Public libraries in England: an examination of public perceptions, post 2009

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Abstract

Since the Charteris Inquiry of 2009, there has been much debate about the use, purpose, governance, and service priorities of public libraries. Moreover, public libraries continue to face many ongoing issues and changes: devolved funding and the Localism Act (2011), a change in central government, cutbacks and closures, an increase in alternative library models, and a lack of guidance regards what constitutes a "comprehensive and efficient service" (Public Libraries and Museums Act, 1964, section 7(1)). Despite contemporary challenges, public libraries in England are legislated for by an Act that was passed nearly 60 years ago.

This thesis aims to identify public perceptions of public libraries in England and the services they provide, by focusing on both library users and non-users. It also aims to consider whether the Public Libraries and Museums Act (1964) is adequate for a contemporary public library service.

This thesis adopts a mixed methods, interpretivist approach across multiple phases. Each phase of the research informed the next in terms of design and data. In Phase One, the existing literature was explored, combining publications from central and local government, the public library sector and academia to review the current public library landscape in England and to establish the research questions. Phase Two employed Q methodology to capture the perceptions of library users and non-users who live, work or study in West Sussex. Phase Three sought to establish how the public, central government, local government and public library sector define public libraries and how these definitions compare. Phase Four undertook a process of bi-directional framework analysis to map the four different definitions against the content and intention of the Public Libraries and Museums Act (1964), to consider its adequacy to legislate a contemporary service.

This thesis has established that the participants hold multiple perceptions about what public libraries should offer but when asked to define their core purpose, the participants offer a more unified view. Moreover, the priorities of the public differ from those of central government, local government and the sector. The research has also demonstrated the participants' perceptions have much in common with the 1964 Act.

By comparison, central government, local government and the sector present priorities for public libraries which exceed the statutory requirements of the Act.

This thesis recommends defining “comprehensive and efficient” (Public Libraries and Museums Act, 1964, Section 7(1)) within the Act to ensure that public libraries and their local authorities understand and meet their statutory duties. Moreover, a definition that is rooted in monitoring, reviewing and responding to public needs and behaviours, through evidence-based local needs assessments, will enable the service to stay true to its core values and at the same time “move with the times and provide a book lending service that matches current needs” (library non-user participant).

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CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

This chapter first details the wider context for the research before explaining its rationale and aims. Thereafter, the specific scope of the research is provided. The chapter concludes with an explanation of the unusual structure of the thesis.

1.1 The topic and context

Public libraries in England were first established with the Public Libraries Act in 1850. Their original purpose was to provide reading materials to the public no matter their class or income. In doing so, they improved access to information and education for the working classes (Chowdhury et al., 2008; McMenemy, 2009a; Independent Mind, 2019). More than 170 years after their inception, contemporary public libraries in England are considered a statutory service that sits within the remit of the Department of Digital, Culture, Media and Sport [DCMS][1]. They are legislated for by the Public Libraries and Museums Act which was passed in 1964.

The 'new' Act is nearly 60 years old and some of its content is certainly antiquated. For instance, in an era of streaming services, the legislation states it is mandatory for public libraries to stock and loan gramophone records (Section 7(2)(a)). Equally, some of the Act's content does not reflect the reality of the current provision; for example, it makes no mention of digital services or digital reading materials. Furthermore, a key part of the Act is ambiguous and undefined. It states that it is the duty of local authorities to provide a "comprehensive and efficient" library service (Section 7(1)) but this phrase is not clarified; moreover, DCMS (2013) states it has no intention of providing a definition. In the face of reports of falling footfall (DCMS, 2019a, 2020b), there are more people in England who use public libraries than attend Premier League matches, the cinema "and the top 10 UK tourist attractions combined" (DCMS, 2017g, p.4). Despite this, public libraries are legislated for by an Act and its pivotal phrase that is so old "it is ludicrous to

[1] The Department of Digital, Culture, Media and Sport was known as the Department for Culture, Media and Sport until mid-2017 (Owen, 2019). In this thesis, both are abbreviated to DCMS in the body of the text but given their full title in the reference list.

suggest that what the term meant in 1964 remains true today" (McMenemy, 2009c, p.559).

It is the statutory responsibility of local authorities to fund and deliver public libraries. However, according to the 1964 Act (Sections 1 and 10), the Secretary of State is expected to superintend by promoting the improvement of public library services. As such, the Secretary of State has the power to defend public libraries by enacting an inquiry if there is a complaint that a local authority is failing to fulfil its statutory duty. Even so, since the 1964 Act came into effect, this power has only been employed on a single occasion. In 2009, an inquiry was commissioned to investigate the proposed changes to the library service by Wirral Metropolitan Borough Council (Woodhouse & Zayed, 2020). The inquiry was led by Sue Charteris who published a seminal report in 2009; her report has continued to influence the landscape for public libraries since its publication.

Charteris (2009) found Wirral Metropolitan Borough Council to be in breach of its statutory duty in four ways. First, it "failed to make an assessment of local needs" (Charteris, 2009, p.57). Second, it lacked a strategic, development plan for the service. Third, it had not considered the needs of children. Finally, there were concerns regarding the provision for the most economically vulnerable communities and the council's fundamental lack of understanding of the "extent and range" (Charteris, 2009, p.58) of its own library service. In the report, Charteris (2009) concludes that local authorities seeking to change their library provision must undertake a local needs analysis, should be able to articulate and evidence "a seamless story" (p.61) of decision making, and ought to strive for transparency. The report's findings have been signposted by the DCMS (2013) as guidance for local authorities proposing changes to their library services. Since the 2009 inquiry and report, no further complaints about proposed changes to public library services have successfully triggered another inquiry of any local authority in England.

Moreover, in the ensuing 14 years, there has been debate surrounding the use, purpose and governance of public libraries. Furthermore, public libraries continue to face several ongoing issues: devolved and reduced funding; cutbacks and closures; a lack of guidance regarding what constitutes a statutory service; the dissemination of conflicting information; and the changing perceptions of the purpose and scope of public libraries

from all stakeholders, including people and organisations who work within and for the sector.

Within this troubling landscape for public libraries in England, there are multiple agencies involved in supporting or leading the sector but they appear to have goals and aims that overlap, repeat or contradict one another (explored in Chapter 4.2.3). Equally, the literature suggests that public engagement is not centred in the picture (Boughey & Cooper, 2010; Coates, 2019; Goulding, 2013). For instance, there is criticism that local authorities have not been "ready to engage with their electorate over library closures" (Goulding, 2013, p.485). This thesis focuses on the perceived issues with the legislation, contextualised by the complex challenges currently facing public libraries and the need to foreground public voice in the debate.

1.2 The thesis rationale and existing research gaps

The motivation for the thesis initially stemmed from the researcher's interest in the age and content of the Public Libraries and Museums Act (1964). This was coupled with the fact that public libraries in England are often depicted in the media and in political, sector and academic literature as a service suffering from a decline in public use (Coates, 2019; DCMS, 2019a, 2020b; McCahill, 2020; Museums, Libraries and Archives Council [MLA], 2010a) and described as a service that is in crisis (Appleton, et al., 2018; BBC News, 2016; Chartered Institute of Library and Information Professionals [CILIP] & The Big Issue, 2019; Chartered Institute of Public Finance and Accountancy [CIPFA], 2018b; Hariff & Rowley, 2011). Essentially, the researcher was curious to explore how legislation that is nearly 60 years old, and which mandates that public libraries should loan gramophone records, could function to adequately reflect a 21st century service experiencing challenges.

In addition to the researcher's initial interest, the literature, particularly from the public library sector, criticises the existing legislation. One view is that the 1964 Act needs to be updated and modernised (McMenemy, 2009c) to better reflect the current reality for libraries. A second view is that a specific aspect of the legislation needs to be clarified (CILIP, n.d.a; Davies, 2014; Dolan, 2007; Goulding, 2006; McMenemy, 2009c; Poole, 2018). The argument within the literature is that by not defining what is meant by "a comprehensive and efficient public library service" (Public Libraries and Museums Act,

1964, Section 7(1)), the Act is open to misinterpretation and does not "provide sufficient legal certainty" (Poole, 2018, para.15) about the statutory duties of local authorities.

The literature review (Chapter 4) establishes that there are no academic studies which research the Public Libraries and Museums Act (1964). This thesis investigates the arguments presented in the literature and fulfils a research gap by exploring the content and intention of the 1964 Act, to evaluate its adequacy for a contemporary service.

The existing literature also presents the argument that the public should be front and centre (International Federation of Library Associations and Institutions [IFLA], 1999; Lankes, 2016) in conversations about public libraries and the services they provide because their function "should be reflective of the expectations of its user community" (Carr, 2014, p.159). This is supported by the concept of democratic responsiveness which argues that whilst governments need to govern responsibly, they should also develop policies for public services which are "at least minimally responsive to what a majority of people want" (Linde & Peters, 2020, p.292) and at best represent a "dynamic and causal relationship" (Beyer and Hänni, 2018, p.S15) between policy makers and service user opinions.

There is concern, within the literature, that this is not the case for public libraries in two ways. The first is that policy makers misunderstand the purpose and potential of public libraries (Casselden et al., 2019, p.875; Sieghart, 2014, p.4). The second is that the public are not sufficiently consulted or involved in decisions about their public library services by the sector (Coates, 2019, p.15) or by central and local government (Goulding, 2013, p.485), meaning that they are at risk of being "given the service that it has been decided they need, rather than that they want"(Boughey & Cooper, 2010, p.197).

The review (see Chapter 4.3) of existing studies suggests the issue of public engagement extends into research with only a very limited range of academic studies focused on public perceptions of public libraries. In particular, the review found just one academic study since 2009 (the date of the seminal Charteris report) which considers public perceptions of the full library service, rather than one specific facet thereof (Appleton et al., 2018; Appleton, 2020). Moreover, despite the wider literature painting a picture of a service with declining public use (Coates, 2019; McCahill, 2020; DCMS, 2019a; MLA, 2010a), the researcher was unable to find any academic studies post-2009 which include the perceptions of library non-users or lapsed users. McCahill et al. (2020) assert that

the public who do not use public libraries should be involved in research about them to "inform the debate on the benefits, relevance and importance of library provision" (p.51).

This thesis responds to the literature and research gaps by foregrounding public voices in its research aims and design. Moreover, it is novel as an academic study that includes the perceptions of library non-users. Equally, based on the concern within the literature that policy makers do not fully understand the role and purpose of public libraries, this thesis also compares the perceptions of the public to those of central government, local government and the public library sector.

1.3 The thesis aims and research questions

The thesis has two aims based on the rationale and established gaps in existing research. The first is to identify public perceptions of public libraries in England and the services they provide, including library users and non-users. The second is to establish whether the current legislation is adequate for a 21st century public library service.

This thesis is not designed to test an existing theory or solve a particular problem. Instead, it adopts an interpretivist theoretical approach, using the literature as "proxy for theory" (Bryman, 2016, p.20). This is further explained in Chapter 2.2.2. In terms of the research questions, it means that they were initially determined through the research aims, literature review and established research gaps. Latterly, the questions were refined in response to early research findings in the thesis. This process is described and justified in greater detail in the methodology chapter (Chapter 2.3) and literature review (Chapter 4.2). Presented here are the final iteration of the research questions which were addressed in the full undertaking of the thesis.

1. What are public perceptions of public library services in England, both user and non-user?
2. How do different stakeholder groups define public libraries: the public, central government, local government and the public library sector?
3. How do these different stakeholder definitions compare?
4. To what extent do the public and stakeholder views of public libraries correspond to the Public Libraries and Museums Act (1964)?

The literature identifies a tension between two schools of thought: the argument that reduced funding and service cuts have resulted in a decrease in public use of libraries versus the notion that a deviation from its core purpose has confused the public and, in turn, affected library use. Research Question 1 seeks to explore this by delving into what the public prioritises in their public library services.

Equally, the tensions and disagreements in the literature often stem from different stakeholder groups: Research Question 2 aims to establish how those different stakeholder groups define public libraries and Research Question 3 seeks to tease out the similarities and differences between them. The findings associated with these two questions then form the basis for exploring Aim 2 – establishing the legislation's adequacy. This second aim, addressed through Research Question 4, is based on the debate within the literature about the role and usefulness of the 1964 Act, as reported in academic, judicial and professional contexts.

1.4 The localised approach of the thesis

This thesis explores public perceptions of public libraries and the adequacy of the Public Libraries and Museums Act (1964) by focusing on West Sussex County Council [West Sussex CC] and its library offer. This local authority provides an interesting focus for the thesis because it still delivers a local authority-led library service and it is undergoing a process of change.

In February 2019, the Council used its print publication, "West Sussex Connections", to announce a "£145 million budget challenge" to be solved by 2023 (West Sussex CC, 2019a). It argues that the loss of the Revenue Support Grant, an increasing elderly population and higher demands for children and family services have all led to the economic situation (West Sussex CC, 2019a). To mitigate the financial challenge, West Sussex CC proposes an increase in council tax, a reduction in spend, and an increase in income generation (West Sussex CC, 2019a). One example currently being trialled is the development of more partnerships by establishing community hubs to group services together, including public libraries (North, 2019, n.d.; West Sussex CC, 2019a).

Between October and November 2019, the first library consultation took place reviewing the proposal to close the Mobile Library Service and to reduce library opening hours (Harris, 2019; West Sussex CC, 2019d). Key issues about the consultation process

are that it was only executed as an online survey, the consultation period lasted just one month, and the full results have never been published (Harris, 2019). Moving forward, West Sussex CC proposes a focus on the concept of community hubs to make further savings (North, 2019, n.d.; West Sussex CC, 2019d.).

CIPFA (n.d.) uses a nearest neighbour model of 41 metrics to publish comparative profiles for public library services. The 2017-2019 issue for West Sussex CC puts the library service in a comparative group of 15 library authorities (CIPFA, 2018c). According to the comparative profile (CIPFA, 2018c), West Sussex CC it is the fifth largest authority in terms of population in the group (p.4), boasts an above average number of visits (p.6), reports the highest number of book issues per 1,000 population (p.6), and has an above average level of active borrowers (p.4). It appears to be a thriving public library service. However, it has a below average level of book stock (p.6), one of the lowest numbers of service points per 100,000 population (p.7), and only one other local authority spends less on its service than West Sussex CC (p.5).

CIPFA (2018c) states this could mean West Sussex CC is already "providing a low cost service" (p.5). This is interesting in light of its recent communications explaining that the local authority and library service must make significant savings (Communications and Engagement Team, 2019; Harris, 2019; West Sussex CC, 2019a, 2019d). Moreover, CIPFA (2018c) suggests that the disconnect between the above average number of active borrowers and the significantly low revenue expenditure could mean that the service is not effectively engaging with the public. Potential evidence of this suggestion, in terms of inadequate communication and engagement with the public, can be provided in four areas. First, West Sussex CC (2019d) reports that 2,079 people or organisations participated in the 2019 consultation about changes to opening hours and the mobile library service; this is just 0.24% of its estimated 2019 population (Office for National Statistics, 2020). Second, West Sussex CC has 36 libraries which are divided into 6 tiers with 24 of the libraries categorised in the lowest two tiers (Director Communities and Infrastructure, 2011). However, there are no publicly available materials which explain what these tiers denote or how libraries are categorised therein. Third, whilst West Sussex CC has not commissioned a third party to manage its libraries, such is the case for other libraries in their profile group (Suffolk Libraries, 2019 and Libraries Unlimited, n.d.), some libraries are joint-use sharing buildings and facilities with organisations like colleges or sport and leisure businesses (Crawley College, 2020; Everyone Active, 2020).

It is not clear from information available to the public whether these are now classed as commissioned libraries (DCMS, 2018a) rather than local authority-led libraries (see Chapter 3.2 for library types). Finally, other services within its comparative group have published strategic documents which indicate their library service's current priorities, aims and goals (examples are Hampshire Library Service, 2016 and Essex County Council & Essex Library Service, 2019). West Sussex CC does not have a publicly available strategy document for its library service, confirmed by West Sussex Library Digital Access Team (email communication, May 28, 2019). The local authority does publish strategic documents for its other public services (examples West Sussex CC, 2022 & 2023). Moreover, there are a number of reports, agendas and meeting minutes which indicate the progress made towards West Sussex CC's plan to pursue community hubs and some of the business priorities for the project that is being trialled in Worthing (Executive Director Communities and Public Protection & Director of Communities, 2019; North, 2019, n.d.). However, these explore the broader strategic and financial benefits of community hubs, particularly in terms of reducing estates, rather than library service specific aims and goals.

Overall, this thesis will focus on West Sussex CC to explore stakeholder perceptions about the role and purpose of public libraries, as well as the adequacy of the 1964 Act. Not only does it provide a manageable scope for a single researcher (further explored in Chapter 2.3.1) but West Sussex CC also offers a useful lens through which to explore the research aims. First, it currently delivers a well-used (CIPFA, 2018c) local-authority run public library service, rather than outsourcing its provision to a third party. Moreover, it has started to reflect on how the service could be changed to drive down costs and this has included some early public consultation (Harris, 2019; West Sussex CC, 2019d).

1.5 The thesis structure

This thesis uses mixed-methods and a series of research activities to address the aims and research questions. Each set of research activities builds on the results of the previous (explained in Chapter 2.3). As such, the thesis is structured into phases to represent each set of research activities; this will help the reader to see and understand how the research developed over time.

Following this chapter, Chapter 2 presents the methodology. It justifies the researcher position, the methodological decisions, and the use of mixed-methods in the thesis.

Although unusual, the methodology chapter precedes the literature review because it presents the overall narrative of the research design, providing clarity for the reader. Moreover, the literature review, in turn, is part of the first phase of the research.

Phase One, *The Public Library Landscape*, reports on the findings of the desktop research. Its purpose is twofold: first to establish the landscape for public libraries in England and, second, to inform the development of the research questions (Chapter 4.2). Within this phase, key definitions are established in Chapter 3 in relation to public libraries: their identities, their foundation, their governance, and the difference between library users and library non-users. Thereafter, Chapter 4 presents the literature review, which discovers significant topics related to the two thesis aims and establishes the research gaps which influence the design of this thesis.

Phase Two, *Capturing Public Perceptions of Public Libraries*, focuses on responding to Research Question 1. First, Chapter 5 explains the Q methodological studies undertaken to elicit public perceptions of public libraries in England in this thesis. This chapter includes an explanation of the design and execution of the studies, as well as the quantitative analysis and outcomes of those studies. Following this, Chapter 6 provides the qualitative interpretation of the Q methodological studies' outcomes: the presentation of library user perceptions and library non-user perceptions, as well as comparisons thereof.

Phase Three (Chapter 7), *Exploring the Core Purpose of Public Libraries*, addresses Research Question 2 and Research Question 3. It first presents the research methods, design and findings that explore how the public participants from Phase Two, central government, local government and the public library sector define public libraries. Thereafter, it compares the definitions to consider the commonalities and tensions between the stakeholder groups.

Phase Four (Chapter 8), *Comparing Perceptions to the Legislation*, responds to the second thesis aim and Research Question 4. This final phase describes how a modified approach to framework analysis was used to compare the stakeholder perceptions of public libraries to the content and intention of the Public Libraries and Museums Act (1964).

Following the four phases, Chapter 9 presents a discussion structured around the two thesis aims: public perceptions of public libraries in England and the adequacy of the legislation for a contemporary public library service. The findings from all four phases of the research are amalgamated and analysed within this chapter. Thereafter, Chapter 10 concludes by presenting a summary of the thesis contributions, both in terms of the research findings and the methodological contributions. Chapter 10 also presents the research limitations and considerations, as well as recommendations for further research.

CHAPTER 2: THE RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODOLOGY

This chapter presents the researcher's philosophical position and methodological choices. It subsequently introduces the research design, including an explanation of how and why the research was redesigned. Finally, the chapter includes a brief introduction to methods and concludes with the researcher's ethical considerations.

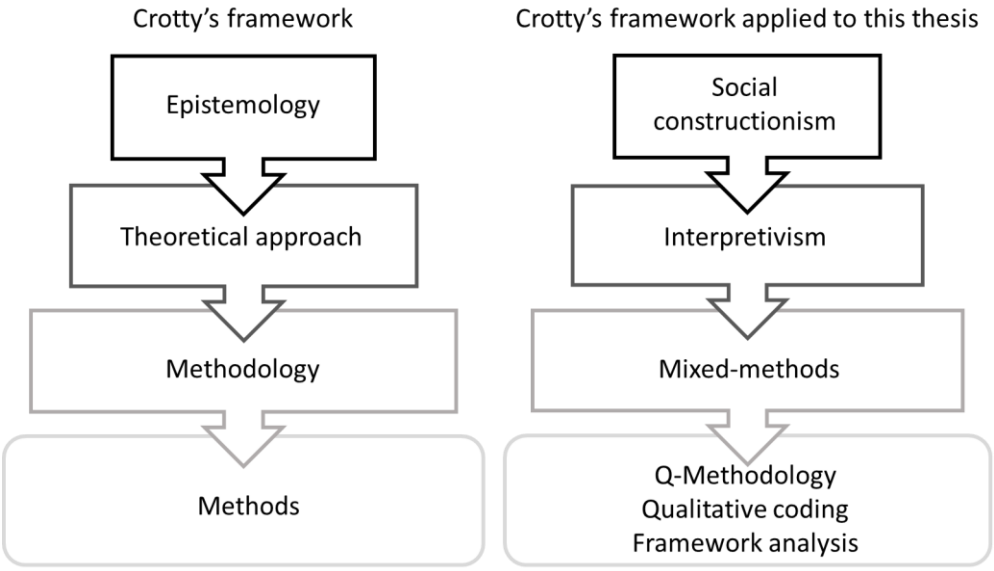
2.1 Introduction

Chapter 2 serves as an overview of the thesis' theoretical and methodological approaches to help provide the context needed to understand the researcher's decisions and actions throughout the research. The chapter also explains how and why the research was redesigned, including how the research questions were established and later modified. The methods employed in the thesis are also introduced, with an exploration of their potential limitations and an explanation of how these were mitigated. Further details about the process, results and implications of the specific methods will be explored in greater depth in Chapters 5 to 8.

2.2 Researcher position

The researcher concurs with Crotty's (1998) framework for social research and its concept that there is a hierarchy of decision making: epistemology lays the foundation for theoretical perspective, which informs methodology, which subsequently directs method choices. The application of Crotty's (1998) framework in this thesis is depicted in Figure 1. The researcher's epistemological stance is social constructionist (outlined in Section 2.2.1). This world view then influences the researcher's theoretical perspective of interpretivism (explained in Section 2.2.2). The thesis adopts a mixed methods approach. This was in part chosen as it functions effectively within social constructionist and interpretivist research approaches (Section 2.2.3). Specifically, the thesis utilises three methods: Q methodology, qualitative coding and framework analysis. These methods require a reflexive, interpretivist approach to ensure their effectiveness. Figure 1 illustrates this researcher's hierarchy of decisions, using Crotty's (1998) framework; each element and method will be further explained within this chapter.

Figure 1: applying Crotty's framework to this thesis



(based on Crotty's framework, 1998, p.4)

2.2.1 Epistemological position

Social constructionists argue that meaning and reality are not naturally given but are created through action between social actors (Alvesson & Sköldberg, 2018; Bryman, 2016; Flick, 2015). As an epistemological viewpoint, social constructionism maintains that individuals construct meaning through individual and interpersonal experiences and actions (Charmaz, 2006; Crotty, 1998), rather than through intrapersonal cognitive processes, which is a constructivist stance (Crotty, 1998; Young & Collins, 2004). Social constructionists contend that culture, history and sociopolitics inform how humans perceive reality (Braun & Clarke, 2013). As a result, this thesis has not explored public perceptions of public libraries in isolation; instead, they are explored in conjunction with the documented viewpoints of central government, local government and the public library sector, Moreover, the findings are contextualised within the sociopolitical landscape.

Social constructionists focus on *how* reality is created by studying "what people at a particular time and place take as real, how they construct their views and actions" (Charmaz, 2006, p.189); as a result, social constructionism theorises that meaning is in a constant state of flux (Bryman, 2016). Moreover, because meaning is derived from contextualised social interaction, constructionists must evaluate which constructions are "definitive" when different realities collide (Charmaz, 2006, p.189). Thus, this thesis

embraces a social constructionist stance in some measure because it is framed by specific temporal and environmental contextualisation: perceptions of the public library service between 2009 and 2021 by those who live in West Sussex. Social constructionist assumptions about meaning and time, coupled with the central government's stance that public library services should be defined and governed locally, substantiate the relevance of the thesis' second aim: to question the efficacy of legislation written more than half a century ago and its capacity to reflect reality, contemporary meaning or current user needs.

2.2.2 Theoretical approach

This thesis adopts an interpretivist theoretical approach, rather than a specific theory or theoretical framework. As discussed in Section 2.3, the literature review supported the researcher to generate the initial research questions and these, in turn, shaped the research design. Bryman (2016) asserts atheoretical research is credible because it focuses on the research questions formed in response to the literature review and, in this way, "the literature acts as a proxy for theory" (p.20). Furthermore, Miller (2007) argues that framing research within an existing theory can affect perceptions, questions and interpretations; "it also imposes blinders" (p.179) causing some research designs to be narrow and limited. Being "preoccupied with theory" (Bryman, 2016, p.19) can mean that anomalous results are disregarded or that "rigor and legitimacy drive out relevance" (Miller, 2007, p.180). Schwarz and Stensaker (2014) assert that by aspiring to contribute to theory or close theory gaps, theory driven research can lose sight of potential contributions to debate, practice and understanding. In contrast, interpretivist approaches permit the research to drive the research; for example, in this thesis, aspects of the design were developed post hoc rather than ex ante (Section 2.3).

Scharwz and Stensaker (2014) further argue that atheoretical research, or phenomenon driven research, is steered by ideas and interpretivism; it differs from problem-based research as it does not seek to solve a problem but rather to better understand a situation. Schwartz-Shea and Yanow (2020) comment that interpretivist research both "aims to depict the complexity" (para.17) of a subject whilst also recognising that any meaning derived from the research is "inevitably partial" (para.17). In the case of this thesis, the literature suggests the phenomenon is complex: conflicting stakeholder perceptions of a service's primary purpose coupled with a decline in public use despite a

maintained public perception of value (Chapter 4). Furthermore, this researcher recognises that the thesis outcomes will be rich but "partial" (Schwartz-Shea & Yanow, 2020, para.17) because the participants, and therefore their viewpoints, are drawn from a specific region of England (Section 2.3.1). Moreover, adopting an interpretivist approach rather than a specific theoretical framework is suitable for this thesis because it prevents the design, data collection, analysis and findings from being too narrow. Applying a specific theoretical framework to an investigation of public perceptions of public libraries could have permitted the thesis to assume causation from the outset. The atheoretical approach in this thesis reduced the opportunity for the captured perceptions and outcomes to be distorted or influenced by existing theory or assumptions.

Interpretivism recognises that the conscious bias, context and experience of the researcher cannot be removed from the process of deriving meaning from research outcomes. The fundamental purpose of interpretivist research is to "get 'insight'" (Cao Thanh & Le Thanh, 2015, p.26) through the interpretations of the researcher and the perceptions of participants (Blandford, Furniss & Makri, 2016); this thesis seeks to capture and understand the perceptions of the public and decision makers related to public libraries. Moreover, as seen in the literature review (Chapter 4), the voices of the public, in particular those who do not use public libraries, are often missing from research, sector outputs and governmental diktats. In contexts like this, interpretivist research is useful for "reading silences in narratives" (Schwartz-Shea & Yanow, 2020, para.17) and suits the approach of this thesis to foreground the public voice (Chapter 3 and Chapter 4). Further advantages of interpretivism include the fact it is reflexive, demands transparency and constantly assesses the validity of findings (Weber, 2004). To this end, throughout all phases of this thesis, the researcher has endeavoured to maintain transparency with the processes and decisions related to methods, data collection and analysis.

A limitation of interpretivism can be its perceived subjectivity and how this affects the validity of research. In order to demonstrate research outcome reliability, interpretivists argue that researcher subjectivity, assumptions and biases must be made explicit (Weber, 2004). Interpretivists embrace the omnipresence of subjectivity when seeking meaning but must avoid distorting or misrepresenting research outcomes as a result (Goldkhul, 2012). This has been factored into the research design, first, in the way the

thesis used mixed methods (explained in Section 2.2.4) and, second, in the selection of methods which specifically rely on transparent processes (detailed in Section 2.4).

2.2.3 When social constructionism meets interpretivism

Social constructionist and interpretivist approaches are congruent because the former recognises that the researcher's version of social reality is distinctive not conclusive (Bryman, 2016) and the latter recognises that meaning is contrived both as the result of the researcher's interpretations (Blandford et al., 2016) and an understanding of "the subjective meaning of social action" (Bryman, 2016, p.26). Social constructionism and interpretivism recognise the active role of the researcher in the process of interpretation and construction of meaning and knowledge (Bryman, 2016; Weber, 2004). Moreover, Bryman (2016) states that social constructionists assert meaning and reality are transient rather than definitive (p.29), which impacts the way research outcomes are viewed; this mirrors Schwartz-Shea and Yanow's (2020) view that interpretivist research outcomes are rich but not definitive because they are partial. Charmaz (2006) posits that social constructionism derives temporally and environmentally contextualised meaning (p.189). Similarly, interpretivists argue that interpretations cannot be disconnected from contextualised culture, sociopolitics and history (Braun & Clark, 2013; Crotty, 1998; Schwartz-Shea & Yanow, 2020). In terms of this thesis, these assumptions reflect the views of Charteris (2009) and the Department for Digital Culture, Media and Sport [DCMS] (2020), who assert that decisions about public libraries and their services should be contextualised through localised governance and a commitment to meeting local needs (Chapter 4). Moreover, the social constructionist argument is that meaning is "fleeting" and can change or fluctuate (Bryman, 2016, p.30), which substantiates the thesis' research aim to question the value of legislation (Aim 2) written more than half a century ago and its ability to reflect contemporary reality.

2.2.4 Methodology

Mixed methods research is viewed as a methodology which exploits both qualitative and quantitative practices within one research design, in order to cross the "borders" (Hesse-Biber, 2015, pp. xxxiii-xxxiv) established by more traditional research methods. Creswell et al. (2006) argue that many researchers view mixed methods as a methodology that emphasises quantitative practices and minimises qualitative, but they caution this is "limited, inaccurate, and stereotypic" (p.1). They assert that mixed

methods research can foreground qualitative data and processes. Moreover, the work of McChesney and Aldridge (2019) supports the argument that mixed methods research requires both qualitative and quantitative elements. McChesney and Aldridge (2019) also demonstrate how interpretivism, a qualitative theoretical approach, can be holistically applied to mixed methods projects, leading to "rich and contextually situated understandings" (p.227). This thesis combined qualitative and quantitative data collection and analysis methods, but the overall balance was weighted towards qualitative.

According to Mason (2006), there are three reasons that mixed methods research is effective, particularly when framed with a qualitative bias: it creates the opportunity for "innovative and creative" (p.13) thinking and research design; it enables research to occupy and explore the space between the macro and the micro; and it enhances "the logic of qualitative explanation" (p.16) through analytical comparison and cross-contextual explorations. This thesis embraced Mason's (2006) mixed methods logic by applying a "flexible, creative approach" (p.21) to the research design (Section 2.3). Moreover, by exploring public libraries at the point of service, through public perceptions, and also at a legislative and governance level, the thesis addressed both micro and macro positions. Finally, not only does the thesis integrate and compare outputs in its discussion (Chapter 8), but comparison was also the fundamental premise of the analytical processes in both Phase Two (see Chapters 5 and 6), Phase Three (see Chapter 7) and Phase Four (see Chapter 8). The embedded comparisons within this thesis also address Creswell and Plano-Clark's (2018) assertion that research using mixed methods must "incorporate many diverse viewpoints" (p.6). The thesis captured and compared the perspectives of the public, both library users and non-users, in addition to the documented viewpoints of sector bodies, local government and central government.

Creswell and Plano-Clark (2018) argue that mixed methods research is more flexible than simply using qualitative practice to substantiate or explain quantitative data. Within this flexibility, however, they argue that there are four necessary components of mixed methods research. These are detailed in Table 1, along with an explanation of how the components have been applied in this thesis.

Table 1: applying Creswell and Plano-Clark's (2018) key components of mixed methods research

Key components of mixed methods research (Creswell and Plano Clark, 2018)	**Application of key components to this thesis**
Researcher "collects and analyzes both qualitative and quantitative data rigorously in response to research questions and hypotheses" (p.7).	As discussed in Section 2.4.1.1, the method employed in Phase Two is a qualiquantological method (Stenner & Stainton Rogers, 2004) because it uses both quantitative and qualitative practices. Phase Three of the thesis then employed qualitative coding (Section 2.4.2) and Phase Four used framework analysis. The thesis, therefore, engaged with both types of data but with a bias towards qualitative.
Researcher "integrates (or mixes or combines) the two forms of data and their results" (p.7).	The data generated in both the qualiquantological Phase Two and the qualitative Phases Three and Four were analysed separately. Moreover, as discussed in Section 2.3, the outputs from Phase Two influenced the design of Phases Three and Four. Finally, the thesis design featured multiple points of comparison, both within Phase Two (Chapter 6), Phase Three (Chapter 7) and Phase Four (Chapter 8), as well as between the phases (Chapter 9).
Researcher "organizes these procedures into specific research designs that provide the logic for conducting the study" (p.7).	The design of this thesis means the research builds upon itself (Section 2.3). The different data collected at each phase influenced the design and data collection of the next phase.
Researcher "frames these procedures within theory and philosophy" (p.7).	The thesis' epistemological position is that of social constructionism. Moreover, the researcher has assumed an interpretivist theoretical perspective.

Overall, the choice to integrate qualitative and quantitative practice meant the researcher was able to draw "interpretations based on the combined strengths of both" (Creswell, 2015, p.2). Moreover, combining quantitative and qualitative methods in a multiphase project meant it was possible to discover different perspectives and potentially generalisable findings (O'Leary, 2017). Each phase of the thesis explored

different aspects of the research questions, thus “extending the breadth of the project” (Gorman & Clayton, 2005, p.12). Moreover, the thesis employed mixed methods to enable development (Connaway, Radford & Powell, 2016) rather than triangulation, whereby each phase was designed to expand on, explore and explain the previous (O’Leary, 2017). This approach elicited broad, deep and illuminating findings (Gorman & Clayton, 2005) that presented a more extensive and rigorous (Creswell, 2015; McKim, 2017) view of public perceptions of public libraries.

2.3 The research (re)design

Before the research methods used in this thesis are introduced in further detail (Sections 2.4 and 2.5), this section of the chapter will focus on explaining the overall research design and how the methods fit within it.

As described in Chapter 1.5, the thesis is structured around multiple phases, each with a different focus and method of data collection. Due to the reflexive, interpretivist approach of the thesis, decisions about research questions, data collection and analytical methods were flexible rather than predetermined. For instance, Phase One (the literature review) helped to generate research questions stemming from the two aims. Moreover, the literature review guided the focus and content of the data collection in Phase Two. The method used in this second phase, however, was chosen ex-ante for two reasons. First, Q methodology sits comfortably within the thesis’ epistemological position of social constructionism (Watts & Stenner, 2012). Second, prior experience with Q methodology (McKenna-Aspell, 2018) meant the researcher recognised it would effectively address the first aim of the thesis, to identify public perceptions of public libraries, because it is a tool for capturing and analysing subjectivity. That said, in line with interpretivist approaches to research, had the outputs in Phase One suggested that Q methodology would not be an appropriate method for the second phase of the thesis, the researcher would have reflexively made a design change.

Evidence of the researcher’s commitment to reflexivity can be seen in the way that both the research questions and Phase Three were developed over the course of the research. Unlike the final version presented in Chapter 1.3, there were five initial research questions, generated through the literature review:

- Research Question 1: What has influenced public library user and non-user perceptions of public libraries in England since 2009?
- Research Question 1a: What are user and non-user public perceptions of public libraries in England?
- Research Question 2: To what extent does the public consider the Public Libraries and Museums Act (1964) adequate for the 21st century?
- Research Question 2a: How do the public, central government, local government and the public library sector define public libraries and how do the definitions compare?
- Research Question 2b: According to public perception, how should public libraries evidence and articulate their value and impact?

