

Council Budget Engagement 2024-25 – Libraries Survey Results

Overview

The survey opened on Monday 20 November 2023 and closed on Thursday 4 January 2024, when the last paper response was entered. It was analysed by the following groupings:

1. Overall (All participants).
2. Sex (Male, Female & Prefer not to say)
3. Geographical area¹.
4. Age groups²
5. Council/Non-Council Employee.

All percentage calculations provided within the analysis are based upon the number of participants answering each question, not the overall number taking part in the survey.

The public were asked to provide their views on current libraries service provision (Physical and Digital services) and share their opinions on changes to future provision. The survey consisted of 37 questions, including seven 'Equalities' questions. Seven questions were open-ended receiving a total of 923 responses. In addition, participants were given the opportunity to answer a question with regards to 'How changes may impact you or your household' with specific consideration to 'Equalities', this question received 250 responses.

Demographics

A total of 758 participants opened the survey and answered the demographic questions, 708 (93.8%) of whom stated they had physically visited a library facility within the past 2 years. 540 (76.1%) participants stated they had used the libraries 'Digital' service within the past 2 years. 401 (59.8%) participants chose to answer the 'Equalities' set of questions at the end of the survey.

181 males (23.9%) and 543 females (71.6%) took part in the survey, 34 participants (4.5%) chose not to provide their sex.

With 23.1%, the Elgin area had the highest and the Milne's area had the lowest proportion of participants (6.3%), both less than general population demographics for these areas at 28.58% and 8.1% respectively. The Keith (12.5%), Lossiemouth (14.9%) and Speyside (16%) areas were overrepresented in comparison with general population demographics (7.3%, 13.5% & 8.7% respectively).

The 65-74 age group had the highest proportion of participants (24.4%) followed closely by the 55-64 age group (22.2%). This would appear to show that the user demographic of libraries increases with age. Although included within the survey to allow for population comparisons it was not expected to receive a significant proportion of responses from the 0-16 age group. A total of 7 responses (0.9%) were received.

119 survey participants (15.7%) identified as being Moray Council employees.

¹ **Buckie Area** e.g. Portgordon, Buckie, Findochty, Portknockie, Cullen, **Elgin Area**, **Forres Area** e.g. Kinloss, Findhorn, Forres, Rafford, Dyke, Dallas, **Keith Area** e.g. Fife Keith, Keith, Rural Keith & Strathisla, **Lossiemouth Area** e.g. Burghead, Hopeman, Duffus, Lossiemouth, **Milne's Area** e.g. Lhanbryde, Mostodloch, Fochabers, **Speyside Area** e.g. Rothes, Craigellachie, Aberlour, Tomintoul & **I don't live in Moray**

² ² Under 16, 16-24, 25-34, 35-44, 45-54, 55-64, 65-74 & 75+.

