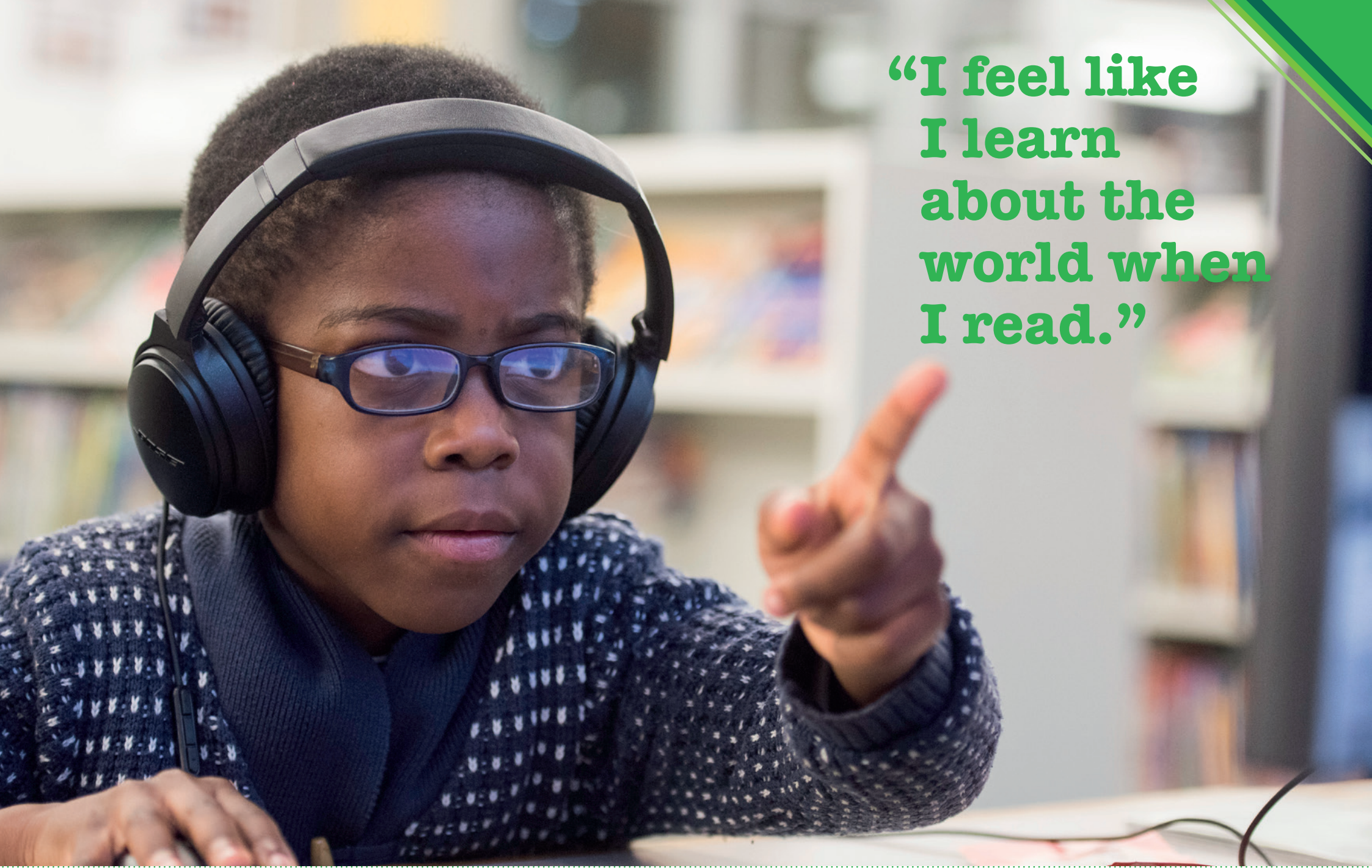
Businesses and community partners were asked if they would pay a value for money fee for a library membership that enables them to use the meeting spaces for free and access the library after hours. 67% of respondents stated yes they would pay for a membership but it should include access to high quality digital resources, high-speed WiFi, easy booking systems and refreshments. Respondents were interested in visiting libraries to access in-person business support and advice, but were less willing to pay a fee to access this type of service in libraries.



Partners from the cultural sector who work within libraries emphasised that ‘cultural projects can stimulate demand for more creative opportunities for residents, build awareness of the wider cultural offer from local organisations and cultural organisations can assist in the development of the cultural community hub model’.

“Networking opportunities to meet with schools, organisations, local businesses who’d like to collaborate and improve community cohesion.”





**“I feel like
I learn
about the
world when
I read.”**

8. Conversations with schools and young people

Insight from interviews with schools and young people, the 'Our Libraries' School Workshops Project 2021, and Hackney Young Futures Commission 2019:

Why children and young people use the library

- Warm atmosphere
- A space away from home
- To read books, manga and comics
- Attend clubs and practice hobbies such as drawing and coding
- Homework, studying and tutoring
- Arts, crafts and cultural activities
- Being able to take out as many books as you like for free
- Libraries are favourite places to go to, amongst theatre, parks and cinemas



**“Libraries give you
a better imagination.”**



9. A snapshot of feedback from our focus groups

Conversations with older residents

Focus group participants were recruited through the Council's Ageing Well Reference Group, Hackney CVS and Connect Hackney. They wanted:

- A social space to combat loneliness and provide volunteering
- A community hub helping people to access council services
- A trusted space with access to lifelong learning opportunities, training and classes
- A place offering events, clubs and information to connect residents to the wider community
- A place offering IT training and computer support as many services are now only accessible online
- A space for like-minded people and offering multiple functions

Older residents said:

“You need older and younger groups represented. And ethnic and faith groups. Those kinds of areas that exist in the community and bring them together to form a joint group.”

Conversations with ethnically diverse groups

Conversations with culturally diverse participants from our focus groups and interviews highlighted that they wanted:

- More events and meeting groups to celebrate Hackney's diversity
- More diversity and representation in the book stock to represent the diversity of the borough, working with diverse authors



The Afrikan Writers Group said:

- More than just books, libraries are community hubs and spaces to connect with the community, especially children and young people
- More involvement between libraries and schools
- In-person services are highly valued
- More to be done in libraries to combat digital exclusion by using local groups to support residents with digital skills



The Orthodox Jewish community said:

- Books are central to Charedi children and families' lives
- Children's games and activities at libraries are well received by the community
- Libraries are important social spaces for many Orthodox Jewish mothers and children
- Libraries could provide more SEND support for children
- There could be better promotion of the library such as opening times with an outdoor display or adverts in Jewish newsletters

The Afrikan Writers Group said:

“Organising visits, getting children excited about books, getting children to meet writers and to meet authors. And to actually bring the literature alive.”



The Orthodox Jewish community said:

“The play area at Stamford Hill is very important to families, but when the weather is bad the library is packed and busy.”



Interviews with LGBTQI+ community leaders said:

“As a lesbian woman, from a racially minoritised background I feel underrepresented to access libraries whilst feeling safe.”



Conversations with disabled residents

Disabled residents told us they wanted:

- More to be done to make libraries and facilities more accessible to disabled people
- A focus on accessibility regarding furniture, parking, book collections and use of inclusive language
- IT training for people with learning impairment provided by disabled trainers and disability equality training for staff

Conversations with the LGBTQI+ community

LGBTQI+ community leaders told us they wanted:

- Libraries to be more LGBTQI+ inclusive
- Improved visibility and allyship shown by using art
- LGBTQI+ content stocked and events hosted