What follows is an explanation of the four triggers which led to both the reflexive modification of these research questions during the research process and to the design of Phases Three and Four. First, new material was added to the literature review at several points: during Phase Two design, during Phase Two analysis, during Phase Three design, and when aggregating outcomes to write the discussion chapter (Chapter 8). More about this process is explained in Chapter 4. It was when returning to the literature during the creation of the Phase Two data collection tools that the researcher discovered a new contribution from Appleton (2020). His PhD thesis undertakes a longitudinal, qualitative study to specifically investigate the role of public libraries and how the public are "advantaged through using public libraries" (Appleton, 2020, p.138). In doing this, Appleton extensively explores the concepts of impact and value in public libraries, from the perspective of library users. Although his work does not specifically address how the public believe impact and value should be articulated, it was close enough to the initial Research Question 2b to cause this researcher to doubt the question's novelty. Second, as a mixed methods project, Phase Three was not designed until Phase Two had been completed. Following the Phase Two data analysis, it became apparent that to answer initial Research Question 2b, the researcher would need to collect additional data. Due to the nature of the multiphase research, this was not feasible within the timeframe of a PhD thesis. Third, due to pandemic-related restrictions, the data collection of Phase Two was carried out virtually. This meant that it was not possible to ask participants what had influenced their perceptions of public libraries in sufficient depth to uphold initial Research Question 1. Finally, it became

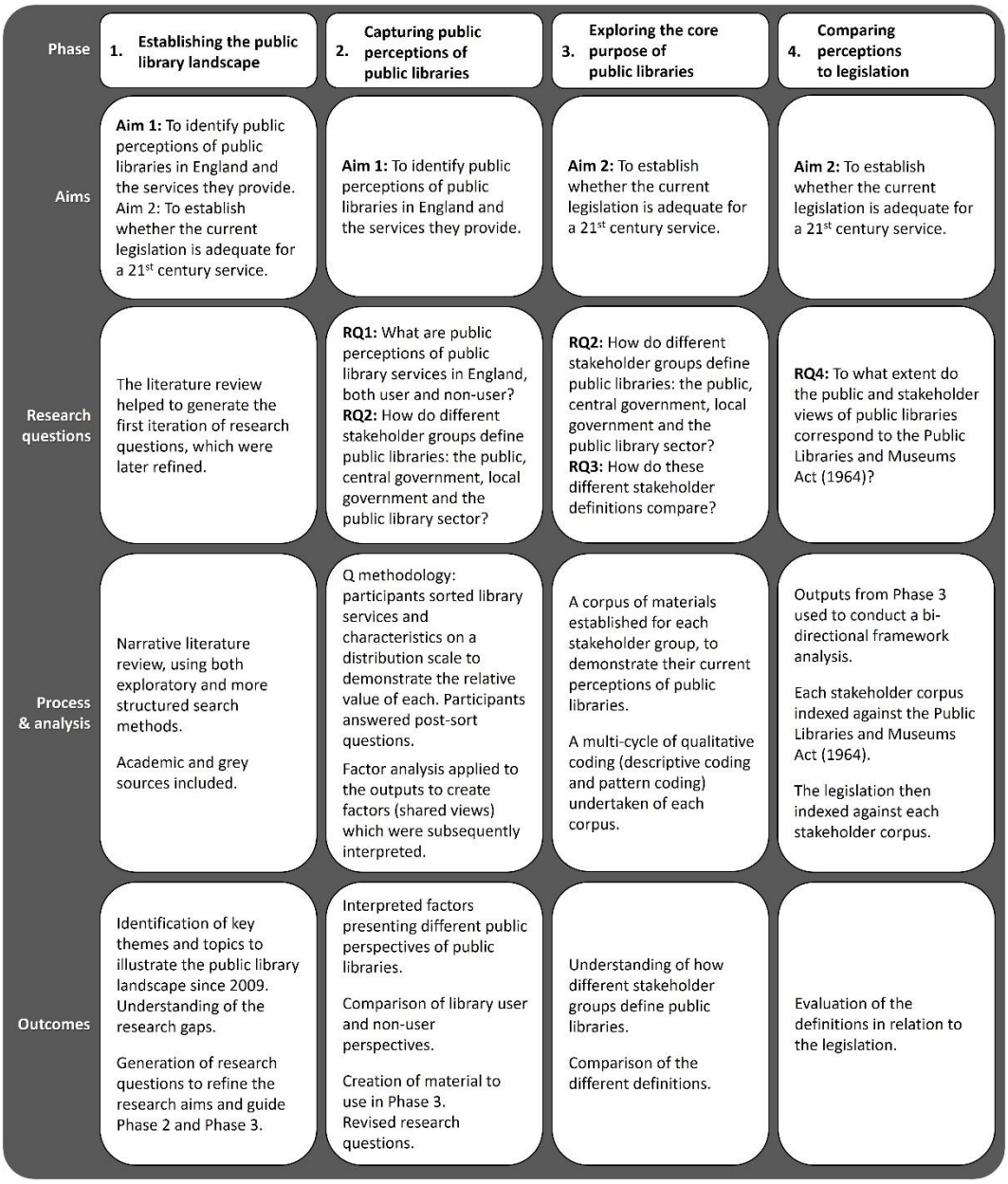
apparent during the analysis of Phase Two outputs that there was a wealth of rich material from the Q methodology data collection which could be used in Phase Three of the thesis design (see Chapters 5 and 7). This material was best suited to address initial Research Question 2, focusing on the legislation, and initial Research Question 2a, considering different stakeholder definitions of public libraries.

In light of these triggers, the initial research questions were modified. These are the questions introduced in Chapter 1; they are presented below for reader convenience:

- Research Question 1: What are public perceptions of public library services in England, both user and non-user?
- Research Question 2: How do different stakeholder groups define public libraries: the public, central government, local government and the public library sector?
- Research Question 3: How do these different stakeholder definitions compare?
- Research Question 4: To what extent do the public and stakeholder views of public libraries correspond to the Public Libraries and Museums Act (1964)?

Figure 2 depicts the final design of the three phases of this research and their relationships to the finalised research questions. It also illustrates how each phase supported the next and also answered the modified research questions.

Figure 2: overall research design



2.3.1 "A small sample, in-depth study": the boundaries of the thesis

Tight (2010) argues that in social research discourse, a case study can be an approach, methodology or method and this renders it unhelpfully vague. Even advocates of case study research recognise that its nature is hard to universally define (Simons, 2009; Thomas, 2016) and practitioners disagree on fundamental elements, such as what constitutes a case or a phenomenon (Simons, 2009; Thomas, 2016; Tight, 2010). Tight (2010) posits case study is frequently used as a "convenient label" (p.337) for social researchers who seek to add reputability and perceived rigour to their research.

Whilst this thesis could have been moulded to fit case study research, there are several reasons why it was not. For example, Thomas (2016) states that a case study views "the how and why something might have happened" (p.4) but this thesis does not aim to understand how or why West Sussex County Council has decided to apply changes to its library service, nor does it explore how the public perceive the proposals or why that is how they perceive them. Moreover, initial Research Question 1, which considered the factors that influenced public perceptions, was removed when the research questions were modified between Phases 2 and 3 (Section 2.3). Instead, this thesis studies library user and non-user perceptions of public libraries, stakeholder views of the core purpose of public libraries and the legislation that governs public libraries.

In case study research, Thomas (2016), Stake (2005) and Simons (2009) all discuss the importance of singularity in terms of the phenomenon under scrutiny. A case study is a rich, deep dive into a single event, issue or "thing" (Thomas, 2016, p.3), examining the case's distinctiveness. In this thesis, the proposed changes in West Sussex may have influenced the public's perceptions of public libraries but they are not the focus of the research. Moreover, the focus is not singular as the public perceptions captured in West Sussex were compared to the perceptions presented in local government, central government and sector publications, as well as the legislation, during Phases Three and Four. Furthermore, the situation in West Sussex is not unique as local authorities across England are faced with transforming services to make fiscal savings (Chartered Institute of Library and Information Professionals [CILIP] & The Big Issue, 2019; Goulding, 2013; National Audit Office, 2018; Serio, 2017; Woodhouse & Zayed, 2020).

Tight (2010) claims that many features of case study research are simply good precepts of any social research. This thesis supports Tight's (2010) argument that researchers should embrace the acceptability and honesty of describing research as a "small, in-depth study" (p.338). To that end, this thesis presented a "small, in-depth study" (Tight, 2010, p.338) that focused on West Sussex County Council and its library service. West Sussex offered an appropriate and timely lens through which to explore public perceptions of public libraries for several reasons:

- it is a well-used, local-authority run service (Chartered Institute of Public Finance and Accountancy [CIPFA], 2018c);
- it is a large authority, with a popular library service that is seeking to make savings despite data that suggests it is already operating a low-cost provision (CIPFA, 2018c);
- it has begun a process of consultation to make significant changes to its offer, such as a reduction of opening hours and the cessation of the mobile library service (Harris, 2019; West Sussex County Council, 2019d);
- it has committed to using community hubs to group services together and is trialling this process in Worthing, following earlier public consultation (North, 2019, n.d.);
- there are potential indications that public engagement and communication is not effective (CIPFA, 2018c; West Sussex, 2019d), which is key for meaningful consultation.

Whilst embracing Tight's (2010) notion of a "small, in-depth study" (p.338), this thesis also borrowed from the case study practice of establishing boundaries (Simons, 2009), in terms of setting plausible limitations. Table 2 depicts the boundaries of the thesis.

Table 2: the boundaries of this thesis

Boundary	Definition	Reason
Timeframe	2009 - 2021	2009 signifies the publication of the seminal Charteris report which impacted public libraries. Moreover, England was at the cusp of central and local government changes. Both phenomena are discussed at length in Chapters 1 and 4. Phase Two data collection of public perceptions occurred in December 2020 and January 2021. Therefore, all materials used in Phases Three and Four were published by, or related to, 2021.
Location	England, West Sussex	The devolved nations have different legislation and approaches to public libraries. West Sussex offers an interesting context to examine public perceptions (Chapter 1). Limiting the geographical location also had beneficial implications for the practicality and feasibility of the data collection in Phase Two, particularly around participant recruitment.
Participant	30-35% library user 65-70% library non-user	The thesis' stratified sampling reflected the published data about library use in England (DCMS, 2020b). Furthermore, it amplified non-user perspectives which are lacking in the existing studies (Chapter 4.3).

By establishing boundaries without employing case study methodology, this thesis emulated the precedent set in other public library perception studies. For example, Hayes and Morris (2005) study user perspectives of the leisure role of UK libraries by undertaking focus groups in two libraries; they provide reasons for the choice without referring to the research as a case study. Equally, McCahill et al. (2020) examined public perceptions of UK public library closures by conducting mixed-methods research in three libraries in one city in the North of England; again, this specificity was not deemed a case study.

It could be argued that any results presented by a "small, in-depth study" (Tight, 2010, p.338) are not generalisable because of the limitations that bind it. However, Flyvbjerg (2006) argues that it is misleading to assume a single case or example cannot be used to form generalisable conclusions and that the strategic decision making in case or example selection can improve the generalisability of research outcomes. Equally, Flyvbjerg

(2006) asserts that whilst cases can be used for generalised discussion, the notion of generalisability is "overvalued" (p.228), whereas the ""force of example" is underestimated" (p.228). This thesis has specific temporal and environmental contextualisation: public library service provision from 2009 to 2021 across West Sussex. Despite this, the research outcomes have a wider impact. For instance, the approach and processes within this thesis, for example, could be replicated by other local authorities to generate regional, timely outcomes which could be employed to inform service decisions and changes. This is further explored in Chapter 10.

2.4 Methods

As a multiphase, mixed methods research project (Figure 2), there are multiple methods used throughout the thesis. This section introduces each of the three methods so that the design, application and analysis presented in Phases Two, Three and Four can be better followed.

2.4.1 Phase Two: Q methodology

Q methodology is featured in Phase Two. Specific details about how the method was used in Phase Two, (including design decisions, the sampling process, and analytical choices) are presented in Chapter 5. This section will provide some background information about Q methodology: its research position, the rationale for its use in this thesis, and its basic principles. A little more space is allocated in this chapter to introducing Q methodology, compared to the other methods, because it is not a widely known method.

Q methodology highlights the relationships within and between participants' perceptions of a particular topic or issue. Participants are presented with a number of statements which, collectively, represent the topic being studied; participants are asked to sort these through a "modified rank-ordering procedure in which stimuli are placed in an order that is significant from the standpoint of a person operating under specified conditions" (Brown, 1980, p. 195).

Q methodology is the study of the intra-individual perspectives (McKeown and Thomas, 2013) of a population of viewpoints. Brown (2008) argues that Q methodology is the most thorough method available for the study of subjectivity (p.699). It was first presented by William Stephenson in a letter to the journal, *Nature*, in 1935 (Watts &

Stenner, 2012, p.7). Stephenson proposed Q methodology to address the need for an objective and systematic study of subjective views through "self-referential meaning and interpretation" (Brown, 2008, p.699). Stephenson elaborated on his initial ideas with "The study of behavior; Q-technique and its methodology" in 1953, which presented the argument that Q methodology could function as a method for combining and comparing viewpoints from multiple individuals. By viewing participants as variables (Brown, 1980, p.55), Stephenson presented a method that elicits comparisons between individuals through the analysis of their correlations. The process of covariation, using factor analysis, means Q methodology reveals groups of people with shared perceptions of a subject or issue (Watts & Stenner, 2012, p.18).

2.4.1.1 Why Q Methodology?

Using Q methodology for Phase 2 was appropriate due to the epistemological, theoretical and methodological positions of this thesis.

Epistemologically, Q methodological research sits comfortably within social constructionism, by exploring "socially shared viewpoints and bodies-of knowledge" (Watts, 2009, p.36). Q methodology studies involve multiple participants and result in factors that represent shared understandings or viewpoints of a particular topic (Watts, 2009; Watts & Stenner, 2012).

As a theoretical approach, interpretivist research acknowledges that there is no single objective truth; meaning is understood through a combination of researcher and participant interpretations and viewpoints (Blandford, Furniss & Makri, 2016, p.63). Equally, Q methodology recognises that it is plausible to discover "truth-value in subjectivity" (Goldman, 1999, p.594), by recognising the researcher is an active and deliberate tool in the creation of meaning (Blandford, Furniss & Makri, 2016; Cao Thanh & Le Thanh, 2015; Goldman, 1999). For instance, Q methodology studies combine participants' subjectivity with researcher interpretation through the process of factor analysis. Equally, interpretivist and Q methodological approaches both recognise that interpretations rely on the researcher's contextual understanding of the research focus (Cao Thanh & Le Thanh, 2015, p.25; McKeown & Thomas, 2013, p.14).

Despite the necessary proximity between the researcher and research, Q methodology helps to manage the researcher bias present in other interpretivist methods (Gauttier,

2017; Gauttier & Liberati, 2020). Rather than relying solely on researcher reflexivity, Q methodology also provides quantitative data through factor analysis. In this data, as the participants and their final Q sorts are the variables, Q methodology "focuses on how individuals have classified themselves rather than being subject to the operational definitions of the researcher" (Goldman, 1999, p.597). Moreover, Gauttier (2017) argues there is an inherent transparency with Q methodology for a number of reasons: all the processes from design to interpretation are documented, shared and can be replicated; final interpretations are linked to rigorous and documented statistical criteria; interpretations can be criticised or reviewed because the preceding steps are openly reported; and "the richness of different viewpoints - together with nuances - is respected" (p.4). This researcher embraced reflexive awareness throughout the thesis and also explicitly documented the transparent process (Gauttier, 2017) of moving from participant input to researcher interpretation in Phase Two (Chapters 5 and 6). Presenting "opaque" decisions and choices (Malaurent & Avison, 2017, p.920) is a tenet of Q methodology and reflexive interpretivism. Reflexivity is an essential element of interpretivist research because it is impossible for any researcher to claim "a value-neutral stance" (Malaurent & Avison, 2017, p.920); this is equally true of Q methodological research because it seeks to "make subjectivity objective" (Gauttier, 2017, p.9). Q methodological outcomes, namely factors and factor arrays, are bound to the researcher's subjectivity and perspective. As "Each factor is not considered from within, but rather through the perspective of the researcher looking at the factor from the outside" (Gauttier and Liberati, 2020, p.40), a reflexive interpretivist approach helped this researcher to ensure Q methodological interpretations maintained integrity in terms of representing library user and non-user viewpoints.

Methodologically, Q methodology is viewed as a qualiquantological method (Stenner & Stainton Rogers, 2004) because it blends qualitative and quantitative research practices (McKeown & Thomas, 2013); therefore, it can be considered a mixed-method in its own right (Ramlo & Newman, 2011). Q methodology supports this thesis' approach to combining qualitative and quantitative data to enhance the "logic of qualitative explanation" (Mason, 2006, p.16) that can be achieved through comparative and cross-contextual analysis. Unlike methods which lose individual participant's perspectives through "categorical averaging" (Brown, 2008, p.699), Q methodology preserves individual viewpoints through factor analysis, which can "reveal patterns within

subjective perspectives that can be overlooked by even the most sensitive and discerning eye" (Brown, 2008, p.699). This supported the thesis' commitment to foreground previously silenced or omitted voices and perspectives.

Finally, whilst Q methodological outcomes cannot be used to measure the extent to which a perception is held within a population (Brown, 1980), it does reveal the types of perceptions which exist (Watts & Stenner, 2012, p.73), including marginal views; therefore, Q methodology could provide the opportunity to capture views which have been absent in other public library studies. Other perceptions may exist beyond those captured by a Q study, but the existence of viewpoints revealed by factors is valid (Brown, 1980, p.67). Brown (1980) asserts that a factor is a "generalized abstraction (based on communalities) of a particular outlook or value orientation" (p.67) for one type of person and, therefore, a factor would be equally true for any other person of the same type (Brown, 1980). For this reason, it is not necessary to engage a large participant group because Q methodology does not focus on *how* often a viewpoint is held, simply that it *is* held. As a result, Q methodology was appropriate for this thesis because it permitted the researcher to engage with a smaller number of participants (Eden, Donaldson & Walker, 2005 p.420) without diminishing the rigour of the output; this was an important practical consideration for a sole researcher (McKeown & Thomas, 2013, p.1). Moreover, using Q methodology to establish the existence of a range of views about public libraries from both library users and non-users in West Sussex was of value as the outcomes had the potential to challenge, question or support the current literature on this topic (Watts & Stenner, 2012, p.73).

2.4.1.2 Q methodology design and process

This section details the processes and practices of carrying out a Q methodological study. Table 3 presents simplified definitions of some of the specific terms used in Q methodology. It is presented here to aid the readability of the remainder of this section.

Table 3: a glossary of key Q methodology terms

Concourse	The body of knowledge or "overall population of statements" (Watts & Stenner, 2012, p.34) from which the Q set is formed.
Distribution model	The shape of the grid onto which participants sort statements / items.
Factor	A viewpoint shared by multiple participants, revealed through "patterns of *association* between a series of measured variables" (Watts & Stenner, 2012, p.21).
Factor analysis	The process through which factors are extracted from the Q sort data.
Factor interpretation	The process through which the factors are explained and described.
Initial sorting	The first sorting stage whereby participants organise the Q set into three piles to indicate agreement, disagreement and uncertainty.
P set	The participants selected to be involved in the study.
Q set	The finalised set of statements or items to be sorted by participants.
Q sort	A participant's final arrangement of the Q set onto the distribution grid, which is captured numerically for future analysis.
Q sorting	The process by which a participant arranges the Q set onto the distribution grid, to indicate how they value statements / items in relation to one another.
Statement / item	Individual cards from the Q set for the participants to rank. They can take any form: sentences, clauses, phrases or pictures.
Statement of instruction	The instruction or question the participant is addressing with their Q sort.

Q methodological studies are suited to answering a range of different research questions. Watts and Stenner (2012, p.55) suggest that Q methodology can help researchers to answer questions related to one of three foci:

- causes and reasons - "*what makes something happen*" (p.55);
- definitions - "*what it is like right now*" (p.55);
- reactions, responses or policies - "*what we should do about it*" (p.55).

In comparison, Curt (1994, pp.134-205) recommends that Q studies can focus on one of three types of question:

- representation - what a subject is for, how it can be used, or its value (Curt, 1994, p.138);
- understandings - the individual understanding or meaning of a subject which is contextualised within "specific circumstances, specific local conditions, at a specific point in time" (Curt, 1994, p.164);
- conduct - the ways in which a subject "can mandate and warrant action" (Curt, 1994, p.191) or potential resolutions to an issue.

Whilst there is a nuanced difference of opinion about the kind of questions which can be addressed, there is consensus (Curt, 1994; Stainton-Rogers, 1995; Watts & Stenner, 2012) that a Q methodological study must focus on a "single proposition" (Watts & Stenner, 2012, p.56). It would have been possible for this thesis to focus its Q methodological study on Watts and Stenner's (2012) version of a definition question, by asking participants to consider what public library services are *currently* like in England. However, this thesis explores the perceptions of both library users and library non-users alike; whilst a focus on the current situation would have suited library users, it would have been less relevant for those participants who are library non-users as they lack up-to-date experiences upon which to draw. Curt's (1994) suggestion of questions related to representation was a more appropriate option for Research Question 1 in this thesis because it enabled both library users and library non-users to reflect on the responsibilities of public library services and what they "should ideally" (Watts & Stenner, 2012. p.55) deliver.

The design stage

Once a suitable research question is established, a concourse must be developed. The

concourse denotes “the volume of common communicability with regard to any topic” (Brown, 2008, p.699) and from this, a Q set is created. A concourse can be derived from interviews with relevant parties or from existing documentation or literature. Traditionally, the concourse is self-referential, however it can cover “common knowledge”, “cultural heritage”, “statements of fact” or information (Watts and Stenner, 2012, p.34) because the subjectivity is later “revealed in Q-sorting operations, whereby self-referential meanings are projected on the sample items” (McKeown & Thomas, 2013, p.21). The concourse and final Q set can be composed of almost anything, such as statements, clauses, phrases, words, objects, photographs, images or descriptions. Henceforth, for ease, *item* will be used as an umbrella term.

The Q set is the finalised set of items to be sorted by participants. Where a concourse should be the “overall shared knowledge and meaning” (Watts & Stenner, 2012, p.33) of a subject, the final Q set should be a representative and manageable sample thereof (Watts & Stenner, 2012; McKeown & Thomas, 2013). The process of turning a concourse into a Q set is reflexive and suits an interpretivist approach because it is a “craft” (Cruft, 1994, p.129) or “more an art than a science” (Brown, 1980, p.186). To meet the demands of an effective Q set, both in terms of purpose and design, it should be piloted and refined (Curt, 1994, p.121; Watts & Stenner, 2012, pp.61-62).

The data collection process

In a “process of *relative* evaluation” (Watts & Stenner, 2012, p.88), participants are asked to sort each item in the Q set in relation to all the other items, to indicate what they value as meaningful or significant. Participants are provided with a grid onto which they can place the items. Q methodology is a ranking process but the items are ranked in relation to one another; in this way, items placed in the lowest placeholders may be of some value to participants but they are of lower value than other items placed in the distribution grid (Watts & Stenner, 2012). The final distribution is called a Q sort (Watts & Stenner, 2012).

The distributions ranges from *most* to *most*, rather than from *most* to *least*, because “the items in a Q sort distribution coexist in transitive relationship, based on their self-reference, distending positively and negatively from a mean of “relative insignificance” (McKeown & Thomas, 2013, p66). Each end of the distribution pole represents a strong, subjective reaction, whereas items placed in the middle lack intensity for a participant

(Watts & Stenner, 2012, p.80). Using numbers as position headers across the top of the distribution model can help participants to appreciate the nuanced relativity between items; for instance, placing an item in -3 would mean it is marginally less valued than an item in -2 but slightly more valued than an item in -4 (Watts & Stenner, 2012, p.79). Unlike other ranking methods, the neutral zero is an anchor because information "bulges out or distends from it - it is all contained in the dispersion about the zero, that is, in the variance" (Stephenson, 1953, p.196).

Factor analysis

Following the Q sort stage of a Q methodological study, the process of factor analysis is quantitative but its interpretation requires a level of subjectivity and narrative writing that is qualitative and interpretivist in nature (Coogan & Herrington, 2011; Moree, 2017). Factor analysis of Q sorts reveals "groups of individuals who have ranked characteristics in the same way" (Coogan & Herrington, 2011, p.24); it uses a quantitative tool to measure a "qualitative dimension" (Moree, 2017, p.1). Factor analysis is a process that follows a "number of statistical techniques the aim of which is to simplify complex sets of data" (Kline, 1994, p.3). In terms of Q methodology, the participants' Q sorts are the complex datasets and the aim is to establish correlations between them to reveal shared perceptions, called factors. Watts and Stenner (2012) illustrate the purpose of factor analysis with a helpful cake analogy: the ingredients represent the specific viewpoints and individual Q sorts captured by a Q study; the final cake represents the entire dataset or correlation matrix once all participants have completed their Q sorts; and a slice of cake represents a single factor or a shared view (p.95). Factor analysis is the process of cutting the cake; only the researcher can decide how many slices to cut and what shape they will be. A different researcher, with their own knowledge and experience of the subject, could cut the same cake entirely differently. With Q methodology factor analysis, the point is for the "data to take the lead" (Watts & Stenner, 2012, p.95), whilst the researcher embraces "a logic of exploration and discovery" (Watts & Stenner, 2012, p.96) and an iterative process of trial and error (Watts & Stenner, 2012, p.106).

Factor analysis begins with the computation of correlations, mapping the relationships between all of the Q sorts (McKeown & Thomas, 2013, p.52). If viewed individually, the Q sorts represent 100% of the study variance; the aim of factor analysis is to "account for as much of this study variance as is possible" (Watts & Stenner, 2012, p.98).

Invariably, as factor analysis is a process of reduction, establishing shared perceptions, some unique viewpoints will not be included in the final factor solution. In addition to considering variance, there are a number of statistical processes which a researcher uses to extract factors; the analytical decisions made in this thesis will be explored in Chapter 5.

Factor interpretation

Interpreting the extracted factors relies on researcher knowledge and understanding of the subject to "facilitate a reasonable explication of the data" (McKeown & Thomas, 2013, p.14). It is through the process of interpretation that meaning is given to the outcomes of factor analysis. Despite its importance, very little is written about the actual process (Watts & Stenner, p.147). McKeown and Thomas' (2013) instructional book on Q methodology dedicates very little space to the act of interpretation. They indicate *what* to use in factor interpretation but not *how* to use it. Rather ironically, McKeown and Thomas (2013) argue that factor interpretations are reliable because the statistical methods used to extract factors are not "hidden from view" (McKeown & Thomas, 2013, p.15), whilst they simultaneously fail to illustrate exactly how factor interpretation is carried out. Where McKeown and Thomas (2013) somewhat unhelpfully comment that researchers will simply become more adept over time (p.15), other Q methodologists have more clearly articulated the mechanics of factor interpretation (Albright et al., 2019; Watts & Stenner, 2012). Indeed, Albright et al., (2019) posit that it is imperative to document the rationale and process of a Q study's factor interpretation. This thesis relied on the guidance from Watts and Stenner (2012) because it is very clear about the process of factor analysis and interpretation, supporting researchers who are not experienced statisticians. Moreover, this thesis undertook two, identical Q studies for the purpose of comparing library user and non-user perspectives; Watts and Stenner (2012) are the only theorists who have discussed this process in any detail. Watts and Stenner (2012) also provide very clear guidance about how a researcher can immerse themselves in the data to ensure that factor interpretations explain the patterns presented in the data. The decisions made during the interpretation process and the full factor interpretations are presented in Chapter 6.

2.4.2 Phase Three: qualitative coding

Qualitative coding is used in Phase Three of the thesis. This section provides information about the purpose of the method, the approach used, and the design and processes. More specific details about the design and outputs of Phase Three will then be presented in Chapter 7.

2.4.2.1 Why qualitative coding?

Qualitative coding is a method that turns "unstructured and messy data" (Richards & Morse, 2013, p.149) into findings that enable the researcher to address research questions. It is a "dynamic" (Linneberg & Korsgaard, 2019, p.262) process, which demands that the researcher oscillates between data immersion and the development of "abstract ideas or general themes" (Richards & Morse, 2013, p.151), to give "voice to one's participants" (Linneberg & Korsgaard, 2019, p.262) and present an understanding of the phenomenon. Where quantitative coding is reductive (Richards, 2015), qualitative coding is exploratory and interpretative. According to Richards (2015), qualitative coding has six potential uses which a researcher may combine:

1. to explore, in detail, sections of the data and its meaning;
2. to query the relationships between coding outcomes and "other ideas from the data" (Richards, 2015, p.105);
3. to collate data from multiple sources to be reviewed and compared as a single corpus;
4. to make "further, finer categories" (Richards, 2015, p.105) using cycles of coding;
5. to seek "patterns in attitudes" (Richards, 2015, p.105) about the focus topic;
6. to compare different researchers' interpretations of data.

In exploring how different stakeholder groups define public libraries (Research Question 2) and how these definitions compare (Research Question 3), this thesis drew upon the first five uses as described by Richards (2015).

Qualitative coding requires an iterative approach. Richards and Morse (2013) advise that "analysis does not stop with coding" (p.163); the researcher must move between the data, codes, categories, themes, and ideas to "monitor, revisit, and debate them" (p.164). Meaning does not simply "emerge" (Linneberg & Korsgaard, 2019, p.259) from

the data when undertaking qualitative coding. Instead, it requires the researcher to recognise that they are active in the abstraction of meaning from the data. In this way, qualitative coding is well suited to this thesis' interpretivist theoretical approach. As discussed in Sections 2.2.2 and 2.2.3, interpretivist research embraces a researcher's position *inside* the research; it requires a sensitive awareness of researcher bias and how this can bring value to the findings. Moreover, qualitative coding, just like Q methodology and framework analysis, involves the researcher demonstrating "transparency in how the findings were developed from the data" (Linneberg & Korsgaard, 2019, p.260). In this thesis, all three methods enabled the researcher to illustrate, in detail, the steps between data and interpretation; these steps are presented in Chapters 5 - 8.

With qualitative coding, It is possible to take an inductive, deductive or "blended approach" (Linneberg & Korsgaard, 2019, p.264). Blending enables a researcher to simultaneously stay close to the data (Linneberg & Korsgaard, 2019) and take a more panoramic view across the data to find "patterns" (Richards, 2015, p.104) and "get beneath taken-for-granted messages" (Richards & Morse, 2013, p.164). The blended approach of qualitative coding was suitable for this thesis for three reasons. First, using some inductive practice meant the researcher maintained a proximity to the data. This was important because an overall commitment of the thesis has been to centre the public; "coding *up* from the data" (Richards & Morse, 2013, p.156) helped to ensure that interpretations did not distort that public voice. Second, Phase Three addresses research questions rather than testing specific theory; the blended approach meant that theory could evolve during the process (Linneberg & Korsgaard, 2019) instead of being formed at the outset. Finally, as the qualitative coding was applied to different corpora of data (Chapter 7.2), it was important that this researcher remained "open to surprises in the data" (Linneberg & Korsgaard, 2019, p.264) rather than make assumptions that the same patterns could be found in each corpus.

2.4.2.2 Qualitative coding design and process

Phase Three involved four stakeholder groups: the public, the public library sector, local government and central government. Each stakeholder group was represented by a range of different materials; for example, the statements made by participants in Phase Two were used to explore the public definitions of public libraries. The justification for the selection of materials is provided in Chapter 7. The data from each stakeholder

group was treated separately, so there were four, distinct corpora of materials. This was because this researcher sought, first, to establish how each group defined public libraries and, second, to compare these definitions.

The design began with a process of first and second cycles of coding. However, this researcher concurs with Saldaña's (2016) notion that coding is "reverberative" (p.68) and "cyclical rather than linear" (p.68). Therefore, the overall process in this thesis transitioned into something messier than two coding cycles; it involved the continuous practice of "comparing data to data, data to code, code to code, code to category, category to category, category back to data" (Saldaña, 2016, p.68), in addition to comparisons across the four corpora of materials.

Saldaña (2016) recommends descriptive coding as the first cycle of coding, using a short phrase to identify the topic of an extract of text. This coding encourages greater data familiarisation and, for this reason, it was chosen as the initial coding approach for this thesis. Following the initial coding, subsequent coding cycles seek to interpret meaning in the data. This thesis used pattern coding for the secondary coding which is an "explanatory or inferential" (Saldaña, 2016, p.236) process. Pattern coding analyses the coding from the first cycle (Miles et al., 2014) by grouping and refining codes into categories and broader themes. According to Miles et al. (2014), pattern coding can also help when seeking comparisons between corpora of materials; this made it an ideal approach for Research Question 3, comparing stakeholder definitions of public libraries.

2.4.3 Phase Four: framework analysis

The final phase used an adapted form of framework analysis. This section provides information about why framework analysis was a suitable method and outlines its design and processes. More specific details about its application and process in Phase Four are provided in Chapter 8.

2.4.3.1 Why framework analysis?

Framework analysis is a method first presented by Ritchie and Spencer (2002) as an effective tool for comparing the content of policy documents (Goldsmith, 2021). As such, it was considered a useful method to apply in this thesis because it would be effective for comparing the different types of document across multiple stakeholder groups. Moreover, framework analysis is an effective method for synthesising vast

amounts of data and for drawing out comparisons between data (Parkinson et al., 2016; Ward et al., 2013). This is well matched to the thesis which works with a large dataset of stakeholder groups and the Public Libraries and Museums Act (1964), specifically comparing their perceptions of public libraries. As with Q methodology and qualitative coding, transparency is a bedrock of framework analysis (Kiernan & Hill, 2018; Goldsmith, 2021); thus, it is well suited to the theoretical approach of this thesis (Section 2.2.2).

Framework analysis is a method that is designed to be most effective in research situations with "specific questions, a limited time frame, a pre-designed sample… and a priori issues" (Srivastava & Thomson, 2009, p.73). In the case of the thesis, the specific question was to establish whether the current legislation is adequate for a 21st century public library service (Aim 2). The limited timeframe related both to the research window of 2009 - 2021 (Section 2.3.1) and also to the nature of undertaking a doctoral thesis as a solo researcher. The pre-designed sample comprised the four stakeholder groups and the Public Libraries and Museums Act (1964). Finally, the researcher had a priori knowledge of the stakeholder groups' views of public libraries from the Phase Three outputs. Moreover, the researcher had pre-chosen the issue to explore: how well each of the stakeholder group's definitions mapped onto the legislation and vice versa.

2.4.3.2 Framework analysis design and process

In essence, with framework analysis, a researcher creates and then applies an analytic framework (Goldsmith, 2021). Because this thesis dealt with four distinct corpora of materials, the steps of framework analysis required adaptation. Further details about how framework analysis was modified for this thesis are provided in Chapter 8. However, Table 4 provides a brief overview of the five steps of framework analysis and an introduction to how these were used or adapted in Phase Four of this thesis.

Table 4: application and adaptation of framework analysis used in Phase Four

The five steps of framework analysis (Goldsmith, 2021)	**Application and adaptation of framework analysis used in this thesis**
1. Become familiar with the data	First cycle of coding, descriptive coding, was applied to the materials representing each of the four stakeholder groups. This occurred during Phase Three. In Phase Four, the process was also applied to the Public Libraries and Museums Act (1964).
2. Identify an analytic framework, through "concrete descriptions of themes" (p.2066) and "abstract concepts" (p.2066)	Second cycle coding, pattern coding, was used to generate concepts and themes. In Phase Three, a structured codebook was created for each stakeholder group, which denoted how each group defines public libraries. This process was replicated in Phase Four for the 1964 Act.
3. Index all data against the framework, systematically	The thesis used a bidirectional approach. First, rather than a single framework, the four codebooks were each used as a distinct framework during Phase Four. The 1964 Act was then indexed against each framework in turn. Second, the four stakeholder groups' corpora were then each indexed, separately, against the 1964 Act's framework.
4. Chart and present the indexed data in a matrix format	The indexed data was presented in two formats. First, an intensity chart to show how the stakeholder groups indexed onto the 1964 Act. Second, a comparison table to show how the 1964 Act indexed onto the four stakeholder groups' frameworks.
5. Map and interpret patterns, to draw "comparisons across and within units of analysis and across and within framework components" (p.2071)	The comparison was multifaceted. Each stakeholder group's definition of public libraries was compared to the other groups' definitions, as well as separately compared to the legislation.

Traditionally, as the process of framework analysis concludes, indexing is an "opportunity for framework revision" (Goldsmith, 2021, p.2068); this means a researcher should refine and develop the framework to assimilate new findings. Revision was not appropriate for this thesis because the objective was to use the four

stakeholder frameworks to assess to what extent each stakeholder group's definition of public libraries corresponded to the legislation. Therefore, a poorly performed framework would indicate a discord between that stakeholder group's view and the legal definition of public libraries. This was also true in the obverse, when indexing the stakeholder groups onto the Act's framework.

2.4.4 Potential limitations of the three methods and their mitigations

There are two possible limitations to using Q methodology: the limitations of its purpose and what it can and cannot demonstrate, and the potential experience for participants. The first type of limitation relates to the method's features and purpose. Unlike other research methods, in Q methodology the participants are the variables and the traits (the Q set items) are the sample (Watts & Stenner, 2012, pp.11-12). Because of this, Danielson et al. (2009) caution that a possible limitation of Q methodology is that it reduces "people's expression to the preselected Q statements" (p.95). The concern is that potential viewpoints could be omitted from the study if the P set is not sufficiently extensive, or that a Q set could be "*value-laden* or *biased* towards some particular viewpoint or opinion" (Watts & Stenner, 2012, p.67). Following the advice of Watts and Stenner (2012), the researcher mitigated this issue by striving to ensure the Q set items were "very close to capturing the full gamut of possible opinion and perspective" (p.58): the concourse was very thorough and included over 500 statements from 47 documents; the process of creating the Q set from the concourse was iterative, reflexive and documented (Chapter 5); the researcher also employed extensive piloting. Another associated limitation is that because the participants are not the sample, some researchers criticise that outputs from Q methodology cannot be generalised (Thomas & Baas, 1992). Brown (1980) argues that Q methodology studies do not offer generalisations "in terms of sample and universe, but in terms of *specimen* and *type*" (p.67). Ultimately, this is only a limitation if Q methodology is used within a research project which aims to statistically generalise perceptions of a wider population. Q methodologists assert that there are a limited number of different perceptions of any topic within a population, and it is these which Q methodology can be employed to identify (Brown, 1980). This thesis makes no claim to present the extent to which the views captured in Phase Two are representative of public perceptions about public libraries across England; it has simply established that these perceptions exist (Watts & Stenner, 2012).

The second type of limitation relates to the participant experience of Q methodology. It is reported that undertaking a Q sort can be overwhelming and time consuming (ten Klooster et al., 2008) for participants who are unfamiliar with the method. Due to restrictions related to face-to-face data collection during the pandemic, it was necessary for the researcher to conduct the Q studies via online software rather than in person. This researcher has experience of using Q methodology software to capture and compare the perceptions of library users and other stakeholders in a large, multistage, mixed methods study exploring library services in further education settings (McKenna-Aspell, 2018). This experience meant the researcher was aware of issues that can arise with participants struggling to use the software functions. This was mitigated with pre-recorded guides demonstrating the process with a dummy Q set, published on the thesis website (more information about the website is presented in section 2.6). Moreover, participants were alerted to the time commitment at the outset of recruitment and throughout the informed consent process. Finally, the number of items in the Q set was reduced during the pilot stage to ensure it was manageable for participants whilst remaining representative of the concourse.

Both qualitative coding and framework analysis share two potential limitations: issues relating to limited time frames and concerns about researcher subjectivity. First, in this thesis, both methods entailed working with corpora to represent stakeholder groups. A potential limitation is that a corpus of materials is indicative of one snapshot in time. At any moment, a stakeholder group could publish new materials which affect or alter the viewpoints presented in the original corpus of materials. In this thesis, it was possible to add materials to the corpora during the qualitative coding phase and whilst establishing the public library definitions which were the final outcomes of the qualitative coding process. Indeed, this was the case for the central government corpus, which initially included the 2020-2021 annual report commissioned by DCMS (2021). During the later stages of refining codes, it was clear that a new DCMS annual report had been published with updated content (2022). Ergo, this was included in the corpus and coded. Where new codes were needed, these were also evaluated against the original materials in the corpus and used if required (Chapter 7.2).