Key Findings

Physical Library use

- A total of 47 (6.2%) participants completing the survey stated they hadn't visited a library in the past 2 years. Eight of the 47 (17%) provided a reason why they hadn't used a library. Two stated they swap books with friends and two stated they had disabilities preventing their access. A further two use online services instead of visiting a library to access books.
- Participants indicated outlying smaller library facilities were used less frequently despite participants residing in these areas.
- Elgin library is the most frequently used facility. More than three times more participants used Elgin (39.1%) compared with all other facilities.
- Libraries in Burghead, Cullen, Dufftown, Fochabers and Tomintoul had particularly low usage levels with all used by less than 5% of participants with only 0.1% stating their most frequently used library was Tomintoul.
- Almost three quarters (72.2%) of participants used library facilities more than once a month, almost half (46%) visited at least once a week. The results show that males use libraries slightly more frequently than females. As ages increase so does frequency of use.
- Whilst the services provided by libraries have diversified with an extensive range of services now on offer, participants indicated that the main purpose of visiting a facility remains as borrowing, or to look at books, magazines or newspapers (94.5%).
- Using facilities to use computers (29.7%), attending events for themselves (28%) or family events/clubs (22.3%) also proved popular.
- Perhaps as a result of the cost-of-living crisis it is concerning that almost 17% of participants currently use library facilities as a place to be somewhere warm.
- Weekday usage (84.2%) is almost six times more popular than weekends (15.8%) and afternoons (50%) are the most popular time of the day. Higher weekday use may be as a result of reduced opening times at weekends.
- Most participants (65.1%) travelled 15 minutes or less to access their most frequently visited library. Two thirds stated they would not use an alternative facility if their most frequently used library were to close, with 86.4% of the 213, who stated they would, not prepared to travel for any longer than 30 minutes to another facility.
- More than half (53.1%) stated that libraries had helped them 'Develop new interests, access information' and 39.5% indicated they had learned new skills by attending libraries. More than a third (33.7%) stated that libraries had helped them 'Support their child'.
- When asked about days to close, if a decision was made to reduce service provision, the most popular day to do so was Monday (39.3%), significantly higher than the next (Saturday @ 17.4%).
- 58.8% thought that there are no barriers to accessing libraries facilities, whilst 30.4% thought that opening times are a barrier.
- Participants were asked to gauge what impact a closure for one or more days would have for them and their family using a sliding scale (0-4), 0 being 'Limited Impact' to 4 'Severe Impact'. Almost two thirds (65.6%) indicated that the impact of such a decision would be no higher than 2.
- The appetite to make changes to current provision of services was limited. More than 70% of participants indicated that all services currently provided should continue, apart from the 'Near Me' service (66.5%).
- With such high proportions of participants not wanting to make changes to current provision the scope for different delivery methods and services no longer required was small. 17% thought that the 'Near Me' service and 15.5% thought seeking support to deal with a Council enquiry or national government scheme could be delivered differently. Similarly, 17.4% believed that attending community groups and 16.5% thought the 'Near Me' service are no longer required.

Digital Services use

- 76.1% of participants are aware of the 'Digital Service', of those 52.4% had used these services.
- Use of 'Digital Services' is not as often as physical visits with more than half (52.1%) monthly or less.

Equalities

- 401 participants (59.8%) chose to answer the equalities set of questions.
- More than half stated they had some form of disability with 21.7% stating a long-term illness, disease or condition, 14% suffered from deafness or partial hearing loss and 12.2% have a mental health condition.
- More than a third (36.2%) have caring responsibilities of some kind.
- The vast majority of participants (93.2%) described themselves as straight/heterosexual, 2.3% identified as gay and 2.6% as bisexual. Seven participants identified as having an 'Other' sexual orientation.
- Three participants identified as trans or as having a Trans history.
- 96% identified as 'White'.
- Almost half (49.2%) of participants stated they had no religion.

Integrated Impact Assessment (IIA)

Participants were asked to leave comments if they believed that any changes to service provision would have an impact on any disabilities, caring responsibilities, old age, pregnancy & childcare and low incomes.

- 250 left a comment for this question. Cost of and ability to travel if local libraries were to close came out as a common theme. The cost of buying books would be prohibitive for some. Both themes appeared to relate to those of old age, those with disabilities and those on low incomes.

Open-ended questions

Within some questions there was the choice 'Other' where participants could provide an alternative response, if none of the listed question choices were applicable.

- The most common 'Other' reason for using a library facility is photocopying. 48 responses were received for this question.
- 'Other' responses to 'Over time the library services have helped me...' received 99 responses. Many of the participants indicated that they found libraries as a place to socialise, meet new people and build relationships and a few believed there was an improvement in their mental health.
- 26 participants added an 'Other' reason for barriers to access. These mainly related to specific libraries which are not open on certain days.
- When asked about 'Different delivery' methods for library services, participants added 151 comments. The majority of participants appeared to misunderstand the question or weren't fully aware of what is currently provided and used this question to give opinions rather than suggestions. This may indicate that libraries have not publicised their services widely enough, it may also indicate that library users use libraries for a specific purpose and don't investigate or are not interested in other services provided. There are a number of comments however that indicated that more services could be provided online. A small amount would not be averse to paying a small fee for borrowing.
- Some of the responses were contradictory of each other, with some indicating that more services could be operated from libraries by creating a larger facility. Others had a view that some of the services currently provided such as 'Job clubs', 'Near Me' and ICT courses could be operated by DWP and NHS and Moray College in other locations.
- 111 participants provided comments about services they'd like to see which are not currently provided. Most comments were not so much about providing new services, but instead about expansion of current services.