The second potential limitation of qualitative coding and framework analysis is a criticism raised against qualitative methods in general: complaints that the inherent subjectivity of the researcher leads to "'made up'" (Braun & Clarke, 2013, p.39) analysis

and reduces the rigour of the research outcomes (Cypress, 2017). In terms of the perceived subjectivity of methods such as qualitative coding and framework analysis, the interpretivist theoretical approach of this thesis positively accepts the researcher's knowledge and experience as an integral part of analysis and interpretation. Braun and Clarke (2013) assert that subjectivity should be taken into account rather than "eliminated from research" (p.39). This thesis embraces the researcher's "role in producing… knowledge" (Braun & Clarke, 2013, p.64), using reflexivity to balance subjectivity. To illustrate the rigour of the qualitative coding and framework analysis outcomes, the researcher ensured that processes and decisions were transparent and "well documented in an audit trail" (Johnson et al., 2020, p.145). Moreover, during the coding and indexing stages of both methods, sufficient time and cycles were built into the design so that consistency could be monitored (Richards & Morse, 2013, p.164). More details about this process are provided in Chapters 7 and 8.

2.5 Ethical considerations

Unsurprisingly, with a multiphase, mixed methods research design, the ethical considerations are complex and many. First, there is an ethical implication related to the author's interpretivist approach and proximity to the research. Any negative impact born of an extensive knowledge of the subject area, such as unconscious assumptions or an identity as a public library user and resident of West Sussex, needed to be recognised and addressed. According to Atkins and Wallace (2012), advantages of insider research include easier access to participants, the potential for deeper disclosures because of an affinity with participants and, as a result, rich, informed, illuminative data. Conversely, insider research can cause concerns of boundary conflict and impartiality (Atkins & Wallace, 2012). Fundamentally, choices were taken by this researcher to actively minimise the impact of these limitations: the self-awareness demanded of an interpretivist approach; a multiphase, mixed methods design with different types of data collection and analysis; careful piloting of the Q sorting task in Phase Two to ensure the Q set was sufficiently representative of the current public library landscape; and blended inductive and deductive approach to coding in Phase Three to first centre the data ahead of any researcher interpretation. In addition, this researcher created a deliberate time-related distance between and within each phase, in terms of design, data collection, analysis and interpretation. This helped to ensure the researcher was open to hearing the "silences in narratives" (Schwartz-Shea & Yanow, 2020, para.17) rather than

leading with predetermined, deductive conclusions. Creating time and space between and within the phases enabled this researcher to foreground the participants' contributions with minimum influence from the outputs of other phases. Later in the analytical process, the multiple phases were then intentionally brought together for comparison.

The research in this thesis has been approved by the Ethics Committee of the University of Sheffield (Appendix 1). To achieve ethical approval, all aspects of Phase Two of the thesis were explained in detail, including the overall design, data collection tools, participant recruitment and approaches to ensure informed consent. Initially, it was possible the later phases of the thesis would involve additional participants for further data collections; therefore, the ethics application clearly states that a separate ethics application would be submitted in this case. As described in Section 2.3, the outcomes from Phase Two and the ongoing restrictions relating to COVID-19 meant the thesis was redesigned so that no further data collection was required. Ergo, no additional ethics applications were submitted.

As per the ethics application, participants for Phase Two were recruited through social media posts; the process and wording for these were included in the application to the Ethics Committee of the University of Sheffield. This method of recruitment enabled the researcher to access potential participants from across West Sussex and also meant potential participants could ask questions about the thesis in an informal setting, as well as through more official channels.

A bespoke website was created for the thesis (Appendix 2 and Chapter 5.5). This provided potential participants with all the information they needed to make an informed choice to participate, in lieu of creating a participant information sheet. All participants were assured that they could withdraw consent up to the point at which they submitted their completed Q sort. It was made clear to participants that after submission, because the data was anonymised, responses could not be isolated to be removed from the dataset. The project website remains live so that participants could return to the information at any time. In the absence of face-to-face data collection, due to the pandemic, it was even more important that information was transparent, accessible and helpful. Before the recruitment window was terminated, 68 participants agreed to participate and completed the Q sort; in the same timeframe, the website

received over 900 visits. This is potential evidence the website was sufficiently informative that people could decide to not participate.

Informed consent was obtained from all participants; this was checked both through the website and again through the Q methodology software. In terms of participation, members of the public remain anonymous in this thesis. The only personal data recorded was each participants' status as either a library user or a non-user. Moreover, by undertaking the Q sort, the participants confirmed that they lived, worked or studied in West Sussex. Their library use status and connection to West Sussex are non-identifying characteristics. Within the thesis, all participants are attributed an alphanumeric designator, based on their library use status. All library non-users are designated NU plus a number, for instance NU2, and all library users are designated U plus a number, for instance U7.

2.6 Conclusion

This chapter has outlined the research position adopted within this thesis. The researcher embraces a social constructionist epistemology and an interpretivist theoretical approach. The research methodology is mixed methods with a leaning towards qualitative data. Throughout the thesis, the researcher's status as an insider researcher has been positively harnessed. Unwanted bias has been deliberately managed: first, through the multiphase, mixed methods thesis design and, second, through the transparent documentation of the data collection and analysis of the three methods.

In clarifying the epistemological, theoretical and methodological approaches of the research, this chapter provides the foundation upon which the subsequent analysis and discussion is based, in all four phases of the research. Moreover, introducing Q methodology, qualitative coding and framework analysis in this chapter has ensured that the decisions made in each phase can be better understood.

Building on this chapter, the next two chapters will present Phase One of the research. This phase sets the scene for the public library landscape in England. First, Chapter 3 provides clarification about key public library terms which are used throughout all four phases of the thesis. Then, Chapter 4 presents the literature review, which acts in proxy of a theoretical framework, and explains the research gaps.

PHASE ONE: ESTABLISHING THE PUBLIC LIBRARY LANDSCAPE

CHAPTER 3: DEFINING KEY CONCEPTS

This short chapter presents the definitions of key concepts related to public libraries which are pertinent to this thesis.

3.1 Introduction

Chapter 3 helps to establish the public library landscape in England by defining key concepts which will be used throughout the thesis: types of public libraries; their philosophy and governance; and library users and non-users. The first aim of the thesis is to explore public perceptions of public libraries, from the perspective of library users and non-users. To that end, it is important to first establish what constitutes a public library in England (Section 3.2), the foundations of the service (section 3.3), and also to define library use and non-use (Section 3.5). The second research aim considers the adequacy of the Public Libraries and Museums Act (1964) for a 21st century service. Therefore, this chapter also introduces basic information about public library legislation and governance in England (Section 3.4) ahead of Phase Four's evaluation of its capacity to reflect a contemporary service.

The description of these concepts precedes the literature review (Chapter 4) so that the reader has a clear overview of the key terms related to the themes in the literature and also of the researcher's position regards library users and non-users. Providing the information in a separate chapter is designed to ease the readability of the literature review.

3.2 Public libraries: an introduction to the different types

Created in the mid-nineteenth century following the Public Libraries Act (1850), public libraries in England enabled universal access to reading materials, regardless of class or income. They were established to increase the access to information and education for the working class population (Chowdhury et al., 2008; McMenemy, 2009a; Independent Mind, 2019). Public libraries were also established to fulfil a leisure role for those with limited income, opportunities and options (McMenemy, 2009a). Public libraries are a statutory service, legislated for by the Public Libraries and Museums Act (1964). According to the Department for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport [DCMS] (2018a), there are four types of library accessible to the public in England, as detailed in Table 5.

Table 5: types of library available to the public

Type of library	Details	Staffing	Status
Local authority run library	● Funded and managed by the local authority. ● Defined as a public library.	● It can be staffed or unstaffed.	Statutory service.
Commissioned library	● Operated by a third party: trust, charity, organisation or business. ● Defined as a public library. ● The responsibility of the local authority.	● It can be staffed or unstaffed.	Statutory service.
Community run library	● Operated by the community. ● Supported by the local authority in terms of arrangements like service level agreements. ● Defined as a public library only when the local authority considers it part of its statutory duty. ● Sometimes referred to as volunteer run library.	● Usually operated by volunteers. ● Sometimes it employs paid staff. ● It can be staffed or unstaffed.	It can be a statutory or non-statutory service.
Independent community library	● Operated by the community or by a third party. ● Not defined as a public library. ● Not part of the local authority provision.	● It can be staffed or unstaffed.	Non-statutory service.

(DCMS, 2018a)

3.3 Public libraries: the foundations of the service

This thesis sets out to consider how different stakeholders, including the public, perceive public libraries and their services (Research Questions 2 and 3); to do so first raises questions about the foundations of public libraries and their purpose. Within existing literature, four broad views exist about the purpose of public libraries. The first is associated with the early work of Ranganathan. In his account, libraries were defined by five laws that offer a useful indication of their underlying principles. Specifically, Ranganathan's (1931) five laws state that: "books are for use" (p.1); "every person his or her book" (p.75); "every book its reader" (p.299); "save the time of the reader" (p.337); and a "library is a growing organism" (p.382). More recently, scholarship has sought to

view these laws through a more modern lens (Carr, 2014; Connaway & Faniel, 2014; McMenemy, 2007c), particularly if 'book' is reframed as 'information'. For instance, McMenemy (2007c) explains that Ranganathan's first law is relevant to a modern philosophy of libraries because it refutes the idea of libraries simply "storing books" (p.98) and instead it indicates that they are "about people having access to books" (p.98). Indeed, in his first three laws, Ranganathan (1931) mirrors the contemporary concept of open access: a fundamental tenet of public libraries according to academic and sector literature (International Federation of Library Associations and Institutions [IFLA], 1999; Chowdhury et al., 2008; Gill et al., 2001; Arts Council England [ACE], 2018). Ranganathan's (1931) fourth law speaks to the experience people should have in a library when seeking information, supported by logical systems and experienced staff (pp.356-369). McMenemy (2007c) asserts that as the world and libraries have moved from "analogue" (p.99) to "virtual" (p.99), the fourth law has become even more relevant. The final law relates libraries to organisms, warning they can "petrify and perish" (Ranganathan, 1931, p.382) if they do not grow and evolve. The literature review (Chapter 4.2.3) explores the tensions that can arise when there is disagreement about the nature of this growth and evolution. Overall, the relevance of Ranganathan's laws for a modern public library service is due to their unwavering focus on the user's needs or the ability of public libraries to meet them (Carr, 2014).

In addition to Ranganathan's (1931) key work, a second view is that public libraries are not just a statutory right but also a fundamental human right. Specifically in terms of the public's right to access information and reading material for educational, cultural, entertainment, and self-development purposes (IFLA, 1999; Chartered Institute of Library and Information Professionals [CILIP], n.d.a; Gill et al., 2001).

A third view of the foundation of public libraries is that they should centre the user. IFLA (1999) asserts that public libraries should even be answerable to the public rather than their funding sources: an argument that sits well with Ranganathan's (1931) first four laws. Lankes (2016) agrees that users are at the heart of public libraries. Moreover, in agreement with Ranganathan's (1931) fifth law, Lankes also emphasises there should be an interdependent relationship between libraries and their communities based on a "continuous change process" ("Salzburg," para.16) which leads to improvement for both, as well as for sustainability.

The fourth view moves beyond the relationship between public library and individual users into a broader responsibility. Chowdhury et al. (2008) assert that the purpose of a public library is to also service the needs of the community and society, as well as library users, by using "a rich set of scientific, social science and humanistic theories, principles and skills to facilitate the creation, organization, management and dissemination of knowledge" (p.6). Sieghart (2014) describes public libraries as depositories of reading materials but also as bastions of "empowerment" (p.6) because they "enrich" lives (Libraries Connected, 2019a, para. 1) by forging an infrastructure that connects individuals and communities to society through lifelong learning, education and literacy (Libraries Connected, 2019a; Sieghart, 2014). In a news article, CILIP (2018) takes this further by claiming that public libraries benefit society by "improving literacy, health and well-being, developing skills and supporting economic growth" (para. 3). Nick Poole, CILIP CEO, argues that from their inception, public libraries were not just about books because a public library serves three purposes: "access to learning, access to knowledge and a free and open platform for civic engagement" (in Anstice, 2017, para.10). Usherwood (2007b) argues that a public library's capacity to contribute to social inclusion is specifically focused on its core purpose of connecting users to knowledge and information.

The differences of opinion about the core tenets of a public library service are further explored in the literature review (Chapter 4.2.2 – 4.2.3). Moreover, the issue of the fundamental purpose of public libraries is a focus of the second and third research questions (explored in Phase Three):

- Research Question 2: How do different stakeholder groups define public libraries: the public, central government, local government and the public library sector?
- Research Question 3: How do these different stakeholder definitions compare?

3.4 Public libraries: legislation and governance

As the second aim of the thesis is to explore the existing legislation and its adequacy for a contemporary service, this section explains the basic details about how public libraries are currently governed at a national and local level.

Public libraries are a statutory entitlement in England, legislation for by the Public Libraries and Museums Act (1964). The Act stipulates that the public in England and Wales should receive a "free and effective library service" (Culture, Media and Sport Committee, 2012, p.5). Two sections of the Public Libraries and Museums Act (1964) relate specifically to the delivery of library services. First, Section 7 explains that the library service is expected to be "comprehensive and efficient" (Section 7(1)) and must ensure:

- access to books and materials loanable to anyone living, working or studying in the library's area (Section 7(1));
- "the keeping of adequate stocks" (Section 7(2)(a)) which includes books, printed matter and gramophone records (Section 7(2)(a));
- stock is "sufficient in number, range and quality to meet the general requirements and any special requirements both of adults and children" (Section 7(2)(a));
- children and adults are encouraged to engage with public libraries (Section 7(2)(b));
- the provision of advice and guidance about information retrieval (Section 7(2)(b));
- "full co-operation between the persons engaged in carrying out those functions" (Section 7(2)(c));
- no charges are levied for the loaning of printed materials (Section 8(3)).

Second, Section 8 of the Public Libraries and Museums Act (1964) relates to service fees, prohibiting libraries from charging users for browsing or borrowing any print publication which is "readable without the use of any electronic or other apparatus" (Section 8(3)(c)). Section 8 permits libraries to use "discretion as to the amount of any charge made" (Section 8(5)(a)) for other services but mandates that such charges must be clearly promoted to the public.

In addition to the two main library sections of the Act, Section 19 permits the creation and use of byelaws. The byelaws, which are to be written by local authorities, are focused on library user behaviour and actions within library spaces, towards staff and in relation to the stock and environment. Their purpose is to support library staff to execute their roles (DCMS & Glen, 2017). An updated template for the byelaws was

published by the central government in 2017 but it is not mandatory for local authorities to adopt them in their library services (DCMS & Glen, 2017). There are examples in the byelaws which could be understood to contradict the basic tenets of public libraries, explored in Section 3.3 and in Chapter 4: inclusion, access for all, and social justice (Independent Mind, 2019; Libraries Connected, 2019a; Sieghart, 2014). For instance, point 17 of the byelaws forbids refreshments in library spaces, without the express permission of staff, which is not inclusive for those who may have a particular need. Another example is point 4, which allows library staff to prohibit members of the public from using the library if the staff judge them to be unclean or unhygienic; this does not engender a sense of access for all.

The legislation places public libraries in the jurisdiction of local authorities in England and Wales. Local authorities are accountable for planning and development, culture and related services, highways and transport, housing, environmental and regulatory services, children's social care, central services and adult social care. Public libraries are situated within their cultural responsibility. Whilst decisions about public library services are made by local authorities, they are superintended by a Secretary of State (Public Libraries and Museums Act, 1964; Goulding, 2006). The two central government ministries linked to the provision of libraries are the DCMS, which superintends libraries, and the Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities [DLUHC][2], which is responsible for local governance. Central government coordinates its relationship with local government through the Department. The structural relationship between central and local government is composite due to statutory duties intersecting with a number of different ministries of state, arm's-length bodies, and regulators with local government (National Audit Office, 2017b; Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government [MHCLG], 2018a).

The statutory role and functions of local government are detailed in the Local Government Act (2000) and The Local Authorities (Functions and Responsibilities) (England) Regulations (2000); they indicate how responsibilities are divided between the Council and the Executive (Sebastian, 2019). Sebastian (2019) states the purpose of the

[2] The Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government [MHCLG] became the Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities in 2023, just as this thesis was finalised.

dual legislation was to cause local government to mirror central government by simplifying decision making with streamlined accountability, but he argues this approach further complicated local governance. In response, the Coalition Government increased decentralisation with The Localism Act (2011), enabling local authorities to make more localised decisions and providing "rights and powers for communities and individuals" (DCMS, 2011, p.3). This localised approach is a strong theme in the legislation governing public libraries (Goulding, 2006) and in the central government's responses to public library issues over the last decade. Governments have frequently reiterated that the Public Libraries and Museums Act (1964) calls on the Secretary of State solely to superintend library services and that local authorities have ultimate responsibility to provide public libraries and decide on the details (Charteris, 2009; Conway, 2008; Davies, 2014; MHCLG, 2018b; Vaizey, 2015). One aspect of superintendence is to undertake inquiries into public libraries, particularly planned closures and changes to service. Woodhouse (2016) reports that the Secretary of State commissioned the inquiry into the proposed changes to the library service by the Metropolitan Borough Council in Wirral, in 2009, but there have been none since despite a number of complaints about funding cuts. The result of the inquiry was the eponymous Charteris report (2009). It is the only time, since the legislation's inception, that a local authority has been considered in breach of its statutory duty to provide a "comprehensive and efficient" (Public Libraries and Museums Act, 1964, Section 7(1)) library service. The fundamental reason for this decision was the fact that the Council had failed to carry out a local needs analysis and, therefore, could not know whether its proposed service would be comprehensive or efficient (Charteris, 2009). Charteris (2009) criticised the Council for assuming "that a local service is not an efficient one" (p.54) and for failing to ascertain how their existing model of library service could be adapted to become more efficient.

Many view devolved governance of public libraries as an advantage to the service as it enables a localised approach that reacts to communities and local needs (Charteris, 2009; DCMS, 2020; Goulding, 2006; Independent Mind, 2019; Local Government Association [LGA], 2017). However, in his 2008 report for CILIP, Conway asserts that central government is deliberately detached from local authority governance of public libraries and that local authorities "know it is most unlikely any real action will be taken by DCMS as a consequence of a reduction in service standards" (p.12). Davies (2014) supports this stance and contends the role of the Secretary of State to superintend

public library services (Public Libraries and Museums Act, 1964, Section 10(1)) is ineffective because it is rarely invoked. Even the Culture, Media and Sport Committee (2012) is bold in its assessment that "the current situation [...], where the Secretary of State has considerable reserve powers but is unwilling at present to use them, satisfies no one" (p.42). CILIP claims its investigations demonstrate that the guidance to local authorities lacks legal-compliance and has enabled them to make "discretionary decisions about their services which risk flouting the law" (Flood, 2015, para.6). Indeed, the updated guidance for local authorities produced by the DCMS (2020a) begins with a disclaimer that the guidance "should not in any way be taken as formal legal advice or be used as the basis for formal council decisions" (para. 1), which echoes the points raised by Conway (2008), Davies (2014) and CILIP (Flood, 2015).

At a national level, Public libraries in England are legislated for and overseen by central government through the 1964 Act and the powers therein for the Secretary of State to superintend. Locally, public libraries are the statutory responsibility of local authorities, which fund and govern them (supported by byelaws). As a result of this two tier governance model, both local government and central government perceptions are included in Phase Three of this thesis when exploring and comparing stakeholder definitions of public libraries. Other points of interest regarding governance, agendas, and legislation content affecting public libraries will be further explored in Chapter Four.

3.5 Public libraries: users and non-users

It is important to define library user and non-user as this thesis seeks to identify and compare their perceptions of public libraries when addressing Research Question 1. Moreover, the terms are defined, or not, differently in other studies.

Existing academic and sector-led studies have varied approaches to defining users and non-users. For instance, in 2015, Fujiwara et al. published a report commissioned by ACE focusing on the health and wellbeing benefits of public libraries. They referred to participants as library visitors and non-visitors. In their 2005 article examining public libraries and leisure, Hayes and Morris omitted to provide a definition of users. The most frequently cited definition is derived from the DCMS' annual *Taking Part* survey. Since 2013, the survey asks participants whether they have used the service in the last 12 months, including visiting a library, using a mobile library, visiting a library website, communicating with a library via email or telephone, accessing an outreach service, or

attending a library event held offsite (DCMS, 2016a). This line of questioning recognises that public libraries go beyond the boundaries of their buildings. That said, DCMS continues to headline library visitation figures in their reports and factsheets, synonymising library use with library attendance (DCMS, 2016a, 2016b, 2020b). ACE, the arm's-length body responsible for libraries, also refers to library users as visitors (Fujiwara et al., 2015). Its predecessor, The Museums, Libraries and Archives Council [MLA] (2010a), argues that defining the notion of user is complex because often participants are not sure how to describe their use. MLA (2010a) states a user is a member of the library, who self-defines as a library user and has used the service within the last year. In comparison, a lapsed user is also a library member but someone who has not used the service within the last year. Finally, a non-user is someone who is not a member of the library, does not self-define as a library user, and has not used a service in the last 5 years or ever.

In exploring the different perceptions of library users and non-users (Phase Two: Chapters 5 and 6), this thesis combines and refines the definitions offered by the DCMS (2016a, 2016b, 2020b) and MLA (2010a). For the purpose of this thesis, a library user is anyone over the age of 16 who has used a public library service in any format within the last five years and a non-user is someone over the age of 16 who has not accessed any aspect of a library service within the last five years. As per elements of the DCMS *Taking Part* survey (2019a), library use will encapsulate all aspects of the service, such as telephone consultations and eBook borrowing. Moreover, those individuals who might self-define as a lapsed or infrequent user will be included because this study focuses on capturing perceptions of public libraries: anyone who has used the service within the last five years will have contemporary experiences upon which to draw. The MLA (2010a) specification of library users as members has not been included in the definition for this research as accessing features of a public library service do not always require membership.

3.6 Summary

For the purpose of this thesis, the following terms are thus defined. A public library service is the statutory provision of public libraries, delivered by a local authority and superintended by the Secretary of State. A public library is any local authority run library, commissioned library or community run library which forms part of the local

authority's statutory provision. Library users are adults who have used any part of a public library service, no matter how infrequently, within the last five years. Library non-users are adults who have not used any part of a public library service within the last five years.

CHAPTER 4: LITERATURE REVIEW

This chapter first explores the methods employed to gather and explore literature. Following this, it presents the significant topics arising from the literature and, thereafter, the relationship between the literature and this thesis.

4.1 Approach and scope

As discussed in greater detail in Chapter 2, the literature review in this thesis "acts as a proxy for theory" (Bryman, 2016, p.20) and as a foundation for the research questions (O'Leary, 2017) which stem from the topics discovered in the literature. As a result, the literature was not searched with predefined questions in mind but rather with the two thesis aims instead:

> **Aim 1:** To identify public perceptions of public libraries in England and the services they provide.
> **Aim 2:** To establish whether the current legislation is adequate for a 21st century service.

The majority of the literature is focused on England or the UK, and published from 2009 onwards, in line with the boundaries established in Chapter 2.3.1. This date range is significant, as explained in Chapters 1 and 2, because the seminal Charteris report was published in 2009, impacting the public library landscape in many ways which are explored throughout this chapter. In addition, there were seismic political changes from 2010 onwards; these are discussed in Section 4.2. A few texts predating 2009 are included because they were considered of merit (such as the Public Libraries and Museums Act, 1964) and/or because they were cited by other authors post-2009 whose work is included in the literature review (such as Conway, 2008, and Dolan, 2007).

The literature review began with exploratory and surveying (Ellis & Haugan, 1997) approaches to information seeking. This enabled a greater familiarity with multiple complex domains (Savolainen, 2018), such as the authority of local and central government in the public library domain or the multifaceted challenges facing the public library sector. Subsequently, a more structured approach was established, in the form of a reading plan (sample in Appendix 3), to ensure initial information searches were both broad and deep. This led to an "improved level of problem comprehension" (Savolainen,

2018, p.581). Consequently, the process was transformed into a blend of exploratory and structured searching: for example, exploratory search outcomes were used to update the synonyms on the reading plan. This method complements the inductive-deductive approach of the research (Chapter 2) because it is dynamic, reflective and embraces the notion that information needs will evolve or diverge as the topic is better understood by the researcher. Table 6 indicates the exploratory and structured search methods utilised during the literature review.

Table 6: search methods

Exploratory search methods	**Structured search methods**
Surveying: initially sweeping the topic to develop necessary lexicon for future searches (Ellis & Haugan, 1997)	Planning: preparing and using keywords, synonyms, controlled vocabularies and taxonomies (SCONUL, 2011) in addition to deciding where to locate information
Chaining: reviewing the bibliographic references of useful articles to find content on similar themes (Ellis & Haugan, 1997)	Filtering: using limitations and mechanisms, such as date ranges, to ensure most relevant information is found (Ellis & Haugan, 1997)
Encountering: discovering information that relates to a different but pertinent topic (Erdelez, 1999) and using organisational tools to capture it for later use	Monitoring: using tools, such as alerts, to "keep up-to-date with developments" in the field (Ellis & Haugan, 1997, p.397)
Berrypicking: using search queries which continually evolve as the researcher's understanding develops; using formal and informal sources (Bates, 1989), such as databases compared to practitioner outputs	Evaluating / distinguishing: making decisions about the most important information and culling information that is not helpful (Ellis & Haugan, 1997; SCONUL, 2011)

The literature review includes multiple types of source: academic articles, books and research; reports, studies and publications from public library sector bodies and charities; outputs from leading public library practitioners; local and central government documents, reports, policies and committee papers; data and reports from independent non-ministerial departments and non-departmental public bodies (NDPBs); Acts of Parliament and judicial proceedings. In this thesis, grey literature is included for four reasons. First, it provides a broader, richer context and understanding of the public library landscape in England beyond what is covered in academic literature (Adams et

al., 2016, p.438; Paez, 2017, p.236 & p.237). This is in keeping with the social constructionist approach of the thesis (Chapter 2.2.1) which argues that meaning is constructed through contextualised social interaction. In this case, the reality of public libraries in England is not solely reflected in academic literature; the grey literature helps to complete the picture. For instance, the Public Libraries and Museums Act (1964) is the main focus of Aim 2 and it is through grey literature that its application can be better understood.

Second, the inclusion of grey literature helps to present a more detailed historical context from 2009 to date (see Chapter 2.3.1 for the temporal boundaries of this thesis). Third, including grey literature means that it is also possible to reflect on reported trends in the public library landscape which are absent in the academic literature (Paez, 2017, p.236), with topical data and statistics. Finally, solely focusing on academic literature would not paint the full "balanced picture" (Paez, 2017, p.233) for public libraries in England since 2009 for three reasons: first, there are only a limited number of academic studies into public perceptions of public libraries (see section 4.3); second, public libraries are not only the subjects of academic study, they are also subject to governmental policy and law, and changes thereto; and third, both central government and public library sector bodies and charities produce or commission research and data reports about public libraries.

The decision to include grey literature means that a systematic literature review or "lookup search" (Savolainen, 2018, p.581) would have potentially limited the outcomes. Thus, the range of exploratory and structured search methods detailed in Table 6 were employed instead. Each source of grey literature was also scrutinised with Tyndall's (2008) model to assess its potential inclusion (Figure 3).

Figure 3: model for assessing grey literature

Authority	Does it have a reliable, credible source: organisation or individual author(s)?
Accuracy	Can it be verified or validated? Does it have a clear and stated aim?
Coverage	Does it have a specific, articulated context and parameters?
Objectivity	Is it balanced and/or does it acknowledge bias?
Date	Does it have a clear publication date and does it cite contemporary resources?
Significance	Is it meaningful and does it enrich the research?

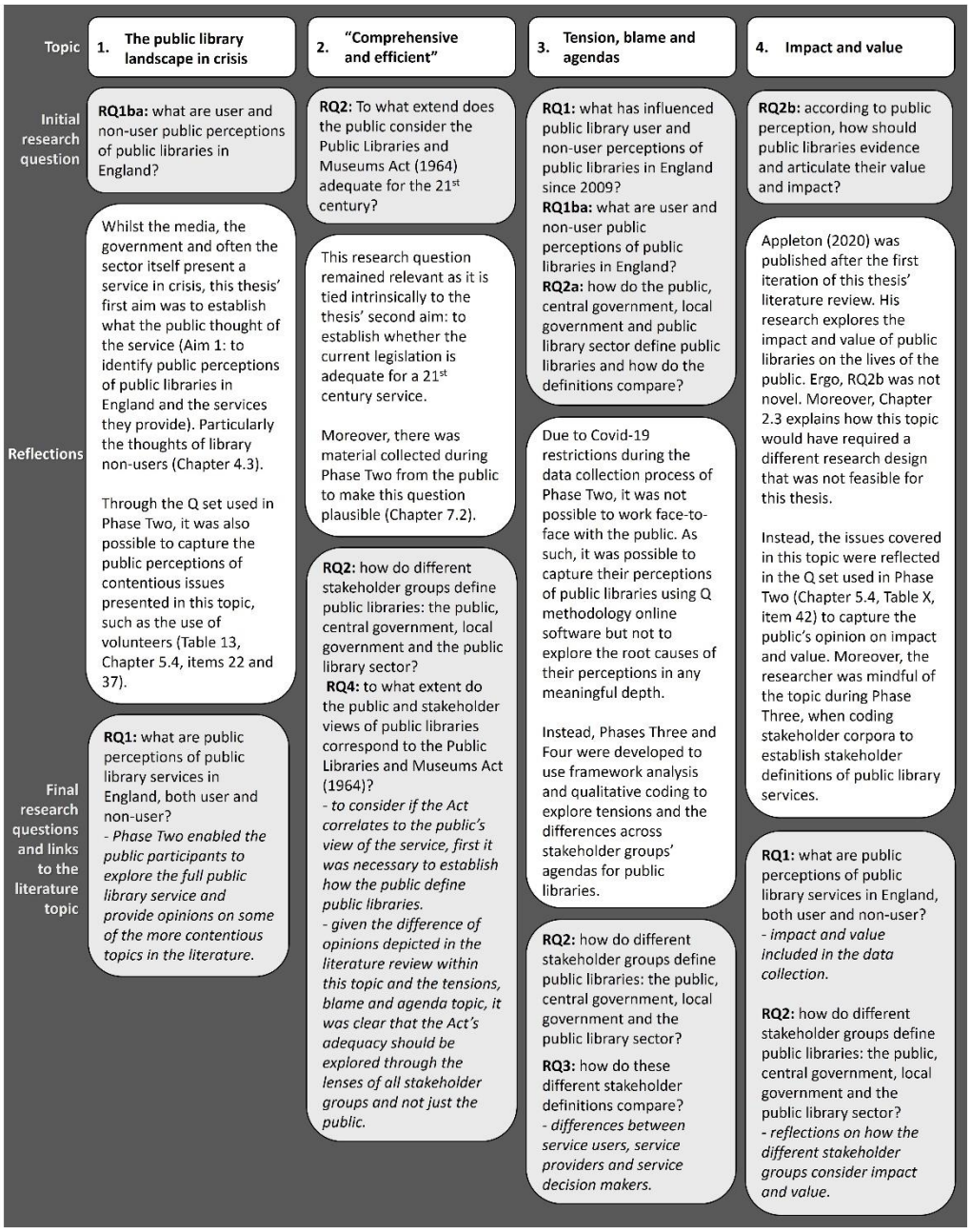
(based on Tyndall, 2008 and 2010)

4.2 Key topics and research questions arising from the literature

With public perceptions of public libraries and the adequacy of the 1964 Act at the forefront of the literature search (Section 4.1), four broad topics were apparent across the literature that informed the identification of the initial research questions. First, the idea that England's public library landscape is in crisis. Second, the problem of the 1964 Act's key phrase, "comprehensive and efficient" (Public Library and Museum Act, 1964, Section 7(1)), and other issues arising from the legislation. Third, the notion of tensions, both in the discourse regarding the root cause of the reported decline in public library use and also in terms of the conflicting agendas impacting and shaping the service. Finally, the notion of how a public library service evidences and articulates its impact and value.

Chapter 2.3 explained how the research questions were developed over the course of the thesis, in response to the data collection and outcomes, and also in response to emerging literature. Figure 4 illustrates how the four literature topics relate to the original research questions and to the final version of the research questions.

Figure 4: developing research questions in relation to topics from the literature



To ease the reading of the chapter, the finalised research questions (Chapter 2.3) are provided again:

- Research Question 1: What are public perceptions of public library services in England, both user and non-user?
- Research Question 2: How do different stakeholder groups define public libraries: the public, central government, local government and the public library sector?

- Research Question 3: How do these different stakeholder definitions compare?
- Research Question 4: To what extent do the public and stakeholder views of public libraries correspond to the Public Libraries and Museums Act (1964)?

4.2.1 The public library landscape in crisis

The perception of a service in crisis is evident across the literature. This section explores the topic in relation to the emotive language used to describe public libraries in England, the causes of the perceived crisis, issues relating to library closures and accurate data reporting, public library funding, staffing and the question of volunteerism, and declining public use of libraries.

The emotive language used to convey the current public library landscape depicts a service in crisis (Appleton et al., 2018). In academic sources, the situation is described as a "fragile" (Casselden et al., 2019, p.874) and "bleak" (Hariff & Rowley, 2011, p.346), coupled with reports that usage is declining at an accelerating rate (McCahill et al., 2020). Furthermore, McMenemy (2007a) asserts that the "public library is a service that constantly has to defend its right to exist" (p.273); Goulding suggests the situation is "volatile" (2006, p.3) and that libraries could suffer from "a slow and lingering death" (2013, p.489); and Coates (2019) maintains that there is a "current rush towards extinction" (p.3). Publications from organisations who support the sector are equally emotive: the current climate for public libraries is "leading to fragmentation, loss of infrastructure and skills in the workforce" (Independent Mind, 2019, p.3) and a "lack of consistency in the public library offer" (Independent Mind, 2019, p.3). Prevalent practitioner voices, such as Ian Anstice of Public Libraries News, describe many of the difficulties faced by the sector as "grim" (2015, para. 2). Outputs from or supported by central government equally share this tone: the Sieghart report (2014), commissioned by the Department for Culture, Media and Sport [DCMS], declares that public libraries are at a "crossroads" (p.4) due to the "severe financial situation" (p.4). In 2018, the chief executive officer (CEO) of the Chartered Institute of Public Finance and Accountancy [CIPFA] called libraries "the canary in the coalmine" (CIPFA, 2018b, para.6); a phrase he has since repeated in other articles (Whiteman, 2019, para. 7). Moreover, The Chartered Institute of Library and Information Professionals [CILIP] and The Big Issue (2019) produced a report which was endorsed by the All Party Parliamentary Group for

Libraries: it states that public libraries are “at risk” (p.3) and “in the firing line” (p.3). The language of libraries in England is frequently portentous or melancholic.

The literature indicates the perceived crisis has several potential causes: changes in governance, funding and austerity issues, a lack of accurate statistics, and a number of sector-specific challenges. The Charteris report (2009) was pivotal as the first and only inquiry ordered by the Secretary of State to investigate whether a local authority was in breach of its statutory duty. Since its publication, the literature shows that the public library sector has undergone several governance changes and issues which are presented here for context. For example, there have been many changes in central government, from the Labour Party, to a coalition government, to the Conservative Party. In addition, central government promoted a more localised approach to governance with the introduction of the Localism Act (2011), designed to afford local authorities greater freedoms and autonomy (Department for Communities and Local Government, 2011, p.4). Moreover, it is the Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities [DLUHC] which oversees local governance through the local accountability framework (National Audit Office [NAO], 2020b; Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government [MHCLG], 2018a) and the publication of the Local Government Accountability System Statement. Each ministry codifies its approach to managing the relationship with local government in the annual Accounting Officer System Statement as illustrated in “A short guide to local authorities” (NAO, 2017b). DCMS, which oversees public library provision in England and Wales, is absent from this map despite its provision of grant funding to local government (DCMS, 2018b).

As the then NDPB for public libraries, the Museums, Libraries and Archive Council [MLA], published its 2007 *Blueprint for excellence* (Dolan, 2007) arguing a need to position public libraries at the centre of local *and* central government agendas. However, just three years later, MLA then issued a report advocating public library double devolvement: “the transfer of power and accountability from local government to local organisations” (MLA, 2010c, p.11) to secure public library sustainability. A few months after the publication of the report, MLA was disbanded by the coalition Government during “a far-reaching quango reform agenda” (Dommett et al., 2014, p.135). In 2011, responsibility for libraries was moved to a different executive NDPB, Arts Council England [ACE], which has a wider remit than MLA encapsulating “skills, knowledge and networks to help establish the conditions in which creativity and culture can flourish

across the country" (ACE, n.d.a, para.1). Three years after this change, Sieghart's (2014) independent report commissioned by the government, concluded that libraries actually needed more focused strategic guidance and support from central government, not just from DCMS and local authorities. Consequently, the Libraries Taskforce was established, sponsored by DCMS and the Local Government Association [LGA], "to offer leadership and assistance in reinvigorating the public library sector" (O'Bryan, 2018, p.4). Funding for the taskforce was limited from 2015 to 2020 and ACE assumed much of its work from 2019 (Cowdrey, 2019). In summary, in the decade since the Charteris report (2009), public libraries have been governed or guided by three governments, two executive NDPBs, a commissioned taskforce and their own local authorities.

During this period of successive change, the literature suggests that reports about public library closures and service reductions have been contentious and this is evidenced in the parliamentary responses of DCMS. In response to a written question from MP Clive Betts querying the number of public library closures, Edward Vaizey, the then Minister of State for Culture and Digital Economy, estimated that 110 public libraries had closed between 2010 and 2016 but that 77 new libraries had opened, implying a total closure of 33 (DCMS, 2016c). CILIP, a chartered membership organisation that supports the public library sector, contested this, calling the figures "flawed" (Poole, 2016, p.1). CILIP (2016) instead argued that figures from CIPFA were more accurate, presenting a net closure of 178 libraries between 2009 and 2015. In comparison to this data, the BBC (BBC News, 2016) used a process of freedom of information requests to ascertain that 343 libraries had closed in the UK between 2010 and 2016, with a further 232 being transferred to community groups or other organisations. In 2017, John Glen, (Parliamentary Under-Secretary for the Department for DCMS) responded to MP Jim Cunningham's written question by justifying DCMS' decision to not keep detailed records of library closures because they would be a duplication of the data created by the Libraries Taskforce (DCMS, 2017e). In response to a House of Lords question raised by Lord Hain in 2019 querying the precise number of closures since 2010, Lord Ashton of Hyde (Parliamentary Under-Secretary for the Department for DCMS) admitted that the Department "monitors proposed changes to library service provision throughout England but does not hold complete figures on the number of public libraries closed since 2010" (DCMS, 2019b, para.2). Anstice (reported in BBC News, 2016) implies the unclear picture on public libraries is purposeful on the part of local authorities which

have “learnt early on how unpopular simply closing libraries is so they have had to cut the vital service in other, less obvious ways” (para.14).

When considering whether or not England’s public library service is in crisis, accurate and reliable data is a necessity. However, alongside the discrepancy in the reported number of public library closures in the literature, there is a debate about the effectiveness of public library data in England. Nick Poole, CEO for CILIP, argues that the annual reports produced by CIPFA “are the most robust and universal dataset published on public libraries in England” (Poole, 2016, p.1). Despite this, O’Bryan, with the Libraries Taskforce, produced a report for DCMS in 2018 refuting the accuracy and helpfulness of “one of the most referenced sources of data on British public libraries” (O’Bryan, 2018, p.5). O’Bryan (2018) argues that the reports are only used by libraries, campaigners and the media “due to a lack of any alternative national figures” (p.64). According to O’Bryan (2018), the reports are problematic in five areas: structure, inconsistency, standardisation, variables and measurement, and accuracy. O’Bryan (2018) asserts that these issues, coupled with their lack of open access, cause the data to be unhelpful in terms of analysing national, year-on-year trends. More recently, a sector support organisation, Libraries Connected (2022), has disputed the usefulness of the annual CIPFA data, claiming it “tells us more about the data systems and structures for libraries than the libraries themselves” (para.1). Moreover, Libraries Connected (2022) is critical of the timescale of the datasets produced by CIPFA because it takes up to a year for them to reach libraries so “it’s too little, too late” (para.6) to have meaningful impact on planning and strategic decisions. Despite the criticisms evident in the literature, the reports published by CIPFA continue to be the primary source of statistical evidence for the annual House of Commons Library research service briefing papers (Woodhouse & Zayed, 2021). In 2016, DCMS published an extended dataset detailing statutory and non-statutory public libraries in England, including closures, opening hours and staffing (DCMS, 2018). This has not since been updated so it is seven years out of date at the point this thesis was published. However, in 2019, the Libraries Taskforce and sector professionals were participants in a workshop hosted by DCMS to “revive work on creating a core dataset for public libraries” (Back, 2020, para.1). The result would be a data schema (Back, 2020; Rowe et al., n.d.) designed to capture details about libraries, library events, loans, membership, mobile library stops, footfall, and stock. The schema’s creators argue that the system to collect data is not the most significant hurdle; rather,

convincing library services and professionals to use it and appreciate its usefulness pose the greater challenge (Back, 2020, para.12).

In summary, despite the criticisms in the literature about the CIPFA data, it remains the only regularly collected and published data about public libraries in England. Moreover, during the period of ongoing challenges since 2009, the literature demonstrates there is no universally accepted, up-to-date data about public libraries, their closures or the public's use of them.

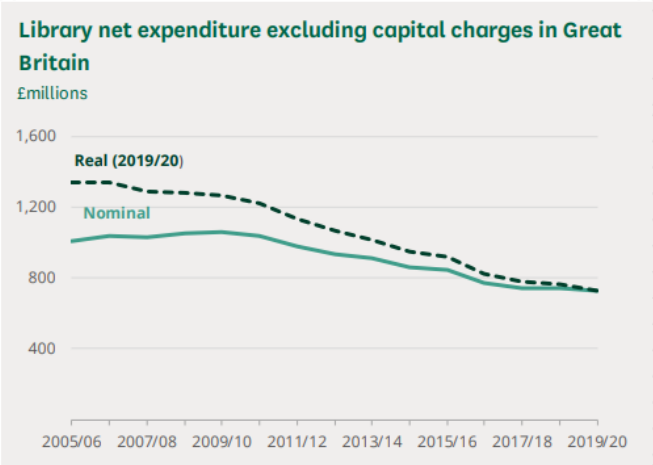
Notwithstanding the controversy surrounding the reporting of closures, all available figures from academic sources, government reports and sector body publications suggest another crisis for public libraries in England: evidence that investment in libraries over the last decade has decreased (CILIP & The Big Issue, 2019; CIPFA, 2023; Goulding, 2013; NAO, 2018; Serio, 2017; Woodhouse & Zayed, 2021; CIPFA, 2022 & 2023). DLUHC is responsible for presenting the annual determination of funding to local governments. This funding is derived from a number of central government departments as well as council tax, capital receipts and business rates (NAO, 2018, 2020b). Elements of this capital and revenue expenditure can be directed by the local authority; in some instances, the local authority is merely the conduit and in other instances, the funding is devolved but the spending restricted to specific statutory duties. There is no statutory ring-fenced funding for libraries, and it is the decision of local authorities how to allocate funding to them. According to central government, this position is unlikely to change:

The Government's position is that local government funding should be non-ringfenced. This has been a long-established Government principle based on the premise that giving greater funding flexibility to local authorities supports them to make spending decisions based on their local needs and priorities. Removing ringfencing also supports good, efficient financial management at a local level and promotes the government's agenda of localism (MHCLG, 2018, para.6)

The 2018 NAO report investigating the financial sustainability of local authorities notes that local authority spending on all statutory duties and services, excluding those related to social care, has decreased by 32.6% in real-terms since 2010/11. In 2017/18, local authorities spent £2.2bn on culture and related services but this only represents 5.4% of total revenue spending by local authorities (NAO, 2020b, p.6). Additional evidence of

funding pressures and the paucity of the spend on library services was highlighted by NAO (2017b) which reported a 34.7% decrease in expenditure on culture and leisure services between 2011/12 and 2016/17. The "Case for support" published by CILIP and The Big Issue (2019) predicts that local authorities would contend with an £18bn deficit in 2020. This figure was estimated before the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic. The CEO of CIPFA, Rob Whiteman, cautions that public libraries have been particularly affected by austerity measures as they are viewed as "'non-essential' services" by local authorities (in CIPFA, 2018b, para.5). Moreover, he describes public libraries as the "'canary in the coal mine' for what is happening to our public services," (Whiteman, 2019, para.7). Most recently, he cautions that "demand for library services is still strong" (in CIPFA, 2023, para.7) but that "given the drop in their income, sustained funding is crucial if they are to continue to be a vital part of the community" (in CIPFA, 2023, para.7). In their qualitative study focused on volunteers in public libraries, Casselden et al. (2019) mirror Whiteman's caution, asserting public libraries are "an easy target" (p.870) for financial cuts against a backdrop of enduring austerity and the increased localism agenda of the current Government. Whilst the decline in funding is not unique to libraries because other services are also impacted, Woodhouse and Zayed's (2021) parliamentary briefing paper presents data that demonstrates it is dramatic: between 2004 and 2010, library net expenditure declined by 6% in real terms compared to a 40% reduction between 2010 and 2020, also in real terms (Figure 5).

Figure 5: library net expenditure excluding capital charges in Great Britain



(Woodhouse & Zayed, 2021, p.22)

In addition to reduced funding, public libraries have seen a reduction in paid staff and an increase in the use of volunteers. According to the CIPFA (2017), public libraries across

the UK continue to lose professional staff and gain volunteers, with a 43% increase in volunteers since 2012. Table 7 indicates the parallel rise of volunteers and reduction in full-time equivalent staff between 2014 and 2020. This is the period during which the full figures are available from CIPFA.

Table 7: professional staff and volunteers in British public libraries, 2014 – 2020

	2014 - 2015	**2016 - 2017**	**2016 - 2017**	**2017 - 2018**	**2018 - 2019**	**2019 - 2020**	**Difference 2014/15 - 2019/20**
Volunteers	41,402	44,501	48,025	51,394	51,478	50,128	+21.1%
Employees (full time equivalent)	18,028	17,064	16,194	15,483	15,300	14,925	-17.2%

(CIPFA, 2018b, 2022; Richards, 2016)

There are concerns in the academic and practitioner literature of the potential impact of volunteer use on the quality of the service overall (Casselden et al., 2019; Goulding, 2013; Peachey, 2017). Goulding's (2013) analytical review of public libraries in England posits that there are two approaches to the use of volunteers in English public libraries: the "involving model" (p.485) which means volunteers support staff and "add value to the core service" (p.485), compared to the "devolving model" (p.485) whereby "groups take over the service" (p.485, for instance, community-led libraries (Chapter 3.2). Goulding (2013) argues that the devolving model leads to issues with "long term viability and effectiveness" (p.479), leading to inevitable closures. In 2016, Carnegie UK Trust (a charity with a history of supporting public libraries) repeated its previous 2011 questionnaire-based study to collect data about public library use in England (Peachey, 2017). In the 2016 version, new questions were asked about the use of volunteers in public libraries. The results reflect Goulding's analysis about the use of volunteers: whilst 49% of the study participants were in favour of the "use of volunteers to add value to the services paid staff offer" (Peachey, 2017, p.10), 72% of the participants were opposed to the "use of volunteers to replace all paid staff" (Peachey, 2017, p.10). Equally, the qualitative study by Casselden et al. (2019) warns that the "greater reliance on volunteers" (p.879) to remedy a deficit in professional staff in underfunded libraries is causing issues relating to social inclusion, community capacity, de-professionalisation, and misunderstandings with user expectations.

In his books focused on public libraries in England, McMenemy (2009a) posits that they share challenges with other public services but that they also face several which are unique to the service they provide: the falling price of books, coupled with the dissolution of the Net Book Agreement that ensured sellers retailed books at the prices set by publishers; the public's increasing capacity to afford to access reading material beyond the library; the coffee-shop retail model embraced by booksellers is becoming expected of public libraries; changing technologies and the libraries' roles in bridging the gap for users who need both access and guidance; populism dominating over professionalism (an argument supported by Usherwood, 2007a & 2007b); and the dawn of the consumer-citizen, "advocating a more commercial approach to service design and delivery" (McMenemy, 2009a, p.16).

Within the context of closures, service reductions, funding cuts and an increasing use of volunteers, it is widely reported that library use is in decline in terms of library visits and loans (DCMS, 2016b, 2017a, 2019a, 2020b; McCahill et al., 2020; MLA, 2010a). That said, Rob Whiteman (CIPFA CEO) argues that recent physical visits were impacted negatively due to "COVID-19 restrictions and the closure of library facilities" (CIPFA, 2022, para.7). Moreover, CIPFA data clearly shows that footfall (up 68% between 2020/21 and 2021/22) and book borrowing (up 58% between 2020/21 and 2021/22) have started to increase again since the pandemic (CIPFA, 2023, para.3). Long term trends, however, indicate a reduction in library use. According to CIPFA's data survey (accessed via CIPFA, 2022), between 2015/16 and 2020/21 visits to library premises have reduced by 72% and the number of issues has reduced by 56%. Despite data that suggests a falling use of public libraries, the DCMS' (2017g) own reporting indicates that visits to public libraries still exceed "the total attendance at English Premier League football matches, cinema admissions in England and the top 10 UK tourist attractions combined" (p.4). Moreover, although library visits and loans appear to be reducing, the participants in the research undertaken by Appleton et al. (2018) indicate that the public do not refer to the service as one in crisis. Instead, they are sensitive to the various contextual issues currently impacting public libraries. Furthermore, there is dispute about the fundamental cause of the longer term decline in library use, which is further explored in Section 4.2.3.

During Phase Two, this thesis seeks to explore the public's perception of public libraries in England (Research Question 1). The design of Phase Two also enables the participants to indicate their opinions of some of the more contentious topics mentioned in the

literature, such as the use of volunteers and more commercialised or neoliberal focused services (see Chapter 5.4). Moreover, as the literature indicates there is a decrease in the number of adults visiting public libraries and borrowing materials, this thesis will also be capturing the perceptions of people who do not use public libraries (Research Question 1).

4.2.2 "Comprehensive and efficient"

It is widely argued across academic, professional and even political literature that the 1964 Act's key phrase, "comprehensive and efficient" (Public Library and Museum Act, 1964, Section 7(1)), is subjective and open to (mis)interpretation (CILIP, 2015; Conway, 2008; Culture, Media and Sport Committee, 2012; Davies, 2014; Dolan, 2007; Information Professional, 2018a; Halpin et al., 2015; McMenemy, 2009c). This section explores the different ways in which the Act's key phrase is interpreted in the literature, other issues with the legislation presented in the literature, and the other guidance public libraries have been expected to follow since 2009.

The 2009 Secretary of State commissioned inquiry (Charteris, 2009) states that "comprehensive and efficient" (Public Library and Museum Act, 1964, Section 7(1)) can be implicitly and explicitly interpreted as a service that "is based on local needs" (p.57). Moreover, Charteris (2009) asserts that this is "why there can be no single definition which is true to all library authorities in England" (p.57). Despite this conclusion, there have been attempts to elucidate the contentious phrase in judicial reviews; claimants have raised complaints against local authorities who have proposed changes to their library provision which they perceive fail to provide a "comprehensive and efficient" service (Public Libraries and Museums Act, 1964, Section 7(1)). For instance, in 2011, Mr Justice Ousley, in Bailey v Brent London Borough Council, made the following ruling:

> A comprehensive service cannot mean that every resident lives close to a library. This has never been the case. Comprehensive has therefore been taken to mean delivering a service that is accessible to all residents using reasonable means, including digital technologies. An efficient service must make the best use of the assets available in order to meet its core objectives and vision, recognising the constraints on council resources (R. (on the application of Bailey) v Brent CC., 2011, point 15).

Mr Justice Ousley's remarks support Charteris' (2009) claim that services need to be reactive to local needs, but he ignores her assertion that there can be no definition when he clearly defines "comprehensive" as accessible and "efficient" as frugal (R. (on the application of Bailey) v Brent CC., 2011, point 15).

In the 2014 case of Draper v Lincolnshire County Council, Mr Justice Collins favourably quoted Mr Justice Ousley's description of "comprehensive and efficient" (R. (on the application of Draper) v Lincolnshire CC., 2014, point 7). However, he also ruled there should be a "reasonable ability to access the service by all residents of the county" (R. (on the application of Draper) v Lincolnshire CC., 2014, point 8) which must factor distance, time and contextual considerations. Moreover, although the Public Libraries and Museums Act (1964), presents "comprehensive and efficient" (Section 7(1)) as equal descriptors of local authorities' statutory duty, Mr Justice Collins accepted Lincolnshire County Council's argument that there is tension between the two notions. The Council asserted that their library service is comprehensive but financially inefficient, and stated that providing a "level of over-provision is a luxury that can be ill afforded" (R. (on the application of Draper) v Lincolnshire CC., 2014, point 12). Mr Justice Collins concurs, ruling that a library service "must not only be comprehensive" (R. (on the application of Draper) v Lincolnshire CC., 2014, point 12). The comments made in the Brent London Borough Council and Lincolnshire County Council cases imply that the Act's key phrase is interpreted in a particular way in judicial settings: efficiency relating to frugality and comprehensiveness relating to accessibility.

In another case, involving Gloucestershire and Somerset County Councils in 2011, the claimants provided definitions of both adjectives from the Oxford English Dictionary, arguing that comprehensive means access to a broad range of materials and efficient means efficacy and success (R. (Green) v Gloucestershire CC and Somerset CC., 2011, point 19). In opposition to this, the county councils argued that comprehensive meant a service should be "evenly spread" (R. (Green) v Gloucestershire CC and Somerset CC., 2011, point 26), both geographically and in terms of the scope of loanable material types, and that efficient pertains to "economic reality" (R. (Green) v Gloucestershire CC and Somerset CC., 2011, point 26). Further, they posited that the reason the phrase is undefined in the Public Libraries and Museums Act (1964) is because it is a "target duty" (R. (Green) v Gloucestershire CC and Somerset CC., 2011, point 27), which means it is deliberately ambiguous and flexible so that local authorities can decide the value and

meaning of “comprehensive and efficient” (Public Libraries and Museums Act, 1964, Section 7(1)). Unlike the previously described cases, Judge McKenna’s ruling did not focus on the meaning of the phrase but, instead, focused on the process of assessing local needs.

These judicial reviews demonstrate that a lack of definition regarding what constitutes a “comprehensive and efficient” (Public Libraries and Museums Act, 1964, Section 7(1)) public library service means that it is not possible to question a local authority’s capacity to deliver such a service. Claimants in the three cases raised concerns about local authorities’ proposals specifically in relation to what is considered a “comprehensive and efficient” service (Public Libraries and Museums Act, 1964, Section 7(1)) but judgements were made based on procedure, consultation, the local authorities’ assessment of local needs and other laws such as the Equality Act (2010). Poole (2020) argues that the Public Libraries and Museums Act (1964) is futile in terms of contesting library closures and that challenges are more likely to be successful if they question a local authority’s compliance with the Equality Act (2010). In a letter addressed to the Secretary of State following concerns about proposed changes to the library service in Northamptonshire, Poole (2018) argues that by refusing to define “comprehensive and efficient” (Public Libraries and Museums Act, 1964, Section 7(1)), the government is failing “to provide sufficient legal certainty” (para.15) and is remiss in its own duties in respect of the Public Libraries and Museums Act (1964), the Human Rights Act (1998), and the Equality Act (2010). Moreover, Poole (in Information Professional, 2018b) contests Charteris’ (2009) assertion that there is no scope for a universal definition of the legislation’s key phrase; he argues a lack thereof results in misunderstanding from all stakeholders, including the public, professionals and government, both local and national.

An example of such misunderstanding is evidenced in the response of DCMS to a report published by the Culture, Media and Sport Committee (2012). The report investigated library closures, with written evidence and testimonies from a vast range of stakeholders including campaigning organisations, professional bodies, local authorities, LGA, ACE, Sue Charteris (the author of the eponymous Charteris report, 2009), public libraries and their users. Recommendations 1, 9 and 10 reflect the sector’s increasing concerns about unclear guidance pertaining to “comprehensive and efficient” (Public Libraries and Museums Act, 1964, Section 7(1)), in addition to recognising the difficulty

in trying to define it (Culture, Media and Sport Committee, 2012). In its response to the report, DCMS (2013) stated that the phrase "represents the balance to be struck by each local authority in meeting local needs within the context of available resources in a way which is appropriate to the identified needs of the communities they serve" (p.5). Moreover, DCMS' (2013) response expresses the importance of the Charteris (2009) report and that local authorities should refer to the recommendations therein when making decisions about their library service. This is clear guidance and yet it did not endure in a judicial setting. The claimants in the 2011 case against Gloucestershire and Somerset County Councils argued that it is mandatory for a local authority to undertake a local needs analysis, as per the Charteris report (2009) recommendations, in order to comply with Section 7 of the 1964 Act (R. (Green) v Gloucestershire CC and Somerset CC., 2011, point 23). Despite the DCMS' (2013) statement that local authorities should use the Charteris (2009) inquiry to aid decision making, the county councils refuted the claimant's argument, asserting that the report was irrelevant with "no factual application to the current proceedings" (R. (Green) v Gloucestershire CC and Somerset CC., 2011, point 25). Judge McKenna concurred with the defendants, stating that the Charteris (2009) report was not an appropriate tool for evaluating the legal compliance of a local authority's library service provision (R. (Green) v Gloucestershire CC and Somerset CC., 2011, point 30).

This example demonstrates that central government, parliamentary committees, local authorities and the legal system do not agree on the interpretation or execution of the legislation. This lack of agreement has come under scrutiny in the literature. In the MLA's *Blueprint for excellence*, Dolan (2007) posits that "an unequivocal definition" (p.6) of the public library service is of paramount importance in creating clearer expectation of what it offers the public. Moreover, he asserts that this is imperative to the future success of public libraries because it is the only way to ensure the value of public libraries is recognised by policy makers. In a 2014 guest blog post for Voices for the Library, Davies (a researcher with an interest in public sector reform) argues that the "vagueness" (para.12) of the phrase is useful to central government because it has given licence to "a succession of UK governments (of all parties) to preside over cuts, while pleading an inability to intervene or an unwillingness to override local democratic decisions" (para.12). Similarly, in her book about the 21st century public library service in the UK, Goulding (2006) posits that a lack of clarity and definition in the legislation leads

to different interpretations and a subsequent "postcode lottery in the public's experience" (p.24) of public library services. In an editorial, McMenemy (2009c) makes the point that leaving "comprehensive and efficient" (Public Libraries and Museums Act, 1964, Section 7(1)) undefined is problematic because it is "ludicrous" (p.559) to imagine the meaning would have stayed the same since the inception of the legislation.

Beyond the contentious phrase, the literature indicates there are further issues with the legislation. For instance, there is a failure to mention technology or access to digital content, both considered staple information needs in the 21st century (Dolan, 2007; McMenemy, 2009c), and yet there are specific references to outdated resources such as gramophone records (Public Libraries and Museums Act, 1964, Section 7(2)(a)). Furthermore, there are significant absences such as the lack of guidance regarding censorship, equality or diversity. CILIP (n.d.a) argues that the Secretary of State's superintendence duties cannot be executed in isolation, solely in relation to the Public Libraries and Museums Act (1964), but must also comply with the Equality Act (2010) and Human Rights Act (1998). Moreover, it posits that the failure to view the legislation through these additional lenses means that local authorities are able to make decisions pertaining to public libraries' access and closures which could disproportionately affect protected groups (CILIP, n.d.a). CILIP's (n.d.a) position implies that a multi-legislative approach is the only way to guarantee public libraries are truly "comprehensive and efficient" (Public Libraries and Museums Act, 1964, Section 7(1)) in terms of supporting the rights of everyone and ensuring an inclusive service. In this regard, the position of DCMS aligns with that of CILIP. DCMS (2020a) has updated the "Libraries as a statutory service" guidance to support local authorities in their understanding of the legislation. This guidance (DCMS 2020a) indicates that local authorities should also take into account other legislation: the Equality Act (2010), the Public Sector Equality Duty, Best Value Duty (2011) guidance, the Localism Act (2011), and the Human Rights Act (1998). DCMS (2020a), however, also makes it very clear that this guidance must not be utilised as the foundation for local authority decision making because it is not "formal legal advice" (para.1); therefore, there is no mandate for local authorities to consider the other Acts when assessing their compliance with the Public Libraries and Museums Act (1964).

In addition to the legislation, the literature demonstrates that several supporting frameworks, strategies and standards have been published over the last two decades by

central government and other bodies to support local authorities in executing their duty to provide a statutory library service. Table 8 provides the timeline of these supporting documents from 2001, the date of the inception of the sector standards.

Table 8: frameworks, strategies and standards for public libraries since 2001

Date	**Commissioned / published by**	**Title**
2001	DCMS	Comprehensive, efficient and modern public libraries – standards and assessment (DCMS, 2001)
2003 (to span 2003-2013)	DCMS	Framework for the future (DCMS, 2003)
2004	DCMS	Public Library Service Standards (DCMS, 2004)
2006	DCMS	Public Library Service Standards (DCMS, 2006)
2008	DCMS	Public Library Service Standards: 3rd revised edition (DCMS, 2008)
2008	Department for Communities and Local Government	National indicators for local authorities and local authority partnerships: handbook of definitions (Department for Communities and Local Government, 2008)
2008	MLA	A suite of tools for performance management in public libraries (MLA, 2008a, 2008b)
2010	DCMS	The modernisation review of public libraries: a policy statement (DCMS, 2010)
2012-2013	ACE	Envisioning the library of the future The library of the future (Davey, 2013)
2013	Libraries Connected (then called the Society for Chief Librarians)	Universal Library Offers (Farrington, 2013; Libraries Connected, 2019a)

Table 8 – continued

Date	Commissioned / published by	Title
2015 (updated 2017)	Libraries Taskforce	Libraries shaping the future: good practice toolkit (Libraries Taskforce, 2017)
2016	Libraries Taskforce	Libraries deliver: ambition for public libraries in England 2016 to 2021 (Libraries Taskforce, 2016)
2017	LGA	Delivering local solutions for public library services: a guide for councillors (LGA, 2017)
2017	DCMS	Benchmarking framework for library services (DCMS, 2017b, 2017c)
2019	Libraries Connected	Universal library offer framework (Mears, 2019)
2019	Libraries Connected and CILIP	Scoping towards a blueprint for public library development and sustainability in England (Independent Mind, 2019)
2020+	Libraries Connected	A new consultation for a replacement framework, yet to be completed or published (Libraries Connected, 2019b, n.d.)

DCMS (2008) claims that the purpose of the frequently revised Public Library Service Standards was to "create a clear and widely accepted definition" (p.4) of "comprehensive and efficient" (Public Libraries and Museums Act, 1964, Section 7(1)). This indicates that prior to the Charteris report (2009), central government clearly considered that the legislation required further clarity. However, the central government interpretation of what makes a "comprehensive and efficient" (Public Libraries and Museums Act, 1964, Section 7(1)) public library service has been in a constant state of flux, demonstrable through the numerous supporting frameworks, strategies and standards over the last twenty years (Table 8). Whilst the DCMS (2020a) now claims that the interpretation of "comprehensive and efficient" (Public Libraries and Museums Act, 1964, Section 7(1)) is the responsibility of local authorities, the continuing existence of everchanging supplementary material seems to support the concerns from within the sector that the legislation requires elucidation (Culture, Media

and Sport Committee, 2012; Dolan, 2007; McMenemy, 2009c). Isobel Hunter, CEO of Libraries Connected (a sector support organisation), does not believe that there is a "problem with the Act itself" (in Anstice, 2018, para.26) but does argue that central government, ACE and Libraries Connected need to work together to provide much clearer governance of the legislation. Despite its CEO's view, Libraries Connected (2019b) contends that the lack of universal standards has led to "significant variations in service" (para.6) and that the sector is calling for a new framework to engender consistency.

There is concern that a multitude of initiatives have been ineffective because of a failure to identify where accountability for public library performance lies and a lack of "strategy for meeting the needs of the public" (Culture, Media and Sport Committee, 2005, p.9). The lack of direct public involvement in defining the features of a "comprehensive and efficient" (Public Libraries and Museums Act, 1964, Section 7(1)) service are evident throughout the frameworks, standards and strategies. For instance, Coates (2019) argues that the Universal Library Offers are a "confusion of vision" (p.14) for public libraries and that the public would "challenge" (p.15) their relevance if they had been consulted. Furthermore, Boughey and Cooper's analysis (2010) notes that both user and non-user views of government initiatives and changes to public library policy have not been captured or published, leading to a "gap in perceptions" (p.197).

This thesis's second aim is to explore the adequacy of the current legislation for a 21st century public library service, including its contentious phrase: "comprehensive and efficient" (Public Libraries and Museums Act, 1964, Section 7(1)). To do this, in Phase Three, the thesis will first seek to establish how the stakeholders, including the public, define public libraries and their core services (Research Question 2). Subsequently, in Phase Four, the thesis will connect the public perceptions of public libraries with the legislation through Research Question 4: to what extent do the public and stakeholder views of public libraries correspond to the Public Libraries and Museums Act (1964)? By comparing the public views of public libraries with the content of the Act, it will be possible to ascertain if the public hold similar concerns about its content compared to the literature (CILIP, n.d.a; Davies, 2014; Dolan, 2007; McMenemy, 2009c; Poole, 2018). Moreover, by capturing both library user and non-user views (Research Question 1) about the public library service, the thesis will address the gap identified by Boughey and Cooper (2010, p.196). Furthermore, in Phase 4, the thesis will also draw

comparisons between public perceptions and the positions of the sector, local government and central government, particularly in relation to the legislation.

4.2.3 Tension, blame and agendas

The third topic is one of tensions: first, in terms of the multiple agendas shaping public library services, and second, the discourse regarding the root cause of the decline in public library use.

Alongside the role of local authorities and DCMS in governing public libraries, there are a number of organisations currently offering non-legislative, non-compulsory advice and guidance to public libraries. These are presented in Table 9.

Table 9: bodies, groups and organisations currently working with the public library sector

	Purpose / remit
Secretary of State for DCMS	Superintending the statutory provision of public libraries in England and Wales (Public Library and Museum Act, 1964)
DCMS libraries team: team of civil servants	Supporting the ministers in the Department for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport to inform and apply policy (Bennet, 2020)
Local authorities	Providing statutory public library services for their communities (Public Library and Museum Act, 1964)
ACE: executive NDPB	Overseeing and funding national offers of creativity and culture, on behalf of central government; supporting "the development of public libraries" (ACE, n.d.b, para.2)
CILIP: chartered membership organisation	Campaigning and advocating for all aspects of the library sector in the UK (CILIP, n.d.b)
The Libraries Taskforce: sector-led working party, from 2016-2020	Developing, implementing and monitoring a national strategy for public libraries, in light of the recommendations from the Sieghart (2014) report (DCMS, 2019c)
Libraries Connected: membership charity (previously the Society of Chief Librarians)	Representing public libraries and heads of library service at a local and national level, as a sector support organisation (Libraries Connected, 2018b)

The literature indicates that their outputs are varied, often conflicting or overlapping, and considered ineffectively evaluated before they are replaced or developed (Culture, Media and Sport Committee, 2005). It is possible they are filling the vacuum created by the ambiguity of the 1964 Act or that the ambiguity of the Act permits multiple interpretations and "fragmentation" (Davies, 2014, para.13).

In their book focusing on social justice and public libraries in the UK, Pateman and Vincent (2010) assert that public libraries must embrace the fact they "exist within a strategic context which is wider than library services and local government" (p.8). They further posit that it is by addressing wider agendas that public libraries are able to deliver services which meet the contemporary needs of their communities. In contrast, Casselden et al. (2019) argue that it is a problem because multiple agendas from multiple masters have resulted in detrimental misconceptions at every level. Their research suggests that public library staff are unconvinced that the fundamental purpose of public libraries is understood by national or local policy makers.

Coates is the former managing director for Waterstones, a library and reading campaigner, and a critic of the current approach of public libraries in England. In his 2019 article for *Public Library Quarterly*, Coates maintains that local authorities have been given the power to use libraries as a tool for fulfilling their social welfare strategies at the cost of the core business of books and reading. Moreover, he posits that the public library sector has sought to align its actions and strategies with such policies as a means "of pleading for funds" (Coates, 2019, p.14). An example to illustrate his point could be CILIP's contribution to LGA's 2017 guidance for councillors on delivering local solutions for public libraries. This publication advocates several ideas which could be perceived as disadvantageous for public libraries: the selling of library services; commissioning trusts or community groups to run libraries; and community hubs that merge multiple services together, including libraries (LGA, 2017). A second example to support Coates' (2019) argument is the scoping study produced by CILIP and Libraries Connected (Independent Mind, 2019), which is essentially an exercise in specifically exploring how public libraries can support local government strategic priorities and, in doing so, secure support for public libraries. It is very different from the blueprint written by Dolan (2007) for MLA, which sought to clarify and communicate the fundamental purpose of public libraries to policy makers and central government, rather than trying to mirror their changing and trending agendas.

In an interview with Public Libraries News, Hunter was asked about the purpose of Libraries Connected as a sector support organisation (in Anstice, 2018). Hunter's comments about the organisation's accountability clearly illustrate the tensions between the sector and local and central government, as demonstrated in Table 10. Libraries Connected is presented as a sector support organisation but it is inhibited from representing the sector in a number of ways. Moreover, it is accountable to several entities (Anstice, 2018), each of which has their own agendas or policies.

Table 10: the accountability of Libraries Connected

Accountable to…	**…because…**	**Resulting tensions**
…trustees and charity commission…	…of its charity status.	● Limited by regulations which guide the political campaigning of charities. ● Aims to work with, not against, local government. ● Libraries Connected is "apolitical" (Hunter in Anstice, 2018, para. 10). ● Prohibited from campaigning against any local authorities. ● Cannot "publicly criticise library staff" (Hunter in Anstice, 2018, para.11). ● Strives to hear and amplify the voices of library workers.
…ACE…	…they are in receipt of funding from ACE.	
…local authorities…	…it is a local government body.	
…heads of library service…	…it is a membership organisation.	
…library staff…	…they are members.	
…the public…	…they use libraries.	

(Anstice, 2018; Libraries Connected, 2018b)

Fletcher's (2019) mixed methods study about art and culture in public libraries presents another issue with conflating agendas for public libraries in relation to NDPBs. Following the quango reform of 2010 (Fletcher, 2019; Institute for Government, 2012), public libraries became the responsibility of ACE. This means they are now grouped with arts and culture, which Fletcher (2019) argues has caused fundamental "shifts in priorities and underlying purposes (p.572). ACE has made funding available to libraries for projects which resonate with their arts and culture agenda, but it has also stressed that this kind

of funding is not a replacement for local authority cuts (Kean, 2017). Fletcher (2019) argues that it is possible public libraries have survived by responding to the "rapid flurry of national policy activity" (p.573) and embracing culture and the arts. However, he also comments that it is not known whether the diversification of public libraries, caused by "a continual flavour of the month policy and funding merry-go-round" (Fletcher, 2019, p.579), has resulted in overall benefits to the service and its longevity. In a guest blog for *Voices For the Library*, McMenemy (2010) equally expresses concern by suggesting the local and national drive for public libraries to be more progressive by meeting ever changing agendas and policies is dangerous: "those voices are siren songs; they are politically motivated to dismantle, not to reinforce the public library mission" (para.13). In comparison to the academic literature, the sector-led literature implies that public libraries embrace the delivery of multiple agendas and policies. For instance, in a guest post for DCMS' library blog, Poole (2015) celebrates a number of agendas which public libraries have supported: digital skills, employment and enterprise, public health, vulnerable groups, and art and culture. Poole (2015) describes public libraries as a "vital channel for local and national government agendas" (para. 13).

In addition to the friction caused by policy and agenda, there is tense debate concerning the definitive cause of the decline in public library use. A recent national petition (Belbin, 2018; Flood, 2018) states that library closures and reductions in both opening hours and staffing are due to reduced local government budgets. It posits that libraries cannot compete for funds against "social care, child protection, etc." (Belbin, 2018, para. 1) and that the common model of community or volunteer run libraries is not sustainable. It reminds central government of its statutory duty to public libraries, makes demands for ring-fenced funding, and calls for the public to sign the petition to force a debate in parliament. Against the backdrop of 34% of all adults in England visiting a library in 2019-2020 (DCMS, 2020b), wide reporting of the negative impact of funding cuts (CILIP & Big Issue, 2019; CIPFA, 2017, 2018b; NAO, 2018, 2020b; Richards, 2016; Woodhouse & Zayed, 2021), and celebrity endorsements for the petition in the media (Belbin, 2018; Flood, 2018), the petition received a lacklustre response of fewer than 40,000 signatures.

Some literature cites funding cuts, austerity or changing technologies as the significant factor in the declining footfall in public libraries, which is then used to justify library closures and service reductions (CIPFA, 2017, 2018a; Flood, 2019; Goulding, 2006, 2013;

Independent Mind, 2019; Information Professional, 2019; Macdonald, 2012; Poole, 2019; Richards, 2016). There is disagreement from those who argue that the fundamental cause of usage decline is rooted in issues emanating from within the sector. Coates (2019) asserts that there is a lack of public interest in libraries across England which cannot be the result of diminished funding or changing technologies because the same reduction in library use is not seen in other countries. McCahill et al. (2020) recognise that there are other complex causes of the decline in public library use but argue that library closures will not lead to increased use, therefore the discourse must be framed by service cuts. Coates (2019), on the other hand, claims that the sector must acknowledge its own choice to move from a provision focused on access to books and reading to one that promotes social justice, community, culture and inclusion. He posits that this choice has diluted the core purpose of libraries and fundamentally diminished their appeal. Coates (2019) further asserts that central government is an influencing factor in the decline of public libraries, not due to austerity measures but because it has advocated a change in the focus of public libraries. He argues that the 2003 publication of the *Framework for the future: libraries learning and information in the next decade* (DCMS, 2003) encouraged local authorities to utilise libraries to deliver their wider responsibilities, such as adult literacy, reducing social exclusion and developing citizenship (Coates, 2019; DCMS, 2003; Goulding, 2006). Coates (2019) not only labels this publication and position as a "bad mistake" (p.10), but he further claims that it contravenes Section 7 of the Public Libraries and Museums Act (1964) because it means that libraries are not centred on delivering a comprehensive book borrowing service.

Fletcher (2019), Goulding (2013, 2006), Dolan (2007), Usherwood (2007a, 2007b) and McMenemy (2010, 2009a, 2009b) also comment on the impact of the diversification of the public library service and the possible correlation to its falling use. A report commissioned by DCMS (BOP Consulting, 2009) is not critical of service diversification but reflects that the public are not necessarily familiar with the "breadth of experiences and support" (p.50) now available in contemporary public libraries. Fletcher (2019) argues that the falling footfall in public libraries could be a result of this "broadening mission" (p.571), as well as a number of other factors: reduced funding; location and environment; asset transfer to community groups and charities; changing government agendas; and an increased focus on the arts, evidenced through the grouping of libraries

with museums, galleries and archives. Goulding (2013) recognises that public libraries must work in partnership with local and central government to ensure their survival but she also mirrors Fletcher's language when cautioning that there is a "mission drift" (p.482) in public libraries because they have become experiments in "localism and community empowerment" (p.489). Dolan (2007) asserts that the lack of definition of what denotes a "comprehensive and efficient library service" (Public Library and Museum Act, 1964*,* Section 7(1)) (explored in Section 4.2.2) is the prime issue in this mission confusion.

Usherwood's outlook (2007a, 2007b) is that public libraries are becoming too distracted by delivering increasingly populist, commercialised, dumbed-down services to satisfy government agendas, rather than providing a quality core service rooted in the lending of print materials. Pateman and Vincent (2010) disagree, proposing that meeting the needs of "a dwindling number of traditional library users" (p.9) is "outdated" (p.9) and will not make English public library services sustainable. They argue that libraries need to attract new audiences to become more "relevant" and "popular" (Pateman & Vincent, 2010, p.9). Usherwood (2007a) observes that library professionals who critique this practice are "attacked as traditionalists, and accused of ignoring social exclusion" (p.4). Moreover, he posits that populism and a drive to attract more users to the service could mean it is irrevocably changed. Coates (2019) concurs and further argues that by concentrating on reaching the most vulnerable in society, public libraries have deterred others from using the service because they assume they are not the target audience.

McMenemy's (2007b, 2009b) discussion of the impact of neoliberalism in public libraries echoes the concerns of Fletcher (2019), Coates (2019) and Usherwood (2007a, 2007b) that the transformation of the service is affecting how the public and policy makers perceive it. McMenemy (2007b, 2009b) theorises that public libraries are increasingly operating like private-sector organisations: library users have become customers, library professionals have become managers focused on value for money, and public libraries are in a competition for funds against other services. McMenemy (2009b) contends that this has "transformed a once proud public service into a philosophical shadow of its former self" (p.401) and that it is fundamentally unwise to embrace consumerism because the public library service would be deemed a failed market that "should not be bolstered by intervention" (p.403). This is an argument also supported by Coates (2019).