What do you think is the most important role the library service plays in Moray and how do you see that continuing in the future given the financial challenges facing the council?

479 responses were received for this question. The libraries services are seen as a valuable resource by most of the survey participants. Many of the responses reflected views previously provided in other open-ended questions, such as:

- A social and community hub for meeting new people and avoidance of social isolation.
- Free access to a good range of books and IT equipment.
- A community resource.
- A community learning resource.
- A safe place.

- Positive impact on mental health and community wellbeing.
- Education and training for all ages.

In addition to the question asked many participants chose to use this question as a means of leaving other generalised comments and suggestions about changes that could be made regarding the libraries service. Whilst not answering the specific question it is important to recognise these views. Comments which appeared more than once are listed below:

- Retain all but open fewer days per week (12)
- Retain all but reduce opening times (8)
- Implement charges for delivering services (7)
- Stop ancillary services such as digital, clubs, meeting groups, warm spaces and retain core only. Move certain services back to where they should belong – Council Offices, NHS, Dept for Work and Pensions (6)
- Bring more services into the library facilities and deliver more from them (use to capacity) – mconnect, electric cars etc (6)
- Create multi function sites with a range of services delivered ie library in schools (6)
- If small branches close – provide mobile service instead (2)
- Lower heating (2)
- Retain libraries only in the main towns (2)
- Use more volunteers (2)
- If small branches close – provide mobile service instead (2)
- Less staff/ utilise natural wastage of staff (not redundancies) (2)

Reference tables

Table 1 (Total Participants opening the survey)

AGE GROUP DEMOGRAPHIC (LIBRARIES) – Participants vs Population				
	Population (Mid 2021)		Survey Participants	
Age Group	Number	%	Number	%
Under 16	15,941	16.50%	7	0.92%
16-24	9,123	9.50%	18	2.37%
25-34	11,075	11.50%	74	9.76%
35-44	11,297	11.70%	112	14.78%
45-54	13,342	13.80%	106	13.98%
55-64	14,098	14.60%	168	22.16%
65-74	11,618	12.10%	185	24.41%
75+	9,916	10.30%	73	9.63%
Prefer not to say			15	1.98%
TOTAL	96,410		758	

Tables 1 & 2 show the age and area demographic of survey participants in comparison with Morays general population. The figures in 'Red' and 'Green' highlighted text show age and area groups either significantly higher (Red) or lower (Green) than general population demographics.

Figures 1 & 2 show, where the 'Red' lines are above the columns, age and area groups overrepresented within the survey.

Table 2 (Total Participants opening the survey)

AREA DEMOGRAPHIC (LIBRARIES) - Participants vs Population				
	Population (Mid 2021)		Survey Participants	
	Number	%	Number	%
Buckie Area	15,489	16.10%	98	12.93%
Elgin Area	27,513	28.50%	175	23.09%
Forres Area	17,126	17.80%	96	12.66%
Keith Area	7,065	7.30%	95	12.53%
Lossiemouth Area	13,057	13.50%	113	14.91%
Milne's Area	7,815	8.10%	48	6.33%
Speyside Area	8,345	8.70%	121	15.96%
I don't live in Moray			12	1.58%
TOTAL	96,410		758	

Figure 1

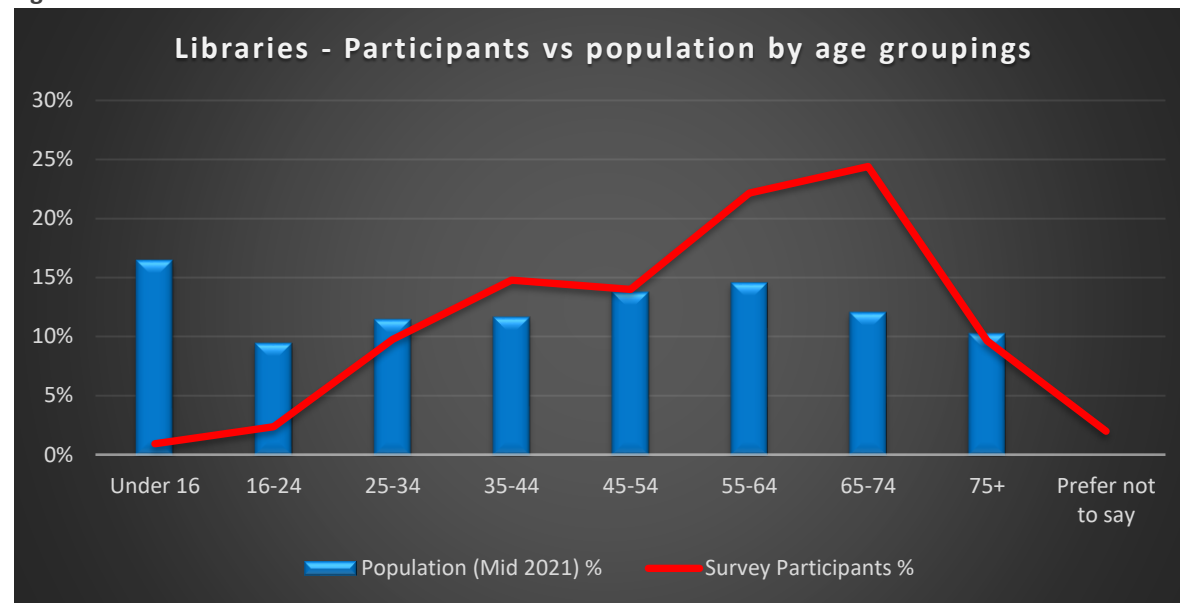


Figure 2

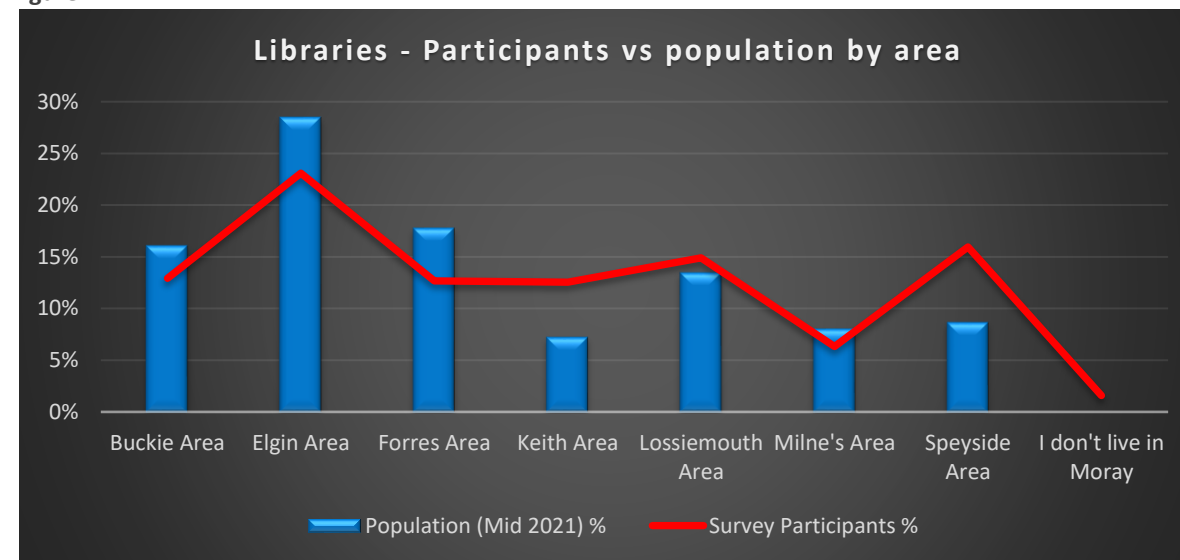


Figure 3

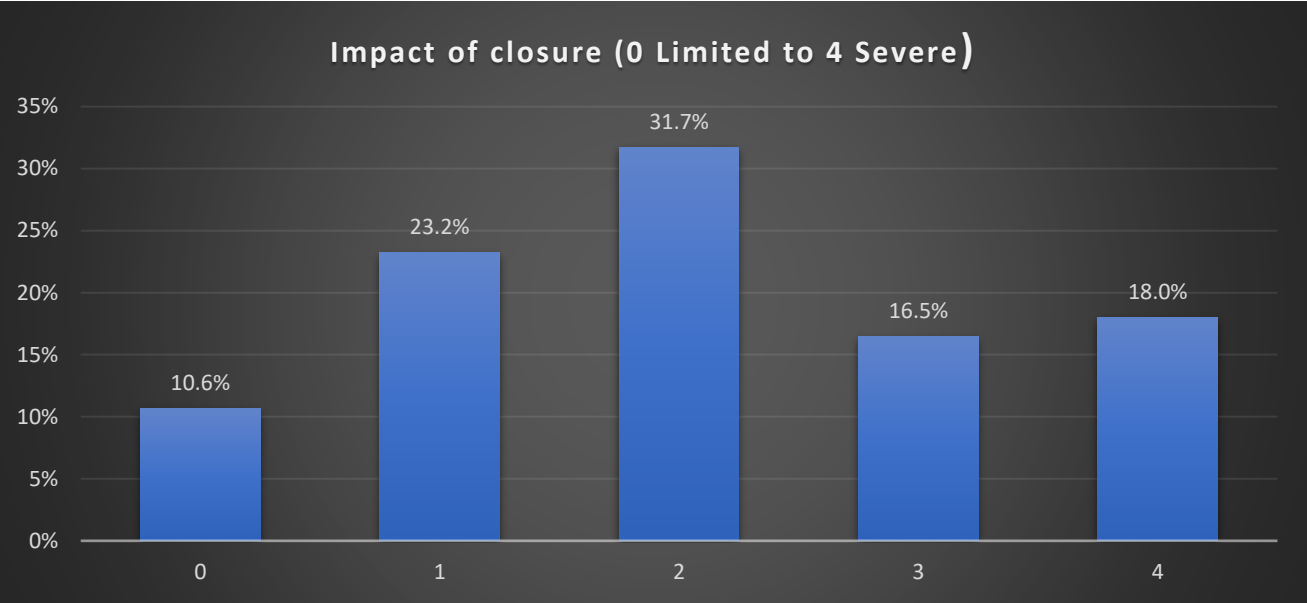


Figure 3 shows the participants perception of the impact of closure for one or more days. The indication is that there is more bias towards limited than severe impact.