Underpinning the tensions between multiple agendas is the notion of democratic responsiveness. According to Linde and Peters (2020), a government must balance governing responsibly, particularly in financially challenging times, with being "at least minimally responsive to what a majority of people want" (p.292). The literature suggests that the public library sector and academic researchers related to the sector do not always agree with the policy direction of central and local government. This thesis will further explore this issue in Phase Three. Moreover, in addressing Research Question 3, the thesis will also explore whether or not the public perception of public library services correlates with the positions of central and local government (Phase Three).

The thesis will investigate the different agendas and tensions presented in the literature in a number of ways. First, the multiple agendas suggest different parties believe that public libraries should be delivering a range of different services. These will be reflected in the Q set design of Phase Two, so that library user and non-user participants can demonstrate their perceptions of these different services. Second, Phase Three of the thesis will seek to establish how different stakeholder groups define public libraries and their core purpose (Research Question 2). Moreover, Phase Three will compare those stakeholder definitions (Research Question 3) to ascertain where the similarities and tensions arise. This includes exploring where the public views fit in comparison to those of central government, local government and the public library sector.

4.2.4 Impact and value

The final topic raised by the literature relates to the issue of how public libraries demonstrate impact and value. This section explores legislation relating to how local authorities demonstrate impact and value; the nature of public libraries; economics and neoliberalism; the communication of impact and value; and the measurement of outcomes.

In 2012, new legislation was created that mandates local authorities consider "economic, social and environmental well-being" (Public Services (Social Value) Act, 2012, Section 1(3)(a)) when commissioning third parties to provide public services. The Public Services (Social Value) Act (2012) highlights central government's increasing focus on social value. Russell (2014), writing for *The Centre For Governance and Scrutiny*, posits there is no universally accepted definition of social value but that it is widely considered to include non-fiscal benefits such as "community wellbeing, inclusion and

happiness" (p.1). The 2012 Act does not remove a local authority's capacity to evaluate the economic value of public service options, like public libraries, but it does require them to assess value more holistically (Boeger, 2017; Russell, 2014). Just as some councils have argued that "comprehensive and efficient" (Public Libraries and Museums Act, 1964, Section 7(1)) is a target duty within the 1964 Act in order to afford local authorities the flexibility to interpret its application in their communities (see Section 4.2.2), advocates of the UK Public Services (Social Value) Act (2012) celebrate its "light-touch" guidance (Boeger, 2017, p.113) because it empowers local decision making.

In her article appraising the 2012 Act, Boeger (2017) suggests that an advantage of the legislation is that it urges local governments to "integrate social value more firmly into their policies and strategies" (p.113); however, she also argues that greater prescription in the legislation would provide clearer accountability. Whilst Russell (2014) disagrees that the localised approach means that the concept of social value is ambiguous, she notes the challenging nature of evaluating social value could mean that, even with the 2012 Act, local authorities will continue to use oversimplified performance indicators for public services like public libraries. For instance, the literature suggests there is a growing trend in the use of contingent valuation methods or social return on investment models to measure the delivery of social value in public libraries (BOP Consulting, 2014; Chung, 2008; ERS Ltd., 2014; Fujiwara et al., 2015; Leathem et al., 2019). Both Russell (2014) and McMenemy (2007b) argue that such methods are flawed because they are open to manipulation to suit particular policies or agendas, and they diminish the real value of public libraries.

One concern in the literature, in terms of demonstrating value and impact, stems from the very nature of public libraries. In 2009, BOP Consulting published a report, commissioned by DCMS, to summarise existing practice for defining and capturing evidence of impact and value in public library services. Pateman and Vincent (2010) agree with a fundamental conclusion of the BOP Consulting (2009) report: it is the fact that public libraries are multifaceted services which makes evidencing their impact and value a challenge (BOP Consulting, 2009; Pateman & Vincent, 2010). The report states that a core issue in demonstrating the impact of public libraries is the fact that they are not the "lead delivery agency" (BOP, 2009, p.2) for many of the services they provide. As a result, the impact is "lower" and "less intensive" (BOP, 2009, p.2). This notion is mirrored in the case for support published by CILIP and The Big Issue (2019), which

argues for more effective benchmarking for evidencing value "because public library services are often integrated with other services and impacts are difficult to separate" (p.1). In their report summarising the outcomes from a mixed stakeholder workshop focused on how public libraries can demonstrate their impact and value, Walker et al. (2012) comment that public libraries do not just provide multiple or integrated services, they also sit within "complex multi-professional and politically led organisations" (p.9). They argue this adds further complications to the issue of communicating impact and value. Moreover, their participants expressed concerns that because "public libraries undertake and provide a huge range of roles and services within different communities" (Walker et al., 2012, p.12), it is impossible for them to choose a singular focus or approach.

Jaeger et al. (2013), in an article focused on public libraries' relationship with democracy, neutrality and value, argue that value and impact are traditionally framed economically due to neoliberalism. They argue that such framing means that public services are "required to demonstrate a tangible value" (Jaeger et al., 2013, p.373), particularly due to a prolonged period of austerity which demands "deeper cuts into services that cannot articular an economically quantified value" (p.373). McMenemy (2007b, 2009b) also argues that public libraries are increasingly viewed through a neoliberal perspective which causes services to focus on fiscal efficacy and return on investment. The literature suggests that over reliance on an economic framework and quantitative data, such as footfall and issues, provides a limited assessment of performance and what value means for public libraries (Halpin et al., 2015; Jaeger et al., 2013; McMenemy, 2007b, 2009b; Rooney-Browne, 2011). The participants in the Walker et al. (2012) workshop included practitioners, policy makers and other stakeholders, who were keen to note that "value relates to more than simple value for money measures" (p.7). Lawton (2015) agrees and in her book on librarianship and impact, she argues that for public libraries value means the "the impact they have on their communities" (p.237).

The literature also demonstrates that measuring the impact or value of public library use is complicated because public motivations to engage with public libraries are complex (McMenemy, 2007b; MLA, 2010a). Lawton (2015) further posits that difficulties arise because the value of a public library is demonstrated through a person's experience of it, and experience eludes measurement. Conversely, in her literature review focused on

demonstrating public library value, Rooney-Browne (2011) asserts that qualitative methods, like social auditing or ethnography, are effective methods for communicating the social value of libraries specifically because they can measure "intangible" (p.16) outcomes with "intrinsic" (p.16) value. Similarly, McMenemy (2007a) posits that an overuse of simplistic quantitative data indicates the extent to which a service is used but it cannot provide an understanding of its impact. Appleton (2020) concurs, arguing that it is an error to consider usage as "synonymous" (p.24) with value. Walker et al. (2011) take a similar position, reflecting that value is not simple and should be viewed in a range of ways beyond usage: the value added to the wider community, social benefit, economic benefit and educational benefit.

The report by BOP Consulting (2009) for DCMS cautions against measuring absolute outcomes. Instead, it promotes the use of relative outcomes because they complement the "key thread" (p.14) of social justice which permeates public library services, and also because relative outcomes are a better fit for government priorities of closing gaps, such as reducing socio-economic disparities between groups. McMenemy (2007a) agrees, arguing that "policy driven by issue statistics" (p.275) misses the social, educational and cultural value that public libraries provide. Coates' (2019) position is that the library sector should embrace measurable data on footfall and book issues. He takes this argument even further by suggesting public library services deliberately rebut quantitative measures because they are driven by a motivation to "change the narrative" (Coates, 2019, p.13) and a reluctance to highlight poor performance which could hinder advocacy. In contrast, Walker et al. (2011) argue that public librarians do understand what is required in terms of evidencing impact but they perceive two problems: one, the data collected by library authorities is "often piecemeal and inconsistent" (p.9) and, two, public libraries are equipped to capture and present quantitative data but struggle to use qualitative data to communicate "personal or social impact" (p.8). The report from BOP Consulting (2009) mirrors the first concern of Walker et al. (2011), stating there are a lack of national "credible baselines" (BOP Consulting, 2009, p.3), which the report posits would be the most effective way to demonstrate the impact of public libraries.

Walker et al. (2011) also indicate that it is of paramount importance that public libraries need to improve their capacity to communicate the impact and value of their services to "a wide range of decision-makers, stakeholders, and non-users" (p.9). Likewise, Jaeger

et al. (2013) state that public libraries and their supporting organisations must move away from “rhetorical claims” (p.369) when seeking to articulate their value, instead effectively demonstrating it rather than simply asserting it. Coates (2019) agrees, implying that the Libraries Connected (2019a) Universal Offers are rhetorical because they are unfulfilled promises, designed to appease funding sources rather than provide measurable objectives. He further argues that public libraries should establish a clear, library-focused universal offer with measurable and realistic objectives (Coates, 2019). Moreover, Coates (2019) contends that the value of public libraries can also be evaluated through lapsed users because they offer a discourse about how a service is ineffective.

The concepts of impact and value underpin the other three topics from the literature review. First, the current library landscape of decreasing budgets and increasing closures (Section 4.2.1) means that being able to articulate the value of public libraries is of paramount importance. Moreover, finding meaningful methods to judge and evidence value is problematic potentially due to ambiguous legislation (Section 4.2.2), a lack of clarity about the purpose of libraries, and fluctuating agendas and policies (Section 4.2.3). Russell (2014) maintains that the solution to the quandary of effective measurement of social value is twofold: success criteria must be “independently established in the commissioning or contracting of a service” (p.7), and the public should be involved in the coproduction of the success criteria. As previously explained, this thesis initially intended to question how the public would expect public libraries to demonstrate their impact and value. However, as later research emerged (Appleton, 2020), it was clear that the topic of value and public perceptions had already been explored in academic literature. Whilst a specific research question relating to value and public perceptions was removed from the thesis, the topic of impact and value remains important as demonstrated by the literature. Therefore, it is still featured in the thesis design. For instance, it is included in the Q set (Chapter 5.4) in Phase Two so that it is possible for the thesis to explore public opinion about it. Moreover, the researcher will be mindful of the topic when undertaking Phase Three of the thesis, exploring outputs from different stakeholder groups to establish definitions of public libraries and their core purpose. Furthermore, it will be possible to review the outputs from the public in Phases Two and Three against Coates’ (2019) proposed replacement for the Universal Library Offers (Libraries Connected, 2019a, 2020c). Moreover, as previously explained,

this thesis will purposely involve the views of lapsed and non-users when exploring public perceptions (Aim 1 and Research Question 1) for a number of reasons, including Coates' (2019) assertion that this population can help to explore any inadequacies of public libraries in England.

4.3 Existing perception studies and gaps in the literature

The literature indicates there are lacunas in the existing research into public perceptions of public libraries because most studies since 2009 have not captured alternative perspectives (Bryman, 2016) in three key ways: qualitative research into public perceptions of public libraries often omits the views of library non-users and lapsed users; limiting the scope of public perceptions, particularly by focusing on a specific element of public library services rather than their full offer and purpose; public views of the purpose and definition of public libraries in relation to the 1964 legislation have not been explored.

Table 11 provides an overview of the research undertaken since the Charteris report (2009) into public perceptions of public libraries.

Table 11: public perception studies related to public libraries since 2009

Study	Focus	Type
MLA (2010a)*	Needs, attitudes and perceptions of library users and non-users	Sector
Black (2011)	Library buildings and environment	Academic
Hariff & Rowley (2011)	Public library service branding	Academic
Macdonald (2012)*	Public attitudes and library use in England, Scotland, Wales, Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland	Sector
ACE (2015)	Health and wellbeing benefits of public libraries	Sector
Peachey (2017)*	Public library use with some focus on attitudes towards them	Sector
Appleton et al. (2018)	Value and impact of public library use	Academic
Casselden et al. (2019)	Use of volunteers in public libraries	Academic
Libraries Connected (2020)	Consultation about what constitutes a quality public library service	Sector
McCahill et al. (2020)	Public library closures and service reductions	Academic
Appleton (2020)	Public library role and the impact of public library use (PhD thesis linked to Appleton et al., 2018)	Academic
Ruthven et al. (2022)	Impact on the pandemic and forced digital services on public library use	Academic
Summers (2022)	The cultural and social role of public libraries in disadvantaged communities	Academic

* Studies including the views of library non-users.

The first gap relates to the fact there are very few studies which have included library non-users as participants. Moreover, the three exceptions (Macdonald, 2012; MLA, 2010a; Peachey, 2017) are sector-based studies, not academic or governmental outputs. MLA (2010a), previous NDPB for libraries, undertook mixed-methods research which included focus groups and surveys across England. It questioned library user

motivations, sought to discover what would incentivise non-users to engage with public libraries, and investigated how library use can change over time. By focusing on the public's value and awareness of their library service offer, the research explored the public's satisfaction and engagement with their existing services. In this thesis, the focus is to enable the public to explore what they want from public libraries (Research Questions 1 and 2) rather than asking them to respond to what they currently experience. Moreover, as per the literature on agendas and tensions (Section 4.2.3), the thesis will explore whether the public's view of the purpose of public libraries differs from those who lead and govern the service (Research Questions 3 and 4).

Both the Macdonald (2012) and Peachey (2017) studies were commissioned by Carnegie Trust UK. Macdonald's (2012) study includes secondary analysis of existing survey data reviewing public library usage and primary analysis of an omnibus survey. The study is geographically broader than the focus of this thesis, including Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland, as well as England. The secondary analysis focuses on library use, breaking the data into different demographics. The omnibus survey consists of six questions, three of which capture perceptions about public libraries (see Figure 6).

Figure 6: perception questions included in the Macdonald (2012) study

Q1a: Generally speaking, how important or unimportant do you think public libraries are as a service to the community?

Q1b: How important or unimportant are public libraries to you personally?

Q5: I'm going to read out a number of potential changes to public library services in (insert country). For each, tell me if it would encourage you to make more use of library services, or if [sic] would not make any difference to you?

- Improving the range and quality of books
- Modernising or improving the library building
- Being able to access library services in other locations
- Improving the IT facilities provided in libraries
- Being able to look for or reserve books online
- Providing other council service in library buildings
- Providing better information on what services libraries offer
- Longer opening hours
- A café or coffee shop on site
- Offering more mobile library services in your area

(Macdonald, 2012, pp.62-63)

In the case of Q1a and Q1b, the participants were asked to reflect on the value of public libraries but not on how the value should be demonstrated (Section 4.2.4). In this thesis, participants are asked to consider the core purpose of public libraries (Research Question 2) rather than to comment on their intrinsic value. Moreover, against the backdrop of falling footfall (Section 4.2.1), the last question seeks to discover what might increase public engagement with public libraries. This question is quantitative in nature and asks participants to consider just 10 specific elements of the service (Macdonald, 2012, p.63). In comparison, this thesis addresses Research Question 1 by inviting participants to explore a much more extensive range of public library features and services (Chapter 5.4) and be asked to consider them in relation to one another (Chapter 2.4.1.2 and Chapter 5.6). They will also be given the opportunity to explain their perceptions and comment on the core purpose of libraries (Chapter 5.6). These responses will enable the researcher to consider how the public define public libraries (Research Questions 2) so that their perceptions can be compared to other stakeholder groups (Research Question 3) and the legislation (Research Question 4).

The report by Peachey (2017) is a longitudinal, quantitative study which repeats the survey in Macdonald's (2012) study in order to draw comparisons over time. In addition to the existing questions, a new question was added that focuses on a contentious topic in the literature (Section 4.2.1): the public's views of volunteers in public libraries. Participants were first asked to consider whether they were in favour or opposed to the "use of volunteers to add value to the services paid staff offer" (Peachey, 2017, p.10) and then to the "use of volunteers to replace all paid staff" (Peachey, 2017, p.10). Library users were more in favour of volunteers supporting staff than their non-user counterparts. Equally, library users were more opposed to volunteers replacing staff, than library non-users.

Also related to the first topic in the literature, the public library service in crisis (Section 4.2.1), the research of McCahill et al. (2020) explores the public perceptions of public library closures and service reductions. Their research focuses on the experiences and opinions of library users. However, they conclude by suggesting the study of occasional, lapsed and non-users could "inform the debate on benefits, relevance and importance of library provision" (McCahill et al., 2020, p.51). The "recognition that more should be done to try and engage non-users" (Halpin et al., 2015, p.37) is equally valid for public library sector and governmental research. For instance, CIPFA (2018a) offer an analytical

service to public libraries through the Public Library Users Survey (PLUS). The survey enables public libraries to capture and evaluate library users' perceptions of their service. The survey, however, is not designed to capture the opinions of those who do not use public libraries (Boughey & Cooper, 2010; CIPFA, 2018a). This thesis seeks to address this gap by including both library user and non-user voices (Aim 1 and Research Questions 1 - 4).

The second research gap relates to the fact that most of the existing perception studies capture the public response to a specific element of the public library service. For instance, Black (2011) investigates perceptions of public library buildings, Hariff and Rowley (2011) explore public perceptions of library service branding and communications, and Casselden et al. (2019) question public perceptions of the use of volunteers within the service. Whilst these topics will be included in the Q set designed for Phase Two, this study seeks to explore the public's broader views about the entire service and the core purpose of public libraries.

A sector study purports to capture public perceptions on a wider scale but the approach lacks direct engagement with the public. At the time of writing, Libraries Connected (2019b, n.d.) have partnered with ACE and CILIP to launch a consultation process in response to the sector's demand for clarity regards "what a high-quality library service looks like" (Libraries Connected, 2019b). It will result in an accreditation framework (Libraries Connected, n.d.) which will complement the newly designed public library open data schema (Rowe et al., n.d.). They have called for the participation of "everyone who supports or cares about libraries" (Libraries Connected, 2020a, para.8). As a study of public perceptions, the process is problematic in two ways. First, it predetermines the answer to the question of what constitutes a quality public library service because the proposed open data schema, which is the focus of the consultation, already stipulates seven data collection areas (Figure 7). This approach to public consultation is evocative of the warning in the literature that local authorities are at risk of providing the public with "the service that it has been decided they need, rather than that they want" (Boughey and Cooper, 2010, p.197). The theoretical approach of this thesis seeks to better understand a situation rather than to test a theory (Chapter 2.2.2); therefore, the methods used to answer Research Question 1 do not anticipate or limit the participants' perceptions of public libraries. Second, despite being described as a public consultation by Libraries Connected, the interim report (Libraries Connected, 2020e, p.18) does not

document how many participants were members of the public compared to library practitioners or other invested stakeholders. The researcher attended the virtual consultation event (Libraries Connected, 2020a) on Friday 21st August 2020 and can confirm that the "wider discussion" (Libraries Connected, 2020e, p.18) described in the interim report was formed of presentations from industry guest speakers (Libraries Connected, 2020f). Attendees were able to ask the speakers questions by using the chat function but only a small number of these were answered. The attendees were not invited to speak, the promised "recording of the session, along with the thoughts, comments and questions posed in the chat" (Libraries Connected, 2020, para.5) is no longer available, nor are the attendee comments reflected in the interim report (Libraries Connected, 2020e, p.18). This approach means that the public voice was drowned out by sector voices. In this thesis, the perceptions of the sector, government and the public will be captured separately (Phase Three, Research Question 2) before being analysed and compared (Phase Three, Research Question 3).

Figure 7: proposed categories for new, DCMS backed public library data schema

Events	Attendance and outcomes.
Libraries	Location, opening hours, types, contact details.
Loans	Library items borrowed.
Membership	Membership counts, by geographic area.
Mobile library stops	Stop locations and frequency.
Physical visits	Visits to library premises.
Stock summary	Stock counts, by item type.

(Rowe et al., n.d., para.3)

The final gap relates to the issues established in the literature with the 1964 Act (Section 4.2.2). There are concerns in academic, political and practitioner literature about the adequacy of the legislation and, in particular, the interpretation and application of its key phrase: "comprehensive and efficient library service" (Public Libraries and Museums Act, 1964, Section 7(1)). The public views are missing from the literature. Coates (2019), for example, argues that the sector misunderstands what the public want from their libraries and, instead, focuses on appeasing local government (p.15). He offers an alternative view of what the public want from their libraries (pp.15-16) but does so in a

manner that reflects the very criticism he makes of the public library sector: his own suggestions are also not based on empirical research. None of the perception studies (Table 11) have compared the public views with those of central government, local government or the public library sector. This thesis does so in Phase Three to address Research Question 3. Moreover, none of the studies have juxtaposed the public's views of public libraries with the 1964 Act or its effectiveness for a contemporary service. This is the focus of Phase Four of the thesis, which addresses Research Question 4.

4.4 Summary

The literature review has drawn together different types of sources to define significant concepts, to consider key topics relating to public libraries in England and to review the existing studies of public perceptions of public libraries. The literature demonstrates that since 2009, public libraries in England have been subjected to budgetary cuts, closures, frequent new governance, and continuously changing policies and agendas. It also raises questions about the cause of the decline in public use of libraries: cuts, changes, new technologies, increasing consumerism, or even a discord within the sector which has altered how different stakeholders perceive it. Moreover, the literature indicates that libraries face an enduring struggle in finding effective ways to demonstrate and evidence their value. There are concerns in the literature about the adequacy of 60 year old legislation to not only reflect a contemporary public library service, but also to be invoked to ensure local authorities execute their statutory duty.

The research in this thesis aims to meet a significant gap in the literature in terms of presenting a neglected viewpoint: library non-users. Moreover, the thesis provides an opportunity for the public to define public libraries and for their perceptions to be examined in comparison to central and local government, the public library sector, and the Public Libraries and Museums Act (1964). In Phase Two (Chapters 5 and 6), the thesis employs Q methodology to capture the perceptions of library users and non-users about what public libraries in England should be delivering (Research Question 1). The data collected in Phase Two is also analysed in Phase Three (Chapter 7) to establish how the public define the core purpose of public libraries (Research Question 2).

PHASE TWO: CAPTURING PUBLIC PERCEPTIONS OF PUBLIC LIBRARIES

CHAPTER 5: THE Q STUDIES

This chapter first revisits the reason for using Q methodology in relation to the aims and research questions of the thesis. Thereafter, it provides a summary of the overall process of carrying out a Q methodological study by explaining each step of the process in relation to the decisions made in this thesis. Finally, it concludes by presenting the quantitative outcomes of the two Q Studies.

5.1 Introduction

Phase Two of the thesis focuses on capturing and analysing public perceptions of public libraries through the use of Q methodology in response to Research Question 1: what are public perceptions of public library services in England, both users and non-users?

Q methodology enables a researcher to discover the relationships within and between the perceptions of a subject held by a participant group (Chapter 2.4.1.2). This thesis seeks to establish public perceptions of public library services in England (Research Question 1) and to compare these perceptions to those of the central government, local government and the public library sector (Research Question 3, Phase Three). The subject is the public library service in England and, in this phase of the thesis, the participant group is constructed of adults who work, live or study in West Sussex. Q methodology is a research tool which allows the researcher to view the subject through participants' eyes (Watts & Stenner, 2012, p.156) because it relinquishes "at least some of the power to define what constitutes the stories being told" (Curt, 1994, p.26) to the participants. This makes it a suitable method for this thesis' approach of foregrounding public voices (Chapter 2.2.2).

There are two chapters within this phase. First, this chapter builds on the introduction to Q methodology presented in Chapter 2 by explaining the research design choices, data collection, and factor analysis undertaken to generate the quantitative results of the two Q studies. In essence, this is the point at which the public perceptions are captured. Subsequently, Chapter 6 explicates the process of interpretation and presents the final factor interpretations; ergo, it analyses the public perceptions captured in this chapter.

5.2 The overall process of a Q methodological study

Table 3 (Chapter 2.4.1.2) presents simplified definitions of some of the specific terms within Q methodology, which will be used in this chapter.

A Q methodological study requires the undertaking of six steps, as detailed in the following list.

1. Identifying the concourse: the body of knowledge which represents the subject and from which the Q set is derived (Section 5.3).
2. Developing the Q set: the collection of statements or items which are used in the Q sorting activity (Section 5.4).
3. Selecting the P set: the participant group who will undertake the Q sorting activity (Section 5.5).
4. Administering the Q sorting task: the process by which participants rank all the statements onto a distribution model (Section 5.6).
5. Undertaking the factor analysis: the predominantly quantitative process by which individual Q sorts are combined and compared to generate shared viewpoints (Section 5.7).
6. Interpreting the factor outcomes: the predominantly qualitative process by which the factors are described and interpreted (Chapter 6).

This chapter will provide an overview of the processes related to steps one to five and the associated decisions made in this thesis, concluding with the final factor outcomes. Chapter 6 subsequently explains the interpretative process of step six, then presents the final factor interpretations and their comparisons.

5.3 Step one: identifying the concourse

The process of designing a Q methodological study begins with the development of a concourse. The concourse denotes “the volume of common communicability with regard to any topic” (Brown, 2008, p.699) and it is the foundation from which a Q set can be established. A concourse can be formed of opinions, information, “common knowledge”, “cultural heritage”, or “statements of fact” (Watts & Stenner, 2012, p.34). Moreover, it can be sourced from a range of materials or a combination thereof: existing documentation, literature, interviews with relevant parties, or surveys and conversations with study participants and stakeholders. The concourse and final Q set

can be composed of almost anything, such as statements, clauses, phrases, words, objects, photographs, images or descriptions. Henceforth, in this thesis, *statement* relates to ideas collected for the concourse and *item* refers to the final Q set version.

In this thesis, the concourse was derived from existing literature written about the sector as well as documents produced by the sector. At the time of generating the concourse, the materials included the most up to date documents produced by the Local Government Association [LGA], central government, the public library sector bodies, and individual library services. Those library services which are within the same profile group (Chartered Institute of Public Finance and Accountancy [CIPFA], 2018c) as West Sussex Library Service were also included, where materials were available. Materials published after the Charteris Report (2009) were included (Table 2, Chapter 2.3.1) as this reflects the timeframe applied to this thesis. The materials included the Public Libraries and Museums Act (1964), guidance, standards, commissioned reports, strategy documents, service or policy documents, academic articles, government committee and briefing papers, and other industry sources. As there are 46 sources, the full list is available in Appendix 4.

The focus for collecting concourse statements was the way in which public library services and their libraries are described. During the collection stage, statements were paraphrased where possible and otherwise recorded as direct quotations. Similar statements from different sources were merged together unless tone, nuance, meaning or language was strikingly different. For instance, in Table 12 some examples about education and learning are provided. Each row in the table demonstrates how multiple sources could mention the same idea; however, the table also shows how ideas which could be grouped together were kept separate at the concourse stage because they meant something slightly different.

Table 12: examples of similar statements from the concourse

Statement	**Sources**
Deliver opportunities for library users to further their education	Appleton et al. (2018); Boughey & Cooper (2010); Library and Information Service (2018)
Deliver opportunities for library users to learn new skills	Appleton et al. (2018); Axiell (2017); Fujiwara et al. (2015); Library and Information Service (2018)
Offer adult training courses and support for employability (e.g., job searching, CV writing, small business creation)	BOP Consulting (2014); Fujiwara et al. (2015)
Offer education opportunities	Essex County Council & Essex Library Services (2019)
Offer lectures and events	Fujiwara et al. (2015); Hampshire County Council (2016)
Promote informal learning	Taylor (2010), Independent Mind (2019), Shared Intelligence (2010)
Promote learning	Appleton et al. (2019); Axiell (2017); Mears (2019); Gloucestershire County Council (2012); Involve & Dialogue by Design (2013); Lee et al. (2019); Libraries Taskforce (2016)
Provide access to education, work, social and community networks	BOP Consulting (2014); Gloucestershire County Council (2012); Libraries Taskforce (2016)
Provide language books and classes	Essex County Council & Essex Library Services (2019); Gloucestershire County Council (2012); Hampshire County Council (2016); Hertfordshire County Council (2014); Libraries Unlimited (2020); Shared Intelligence (2010)
Provide learning resources	Essex County Council & Essex Library Services (2019); Gloucestershire County Council (2012); Hampshire County Council (2016); Hariff & Rowley (2011); Libraries Taskforce (2016); North Yorkshire County Council (2020); Opinion Research Services (2016)

Table 12 - continued

Statement	Sources
Provide opportunities for adult learning	LGA (2017), Shared Intelligence (2010)
Provide training courses	BOP Consulting (2014); Fujiwara et al. (2015); Library and Information Service (2018); Hampshire County Council (2016)
Work with schools	Charteris (2009), Hampshire County Council (2016), DCMS (2010)

The purpose of the concourse is to gather all the information on a subject; refinement happens during the Q set creation. Over 500 unique examples were collected during the concourse process[3].

5.4 Step two: developing the Q set

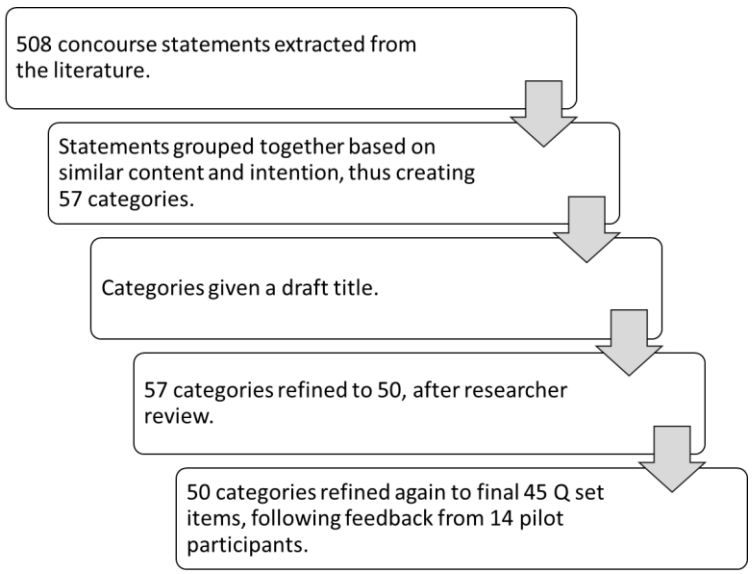
The concourse should be refined into a final Q set, which is both a representative and manageable sample of the concourse (Watts & Stenner, 2012; McKeown & Thomas, 2013). The "art" (Brown, 1980, p.186) or "craft" (Curt, 1994, p.129) of transforming the concourse into the Q set is based on the researcher's decision to either allow a "structure to *emerge*" from or "to be *imposed*" (Brown, 1980, p.189) on the concourse. An unstructured or structured approach governs how the concourse is organised and categorised to create the Q set. The decision depends on the research aims and questions, the subject, and the concourse material (Brown, 1980; Watts & Stenner, 2012). A structured Q set is created through an imposed categorisation of the concourse, based on existing theory or researcher knowledge, and a system to ensure items are evenly created across the categories (Watts & Stenner, 2012, p.59). This method was not suitable for this thesis which is based on an interpretivist theoretical approach rather than a specific theoretical framework (Chapter 2.2.2). Applying a

[3] The concourse is too large to include within this thesis but, as a significant finding and a resource others in the field might wish to utilise, it can be obtained upon request.

structure would assume a priori theory about how public libraries are described and what they offer. In comparison, an unstructured Q set does not mean an "absence of structure" (Watts & Stenner, 2012, p.60) but it does allow for "more fluidity" (Watts & Stenner, 2012, p.59). An unstructured approach was used in this thesis because it meant the identification of categories could result from the researcher's appraisal of the subject and the whole concourse (Watts & Stenner, 2012, p.60).

The final Q set must be indicative of the concourse and, at the same time, manageable for participants. There are no definitive rules in Q methodology about the final number of items: there are suggestions that studies should employ between 40 and 80 items (Curt, 1994; Watts & Stenner, 2012, p.61), or 30 to 60 (Brown, 2008, p.700), or even 25 and 90 (Watts & Stenner, 2012, p.61). Watts and Stenner (2012) advise researchers to generate more Q set items than needed and then distil these into a smaller set to avoid "being overly restrictive or dismissive of possible content at too early a stage" (p.61). In terms of the final number of items, the researcher must make a decision informed by the study's aims and intended participants. In this thesis, the intention was to capture the participants' perception of the full public library offer in England but, at the same time, it was necessary for participants to work with the Q set without the researcher present (Section 5.6). First, all the concourse statements were grouped into categories, so that the Q set fully represented the concourse rather than being a partial selection. Second, the categories were refined into a more manageable Q set. Figure 8 denotes how the 500+ concourse statements were used to generate a final Q set of 45 items.

Figure 8: process of creating Q set from the concourse



The piloting process enabled the researcher to ensure the language was accessible for the target audience (Curt, 1994, p.121; McKeown & Thomas, 2013, pp.22-23; Watts & Stenner, 2012, p.62) both in terms of the Q set and the associated instructions. Furthermore, the researcher was able to gather information about the time taken to complete the task and any concerns testers had about the wording of instructions. The final Q set items (Table 13) were written as phrases which could complete the statement of instruction: *Public libraries in England should…* Moreover, in light of the fact participants would be completing the Q sorting activity remotely and without live support from the researcher (Section 5.6), examples from the concourse were included with each Q set item in order to illustrate its meaning. The final Q set is an important outcome in this thesis because it provides a potential resource for other researchers and practitioners in the field to use with other public library services. For this reason, it is reproduced here in its entirety.

Table 13: the final Q set

No.	Item	Examples provided to participants
1	Be inclusive and support social justice	Work with disadvantaged families, support vulnerable adults, design services for people with disabilities, provide services for non-English speakers, help reduce social exclusion, be inclusive, promote equality
2	Provide learning and education opportunities	Arrange adult training courses, collaborate with education organisations, provide learning resources
3	Promote literacy	Organise literacy focused activities, support communication skills for children
4	Provide cultural opportunities	Host exhibitions, provide access to local heritage materials, work with other cultural organisations
5	Support digital inclusion	Provide WiFi, provide access to the internet and computers, make sure there is assistive technology, offer IT support, provide digital skills training, organise coding clubs, provide access to computers, make sure IT provision is accessible, offer facilities to charge personal devices, loan CD-ROMs and software, provide access to printers, photocopiers and fax machines
6	Provide a comprehensive and efficient library service	This is a key phrase from the public libraries legislation

Table 13 – continued

No.	Item	Examples provided to participants
7	Loan physical print items	Loan books, newspapers, periodicals and magazines
8	Loan a range of physical items	Loan CDs, DVDs, computer games, pictures, audiobooks, records, toys, CD-ROMs, learning packs, multi-media packs
9	Provide free services	Loan items, provide services for schools, connect people to information
10	Work with other organisations and services	Work with other public services, support local government priorities, provide access to council services online, provide interlibrary loans, link with charities, coordinate with libraries across the UK, support the NHS, partner with commercial businesses, work with other libraries
11	Provide high quality stock	Replace damaged stock, coordinate stock purchase and circulation across all the libraries, use public opinions to inform stock development, make sure the collection is extensive and includes different formats
12	Meet the needs of children and young people	Stock fiction and non-fiction for children and young people, work with schools, promote the library to young people, support learning and literacy development, organise reading challenges, provide age appropriate activities, clubs and events
13	Support democracy	Provide access to political information, support the development of citizenship, help people to fulfil their societal obligations, serve as a meeting place to help people to be active citizens
14	Work with the community	Act as a hub, provide community spaces, support community events and activities, connect people to community groups, work with community mobilisers, involve the community in decision making
15	Comply with relevant laws	Public Libraries and Museums Act 1964, data protection laws, Equality Act 2010
16	Provide services to support employment	Offer meeting places, arrange employability training such as CV writing, display careers information, offer co-working and enterprise spaces
17	Provide clear guidance about the library service	Communicate any charges for additional services, publish information about the service online, publicise the opening hours, provide advice about how to use the library service

Table 13 - continued

No.	Item	Examples provided to participants
18	Encourage the public to connect with others	Provide meeting spaces, offer opportunities to develop friendships, support people to communicate with others, connect people to groups, act as a free third space (neither work nor home), help people share experiences, provide access to work, community and social networks
19	Link people to information	Provide access to print and online information, provide access to academic journals, share information in all formats, provide access to reference materials, provide access to local history and information, collect different information resources, connect people to the information and knowledge they need
20	Address social isolation	Arrange events and activities to tackle social isolation, stock resources aimed at social inclusion, provide outreach services, support independent living for older people, combat loneliness, provide safe and inclusive spaces
21	Provide spaces for different needs	Offer meeting spaces, provide maker-spaces, cater for groups, provide spaces for individual privacy, use zones for different purposes, provide space for reading, share space with other organisations
22	Employ and develop professional staff	Employ skilled, helpful, knowledgeable staff, provide high quality training and workshops for staff, recruit a diverse workforce, ensure training is focused on improving the service for the public, share best practice with libraries across the UK and internationally
23	Offer leisure based services	Stock leisure and recreational materials, offer entertainment opportunities, provide space to relax, help people to explore their interests
24	Be people-focused	Understand the needs of users and non-users, prioritise public needs above funders' demands, offer a cradle-to-grave service, help users to satisfy their curiosities, meet the needs of older people, children and young people, involve the public in decision making, organise consultations, react to public voice
25	Work with families	Loan toys, support disadvantaged families, arrange story time, organise reading challenges, provide children's activities, provide childcare or crèche facilities
26	Provide specialist services	Accommodate special collections, provide digital making opportunities, loan choral and orchestral sets for music groups, arrange music courses, provide genealogy research materials, provide access to academic articles and research

Table 13 - continued

No.	Item	Examples provided to participants
27	Deliver core services	Allow renewals and reservations online or in person, respond to enquiries online and in person, provide systems for people to request specific items, enable users to reserve items across the network of libraries, provide free access to the catalogue in the libraries and online, loan items
28	Deliver some services digitally	Loan eBooks, eAudiobooks and eMagazines, create a 24/7 library service with digital services, provide a useful website offer online reservations, respond to enquiries online, offer online renewals, send emails/text messages, promote the eLibrary
29	Provide pleasant environments	Provide library buildings, make sure signage is clear, make sure furniture, fittings and equipment are in good condition, carry out regular maintenance, make sure buildings are warm, clean, well-lit and attractive
30	Offer a range of facilities	Provide clean toilets, offer an on-site café, offer an on-site shop, hire out equipment like projectors, provide access to printers, maintain and fix facilities and equipment
31	Promote the library service	Increase the visibility of libraries in the community, provide consistent branding, create display to engage different audiences, communicate the purpose of the library service, encourage more people to use the library service, promote the benefits of using a library, have a social media presence
32	Support the health and wellbeing of the public	Promote health campaigns, provide access to health checks, help develop the confidence of individuals, buy stock that promotes health and wellbeing, arrange NHS clinics, arrange books on prescription, help combat loneliness and depression, provide health information
33	Be accessible	Make sure buildings are accessible, offer extended opening hours, make sure IT provision is accessible, display stock accessibly, offer a postal book service, make sure people can easily get to a library, make sure service is consistent across the library network
34	Demonstrate good customer service	Communicate with the public in a variety of ways, provide a click and collect service, ensure people receive efficient and prompt services, create feedback systems, offer facilities for customer convenience, consider library users as customers, employ managers who improve customer experience

Table 13 - continued

No.	Item	Examples provided to participants
35	Focus on reading as their core purpose	Organise reading groups, loan different kinds of books, create displays about reading, encourage young people to read, promote the benefits of reading, involve the public in stock choices, arrange books for reading groups, organise reading-related activities and events, focus on services related to reading, give advice about reading
36	Arrange events and activities	Organise workshops, provide opportunities to meet authors, support reading groups, arrange live readings, provide space for community-led events, offer lectures, arrange activities for children, organise language classes, set up homework support
37	Involve volunteers	Engage volunteers to support library activity, use volunteers to fill staff gaps, provide volunteering opportunities for a diverse range of people, support volunteer-led libraries, train and manage volunteers
38	Provide alternative service models	Support community-led and volunteer-led libraries, offer unstaffed libraries, provide digital library services, facilitate co-production models, co-locate by sharing space with public services like Citizens Advice Bureau and the Job Centre
39	Operate effectively and viably	Produce a strategy, write investment plans, reduce costs, generate income, communicate service value to funders, demonstrate good leadership
40	Be trustworthy	Provide safe spaces, be supportive, provide trusted information and guidance, uphold ethical principles, provide non-judgemental spaces, provide uncensored and impartial access to information, demonstrate neutrality
41	Provide information, advice and guidance	Connect people to community resources, arrange NHS clinics, organise advice drop-ins, signpost other public services, help vulnerable people to access council services, stock self-help books, offer books on prescription, arrange therapeutic reading groups
42	Demonstrate impact and value	Measure user satisfaction, undertake performance self-assessment, communicate success criteria for the service, publish performance outputs, communicate service value to all stakeholders, make evidence-based decisions, measure footfall, book issues and event attendance
43	Offer outreach services	Visit schools, organise pop up libraries, arrange a postal book service, offer a mobile / home library service, loan book collections to community groups, visit community spaces, work with homeless centres, provide a prison library service

Table 13 - continued

No.	Item	Examples provided to participants
44	Innovate and modernise the library service	Embrace changing technologies, monitor future library trends, provide self-service terminals, improve the service to meet changing public needs, adopt ideas from other libraries
45	Promote prosperity	Be involved in local regeneration, support small / new businesses, contribute to individual and community prosperity, benefit the local area by increasing footfall to local shops

5.5 Step three: selecting a P set

Q methodology does not seek to measure the extent to which perceptions are held by populations, but rather to establish that the perceptions exist. Curt (1994) therefore argues that participant recruitment should aim for "diversity and comprehensiveness" (p.122) to ensure the inclusion of "a medley of people who, between them, are likely to express lots of different viewpoints" (p.122). In this thesis, the diversity relates to a gap established in the literature review (Chapter 4.3): since 2009, the perceptions and views of library non-users have been omitted from academic research. To that end, stratified sampling was used in this thesis to recruit two distinct participant groups: library users and library non-users (see Chapter 3.5 for definitions).