Figure 4

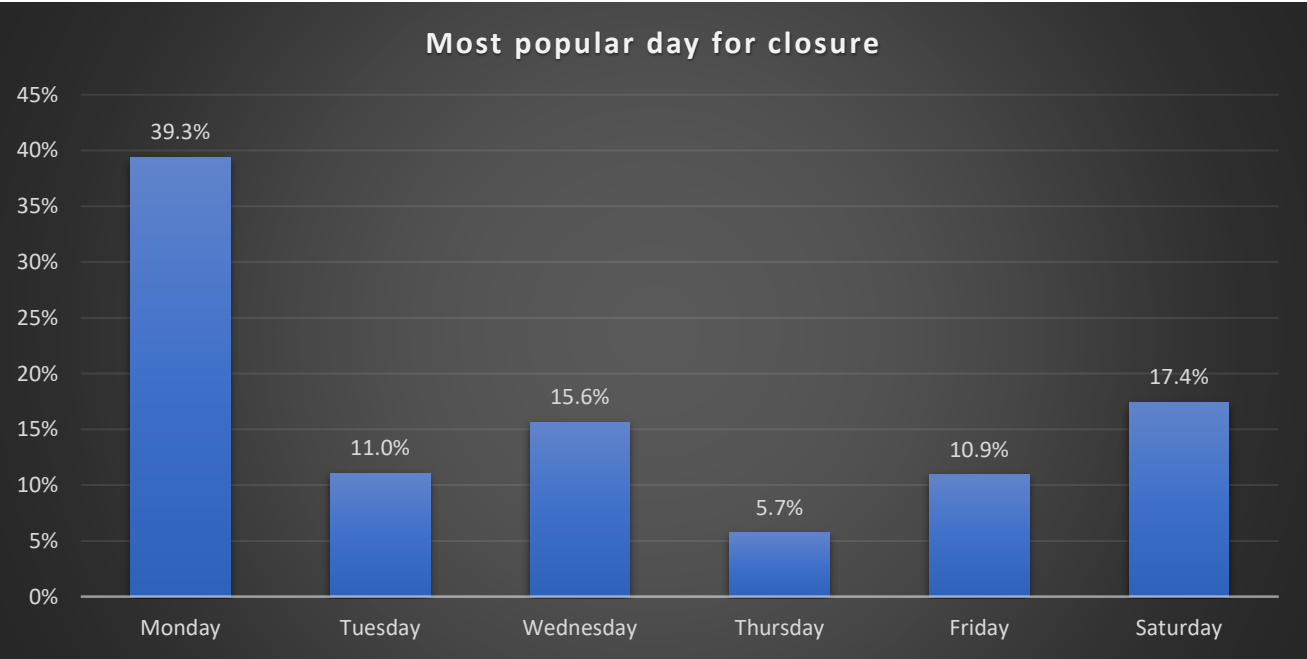


Figure 4 shows Monday to be the most popular day close by a significant margin.