There are very few examples of research which has used Q methodology to compare perceptions (McHugh et al., 2019; Rhoads & Brown, 2002; van Exel et al., 2015); moreover, the researcher could only find one example of research which was designed to simultaneously compare the perceptions of two P sets about the same topic (Van Damme et al., 2017). Whilst it is not common to design a study to compare viewpoints with Q methodology, it was a suitable approach for this thesis because it is tightly linked to the thesis' focus. In other studies, splitting the P set into groups by characteristics could present assumptions about the impact of those characteristics on the participants' viewpoints of the topic. However, in this thesis, it is valuable to separate and compare the views of people who use a service and people who do not use a service.

Despite its rarity, Watts and Stenner (2012) argue that it can be done and they also appear to be the only Q methodologists who discuss how to do it. Following their guidance, Phase Two involved two, parallel Q studies: one for the library users (Q Study 1) and a second for the library non-users (Q Study 2). Both Q studies involved the same

Q set (Table 13) and participants were given identical experiences in terms of instructions, support materials, and processes. Watts and Stenner (2012) explain that it is most effective to then analyse the Q studies separately to establish the perceptions of each P set (see Sections 5.8 and 5.9) before undertaking a "post hoc" (p.54) comparison (Chapter 6.9).

Phase Two aimed to recruit two P sets that were similar in proportion to the reported national picture of library users and non-users. 40% of participants were library users (n = 27) and 60% were library non-users (n = 41). This was an intentional split to emulate the DCMS' *Taking Part* survey (2020b), which states that 34% of adults in England visited a public library within the last 12 months of the survey. Although the approaches to defining library users and non-users in this thesis differ from DCMS, the Government's *Taking Part* surveys are the only data available about adult use of public libraries in England. Furthermore, Q methodology does not require large P sets because the method seeks to establish viewpoints and not to evaluate the prevalence of the viewpoints within a population. Watts and Stenner (2012, p.73) provide two suggestions: first, that the P set should be smaller than the Q set and, second, that 40-60 participants is becoming an "adequate" (p.73) sample size in UK based Q methodology research. In this thesis, the researcher needed to balance this guidance with the aim of replicating the library user to non-user ratio suggested by DCMS (2020b) data. Taken individually, both Q Study 1 (n = 27) and Q Study 2 (n = 41) have smaller P sets than the total number of Q set items (45). In total, the P set is just outside of the 40-60 suggested range but this was to accommodate the required library user to non-user ratio.

Recruitment was carried out through social media posts inviting adults who work, live or study in West Sussex to participate. Example posts are provided in Appendix 5. West Sussex has six tiers of library (Chapter 1.4) with Tier 1 denoting the municipal libraries and Tier 6 the smallest, village libraries. The invitations were posted on local community groups on Facebook, ensuring there was a reasonable spread across groups that represent the six tiers. A similar process was used on Twitter and Instagram, tagging local community groups, by tier, in the invitation posts. The social media posts gave some details about the purpose of the research and what it would be like to undertake, in terms of time commitment and activity. The posts directed the potential participants to find more information at the project website: www.publiclibraryresearch.org.

The project website was designed to provide all the information potential participants would need in a format that was accessible and not overwhelming. Examples from the website can be found in Appendix 2 but the website is also still available to review. The first web page, “What?”, provided all the information traditionally included on a participant information sheet, including the premise of the research, potential risks, data collection and storage. The second page, “How?”, provided more detailed information about the process of undertaking a Q sorting activity using the online software chosen for this thesis, Q-Sortouch (Pruneddu, 2016). This web page described the activity but also provided short video demonstrations, with a dummy Q sort, to illustrate the experience for potential participants. Moreover, the page helped to prepare people with a realistic expectation of the commitment required to participate, in terms of time, reading, and access to an appropriate device and the internet. This meant only interested parties volunteered, which is one way to mitigate issues with low quality Q sorts (Watts & Stenner, 2012, p.87-88), particularly when the researcher is not present during Q sorting to troubleshoot issues. If people were still interested in joining the research, they were directed to the final page, “Now?”. This page provided the potential participants with information about what their consent would mean. They were directed to select the link that related to their status as either a library user or a non-user. The relevant link took them to Q Study 1 on Q-Sortouch if they were a library user and Q Study 2 on Q-Sortouch if they were a library non-user. Once participants arrived at Q-Sortouch, consent was once again established.

Library use status was the only participant characteristic recorded during the thesis because it suited the research aims and the gap related to non-user viewpoints identified in the literature (Chapter 4.3). Other demographic details were not collected because they were not relevant to the analysis and would be an unnecessary intrusion for participants. Through the social media posts, the project website and Q-Sortouch software, people were repeatedly reminded that to be eligible to participate they should be adults who work, live or study in West Sussex.

5.6 Step four: administering a Q sorting task

Q methodology studies are most commonly carried out in person, using physical cards for the Q set and a printed distribution grid. First, it enables the researcher to facilitate the activity as Q sorting is easier to demonstrate than explain (Watts & Stenner, 2012,

p.87) and, second, it eases the collection of additional information such as the post-sort interview. Due to COVID-19 restrictions, face-to-face research was impossible. This thesis used an alternative method by creating the Q sorting task on web based software: Q-Sortouch. The researcher has prior experience of this online software (McKenna-Aspell, 2018) and, therefore, was aware that it would perform effectively. As well as functioning on laptops and computers, Q-Sortouch can be used on personal devices like tablets and smartphones. Using online software meant the researcher could control the experience for each participant and ensure that the process was identical for all participants, across both Q studies.

Watts and Stenner (2012) caution that problems can arise with remote methods, particularly in relation to the clarity of instructions and the post-sort interview (p.87). To that end, demonstration videos and images for each stage of the Q sorting activity were provided on the project website for participants: a video to show the initial sorting activity; a graphic which showed the overall distribution model; a video to show the main sorting process; and a final video to show the post-sort questions. In the absence of face-to-face interaction, the different formats of instruction increased the chances there would be a suitable and accessible option for most participants. Equally, by providing the demonstrations and instructions on the project website, participants were well apprised of the research expectations and commitment before choosing to participate.

Furthermore, so that participants were not unintentionally influenced on the topic of public library services, the video demonstrations used the same distribution model but involved a fictitious Q set about animals.

The distribution model is the grid onto which participants position all the items from the Q set. The placement of the Q set within the distribution model indicates how the participant values items in relation to one another. The model can be free choice, meaning that participants choose the shape of the grid and how many items to place within each rank (McKeown & Thomas, 2013, p.66; Watts & Stenner, 2012, pp.77-78). In comparison, a fixed or forced choice distribution model is usually symmetrical and it means that each participant experiences the same grid into which they rank the Q set (McKeown & Thomas, 2012, pp.66-67; Watts & Stenner, 2012, pp.77-78). A fixed model can feel “restrictive” (Watts & Stenner, 2012, p.77) to some participants but it can also

ensure participants "devote due deliberation and discrimination in ranking the items" (McKeown & Thomas, 2013, p.66). Given that it was important that both P sets had the same experience, to enable future comparisons, this thesis used a fixed distribution model. Furthermore, the expectations of a fixed distribution model (place one item in each position) were clearer for participants undertaking the Q sorting task without the researcher present.

In Q methodological studies, the distributions do not range from *most* to *least*, but rather from *most* to *most* because each pole is "designed to capture very strong feelings, be they positive or negative" (Watts & Stenner, 2012, p.80). Items placed in the middle of the distribution are those which lack intensity or importance for a participant; items which incite less of a subjective reaction "proliferate towards the middle of the distribution" (Watts & Stenner, 2012, p.80). In this thesis, the Q set items were designed to complete the sentence opener: *Public library services in England should…* The poles were labelled *most disagree* (-5) to *most agree* (+5). In essence, items placed in -5 are not those the participants least agreed with but rather those they most disagreed with in relation to other items. Furthermore, numeric position headers were indicated across the top of the distribution model to support participants as they ranked each item in relation to all the others. This would have particularly helped participants working on smaller screens, such as tablets and smartphones, as they would potentially not have seen the full distribution model on the screen at the same time.

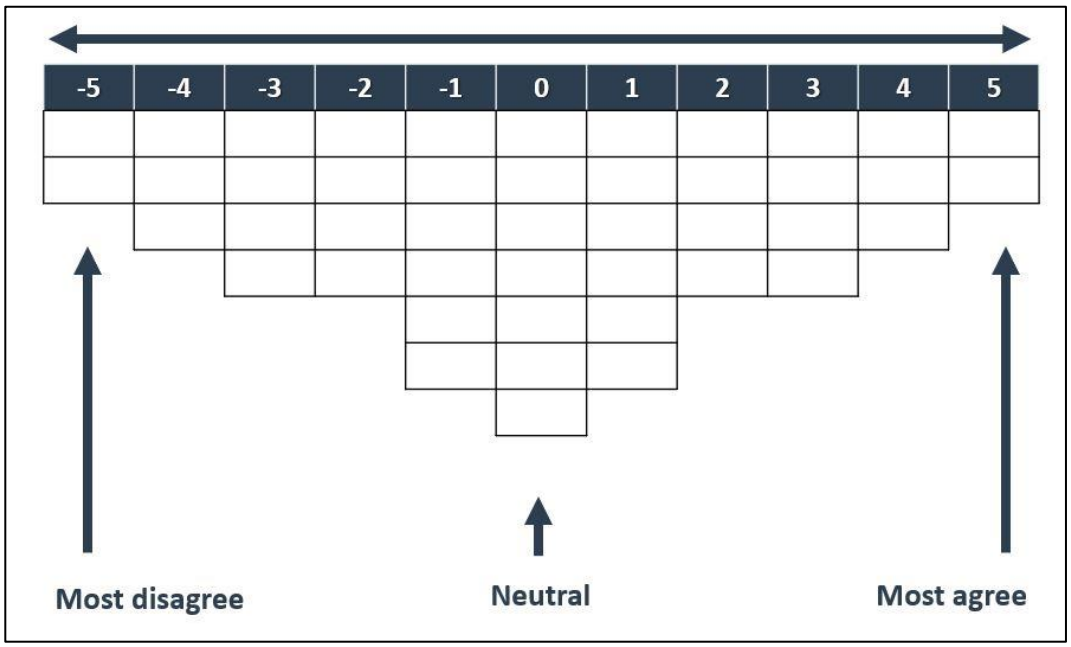
With regards to the shape or gradient of a fixed distribution model, Watts and Stenner (2012) explain that in terms of achieving research aims or exploring a theory, it is "the pattern of items within the distribution that counts" (p.77), therefore any distribution model can be used. The design of the distribution model mandates how many items participants can place at each value. Both Block (2008) and Watts and Stenner (2012) argue that the shape of the distribution model should ease participant experience and ensure the options for item placement are "sensible" but not "excessive" (Block, 2008, p.51). Brown (1980) recommends a symmetrical, platykurtic distribution for Q studies involving participants who are familiar with the topic because it enables more Q set items to be placed at either end of the distribution model and fewer in the middle (p.200). If participants are less familiar with the topic, Brown (1980) recommends a more leptokurtic distribution model to offer "more room for error" (p.200) with greater

opportunities to place Q set items in the middle. Brown (1980) also provides guidelines for the distribution model range:

- Q set of *N* = <40 requires a range of -4 to +4;
- Q set of *N* = 40-60 requires a range of -5 to +5;
- Q set of *N* = >60 requires a range of -6 to +6 (p.200).

In this thesis, as per Brown's (1980) recommendation, the model ranged from *-5 most disagree* to *+5 most agree* because the Q set featured 45 statements (Figure 9). The distribution model had a mesokurtic curve because most participants would have some level of familiarity with public libraries which meant a leptokurtic curve was unnecessary. The platykurtic model recommended by Brown (1980) for expert participants or "controversial issues" (p.200) was not suitable for two reasons: first, the library non-user participants would be less familiar with public libraries than the library user participants who could use a platykurtic model; second, whilst it would be appropriate for the library users, it was important that both P sets received the same condition of instruction, including the same distribution model.

Figure 9: distribution model for both Q studies



Before participants undertake the full Q sorting activity, they should be encouraged to pre-sort the Q set items into "three provisional ranking categories" (Watts & Stenner, 2012, p.83): agree or positive feeling, disagree or negative feeling, and neutral or

uncertain. This task allows participants to become familiar with the Q set as each item is read and explored; moreover, it begins the process of relative ranking between items before participants undertake "progressively finer-grained value judgements" Watts & Stenner, 2012, p.83) during the full Q sorting task. Participants in this thesis were first instructed to pre-sort the Q set into three groups, using a drag and drop function in Q-Sortouch software: agree, disagree and unsure. Following the pre-sort exercise, participants were asked to arrange the statements in the fixed distribution model to indicate their perception of the item's value in relation to other items. During the pre-sorting and final sorting tasks, it is important that participants can view the full Q set and distribution model at all times so that they can change their minds about item positions and perform the "*relative* evaluation" (Watts & Stenner, 2012, p.88) which is unique to Q methodology. With Q-Sortouch, participants engaged with the Q set items one at a time, but as each item was placed into one of the three pre-sort categories (during pre-sorting) or onto the distribution model (main sorting task), they remained visible on a laptop or computer. This is why participants were advised to avoid the task on smaller devices. Moreover, because it was a fixed distribution model, the Q-Sortouch software would alert the participant if one column had too many items within it. Items could also be moved unlimited times, just as would be the case with physical cards.

Both Q studies were conducted anonymously and online, therefore, post-sort interviews with participants were not possible. As an alternative, the Q-Sortouch online software enabled the researcher to ask two post-sort questions. Alongside each question, the software displays the items which the participant sorted at either end of the distribution model, ranked at -5 or +5. The participants are provided free-form text boxes to write their responses. Table 14 indicates the wording of the questions, the purpose of the questions, and the number of responses.

Table 14: post-sort questions

Items on display	Question	Rationale	Q Study 1 responses	Q Study 2 responses
The two items ranked at -5	1) Can you explain why you placed these statements in 'most disagree'?	This question asks participants to articulate their reasoning for the services and features placed in -5.	22/27 participants responded	25/41 participants responded
The two items ranked at +5	2) In your opinion, what is the core purpose of a public library service?	Whilst viewing the statements placed in +5, this question asked participants to consider what they perceive a public library service should do and be, overall.	21/27 participants responded	28/41 participants responded

The responses to these questions assisted with the factor interpretations, reported in Chapter 6. Moreover, responses to the second post-sort question formed the basis of the research design for Phases Three and Four of the thesis (Figure 2, Chapter 2.3). In Phase Three, the participant responses were used to help discover how the public define public libraries (Research Question 2) and how the public's definition compares to other stakeholder groups (Research Question 3). Then in Phase Four, the responses helped to establish how public perceptions of public libraries correspond to the current public library legislation (Research Question 4).

5.7 Step five: undertaking factor analysis

The fifth step of a Q methodological study involves a statistical method called factor analysis which simplifies "complex sets of data" (Kline, 1994, p.3). Because factor analysis is the most complex stage of Q methodology, this section first introduces an overview of the process; thereafter, Section 5.7.1 explains the approach taken in this thesis; and finally, Sections 5.7.2 and 5.7.3 present the factor analysis results of the two Q studies.

In a Q study, the datasets are the participants' Q sorts and the factor analysis simplifies these into patterns of shared viewpoints, called factors. Table 15 describes some of the core terms used in Q methodology factor analysis. This section will explain the processes required for factor analysing the two Q studies but will not attempt to explain

"mathematical complexities extending well beyond the scope" (McKeown & Thomas, 2013, p.52) of this research.

Table 15: glossary of terms used in factor analysis

Term	**Meaning**
Bipolar factor	A factor with both positively and negatively associated Q sorts; it captures shared viewpoints which mirror each other.
Communality	Communality, referred to as h^2, provides a value between 0 and 1 for each individual Q sort to indicate "how much it *holds in common* with all the other Q sorts" (Watts & Stenner, 2012, p.104). H^2 scores nearer to 1 suggest that a Q sort is typical of the p set, whereas those nearer to 0 are atypical and unlikely to load significantly onto a factor.
Confounded Q sort	A Q sort which loads significantly onto two or more factors and, therefore, cannot be included in the final factor solution.
Correlation coefficient	The "numerical measure of the degree of agreement between two sets of scores" (Kline, 1994, p.3).
Correlation matrix	A matrix that maps the correlation coefficients between Q sorts, in order to indicate possible factors. It can also be used to assess similarities between factor arrays.
Distinguishing item	Any item that has been ranked significantly differently in one factor compared to all other factors, to a $p < 0.01$ level.
Eigenvalue	A numeric value to denote how much of a variance a factor represents and explains. It is calculated by "summing the squared loadings of all the Q sorts on that factor" (Watts & Stenner, 2012, p.104).
Factor analysis	The factor extraction process that allows for common and specific variance; factor analysis seeks to reduce a larger dataset into fewer latent variables.
Factor array	A visual representation of the factor, presented as a Q sort, which serves as the "best possible estimate of the relevant factor" (Watts & Stenner, 2012, p.141).
Factor estimates	The composite of two or more significantly loading Q sorts. Final factor estimates are calculated by "weighted averaging all individual Q sorts that load significantly on that factor and that factor alone" (Watts & Stenner, 2012, p.129). Converting weighted scores into standard scores (Z scores) enables cross-factor comparison.

Table 15 - continued

Term	Meaning
Factor extraction	The process through which decisions are made about how many meaningful factors the data presents. It has multiple steps and decisions are made at each step.
Factor loadings	A mathematical score which indicates how much an individual Q sort exemplifies a proposed factor, measured as a correlation coefficient. A significant loading means a Q sort has met the criteria set by the researcher.
Factor rotation	Conceptually, this is the process by which Q sorts are mapped, in a 3D sense, to demonstrate their relationships to one another so that groupings or shared viewpoints can be unearthed. It "identifies any Q sorts whose position and viewpoint closely approximate that of a particular factor" (Watts & Stenner, 2012, p.142).
Insignificant Q sort	A Q sort which does not load significantly onto any factor at the level $p < 0.01$
Significant Q sort	A Q sort which loads significantly onto a factor at the level $p < 0.01$
Variance	An indication of commonality. Study variance indicates how much of the data (individual Q sorts) is encapsulated in the final solution (factors). Explained variance demonstrates how much of the data is included in an individual factor.

In contemporary studies, Q methodological factor analysis is usually undertaken with "purpose-built" (Watts & Stenner, 2012, p.94) statistical software programs such as PQMethod (Schmolk, 2014) and Ken-Q Analysis (Banasick, 2023). In this thesis, Ken-Q Analysis was used. However, no software program can provide a singular, perfect factor solution because there are a number of decisions a researcher must make with both a "logic of exploration and discovery" (Watts & Stenner, 2012, p.96) and "common sense" (McKeown & Thomas, 2013, p.54). There is no one prescribed process for undertaking factor analysis in Q methodology (Watts & Stenner, 2012; McKeown & Thomas, 2013) but Watts and Stenner (2012) offer practical guidance for novice Q methodologists. Their advice begins with the assertion that analytic decisions should:

1. centre the data and be mindful of participants' "feelings and viewpoints" (Watts & Stenner, 2012, p.96);
2. complement the research aims and questions (Watts & Stenner, 2012, p.96);
3. be statistically and methodologically "acceptable" (Watts & Stenner, 2012, p.96);
4. make "*good sense* of the data you have gathered, ultimately for the benefit of your reader/audience" (Watts & Stenner, 2012, p.96).

Factor analysis is an iterative process of trial and error (p.106). Watts and Stenner (2012) recommend an initial extraction of one factor for every six to eight participants as a reasonable basis from which additional "rumination will nonetheless be required" (Watts & Stenner, 2012, p.106). Through the process of applying statistical criteria and abductive reasoning, the researcher can experiment with different factor options until they reach the most effective solution for the Q study. In Q methodology, as factor analysis reduces the data to find shared viewpoints, not all Q sorts will be included in the final factor solution. A study variance of 35% or more indicates that sufficient Q sorts have been included to deem the factor solution viable (Watts & Stenner, 2012, p.105).

In addition to considering variance, a factor's eigenvalue helps to establish potential significance. Eigenvalues are calculated with factor loadings, the correlation coefficients, for each Q sort indicating its strength of association to each factor. In essence, how much each Q sort loads onto each factor. To calculate an eigenvalue, the squared factor loadings of all Q sorts associated with a factor are added together (McKeown & Thomas, 2013, p.53). Kaiser-Guttman criterion indicates an eigenvalue lower than 1.00 means the factor is deemed insignificant because it would represent less study variance than a single Q sort (Watts & Stenner, 2005, p.87) and, therefore, is not viable for extraction. Eigenvalues are also used to establish the variance of a factor, as a percentage, using the following equation:

> % total variance = 100 x (eigenvalue ÷ total number of Q sorts)
> (Brown, 1980, p.222)

With this calculation, it is possible to determine the study's total variance.

Deciding which Q sorts are encapsulated within each factor can be ascertained via the calculation for a significant factor loading at $p < 0.01$. Moreover, a factor is deemed

viable if two or more Q sorts load significantly onto it (Watts & Stenner, 2012, p.107). The calculation for significant loading is as follows:

> Significant factor loading = 2.58 x (1 ÷ √no. of items in the Q set)
> (Brown, 1980, pp.222-223)

It is possible for a factor to be constructed from Q sorts which significantly load positively and negatively. Such bipolar factors (Section 5.7.2) encapsulate Q sorts which correlate because they demonstrate "*polar opposite*" or "*mirror-image*" (Watts & Stenner, 2012, p.133) views.

In addition to quantitative measures, Watts and Stenner (2012) posit researcher judgement must also play a role when deciding how many and which factors to extract from the data to find the "most informative solution from a substantive or theoretical perspective" (p.99).

After extraction, potential factors are subjected to factor rotation to "maximise the purity of saturation of as many variates (Q sorts) as possible" (McKeown & Thomas, 2013, p.55) onto the potential factors. Watts and Stenner (2012) explain rotation conceptually: factor loadings "take on a spatial or geometric function. They are used as *coordinates* and hence as a means of mapping the relative positions, or viewpoints, of all the Q sorts in a study" (p.114) in three dimensions. By-hand rotation is carried out by the researcher and varimax rotation is automated by the factor analysis software. Watts and Stenner (2012) advise researchers to experiment with and potentially combine both styles of rotation (p.126). Factor analysis software will also provide a matrix to show the correlations between factors post-rotation; if the matrix demonstrates factors are highly correlated, it is a potential indication that too many factors have been extracted from the data (Watts & Stenner, 2012, p. 212) and that the factors will be too similar.

The final stage of factor analysis is to create factor estimates for each factor. Q sorts which load significantly onto two or more factors are confounded and are not included in the factor estimates because they do not exemplify a single factor (Watts & Stenner, 2012, pp.129-130). Factor estimates are generated through weighted averages of Q sorts which significantly load onto a factor (Watts & Stenner, 2012, p.130); thus, those Q sorts with a higher factor loading will influence the factor array more than those with a lower factor loading. The use of weighted averages helps to mitigate error and improve

reliability (Watts & Stenner, 2012, p.131). The weighted averages are converted into standard scores, allowing for a rank order of the Q set items in each factor. To aid in the process of interpretation, the standard scores are used to create "a single composite Q sort" (Brown, 2008, p.701), or factor array, for each factor. The factor array will not correlate entirely with the "*personal* viewpoint" (Watts & Stenner, 2012, p.163) of an individual participant because it represents the shared viewpoints of all Q sorts which load significantly onto a factor.

5.7.1 The factor analysis approach for Q Study 1 and Q Study 2

In line with the thesis' overall interpretivist position, the researcher undertook the factor analysis of both Q studies with an exploratory and abductive approach. Furthermore, as an overall commitment in this thesis is to foreground the public, the researcher was particularly mindful of Watts and Stenner's (2012) aforementioned advice to centre the data and participants' "feelings and viewpoints" (p.96). To that end, the main drive was to capture as many voices as possible, which meant seeking factor solutions which encapsulated as many Q sorts as possible. McKenzie et al. (2011) refer to this as the principle of "parsimony" (p.2136) in their study, whereby a solution is established that accounts for as much variance as possible, maximising significant Q sorts whilst minimising confounded and insignificant Q sorts.

The same statistical criteria were applied to both Q studies so that factor solutions were comparable and could be subjected to second order factor analysis (Chapter 6.9). In line with the exploratory approach, both Q studies were subjected to an initial factor extraction at the ratio of one factor for every six Q sorts before statistical criteria were applied. Factors were first subjected to an automatic varimax rotation using the Ken-Q Analysis software before the researcher applied by-hand rotation to maximise the significantly loading Q sorts. Ken-Q Analysis functions at the level of four decimal places; the same was applied to the calculation for significant loading because it enabled more of the Q sorts to be included in the final factor solution. The significant loading at $p < 0.1$ (Section 5.7) for both Q studies is as follows:

Significant factor loading = 2.58 x (1 ÷ √no. of items in the Q set)

2.58 x (1 ÷ √n^{o} items in Q set)

2.58 x (1 ÷ √45)

2.58 x (1 ÷ 6.7082)

2.58 x 0.1491

= 0.384678

= 0.3847

A study variance above 35% was achieved for both Q studies (Watts & Stenner, 2012, p.105) and an eigenvalue >1 was also achieved for each factor in both Q studies.

Each participant is afforded an alphanumeric designator to ensure anonymity: U1, U2 and so on for library users and NU1, NU2… for non-users.

5.7.2 Q Study 1 factor analysis outcomes

Following the approach described in Section 5.7.1, three separate factor extractions were trialled for Q Study 1. Table 16 demonstrates the results of the trials, as unrotated factor extractions.

Table 16: Q Study 1 unrotated factor extraction trials

		Factor 1	**Factor 2**	**Factor 3**	**Factor 4**
Trial 1	Eigenvalues	9.1017	1.9735	0.2346	1.2972
	Variance %	34	7	1	5
	Total variance %	47			
Trial 2	Eigenvalues	9.1017	1.9735	0.2346	
	Variance %	34	7	1	
	Total variance %	42			
Trial 3	Eigenvalues	9.1017	1.9735		
	Variance %	34	7		
	Total variance %	41			

The most appropriate outcome for Q Study 1 was the two factor solution. It yielded a 41% study variance, above the recommended 35% benchmark (Watts & Stenner, 2012,

p.105). Moreover, each factor exceeded the eigenvalue criteria of >1. Initially, a varimax rotation meant that 16 of the 27 Q sorts loaded onto the two factors. Following the Watts and Stenner (2012, p.126) recommendation to first undertake a varimax rotation and then a by-hand rotation, the researcher applied a 19° rotation. This meant three additional Q sorts were loaded onto the two factor solution, bringing the total to 19.

The factors for Q Study 1 are called Factor A and Factor B. The breakdown for these factors is presented in Table 17.

Table 17: Q Study 1 final factor solution

	Factor A	**Factor B**
Eigenvalue	9.1017	1.9735
Variance (post-rotation)	32%	9%
Q sorts significantly loaded onto the factor (in order of weighted score)	U3, U17, U26, U25, U5, U19, U14, U9, U21, U8, U1, U7, U10, U6, U23, U4	U18, U16, U27
Confounded Q sorts (excluded from factors)	U11, U15, U22, U24	
Insignificant Q sorts (excluded from factors)	U2, U12, U13, U20	

Finally, the correlation scores were evaluated. The two factors encapsulate different viewpoints (Table 18) because they are under the significance threshold at p> 0.01 (0.3847). Ergo, the two factor extraction was a suitable factor solution for Q Study 1.

Table 18: correlation matrix for Q Study 1 factor solution

	Factor A	**Factor B**
Factor A	1	0.0192
Factor B	0.0192	1

The final stage of the process of factor analysis is to generate the factor arrays. They are presented here in the format of a Q sort (Factor A: Figure 10; Factor B: Figure 11) because it helps to visualise the relative ranking of each item. The data is presented in a

tabular format for Q Study 1 in Appendix 6. The interpretations of these factors and their significant items are subsequently presented in Chapter 6.

Figure 10: factor array for Factor A

Public library services in England should...

Most disagree					Neutral					Most agree
-5	-4	-3	-2	-1	0	1	2	3	4	5
support the health and wellbeing of the public	demonstrate impact and value	offer leisure based services	provide cultural opportunities	support digital inclusion	be trustworthy	promote the library service	be people-focused	employ and develop professional staff	deliver core services	loan physical print items
promote prosperity	provide services to support employment	provide specialist services	work with other organisations and services	arrange events and activities	demonstrate good customer service	provide pleasant environments	be accessible	focus on reading as their core service	provide free services	link people to information
	support democracy	provide alternative service models	provide information, advice and guidance	provide spaces for different needs	work with families	provide clear guidance about the library service	loan a range of physical items	provide high quality stock	meet the needs of children and young people	
		address social isolation	involve volunteers	offer a range of facilities	innovate and modernise the library service	offer outreach services	deliver some services digitally	promote literacy		
				provide learning and education opportunities	work with the community	comply with relevant laws				
				encourage the public to connect with others	be inclusive and support social justice	provide a comprehensive and efficient library service				
					operate effectively and viably					

Figure 11: factor array for Factor B

Public library services in England should...

Most disagree					**Neutral**					**Most agree**
-5	**-4**	**-3**	**-2**	**-1**	**0**	**1**	**2**	**3**	**4**	**5**
provide information, advice and guidance	provide alternative service models	innovate and modernise the library service	offer leisure based services	provide learning and education opportunities	link people to information	promote literacy	support digital inclusion	meet the needs of children and young people	encourage the public to connect with others	be inclusive and support social justice
loan physical print items	provide a comprehensive and efficient library service	loan a range of physical items	involve volunteers	promote the library service	provide pleasant environments	support democracy	be trustworthy	be accessible	work with families	address social isolation
	demonstrate impact and value	provide high quality stock	operate effectively and viably	provide clear guidance about the library service	provide cultural opportunities	deliver some services digitally	be people-focused	support the health and wellbeing of the public	provide services to support employment	
		work with other organisations and services	demonstrate good customer service	work with the community	provide spaces for different needs	offer outreach services	employ and develop professional staff	focus on reading as their core purpose		
				arrange events and activities	promote prosperity	provide free services				
				provide specialist services	deliver core services	offer a range of facilities				
					comply with relevant laws					

5.7.3 Q Study 2 factor analysis outcomes

As with Q Study 1 and the approach described in Section 5.7.1, factor extraction trials for Q Study 2 began with the ratio of one factor per six Q sorts. Table 19 demonstrates the results of the trials, as unrotated factor extractions.

Table 19: Q Study 2 unrotated factor extraction trials

		Factor 1	**Factor 2**	**Factor 3**	**Factor 4**	**Factor 5**	**Factor 6**	**Factor 7**
Trial 1	Eigenvalues	18.7317	2.2425	1.7623	1.0236	0.797	0.9238	0.2484
	Variance %	46	5	4	2	2	2	1
	Total variance %	62						
Trial 2	Eigenvalues	18.7317	2.2425	1.7623	1.0236			
	Variance %	46	5	4	2			
	Total variance %	57						
Trial 3	Eigenvalues	18.7317	2.2425	1.7623				
	Variance %	46	5	4				
	Total variance %	55						

In Q Study 2, the most appropriate outcome was a three factor solution. It yielded a 55% study variance, well exceeding the recommended 35% benchmark (Watts & Stenner, 2012, p.105). Furthermore, each factor presented an eigenvalue greater than the criteria of >1. Varimax rotation meant 32 of the 41 Q sorts loaded significantly onto factors and this figure did not increase when by-hand rotation was trialled. Therefore, the varimax rotation solution was used. Table 20 demonstrates the key statistical information for the three factor solution.

Table 20: Q Study 2 final factor solution

	Factor C	**Factor D**	**Factor E**
Eigenvalue	18.7317	2.2425	1.7263
Variance (post-rotation)	46%	5%	4%
Q sorts significantly loaded onto the factor (in order of weighted score)	NU37, NU38, NU36, NU3, NU18, NU2, NU26, NU22, NU16, NU15, NU21, NU27, NU17, NU34, NU35, NU14, NU31, NU33, NU41, NU19, NU13, NU40, NU39, NU12	NU23, NU24, NU11, NU25, NU10, NU7	NU6, NU29
Confounded Q sorts (excluded from factors)	NU1, NU5, NU9, NU20, NU30, NU32		
Insignificant Q sorts (excluded from factors)	NU4, NU8, NU28		

Factor D is a bipolar factor because NU7 loads significantly onto the factor but with a negative weighted score of -0.3922. The process by which this factor was interpreted is explained in Chapter 6.3.1.

The factors for Q Study 2 are called Factor C, Factor D and Factor E. Finally, the correlation scores were evaluated (Table 21). Factor C and Factor D exceed the significance threshold at $p > 0.01$, which is set at 0.3846 to four decimal places. This would suggest that the viewpoints captured in both factors have some similarities. Despite exceeding the significance threshold for similarity, there were four reasons the researcher decided to include all three factors. First, a two factor solution lost three Q sorts and reduced the total number of included Q sorts from 32 to 29. Second, during the extraction trial process, it was evident that four factors were potentially plausible (Table 19). This suggests there are different viewpoints captured by the Q Study 2 data and reducing this to two factors would lose some of that nuance. Third, Factor D is bipolar and offers an interesting opportunity to see the viewpoint it captures from two perspectives. Moreover, Watts and Stenner (2012) caution against removing factors

based purely on quantitative information because it can mean a “viewpoint of interest and theoretical significance may get overlooked as a result” (p.110). Finally, in all other quantitative measures, Factor D is viable: an eigenvalue greater than 1 with two or more significantly loading Q sorts.

Table 21 correlation matrix for Q Study 2 factor solution

	Factor C	**Factor D**	**Factor E**
Factor C	1	0.4091	0.2939
Factor D	0.4091	1	0.2041
Factor E	0.2939	0.2041	1

The final stage of the process of factor analysis was to present the factor arrays for Factor C (Figure 12), Factor D (Figure 13) and Factor E (Figure 14). As with Q Study 1, they are presented in Q sort format here and in tabular format in Appendix 7. The interpretations of these factors are presented in Chapter 6.

Figure 12: factor array for Factor C

Public library services in England should...

Most disagree					Neutral					Most agree
-5	-4	-3	-2	-1	0	1	2	3	4	5
involve volunteers	provide services to support employment	work with other organisations and services	operate effectively and viably	encourage the public to connect with others	provide clear guidance about the library service	meet the needs of children and young people	promote literacy	provide free services	loan physical print items	employ and develop professional staff
promote prosperity	support democracy	demonstrate impact and value	address social isolation	be inclusive and support social justice	be accessible	work with families	provide pleasant environments	deliver core services	provide high quality stock	link people to information
	provide alternative service models	support the health and wellbeing of the public	provide cultural opportunities	provide a comprehensive and efficient library service	support digital inclusion	deliver some services digitally	demonstrate good customer service	loan a range of physical items	focus on reading as their core purpose	
		provide specialist services	innovate and modernise the library service	provide learning and education opportunities	provide spaces for different needs	offer outreach services	promote the library service	be people-focused		
				provide information, advice and guidance	offer a range of facilities	work with the community				
				comply with relevant laws	offer leisure based services	be trustworthy				
					arrange events and activities					

Figure 13: factor array for Factor D

Public library services in England should...