Figure 5

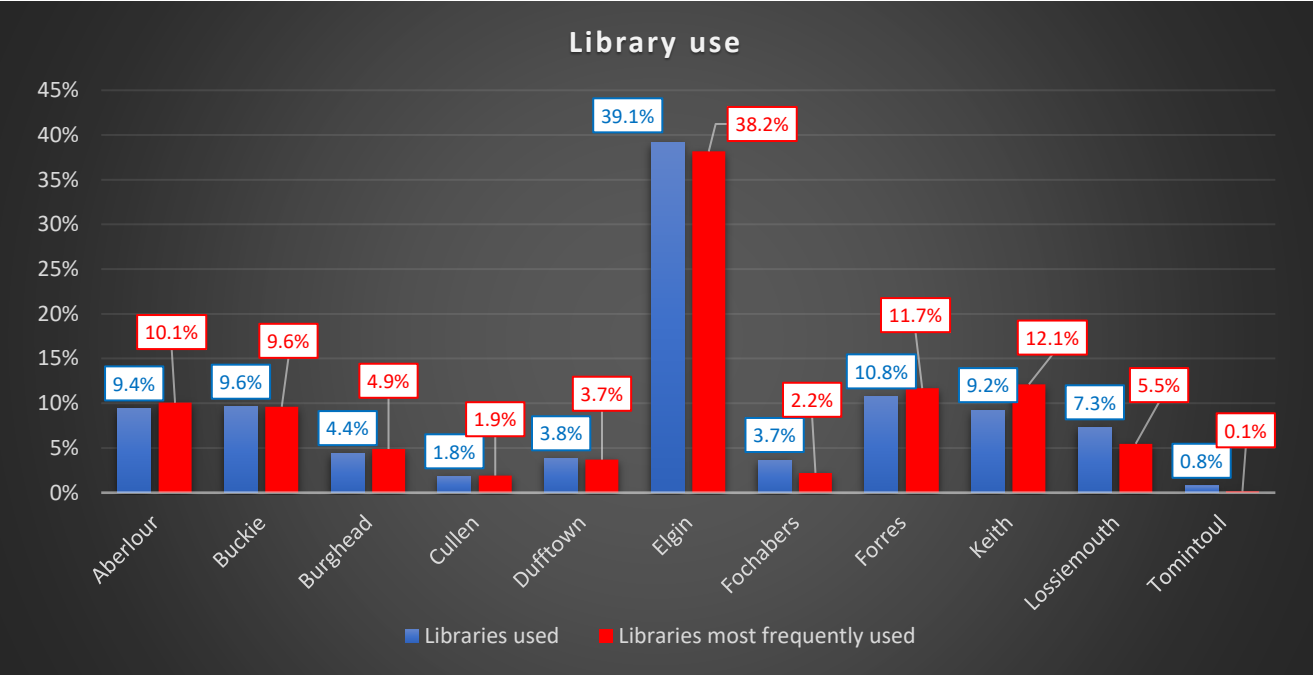


Figure 5 shows Elgin Library to be the most used and most frequently used facility. However this is likely to be skewed somewhat by the higher numbers of Elgin participants (175), but not to the extent to influence the significant difference in attendance than experienced in other localities.

Figure 6 shows the reason why people visit libraries. Even with the modernisation of libraries to offer more and innovative services it is clear that the public still see the traditional reason of borrowing books as the main purpose of their visit. Almost 30% however also use libraries to access computers, printers or free WiFi.

Figure 6



Figure 7

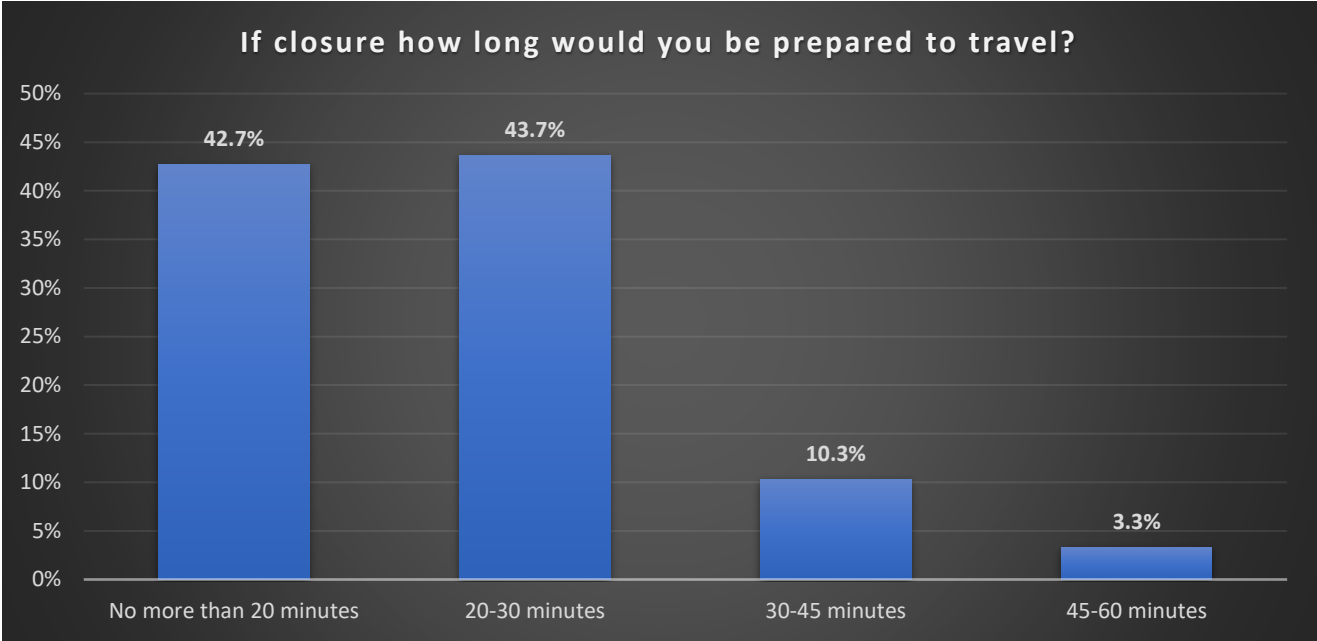


Figure 7 shows very little willingness to travel more than 30 minutes if there were any changes to service provision to their most frequently use library.