Most disagree					Neutral				Most agree
-5	-4	-3	-2	-1	0	1	2	3	4	5
offer leisure based services	provide services to support employment	provide learning and education opportunities	provide spaces for different needs	provide high quality stock	address social isolation	deliver core services	work with other organisations and services	provide a comprehensive and efficient library service	be accessible	be trustworthy
work with families	support the health and wellbeing of the public	promote prosperity	encourage the public to connect with others	provide cultural opportunities	provide clear guidance about the library service	work with the community	innovate and modernise the library service	comply with relevant laws	link people to information	support digital inclusion
	provide information, advice and guidance	loan a range of physical items	provide specialist services	demonstrate impact and value	provide pleasant environments	provide free services	promote the library service	promote literacy	loan physical print items	
		offer outreach services	provide alternative service models	operate effectively and viably	offer a range of facilities	meet the needs of children and young people	focus on reading as their core purpose	employ and develop professional staff		
				involve volunteers	deliver some services digitally	demonstrate good customer service				
				be inclusive and support social justice	be people-focused	arrange events and activities				
					support democracy					

Figure 14: factor array for Factor E

Public library services in England should...

Most disagree					Neutral				Most agree
-5	-4	-3	-2	-1	0	1	2	3	4	5
support democracy	promote literacy	be trustworthy	focus on reading as their core purpose	offer a range of facilities	arrange events and activities	provide clear guidance about the library service	promote the library service	deliver core services	link people to information	innovate and modernise the library service
support the health and wellbeing of the public	provide learning and education opportunities	provide services to support employment	encourage the public to connect with others	provide specialist services	be inclusive and support social justice	operate effectively and viably	provide free services	demonstrate impact and value	loan a range of physical items	deliver some services digitally
	address social isolation	promote prosperity	work with families	provide a comprehensive and efficient library service	provide spaces for different needs	loan physical print items	provide high quality stock	demonstrate good customer service	provide alternative service models	
		provide cultural opportunities	work with the community	meet the needs of children and young people	be people-focused	offer leisure based services	support digital inclusion	involve volunteers		
				provide information, advice and guidance	offer outreach services	provide pleasant environments				
				be accessible	comply with relevant laws	employ and develop professional staff				
					work with other organisations and services					

5.9 Conclusion

This chapter introduces Phase Two of the thesis. Its purpose is to present information about how Q methodology was used in this thesis to gather data that can address Research Question 1: what are public perceptions of public library services in England, both users and non-users? A Q methodological study follows six steps and this chapter provides information about the first five: concourse identification, Q set development, P set selection, Q sort administration, and factor analysis. The sixth step, factor interpretation, is the focus of Chapter 6. Furthermore, Chapter 5 has explained why the thesis unusually includes two separate Q studies and why these were delivered via online software.

In addition to explaining the methods and design choices, Chapter 5 has detailed the quantitative outcomes of both Q Study 1 and Q Study 2. Q Study 1 explored the perceptions of library users. It provided a two factor solution with a total variance of 41%, capturing 19/27 of the library user participant Q sorts. Q Study 2 provided a three factor solution with a study variance of 55%, encompassing 32/41 of the library non-user participant Q sorts.

In Chapter 6, full interpretations are presented for each factor, alongside intra-study comparisons of the factors and inter-study comparisons of the views held by library users and non-users.

CHAPTER 6: INTERPRETING THE Q STUDIES

This chapter explains the process of factor interpretation within Q methodology. The chapter then presents the factor interpretations for Q Study 1 and Q Study 2 in turn. It concludes by explaining how the two studies were compared and the results of that comparison.

6.1 Introduction

Phase Two of the thesis addresses Research Question 1: what are public perceptions of public library services in England, both user and non-user? The phase includes two chapters. Chapter 5 reported the first five steps (Chapter 5.3) of the Q methodological studies, including three key outcomes: the concourse, the Q set and the factor analysis outputs. This chapter presents the sixth and final step of executing a Q methodological study: the interpretation of the factors extracted during factor analysis. Where Chapter 5 responds to Research Question 1 by extrapolating the library user and library non-user perceptions, Chapter 6 interprets and compares those perceptions.

In line with the thesis' interpretivist theoretical approach, which demands transparency, reflexivity and an acknowledgement of the researcher's role in interpretation (Chapter 2.2.2 and 2.4.1.1), this chapter first explains this process of factor interpretation so that researcher decisions remain "opaque" (Malaurent & Avison, 2017, p.920). Thereafter, the factors from Q Study 1 (library users) are interpreted and then compared. Following this, the factors from Q Study 2 (library non-users) are also interpreted and then compared. The chapter concludes by exploring whether there are commonalities between the perceptions of library users and library non-users.

6.2 The process of factor interpretation

As outlined in Chapter 2, the process of factor interpretation requires the researcher to "facilitate a reasonable explication of the data" (McKeown & Thomas, 2013, p.14) generated during factor analysis. Like other qualitative practices, factor interpretation explains patterns presented in the data to uncover its "story" (Albright et al., 2019, p.142). Watts and Stenner (2005) explain that the act of interpretation is synonymous with creating "a series of summarizing accounts" (p.82). As demonstrated in Chapter 5, there is extensive guidance on how to carry out the first five steps of a Q methodological

study: concourse, Q set, P set, Q sorting and factor analysis. However, despite the fact a strength of Q methodology is the transparent manner in which it captures and presents perceptions (Gauttier, 2017, p.4; McKeown & Thomas, 2013, p.15), there is very little literature which unambiguously explains how to interpret factors (Watts & Stenner,2012, p.147). Watts and Stenner (2012) are the exception and their book provides clear guidance for novice Q methodologists about how to move from factory analysis into factor interpretation; therefore, their guidance is utilised in this thesis.

In Q studies, the factor arrays are the primary data (Chapter 5.8); these "best-estimate" (Watts & Stenner, 2005, p.82) composite Q sorts exemplify the weighted average of each Q set item for each factor. The factor arrays serve as concrete, visual aids for the "conceptual stage" (Albright et al., 2019, p.143) of seeking and explaining patterns and themes. In addition, other data is considered: post Q sort interviews can offer illuminating clues to better understand the shared perception captured by the factor array; reviewing the strongest loading Q sorts on each factor can offer helpful insights; and identifying the distinguishing[4] items can demonstrate how each factor differs from the others (Albright et al., 2019; Watts & Stenner, 2012).

For each factor, Watts and Stenner (2012) explain that interpretation begins with an examination of its distinguishing items and items ranked at the polar ends of the distribution model of its factor array (p.82). Additionally, Watts and Stenner (2012) are emphatic that all Q set items in the factor array must be considered in order to present a full interpretation and to avoid careless omission of viewpoints (p.149). To this end, Watts and Stenner (2012) suggest the researcher generates a crib sheet as a "security blanket" (p.150) to ensure the interpretation process is thorough and considered. A crib sheet forces the researcher to consider each item in each factor, in turn. The crib sheet records four qualities from the factor array (Watts & Stenner, 2012, p.153):

[4] A distinguishing item is an item that is ranked significantly differently in one factor compared to the other factors, at the $p < 0.01$ level (Watts & Stenner, 2012, p.149).

- the highest ranked items,
- the lowest ranked items,
- items ranked higher "*than by any other study factors*" (Watts & Stenner, 2012, p.153),
- and items ranked lower "*than by any other study factors*" (Watts & Stenner, 2012, p.153).

The crib sheet helps to compare the factor to the other study factors and also to identify those items which have "important contributions within the factor" (Watts & Stenner, 2012, p.153) to guide the explanation of the factor's overall viewpoint. Other items of interest can also be added to the crib sheet, based on researcher judgement. Moreover, the crib sheet approach can highlight consensus items between the factors as well as items placed in the middle of the distribution model, which are significantly different from the other factors; these can "act as a fulcrum for the whole viewpoint being expressed" (Watts & Stenner, 2012, p.155). In addition to the pragmatic tool of the crib sheet, Watts and Stenner (2012) offer guiding principles for interpreting factors: using an abductive approach; interrogating the position of each item on the factor array; posing hypotheses about item placements and corroborating with additional information such as post sort interviews or demographic details; moving reflexively between viewing individual items and the whole factor array; taking on the perspective of the participants (pp.155-158). The final written interpretation takes the form of a narrative or commentary style that can be substantiated with qualitative comments from the participant interviews, and includes item numbers and rankings for clarity (Watts & Stenner, 2012, pp.162-163). Moreover, Watts and Stenner (2012) stress that final interpretations "must *express* what was *impressed* into the array" (p.163).

At the point of interpretation, critics of the method may argue that any meaning could be drawn from the data; Watts and Stenner (2005, 2012) refute this on multiple grounds. First, they argue that interpretations are bound to participant contributions, which are documented and "frozen" (Watts & Stenner, 2005, p.85) in the factor arrays. Therefore, as "subjective input produces objective structures" (Watts & Stenner, 2005, p.85), misrepresentation of participants' perspectives would be readily evident. Second, outcomes from the factor analysis mean that weak interpretations can be refuted "whilst allowing scope for numerous subtly different competent readings to coexist" (Watts & Stenner, 2005, p.85). Third, the process of factor interpretation includes a

thorough examination of the factor array, item by item, in addition to an abductive approach of moving between close scrutiny at item-level and a panoramic view of the whole factor (Watts & Stenner, 2012, p.153-159). Finally, researchers use other available data, such as participants' comments, to substantiate interpretations of the factor arrays (Watts & Stenner, 2012, pp.157-158).

6.3 Q Study 1 and Q Study 2: the approach to factor interpretation

Both Q studies were interpreted following the guidance provided by Watts and Stenner (2012), detailed in the preceding section. In particular, the approach was governed by their assertion that "Every single item offers a potential sign or clue that deserves your full intention and investigation" (Watts & Stenner, 2012, p.155).

First, crib sheets that feature the four aspects of Watts and Stenner's (2012, pp.150-154) guidance was created for each factor in both studies. As an example, the crib sheet for Q Study 1 is provided in Appendix 8. In addition to this, distinguishing items at the level of $p < 0.01$ were also included; these items are generated automatically by the factor analysis software. Furthermore, a list of all the Q sorts which loaded onto each factor, in order of weighted score, was added to each crib sheet. For instance, with Factor C (Q Study 2), NU37 was listed first because it has the highest weighting (a score of 10), showing it loads most significantly onto the factor. NU12, conversely, is listed last, as it has the lowest weighting (a score of 1.1429). When reviewing a feature of a factor array which is challenging to understand and articulate, it is helpful to then review the strongest loading Q sorts on that factor. In doing so, it is possible they will offer clues and insights into how to unlock the factor array's meaning. Alongside the ranked list are the responses to the post-Q sort questions for each participant who provided answers.

Second, in addition to reviewing the crib sheets for each factor, the factor arrays were printed and annotated by hand. The physical factor arrays enabled the researcher to consider how each individual item was ranked in relation to all the others because every item could be seen simultaneously. Ideas, connections between items and questions were all annotated onto the factor arrays; these were subsequently reviewed in light of the information gathered in the crib sheet.

Overall, a key tenet of Q methodology is to recognise that the researcher is active in the interpretation process (McKeown & Thomas, 2013, p.14), whilst balancing the need to "see things exclusively from the perspective of your participants" (Watts & Stenner, 2012, p.156). The crib sheets, participant comments and hand-annotated factor arrays meant the researcher maintained a close proximity to the data during the process of interpretation. In addition, the researcher did not return to the literature review or concourse materials until the factor interpretations were completed and ready for comparison. This was to create a deliberate distance between those materials which could influence the interpretations and to ensure the researcher was able to "let the factor array govern proceedings" (Watts & Stenner, 2012, p.148).

6.3.1 The issue of the bipolar factor in Q Study 2

As explained in Chapter 5.7.3, Factor D is a bipolar factor. The factor has both positively and negatively loading Q sorts so it captures shared viewpoints which mirror one another. In this thesis, they are referred to as Factor D and Factor D^{-ve}.

A decision was required in terms of how to treat the factor. The researcher considered four options: removing the NU7 Q sort; interpreting the NU7 Q sort separately (O'Neil, 2012); splitting the factor (Brown, 1980; Ramlo, 2020, 2022); or inverting the factor array by hand to create a mirrored array for the bipolar viewpoint. The participant who completed Q sort NU7 did not provide responses to the post-Q sort questions; therefore, it was not possible to use their comments to ascertain whether they had unintentionally inverted the polar ends of the distribution grid when ranking the Q set items. Consequently, the NU7 Q sort had to be viewed as intentional. Removing a Q sort because it appears to be anomalous was deemed unethical by the researcher, so the first option was dismissed. The second and third options, to separate NU7 from the factor and investigate it separately by using its Q sort or by splitting the factor, would ignore the fact that Q methodological factor analysis establishes correlations across viewpoints. The NU7 Q-sort loads onto Factor D, meeting the $p < 0.01$ criteria and its negative correlation to the other five Q sorts is part of what makes Factor D. Moreover, it is evidence that the viewpoint captured by Factor D is shared because the NU7 Q sort is in polar opposition to NU23, NU24, NU11, NU25, and NU10. Therefore, retaining NU7 and manually inverting the factor array to create a mirrored version, labelled Factor D^{-ve},

was the most effective choice for this study. Using a mirrored factor array, it is possible to present "*twinned* interpretations" (Watts & Stenner, 2012, p.165) for a bipolar factor.

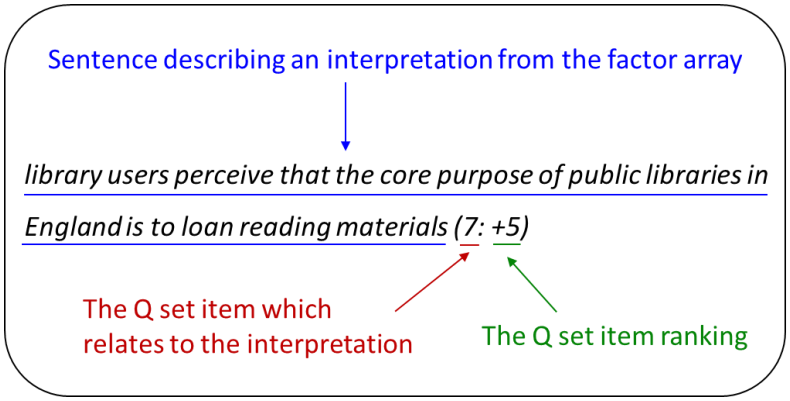
Factor D^{-ve} does not have statistical outcomes of its own because it is a part of Factor D. As a result, there are no distinguishing items to use during the interpretation process. Moreover, there is only a single participant whose Q sort loads significantly onto Factor D^{-ve} (NU7) and this person did not answer the post-Q sort questions. As such, the interpretation of Factor D^{-ve} is based solely on its factor array and its crib sheet, due to a lack of supporting information. Despite this, completing the interpretation was important as an exercise to better understand Factor D because Factor D^{-ve} is its inverted view. In reality, Factor D^{-ve} is a single Q sort but its function is to help create Factor D through its statistical input (Chapter 5.7.3). As Factor D^{-ve} is based on a single Q sort, the interpretation is not presented in this chapter as a final outcome; instead, it can be viewed in Appendix 9.

6.4 How the factor interpretations are presented

Factor interpretations are written as descriptions, in a narrative style (Watts & Stenner, 2012). In this thesis, each factor is presented in the following structure: a title, a summary, and then the full description of the viewpoint captured in its factor array. The descriptions are not brief because they deal holistically with the entire perception captured by each factor (Watts & Stenner, 2012, pp. 163-164).

In each factor's description, reference to Q set items and their rank in the factor array are presented in parentheses. This is to help readability so that the reader does not need to repeatedly cross-reference with the full Q set and factor arrays presented in Chapter 5. Figure 15 demonstrates an example of how the factors are presented, taken from Factor A, and explains how the parentheses work.

Figure 15: illustration of the presentation of factor interpretations



As described in Sections 6.2 and 6.3, the post-Q sort question responses from participants were helpful for interpreting the factor arrays. The factor descriptions also include direct quotations and paraphrased ideas taken from these responses. They are attributed to participants in parentheses and each participant is referred to as their alphanumeric designator (Chapter 5.6). For example, *they are not "teaching spaces" (U4)* demonstrates that this quotation is from library user U4. When quoting participant comments, the text is presented verbatim which may include small typing mistakes. In all cases, the participants' intended meaning was clear; therefore, there was no need to edit their responses or draw attention to them with the use of [sic].

Descriptive sentences within the interpretations can often pertain to multiple items and participants. In this case, the participant is presented first and the Q set items are then presented in order of rank value. Figure 16 presents an example from Factor E. It relates to two post-Q sort responses and two Q set items, and the sentence is describing a *most agree* viewpoint:

Figure 16: example descriptive sentence from a most agree viewpoint

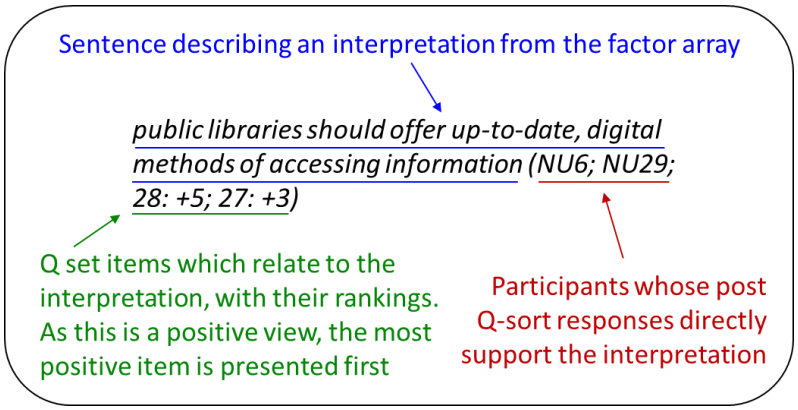
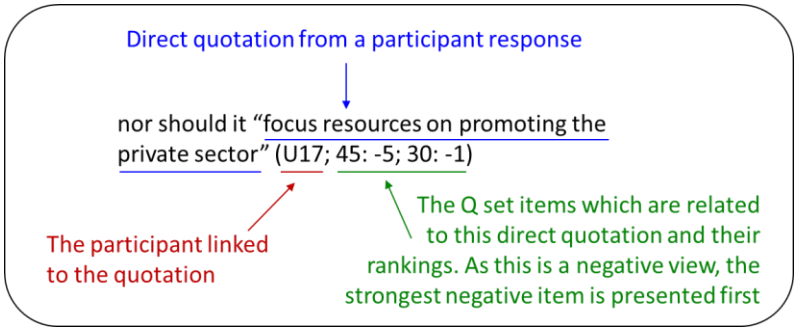


Figure 17 provides an example from Factor A which depicts a *most disagree* viewpoint, including a direct quotation and links to two Q set items:

Figure 17: example descriptive sentence from a most disagree viewpoint



6.5 Q Study 1: interpretations

Research Question 1 is focused on establishing the public perceptions of public libraries in England, both library users and non-users. Q Study 1 captured the perceptions of the library user participant group (n=27). The factor analysis (Chapter 5) resulted in a two factor solution, meaning that there are two distinct viewpoints of public libraries held by the library user participant group. In response to Research Question 1, Table 22 presents an overview of the two viewpoints found in the library user participant group, named Factor A and Factor B.

Table 22: overview of the factor interpretation for Q Study 1

	Title	**Summary**
Factor A	A public library service "can't be all things to all people"	Public library services should provide a refined service true to the perceived core purpose of public libraries, which meets the needs of individuals specifically in relation to that core purpose.
Factor B	Public libraries help "people to meet and connect, and get assistance"	Public library services should address social isolation, providing a space to help individuals to feel connected.

6.5.1 Factor A interpretation: a public library service "can't be all things to all people"

Factor A library users (n=17) perceive that the core purpose of public libraries in England is to loan reading materials (7: +5) and connect individuals to information (19: +5). This is underpinned by the conviction that loanable stock should be of a high quality (11: +3), and that other items should also be available to borrow (8: +2). Through the provision of an eLibrary, library users should also be able to access information in all formats, including eBooks, eAudiobooks and eMagazines (28: +2). In addition, library users perceive that "nurturing a love of reading" (U22; 35: +3) and promoting literacy (3: +3) are integral to the core purpose of spreading information, books and literature (U17; 7: +5; 19: +5) for free (9: +4).

Library users associated with Factor A are clear that connecting people to information means curating and providing access to print and online information, in all its formats (19: +5). They do not perceive that public libraries should offer information, advice and guidance (41: -2), connecting people to resources, support, other public services and organisations. Library users do not perceive public libraries as a signposting service for other services.

Library users associated with Factor A believe public libraries should focus on delivering core services (27: +4) rather than exceeding their "remit" (U8). Services associated with wider societal issues, such as public health and wellbeing (32: -5), prosperity (45: -5), democracy (13: -4), unemployment (16: -4) or social isolation (20: -3), "should be a by-product rather than an aim or goal" (U3) because "they are core services of other public bodies" (U19). Not only are they perceived as deviations from "the function of a library" (U9) because they do not allow "staff / resources to focus on the core services libraries should provide" (U8), but it is also possible they will "alienate some demographics" (U14).

Digital services are another example of Factor A emphasising a refined library purpose. Library users agree that public libraries should provide digital content and some digitised services (28: +2); however, they believe that it goes beyond the library's "remit" (U8) to support digital inclusion (5: -1): "I agree that there are whole groups of people being left behind, digitally speaking... but who decided that it was the role of libraries to pick them up?" (U4).

In the same way, library users strongly believe that public libraries should meet the needs of children and young people (12: +4) through relevant collections, promoting the library and supporting literacy. That said, providing more formalised learning and education services (2: -1) is considered beyond the "remit" (U8) of public libraries because they are not "teaching spaces" (U4).

Participants value practice which connects individuals to the library service when it is related to the core purpose, such as linking individuals to information (19: +5), understanding and responding to individuals' library-related needs (24: +2) or providing outreach services so that all individuals can access reading materials (43: +1). However, participants are ambivalent towards practice which deviates from this: acting as a mediator for the public to connect with other members of the public (18: -1); dealing with library users as customers (34: 0); or connecting the library service to groups, rather than individuals (14: 0; 25: 0).

The relationship between the library service and individual people seeking to borrow materials (7: +5; 11: +3; 8: +2; 28: +2) or finding information (19: +5) is further illustrated by the high regard for public libraries being people-focused (24: +2) compared to the low regard for demonstrating impact and value (42: -4). Both attributes embrace feedback and user satisfaction. However, where being people-focused (24: +2) means listening to public voice, prioritising public needs above funders' agendas and helping the public to satisfy their curiosities, demonstrating impact and value (42: -4) is focused on measuring and evidencing performance. The former embodies the notion of the public library working with individuals to effectively meet their borrowing and information needs; the latter is not focused on improving the individual's experience of using the library's core functions.

Even the service aspects which relate to the physical library buildings are viewed in light of whether they support individuals to borrow items (7: +5; 11: +3; 8: +2; 28: +2), read (35: +3) or access information (19: +5). For instance, a pleasant environment (29: +1) that has clear signage, well maintained furniture and good lighting will support individuals to browse and read materials. However, providing spaces for different needs (21: -1) or offering a range of facilities (30: -1) like cafés or shops, does not support individuals to borrow items or access information. This factor suggests a library building

is considered more a space to acquire materials (7: +4; 29: +1) than as space to be (20: -3; 23: -3; 4: -2; 18: -1; 21: -1; 30: -1; 36: -1).

Innovating and modernising the library service (44: 0) might help to "keep public interest and keep libraries relevant in an ever changing world" (U14) by responding to changing public needs; however, embracing changing technologies could deviate too far from the core purpose. Certainly, services not related to connecting people to information (19: +5; 28: +2) and loanable items (7: +5; 11: +3; 35: +3; 8: +2) are perceived as a departure from the core purpose: arranging events and activities (36: -1); providing cultural opportunities (4: -2); working with other organisations and services (10: -2); offering leisure based services (23: -3); and providing alternative types of libraries (38: -3).

Library users also value provision which helps an individual's use of or access to the core services of borrowing materials (7: +5; 11: +3; 8: +2; 28: +2) and accessing information (19: +5). For instance, these services should be free (U6; U10; U17; U26; 9: +4) and delivered by professional staff (22: +3) who "know what their doimng" (U5) rather than "nice well-meaning" (U5) volunteers (37: -2). Digital services (28: +2) enable individuals to reserve, renew and borrow items anytime and anywhere. There is also an expectation that public libraries will be accessible (33: +2) in terms of buildings, extended opening hours and postal loaning services. Providing outreach services (43: +1; U1) means that no one is excluded from accessing "quality reading material" (U10). Moreover, promoting libraries (31: +1) and providing clear guidance about the library service (17: +1) helps people to know what "is available from the outset" (U6) and to ensure the core purpose is not "lost" (U3).

It could be important that a public library service operates effectively and viably (39: 0) by being "accountable for spending" (U6) but it "should not be regarded as income generation or treated as a business entity" (U6; 45: -5; 39: 0); nor should it "focus resources on promoting the private sector" (U17; 45: -5; 30: -1) or "niche activities which require deep specialist investment" (U23; 45: -5; 26: -3). Library users also perceive that public libraries should provide a comprehensive and efficient library service (6: +1) and "cannot operate outside of" (U19) relevant laws (15: +1). However, there is tension around whether libraries should be trustworthy (40: 0) or inclusive by supporting social justice (1: 0). Certainly, library users believe that everyone should have equal access (9: +4; 33: +2; 43: +1) to information (19: +5; 28: +2) and reading materials

(7: +5; 11: +3; 35: +3; 8: +2), which inclusively supports those who are disadvantaged (1: 0). The core purpose of providing "books and nurturing a love of reading and information is essential to our society" (U22) and it is in this way that libraries serve the public, rather than by trying to "tackle" (U3) wider societal issues which are "not important to the function of a library" (U9), such as unemployment (16: -4), democracy (13: -4) or public health (32: -5). Ultimately, a public library service "can't be all things to all people" (U22).

6.5.2 Factor B interpretation: public libraries help "people to meet and connect, and get assistance"

Library users associated with Factor B (n=3) perceive that public library services are centred on human connection because they address social isolation (20: +5). Public libraries provide opportunities and "spaces for people to meet and connect, and get assistance" (U16; 18: +4) through a people-focused service (24: +2). In order to create environments and services which encourage people to interact with one another (20: +5; 18: +4) and which address social justice (1: +5), library users expect public library services to be trustworthy (40: +2) and accessible (33: +3). This impartial and ethical approach to providing services is considered more important than complying with relevant laws (15: 0) or providing a comprehensive and efficient library service (6: -4).

Public libraries should strive to ensure no one is left behind in society. This conviction is not rooted in delivering core services (27: 0) which promote literacy (3: +1), loan print materials (7: -5) or link people to the information they need (19: 0). Instead, library users associated with Factor B place greater value on libraries helping the public in ways which go beyond the traditional library model, by supporting the public with employment (16: +4), health and wellbeing (32: +3), digital inclusion (5: +2) and democracy (13: +1). Given the potential sensitivity of these services, library users assert the need for professional staff, who are skilled, helpful and diverse (22: +2), rather than volunteers (37: -2). Furthermore, these services improve individuals' prospects and are deliverable by public libraries without reliance on external partnerships; library users are less concerned about services which focus on empowerment but not for individuals, such as promoting prosperity in the local area (45: 0) and working with the community (14: -1). Moreover, library services which could support individual prospects but rely on collaboration with other organisations, businesses and public services are not considered priorities for public libraries (41: -5; 38: -4; 10: -3; 2: -1).

Whilst potentially enriching for an individual, services related to leisure (23: -2), events, activities (36: -1) and culture (4: 0) are considered superfluous to the expectation that public libraries will improve the quality of life for individuals (1: +5; 16: +4; 32: +3; 5: +2). Furthermore, although reading is core to public libraries' purpose (35: +3; 3: +1), library users recognise that printed reading material (11: -3) is not the only format to access information (28: +1; 19: 0). In fact, Factor B suggests that libraries are not defined by their spaces (29: 0; 21: 0; 30: +1) or collections (7: -5; 8: -3; 11: -3). Library users are not averse to pleasant environments (29: 0), a variety of different spaces (21: 0) or a range of facilities (30: +1) but place slightly more value on a service that reaches people beyond the confines of its physical boundary (33: +3; 5: +2; 9: +1; 28: +1; 43: +1). Library users also perceive that working with people, including children (1: +5; 20: +5; 16; +4; 18: +4; 25: +4; 12: +3; 32: +3; 5: +2; 22: +2), is more important than assets (7: -5; 8: -3; 11: -3). Moreover, providing high quality stock (11: -3), including print items (7: -5) and other loanable materials (8: -3), are "good aims" (U16) but not "the key services that libraries need to provide" (U16). Therefore, aspects of the public library service which are linked to commercialism or neoliberalism (42: -4; 44: -3; 34: -2; 39: -2; 26: -1; 30: +1;) are not prioritised above those which are perceived to improve individuals' lives (1: +5; 20: +5; 16: +4; 25: +4; 32: +3; 33: +3; 5: +2; 24: +2): "I understand that libraries have to run on a business model, but I feel their main role is to support people" (U16). Equally, practice associated with promoting (31: -1) and providing guidance (17: -1) about the library service is considered too corporate and not sufficiently personalised or people-focused (24: +2).

6.6 Q Study 1: factor comparison approach

To undertake a comparison of the two factors extracted in Q Study 1, the researcher reviewed the consensus items and the distinguishing items. Consensus items are items upon which the two factors agree, established through "the total weighted score for each item [which] is converted into a *z* (or standard) *score*" (Watts & Stenner, 2012, p.143). Conversely, a distinguishing item is an item that has been ranked by one factor in a "significantly different fashion to the other study factors" (Watts and Stenner, 2012, p.149) at the level of $p < 0.01$.

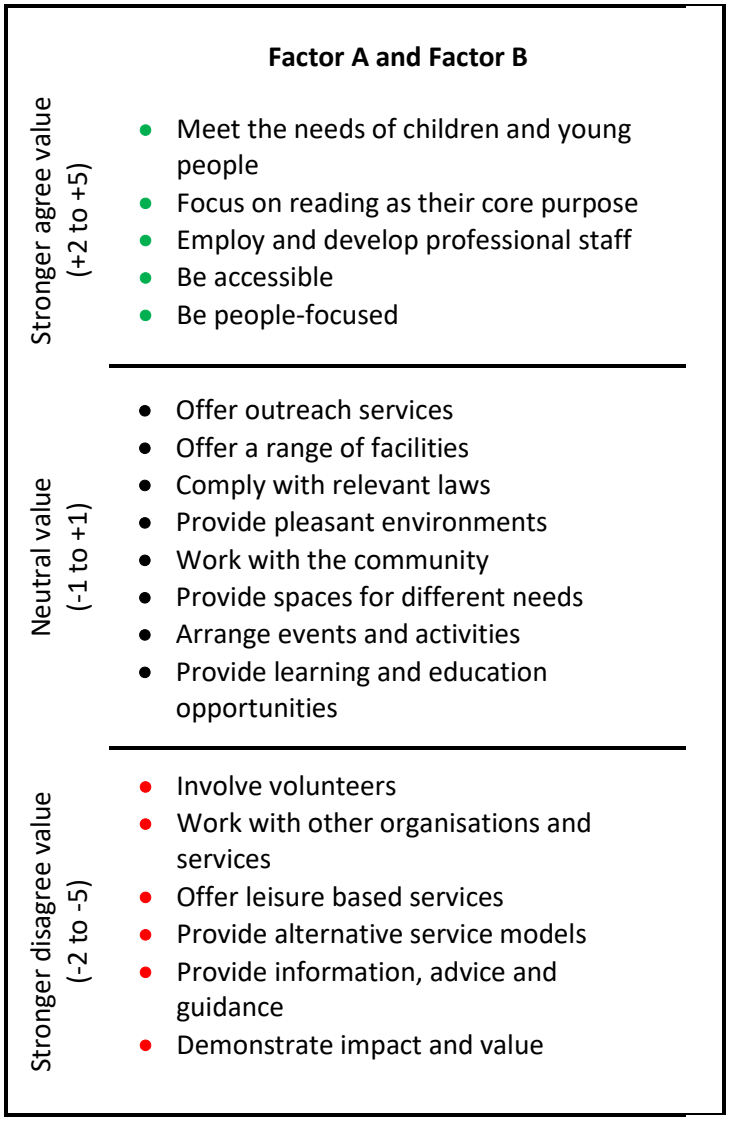
In a Q study with a two factor solution, such as Q Study 1, this is nominally problematic as all non-consensus items are, by definition, distinguishing items. It is also worth noting

that some distinguishing items between two factors can be ranked at a similar end of the distribution model. For example, *provide free services* was ranked at +4 in Factor A and +1 in Factor B. In this situation, it is not the case that Factor B disagrees with the idea of providing free services but more that it is not considered as high a priority as it is in Factor A. To refine the comparison of Factor A and Factor B, distinguishing items ranked neutrally (between +1 and -1) were not included. It was more useful, for interpretation purposes, to compare those items which have the strongest value of agree (ranked +2 to +5) or disagree (ranked -2 to -5). These are depicted in Figure 18. In terms of consensus items, all items which were agreed upon by the two factors are included because they represent the shared views of all library users in Q Study 1. These are presented in Figure 19.

Figure 18: distinguishing items in Q Study 1

	Factor A	**Factor B**
Stronger agree value (+2 to +5)	• Loan physical print items • Link people to information • Provide free services • Deliver core services • Provide high quality stock • Loan a range of physical items	• Be inclusive and support social justice • Address social isolation • Work with families • Encourage the public to connect with others • Provide services to support employment • Support the health and wellbeing of the public • Support digital inclusion
Stronger disagree value (-2 to -5)	• Address social isolation • Support democracy • Provide services to support employment • Support the health and wellbeing of the public • Promote prosperity	• Demonstrate good customer service • Innovate and modernise the service • Loan a range of physical items • Provide high quality stock • Provide a comprehensive and efficient library service • Loan physical print items

Figure 19: consensus items in Q Study 1



In addition to reviewing the consensus and distinguishing items in Figures 18 and 19, the researcher also consulted the factor interpretation crib sheets (see Section 6.3), participant post-Q sort question responses, the factor arrays and the full factor descriptions.

6.6.1 Q Study 1: factor comparison

In addressing Research Question 1, Q Study 1 has established two perceptions of public libraries in Factor A and Factor B. However, some views are shared by both factors. For instance, library users agree that libraries should not have to demonstrate their impact and value (42: Factor A -4 / Factor B -4) because public libraries "are a statutory right" (U6). Both factors also agree that public libraries should prioritise reading and literacy based services (35: Factor A +3 / Factor B +3; 3: Factor A +3 / Factor B +1); whereas

leisure based activities (23: Factor A -3 / Factor B -2) are not considered “core to library services” (U25). Moreover, Q Study 1 indicates that library users are disinterested in public libraries exploring alternative service models (38: Factor A -3 / Factor B -4).

Both Factor A and Factor B also assert that public libraries should centre people’s needs, including those of young people (12: Factor A +4 / Factor B +3; 24: Factor A +2 / Factor B +2), and be accessible (33: Factor A +2 / Factor B +3). This view is summed up by a participant in Factor B: “their main role is to support people that may not otherwise have access to books/computers for a variety of purposes, and to provide spaces for people to meet and connect, and get assistance” (U16). Both library user factors share the view that employing professional staff (22: Factor A +3 / Factor B +2) is far more important to delivering library services and meeting people’s needs than working with volunteers (37: Factor A -2 / Factor B -2).

The viewpoint of Factor A focuses on the tangible and traditional aspects of public libraries; for example, core library services (27: Factor A +4 / Factor B 0), the primacy of print (7: Factor A +5 / Factor B -5) and the importance of a high quality collection (11: Factor A +3 / Factor B -3), and services which link people to the information they need (19: Factor A +5 / Factor B 0). By comparison, Factor B focuses on the more intangible and ideological aspects of public libraries: being an inclusive service which supports social justice (1: Factor B +5 / Factor A 0); addressing social isolation (20: Factor B +5 / Factor A -3) and encouraging connectedness (18: Factor B +4 / Factor A -1); working with families (25: Factor B +4 / Factor A 0); and helping people to improve their quality of life through services which support employment (16: Factor B +4 / Factor A -4), health and wellbeing (32: Factor B +3 / Factor A -5) and digital skills (5: Factor B +2 / Factor A -1).

Overall, despite the differences, library users in Q Study 1 share the view that reading, employing professional staff, being accessible, and foregrounding people’s needs are fundamental to public libraries. This finding, related to Research Question 1, will be discussed at greater length in Chapter 9 in combination with the findings from the literature.

6.7 Q Study 2: interpretations

Research Question 1 is focused on establishing the public perceptions of public libraries in England, both library users and non-users. Q Study 2 captured the perceptions of the

library non-user participant group (n=41). As explained in Chapter 5, the factor analysis resulted in a three factor solution with one bipolar factor (Factor D). This means there are three distinct viewpoints about public libraries within the library non-user participant group. In response to Research Question 1, Table 23 presents an overview of the three viewpoints held by the library non-user group, named Factor C, Factor D and Factor E.

Table 23: overview of the factor interpretation for Q Study 2

	Title	**Summary**
Factor C	"Books stuffed into phone boxes are cute but they're not libraries"	Public library services should provide a professional service focused on linking people to the information they need.
Factor D	"The more accessible a library is, the more people will use a library"	Public library services should focus on connecting people to information through digital inclusion and accessible, trustworthy practice.
Factor E	"Amazon vs. the library - Amazon is going to win"	Public library services should innovate and modernise their offering to better link people to the information they need.

6.7.2 Factor D interpretation: "The more accessible a library is, the more people will use" it

The library non-users within Factor D (n=6) assert that public libraries "need to be seen as safe, neutral, and trustworthy spaces" (NU24; 40: +5; 33: +4) because "the more accessible a library is, the more people will use" it (NU25). Moreover, to ensure trustworthiness (40: +5) and accessibility (33: +4), public libraries should employ and develop professional staff (22: +3), rather than involving volunteers (37: -1), who uphold ethical principles and comply with relevant laws (15: +3).

Providing the public access to information (19: +4) is even more important than promoting reading (35: +2) and literacy (3: +3): "whilst reading and literacy is core to their purpose, it is the wider aspiration connecting people with information and access to information for free that is important" (NU24). Because "we are in an ever evolving technological world" (NU25), it is crucial that public libraries actively support the digital

inclusion of the public (5: +5). It also serves as a means of ensuring equitable access to information, particularly as “most books / academic papers are online now” (NU25).

Reading (35: +2) remains an important part of the public library offer for library non-users who associate with Factor D; this includes the loaning of physical print items (7: +4) and literacy promotion (3: +3). Reading and books are “mysterious and exciting” (NU10); public libraries should help young people (12: +1) and the “future generation” (NU10) to discover them. Library non-users also assert that public libraries should encourage more people to use their services, which will encourage more readers. For instance, public libraries should promote what they offer (31: +2) and employ professional staff to deliver their services (22: +3). Furthermore, although non-users appear ambivalent about digital services (28: 0), such as lending eMaterials and using digital forms of communication, they are clear that innovating and modernising (44: +2) the service will help attract more library users, particularly young people:

> I think future generation should immerse more into library but what will help them is modernisation. The world is evolving into something that years ago we thought was just a fiction CY-FY fantasy. The library must keep up with the world in order to stay relevant for future generation (NU10).

Public libraries should provide free services (9: +1) and “access to information for free” (NU24) but library non-users positively associated with Factor D show some concern that “funding for them has to come from somewhere, otherwise they will close down as I saw when I was growing up” (NU25). As public libraries should be funded (NU25), it is not their responsibility to produce strategies, write investment plans, generate income (39: -1) or demonstrate impact and value (42: -1). Furthermore, library non-users are wary of provision which would unduly cost the service money in real terms or in staff time. Loaning a range of physical items (8: -3) not associated to reading, for example, “will put more stress on the staff members because they will need to monitor those items and call every time a person did not returned the item, but there is also a risk of stealing and breaking which will be costly for the library” (NU10).

As public libraries are a free service (NU24; 9: +1), library non-users do not “see why they should have to provide more free services” (NU25) beyond those which connect the public to information (5: +5; 19: +4) and books (7: +4; 3: +3; 35: +2; 27: +1). Offering specialist services (26: -2), leisure based services (23: -5), employment support (16: -4),

health and wellbeing support (32: -4), learning and education opportunities (2: -3) and outreach (43: -3) is additional to the core purpose and potentially costly. Moreover, "there are other places which can and do work with families" (NU25; 25: -5) and vulnerable members of society (1: -1); ergo, "there is no need for library's to have to fund this as well" (NU25). Instead, public libraries should work with other organisations and services (10: +2) to signpost more appropriate places for the public to get help: whilst public libraries "can link to some health and wellbeing services, I believe the responsibility for promoting these sits elsewhere in our public services and is not a core component of the [library] service" (NU24).

Public library services should remain focused on connecting people to information (19: +4) in an "accessible… safe, neutral, and trustworthy" space (NU24) and by ensuring digital inclusion (5: +5). Whilst extending "beyond just reading as its core purpose and encompass[ing] wider community participation and support services" (NU24; 5: +5; 10: +2; 14: +1; 36: +1) could strengthen the "wider aspiration of connecting people with information" (NU24; 19: +4), public libraries should be cautious about what they offer. Providing spaces for different needs (21: -2) or "irrelevant groups of people" (NU10), arranging opportunities for people to connect with one another (18: -2) or offering a range of facilities (30: 0) could be problematic because "the library will not only be overloaded, but the atmosphere will change into a more hectic and busy mess" (NU10). Too broad an offer which assumes the responsibilities of other public services (NU24) distracts from connecting people to information and books (NU10; NU24; NU25; 4: +4; 19: +4; 3: +3; 35: +2), incurs additional costs (NU10; NU25; 9: +1) and runs the risk of a public library service which is not comprehensive or efficient (6: +3).

6.7.1 Factor C interpretation: "Books stuffed into phone boxes are cute but they're not libraries"

Library non-users whose perceptions loaded onto Factor C (n=24) are emphatic that employing and developing professional staff (22: +5) is fundamental to providing a public library service. Professional staff "help people to get what they need" (NU38) because they "are trained to best help connect people to information" (NU36; 19: +5). Moreover, "you need professional staff to" (NU27) provide access to information and reading materials (19: +5; 7: +4; 11: +4; 35: +4; 8: +3; 27: +3; NU2; NU3; NU12; NU15; NU16; NU22; NU27; NU31; NU33; NU34; NU36; NU37; NU38; NU39). Factor C library non-users prefer a service delivered by trained, professional staff; therefore, the use of

volunteers is considered “free labour” (NU3) and an undesirable replacement for paid staff (NU3; NU22; NU37). This point is illustrated by the following participant comment:

> Charity shops are great but they're not John Lewis. You know there's a difference in the service at both and John Lewis prides itself on its professional staff. Libraries are the same - I'm sure those run by volunteers are nice enough but they'll be the charity shop version rather than the John Lewis version. I'd rather deal with trained staff, who are reliable and knowledgable (NU22).

Whilst content, stock and loanable items in all formats are important (7: +4; 11: +4; 8: +3), library non-users stress that a public library service is only effective because of people (22: +5; 24: +3; 34: +2):

Before I'd have said a library was all about its books and what it can loan you. But then we've been getting all these "mini libraries" over lockdown. Books stuffed into phone boxes etc. They're cute but they're not libraries. You can't talk to anyone, ask for help, check out the authors next book. So I'm beginning to think the core purpose of a library is to connect people to the info they need. And for that, you need professional staff (NU3).

Reading is considered the core purpose of public libraries (35: +4; NU16; NU19; NU22; NU27; NU31; NU34; NU36; NU37), so aspects of the service which support reading should be prioritised: offering physical print items to borrow (7: +4); ensuring stock is of high quality (11: +4); delivering core services related to loans, renewals and reservations (27: +3); and promoting literacy (3: +2).

People should have a good experience when engaging with public library services through variety and choice (NU33; 11: +4), good customer service (34: +2), pleasant environments (29: +2), and people-focused practice (24: +3). That said, public libraries should prioritise a broad loanable collection (NU39; 11: +4) above looking too “swanky” (NU39) because books can be borrowed and taken home. Although it might help to ensure a good experience, library non-users are ambivalent about publishing guidance about using the library service (17: 0), ensuring accessibility (33: 0) or maintaining law compliance (6: 0; 15: 0) because the expectation is that “good” (NU38), “professional” (NU3, NU22, NU27, NU34, NU36), “trained paid staff” (NU19) will support those using

the service. Moreover, public libraries should be free (NU2; NU16; NU22; NU33; NU36; NU37; NU39; 9: +3) because they are “for everyone” (NU16).

Library non-users assert that public libraries should focus on their core remit of delivering services which link people to information (19: +5; 11: +4) and enable them to borrow reading materials and resources (7: +4; 11: +4; 35: +4; 8: +3; 27: +3). Deviating from this is considered “diluting the library service” (NU36). For instance, promoting prosperity (45: -5) is “not the point of a library” (NU15) because it is focused on the economy by “increasing footfall to local shops” (NU19). Equally, providing specialist services (26: -3) is described as “expensive” (NU33, NU38) and they “take up staff time” (NU33) from providing core services. Although library non-users stress that public libraries help the public, this help should prioritise “connect[ing] people to information and reading materials” (NU16) rather than offering broader support with employment (16: -4), health and wellbeing (32: -3), learning and education (2: -1), networking (18: -1) or digital inclusion (5: 0).

Library non-users argue modernisation (44: -2) and diversification (21: 0; 30: 0) will not necessarily increase the number of library users (NU38); indeed, deviating from its core purpose could alienate some people: “Why do library’s keep trying to be different things? I stopped going to mine when it opened a cafe” (NU2). In addition, aspects of the public library service focused on culture (4: -2), leisure (23: 0), events and activities (36: 0) are not as important as those which help people to embrace reading (11: +4; 35: +4; 3: +2; 12: +1) or find information (19: +5; 8: +3; 27: +3; 28: +1).

Public libraries should be apolitical (NU37) according to Factor C library non-users, so supporting democracy (13: -4), addressing social isolation (20: -2) or supporting social justice (1: -1) puts public libraries on “dodgy ground” (NU37). Public libraries should operate from an unambiguous position, recognising their core purpose and not drifting from this. Therefore, they should not offer information, advice and guidance (41: -1) unless it pertains to helping “the public to get free access to reading materials and inforamtion” (NU22); nor should they work with other organisations and public services (10: -3) because it “seems like diluting the library service or privatisation by stealth?” (NU36).

Factor C library non-users contend that public libraries should promote but not “defend” (NU3) their services. Promoting their services (31: +2) is important but a public library

service should not have to demonstrate its impact and value (42: -3) or operate effectively and viably (39: -2) because it implies “it has to defend itself” (NU3) when “Its meant to be a public service” (NU3). Moreover, “demonstrate value sounds like prove the value of their existence” (NU33) which is unnecessary as non-users still understand them to be “valuable” (NU33). Furthermore, the perception held by Factor C library non-users is that public libraries should stand apart from other services (10: -3) by offering a distinct loaning and reading focused service, rather than exploring alternative service models (38: -4), innovating and modernising the service (44: -2) or providing services which should be offered by other organisations (13: -4; 16: -4; 32: -3; 4: -2; 20: -2, 2: -1; 41: -1).

6.7.4 Factor E interpretation: “Amazon vs. the library - Amazon is going to win”

According to the library non-users associated with Factor E (n=2), public libraries should “move with the times and provide a book lending service that matches current needs - what people want to read and the kind of service they want to use” (NU6). Innovating and modernising the service (44: +5) will help people to find the information they need (19: +4) because “books aren’t the only way to get information now a days” (NU29). By offering some services digitally (28: +5), providing alternative service models (38: +4), demonstrating good customer service (34: +3) and supporting digital inclusion (5: +2), public libraries can adapt to meet contemporary public needs. Otherwise, in “Amazon vs library - Amazon is going to win” (NU6).

Factor E library non-users are clear that a public library service “can’t be everything to everyone” (NU29). It is “not the job of a library” (NU6) to support the health and wellbeing of the public (32: -5), support democracy (13: -5), promote prosperity (45: -3) or provide services to support employment (16: -3). Nor is it the “job of a library” (NU6) to address social isolation (20: -4) by providing trustworthy, safe spaces (40: -3) for people. Library non-users raise the question, “is this provided by another service or organisation? If it is why are libraries trying to do it?” (NU29). The public can experience cultural opportunities (4: -3), find advice and guidance (41: -1), or access a range of facilities (30: -1), spaces (21: 0) and specialist services (26: -1) elsewhere. Moreover, other organisations work with the community (14: -2) to support families (25: -2) and encourage the public to connect with one another (18: -2). The public should approach these organisations directly rather than through public libraries (10: 0).

Library non-users are clear about which functions are “not the job of a library” (NU6) but also comment there is confusion about public libraries’ main purpose:

> the core purpose of a library has changed over time or should have changed. They were places to get books but books aren’t the only way to get information now a days so they probably need to look at what there core purpose is. I don’t know what it is. Which means it’s not being communicated very well (NU29).

Therefore, Factor E library non-users maintain that public libraries should promote themselves (31: +2), provide clear guidance about their services (17: +1), and demonstrate their impact and value (42: +3), to help the public and other stakeholders understand their purpose and services. Better communication about their role should be a greater priority for public libraries than accessibility (33: -1), inclusivity (1: 0), law compliance (15: 0), comprehensiveness and efficiency (6: -1).

Despite the conviction that public libraries are not clearly communicating their core purpose, Factor E library non-users are aware they are access points to information (19: +4; 27: +3). Moreover, they are emphatic that public libraries should offer up-to-date, digital methods of accessing information (NU6; NU29; 28: +5; 27: +3) as well as loaning high quality (11: +2) physical and print items (8: +4; 7: +1). Public library services should not exceed the remit of information access (19: +4; 27: +3) by assuming an educator role because “this is provided by another service or organisation” (NU29); this includes promoting literacy (3: -4), providing learning and education opportunities (2: -4), focusing on reading as their core purpose (35: -2) or targeting the needs of children and young people (12: -1).

Factor E library non-users maintain that public libraries should provide a good experience for the public by ensuring that services are free (9: +2) and that volunteers are engaged (37: +3) to support the work of professional staff (22: +1). Moreover, public libraries must offer good customer service (34: +3) and innovative, technological ways to meet public needs (44: +5) rather than more traditional methods, such as outreach (43: 0) or consultation (24: 0).

6.8 Q Study 2: factor comparison approach

To undertake a comparison of the factors extracted in Q Study 2, the researcher used the same approach described in Section 6.6. First, the consensus items and the

distinguishing items were reviewed. As with Q Study 1, the consensus items were generated through weighted scores (Watts & Stenner, 2012, p.143) and distinguishing items were those items ranked by one factor in a "significantly different fashion to the other study factors" (Watts and Stenner, 2012, p.149).

The challenges with comparing the factors in Q Study 2 relate to distinguishing items. In a study with three or more factors, it is possible for an item to be a distinguishing item for a factor but without it generating any significant meaning to help interpretation. For instance, *25: work with families* is a distinguishing item for Factor C at the level of $p < 0.01$. Each factor ranked this item in the following way:

- Factor C: +1
- Factor D: -5
- Factor E: -2

In this example, Factor C has ranked the item in a distinctive way compared to the other factors. However, in terms of interpreting and comparing the factors, both Factor D and Factor E have far stronger views about the responsibility of public libraries to *work with families*.

Figure 20 presents the distinguishing items in Q Study 2. Items have been included based on a combination of information: distinguishing items at the level of $p < 0.1$, item rank on the factor array, and item rank in relation to the other factors. Furthermore, as with Q Study 1, the figure focuses on items ranked +2 to +5 and -2 to -5, because these demonstrate the strongest perceptions. Figure 21 presents the consensus items.

Figure 20: distinguishing items in Q Study 2

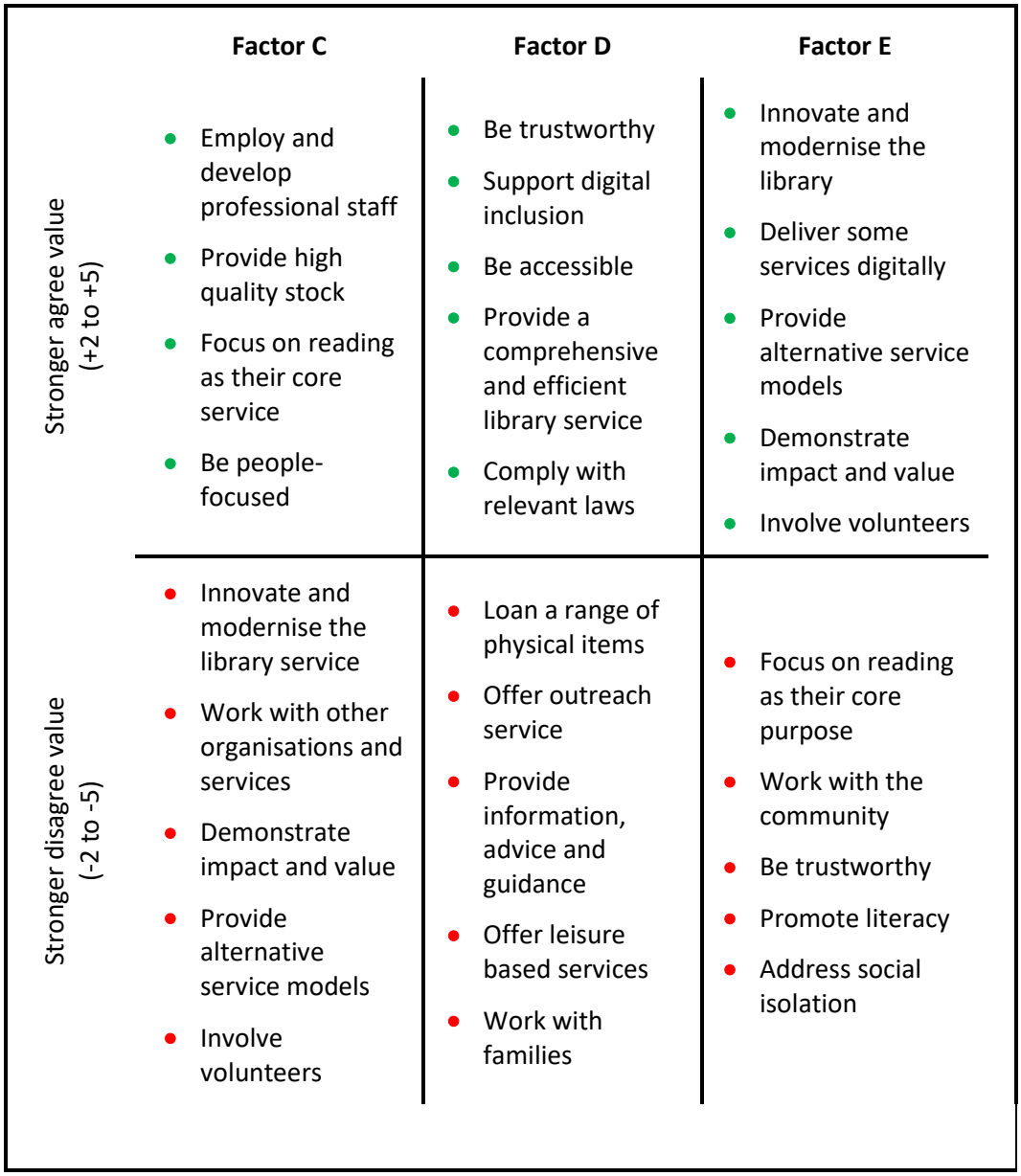
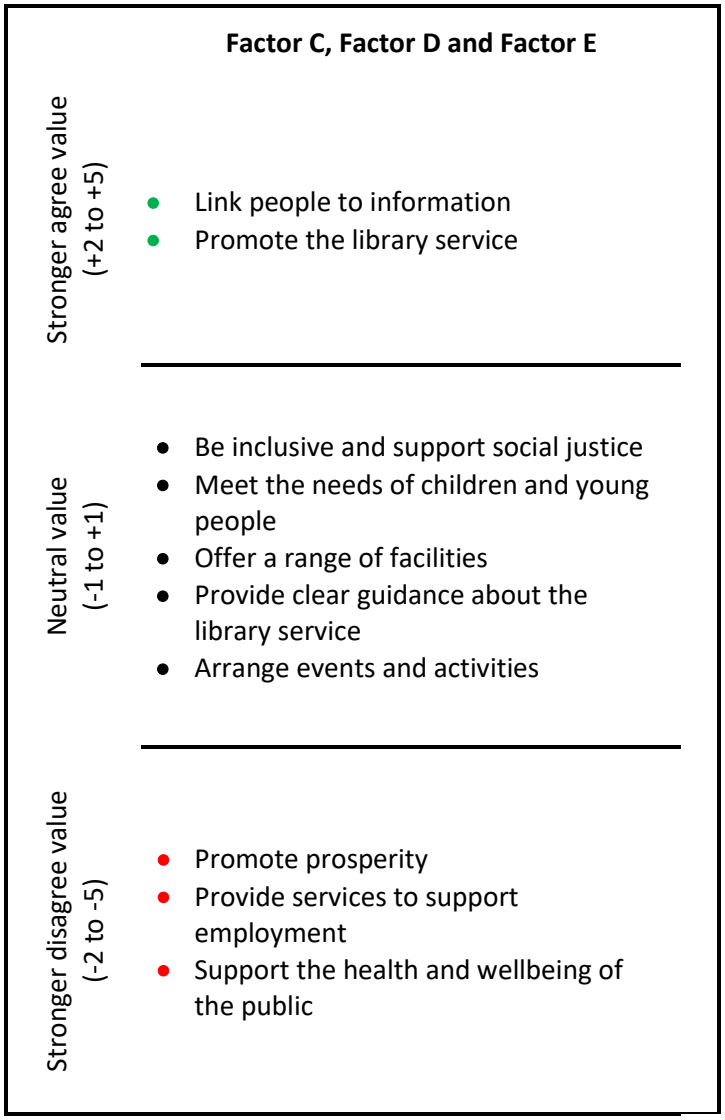


Figure 21: consensus items in Q Study 2



In a similar approach to Q Study 1, the factor interpretation crib sheets (see Section 6.3), participant post-Q sort question responses, factor arrays and full factor descriptions were combined with the noteworthy (Figure 20) and consensus (Figure 21) items to guide the comparison of the factors within Q Study 2.

6.8.1 Q Study 2: factor comparison

In responding to Research Question 1, Q Study 2 has established three separate perceptions of public libraries in Factor C, Factor D, and Factor E. However, whilst the factors do not share a perception on the importance of books and reading, there are some views are shared across the library non-user factors. For instance, there is consensus between Factor C, Factor D and Factor E that the role of public libraries is to

connect people to information (19: Factor C +5 / Factor D +4 / Factor E +4). In addition, both Factor C and Factor D consider the loaning of physical print items (7: Factor C +4 / Factor D +4) and the promotion of literacy (3: Factor C +2 / Factor D +2) as important services.

Between the three factors of the library non-user group, there is a reasonably strong, shared conviction that public libraries should promote their services (31: Factor C +2 / Factor D +2 / Factor E +2). Moreover, Factor C, Factor D and Factor E demonstrate some agreement that people should have positive experiences in public libraries, with good customer service (34: Factor C +2 / Factor D +1 / Factor E +3) and pleasant environments (29: Factor C +2 / Factor D 0 / Factor E +1).

The other factors share the view that it is not the role of public libraries to improve the economic prospects of individuals by promoting prosperity (45: Factor C -5 / Factor D -3 / Factor E -3) or offering services that support employment (16: Factor C -4 / Factor D -4 / Factor E -3). Similarly, the factors' shared viewpoint is that it is "not the job of the library" (NU6) to support the health and wellbeing of the public (32: Factor C -3 / Factor D -4 / Factor E -5).

The comparison of noteworthy items across Q Study 2 indicates that each factor differs from all the others in three distinct ways:

1. the manner in which a public library should approach its service;
2. aspects of the service a public library should deliver;
3. aspects of the service a public library should not deliver.

These distinctions are presented in Table 24.

Table 24: distinctions between Q Study 2 factors

Factor	**Approach**	**Public libraries should focus on…**	**Public libraries should not…**
Factor C	professional (22: +5)	supporting people by focusing on reading (35: +4)	involve volunteers (37: -5)
Factor D	trustworthy (40: +5) accessible (33: +4)	supporting people by focusing on digital inclusion (5: +5)	work with families (25: -5) or provide leisure based services (23: -5)
Factor E	modern (44: +5)	staying relevant by offering digital services (28: +5)	promote literacy (3: -4)

Overall, the most overt difference between the factors relates to the involvement of volunteers. Factor D (37: -1) is ambivalent about the involvement of volunteers, whereas Factor E is positive that this is beneficial to libraries (37: +3). In comparison, Factor C is emphatic that public libraries should not involve volunteers in the service (37: -5). Not only is this item placed in the lowest ranked position, but many of the participant comments also focused on why public libraries should not involve volunteers. The comments are presented in Figure 22.

Figure 22: Factor C participant comments related to volunteers

> "Volunteers are useful but I feel like once organizations start using them they too easily become replacements for actual staff" (NU37)
>
> "Using volunteers worries me in any setting - the idea of free labour and volunteers being used as replacements for paid staff" (NU3)
>
> "Charity shops are great but they're not John Lewis. You know there's a difference in the service at both and John Lewis prides itself on its professional staff. Libraries are the same - I'm sure those run by volunteers are nice enough but they'll be the charity shop version rather than the John Lewis version. I'd rather deal with trained staff, who are reliable and knowledgable" (NU22)
>
> "...it should be a professional service. Not volunteer based or unstaffed" (NU27)
>
> "I also feel libraries should be run by well trained paid staff. Give people paid employment" (NU19)

6.9 Inter-study comparisons in Q methodology

Whilst there are examples of research which compare two or more Q studies (Donaldson et al., 2011; Ludlow et al., 2019; Rhoads & Brown, 2002; Van Dijk et al., 2015;), there is very little literature that explores the process of such comparisons. This section combines the minimal guidance from the literature with an explanation of the process undertaken in this thesis to compare Q Study 1 and Q Study 2. The outcomes of the comparison are reported in Section 6.9.1. Watts and Stenner (2012) and Donaldson et al. (2011) offer details of a range of options for comparison; these are introduced in Table 25.

Table 25: different options for inter-Q study comparison

Option	Details	Citation
A: simple comparison of viewpoints	Using the factor interpretations, factor arrays and distinguishing items to draw conclusions about similarities and differences.	Watts & Stenner (2012, p.54) Donaldson et al. (2011, Appendix 4.III, p.3)
B: correlation analysis	Creating a matrix of correlation coefficients between all the studies' factors, by using the factor arrays as Q sorts. Similar viewpoints will yield statistically significant positive scores and dissimilar viewpoints will yield the inverse.	Watts & Stenner (2012, p.54) Donaldson et al. (2011, Appendix 4.III, p.3)
C: second order factor analysis	Applying all the studies' factor outputs as the data in a new factor analysis. In essence, using the factor arrays as Q sorts and investigating if new, super factors can be extracted.	Watts & Stenner (2012, p.54) Donaldson et al. (2011, Appendix 4.III, pp.3-4)
D: pooled sample analysis	Undertaking a new factor analysis whereby the individual participant Q sorts from all studies are used as the new dataset. The new factors are interpreted and can also be compared to the original studies' factor interpretations.	Donaldson et al. (2011, Appendix 4.III, p.4)

In this thesis, to establish the most effective method of comparison, all four options were trialled. What follows is an explanation of how these methods were employed. Subsequently, Section 6.9.1 presents the findings of the comparison.

First, a correlation matrix (Option B) was created using all of the factors from Q Study 1 and Q Study 2. To achieve this, the factor arrays for each factor were inputted into the factor analysis software, KenQ Analysis, as though each was an individual Q sort. Table 26 presents the correlation scores between the factors from both Q Studies.

Table 26: correlations between the factors of both Q Studies

		Q Study 1		Q Study 2		
		Factor A	Factor B	Factor C	Factor D	Factor E
Q Study 1	Factor A	100	1	87	55	38
	Factor B	1	100	6	0	-47
Q Study 2	Factor C	87	6	100	40	29
	Factor D	55	0	40	100	18
	Factor E	38	-47	29	18	100

As per the factor analysis demonstrated in Chapter 5, any correlation score of 38 or above (or factor loading of 0.3847) is considered significant. Table 27 summarises what the correlations indicate in terms of how the factors compare.

Table 27: a summary of the inter-study factor correlations

Factors	**Correlation**	**Score**	**Comment**
Factor A and Factor C	Strong	87	Very similar
Factor A and Factor D	Significant	55	Some similarities
Factor A and Factor E	Significant	38	Some similarities
Factor B and Factor C	Insignificant	6	Nothing in common
Factor B and Factor D	Insignificant	0	Nothing in common
Factor B and Factor E	Strong negative	-47	Polar opposites

Following the generation of this correlation matrix, a second order factor analysis was completed (Option C). In this analysis, each of the factor arrays was inputted into the factor analysis software as individual Q sorts. The same statistical decisions were made for the second order factor analysis as were made during the initial factor analyses for

both Q studies described in Chapter 5: varimax rotation was employed and significance was measured at the level of $p < 0.01$ (0.3847). The first round of second order factor analysis utilised Factor A, Factor B, Factor C, Factor D and Factor E. The outcome was a one factor solution which encapsulated Factor A, Factor C and Factor D. Factor B and Factor E did not load onto this factor; nor did they create a second factor.

This super factor demonstrates that Factor A, Factor C and Factor D share similar viewpoints; however, this outcome was already established in the correlation matrix (Option B) described above. Therefore, a second round of second order factor analysis was undertaken with the inclusion of Factor D^{-ve}. Again, the same parameters were maintained in terms of varimax rotation and level of significance. The factor solution demonstrated that Factor A and Factor C are similar and that Factor D and Factor D^{-ve} form one bipolar factor; both outcomes were already known so this iteration of second order factor analysis did not present new, meaningful information to help shape the inter-study comparison.

Next, a pooled sample analysis (Option D) was undertaken. The 68 Q sorts from Q Study 1 (Q sorts U1 - U27) and Q Study 2 (Q sorts NU1 - NU41) were combined to create a single dataset. As with all other factor analyses, varimax rotation was employed and level of significance was set at $p < 0.01$. The only near plausible outcome was a two factor solution; however, not only was the correlation between factors too high (correlation score 59), this solution only captured 65% of the Q sorts (n=44).

Given that the purpose of any analysis at this stage was to assist in drawing comparisons between the two existing studies, a new pooled sample analysis was trialled in which only those Q sorts previously loaded onto factors in Q Study 1 and Q Study 2 were included. This meant removing the following Q sorts:

- Q Study 1: U2, U11, U12, U13, U15, U20, U24
- Q Study 2: NU1, NU4, NU5, NU8, NU9, NU20, NU28, NU30, NU32

Even with this refined dataset, no plausible factor solution was established because the factor correlations were too high. Of all the options for comparison, a pooled sample analysis (Option D) was the least productive for the aim of comparing Q Study 1 and Q Study 2, so that library user and library non-user perceptions could be compared. The

researcher's notes for the calculations, thought processes and explanations for the inter-study comparisons can be seen in Appendix 10.

As a result of trialling the different comparison options, it was evident that the correlation matrix (Option B) was the most appropriate for the purpose of comparing the thesis' two Q studies, in order to establish how library user and library non-user views relate. Essentially, the correlation matrix (Option B) indicated where the researcher should look. Subsequently, a simple comparison of viewpoints was undertaken (Option A) using the factor arrays, distinguishing items, participant comments and the factor interpretations from each study. This process of comparison mirrors the steps undertaken in the intra-study comparisons reported in Section 6.7 and Section 6.8.

6.9.1 Factor level comparisons of library user and library non-user perceptions

Factor A (Q Study 1) and Factor C (Q Study 2)

The greatest correlation between viewpoints across Q Study 1 and Q Study 2 is captured in Factor A (Q Study 1) and Factor C (Q Study 2), with a correlation score of 87. Furthermore, the 10/13 of the top ranked items (between +2 and +5) and 11/13 of the lowest ranked items (between -2 and -5) were the same, as demonstrated in Table 28.

Table 28: items ranked similarly in Factor A and Factor C

High ranked items	**Factor A rank**	**Factor C rank**
3: promote literacy	+3	+2
7: loan physical print items	+5	+4
8: loan a range of physical items	+2	+3
9: provide free services	+4	+3
11: provide high quality stock	+3	+4
19: link people to information	+5	+5
22: employ and develop professional staff	+3	+5
24: be people-focused	+2	+3
27: deliver core services	+4	+3
35: focus on reading as their core purpose	+3	+4
Low ranked items		
4: provide cultural opportunities	-2	-2
10: work with other organisations and services	-2	-3
13: support democracy	-4	-4
16: provide services to support employment	-4	-4
20: address social isolation	-3	-2
26: provide specialist services	-3	-3
32: support the health and wellbeing of the public	-5	-3
37: involve volunteers	-2	-5
38: provide alternative service models	-3	-4
42: demonstrate impact and value	-4	-3
45: promote prosperity	-5	-5

Although there are differences in terms of the exact placement and relative ranking between items, the factor arrays demonstrate a general agreement that public libraries

should be staffed by professionals (22: Factor A +3 / Factor C +5) who link the public to information (19: Factor A +5 / Factor C +5), loan physical and print items (7: Factor A +5 / Factor C +4; 8: Factor A +2 / Factor C +4), and deliver core services to the public (27: Factor A +4 / Factor C +3). These services should be free at the point of use (9: Factor A +4 / Factor C +3) and be people-focused (24: Factor A +2 / Factor C +3). Moreover, the service should promote literacy (3: Factor +3 / Factor +2) and be focused on reading (35: Factor A +3 / Factor C +4), including maintaining a high quality stock (11: Factor +3 / Factor C +4). The viewpoint shared between Factor A and Factor C mirrors the position of Coates (2019) and Usherwood (2007a, 2007b) presented in the literature review (Chapter 4.3.3).

In addition, both factors demonstrate a general agreement that public libraries should not be addressing wider social issues such as prosperity (45: Factor A -5 / Factor C -5), employment (16: Factor A -4 / Factor C -4), democracy (13: Factor A -4 / Factor C -4), health and welfare (32: Factor A -5 / Factor C -3), social isolation (20: Factor A -3 / Factor C -2), or culture (4: Factor A -2 / Factor C -2). In this way, Factor A and Factor C do not complement some of the discourse from the sector, local government and central government about how public libraries can fill social need gaps (Chartered Institute of Library and Information Professionals [CILIP], 2018; CILIP & The Big Issue, 2019; Department for Culture, Media and Sport [DCMS], 2003; Independent Mind, 2019; Libraries Connected, 2019a; Libraries Taskforce, 2016; Local Government Association, 2017). For example, the Government's Libraries Taskforce (2016) claims that "libraries and their staff don't sit in isolation; they support other public services that are vital for local and national prosperity and wellbeing" (p.12). In contrast, Factor A views that such work can be a "by-product rather than an aim or goal" (U3) because it is not a public library's "job to tackle" (U3) social justice issues. Moreover, Factor C suggests these kinds of services "don't seem like their the point of a library" (NU15) and that public libraries should not "be political in anyway" (NU38).

Furthermore, both factors assert that a public library service should not have to demonstrate its impact and value (42: Factor A -4 / Factor C -3) because "its meant to be a public service" (NU3) so it should not have to "defend itself" (NU3) or "prove the value of [its] existence" (NU33). The shared viewpoint echoes the concern of McMenemy (2007a) that the "public library is a service that constantly has to defend its right to exist" (p.273). Although the participants whose Q sorts loaded onto Factor C do not use

public libraries, they acknowledge their importance nevertheless: “I don’t use them but they are valuable” (NU33). Moreover, the comment from NU3 (“I’m not convinced things like footfall tell you it’s value anyway”) mirrors the disagreements reported in Chapter 4 (Section 4.7) about how public libraries can effectively demonstrate their impact and value. On one hand, the Government’s own data sources are predominantly quantitative (DCMS, 2016a, 2016b, 2018), there is ongoing work to create a new data schema to capture consistent data about public library performance in England (Back, 2020; Harris, 2019; Rowe et al., n.d.), and work is underway on a new, sector-driven accreditation scheme to help public library services to self-evaluate (Libraries Connected, 2019b). On the other hand, some academics and practitioners are concerned that quantitative focused measures lack the required nuance to demonstrate the real value of public libraries (Appleton, 2020; BOP Consulting, 2009; McMenemy, 2007b, 2009b; Walker et al., 2011). Lawton (2015) even warns that such measures “can weaken the position of the library” (p.237).

Factor A (Q Study 1) and Factor D (Q Study 2)

In addition to the strong correlation between Factor A and Factor C, there is a significant correlation (correlation score of 55) between Factor A (Q Study 1) and Factor D (Q Study 2). They share 6 high ranking items (ranked +2 to +5) and 6 low ranking items (ranked -2 to -5) as presented in Table 29.

Table 29: items ranked similarly in Factor A and Factor D

High ranked items	**Factor A rank**	**Factor D rank**
3: promote literacy	+3	+3
7: loan physical print items	+5	+4
19: link people to information	+5	+4
22: employ and develop professional staff	+3	+3
33: be accessible	+2	+4
35: focus on reading as their core purpose	+3	+2
Low ranked items		
16: provide services to support employment	-4	-4
26: provide specialist services	-3	-2
32: support the health and wellbeing of the public	-5	-4
38: provide alternative service models	-3	-2
41: provide information, advice and guidance	-2	-4
45: promote prosperity	-5	-3

The two factors concur that public libraries should be staffed by professionals (3: Factor A + 3 / Factor D +3) who help to link people to information (19: Factor A +5 / Factor C +4) and promote literacy (3: Factor A +3 / Factor D +3). Both factors view that loaning physical print items is an important service (7: Factor A +5 / Factor D +4); however, Factor D does not consider it a priority for public libraries to provide high quality stock (11: -1) or a range of physical items to borrow (8: -3), in contrast to Factor A (11: +3; 8: +2).

Both factors also agree that public libraries should not focus on supporting public health and wellbeing (32: Factor A -5 / Factor D -4), prosperity (45: Factor A -5 / Factor D -3) or employment (16: Factor A -4 / Factor D -4). However, there is disagreement in terms of whether or not public libraries have a role in supporting democracy: Factor D is ambivalent (13: 0) but Factor A is very clear this is not the "remit" (U9) of a public library (13: -4). Conversely, where Factor A is neutral on the position that public libraries should

be trustworthy (40: 0), it is of paramount importance to Factor D (40: +5) that public libraries are “seen as safe, neutral, and trustworthy spaces” (NU24).

Factor A (Q Study 1) and Factor E (Q Study 2)

The final pair of factors which share a significant correlation between the two studies are Factor A (Q Study 1) and Factor E (Q Study 2), with a correlation score of 38. As with the preceding pairs of similar factors, Factor A and Factor E share a number of similarly ranked items (Table 30), both positively (+2 to +5) and negatively (-2 to -5). However, there are also a significant number of items which are ranked entirely differently (Table 30).

Table 30: items ranked similarly and in a significantly different manner in Factor A and Factor E

High ranked items	**Factor A rank**	**Factor E rank**
8: loan a range of physical items	+2	+4
9: provide free services	+4	+2
11: provide high quality stock	+3	+2
19: link people to information	+5	+4
27: deliver core services	+4	+3
28: deliver some services digitally	+2	+5
Low ranked items		
4: provide cultural opportunities	-2	-3
13: support democracy	-4	-5
16: provide services to support employment	-4	-3
20: address social isolation	-3	-4
32: support the health and wellbeing of the public	-5	-5
45: promote prosperity	-5	-3
Items ranked significantly differently		
3: promote literacy	+3	-4
7: loan physical print items	+5	+1
34: demonstrate good customer service	0	+3
35: focus on reading as their core purpose	+3	-2
37: involve volunteers	-2	+3
38: provide alternative service models	-3	+4
42: demonstrate impact and value	-4	+3
44: innovate and modernise the library service	0	+5

Between Factor A and Factor E there is agreement that public libraries should link people to information by delivering core services (27: Factor A +4 / Factor E +3) such as loaning physical items (8: Factor A +2 / Factor E +4) and providing a high quality stock (11: Factor A +3 / Factor E +2). These services should be free to use (9: Factor A +4 / Factor E +2). The factors agree that public libraries should "spread information" (U17) because it "is essential to our society" (U22) but there is disagreement about the nature of that information. Factor E ranks the loaning of physical print items (7: +1) significantly lower than Factor A (7: +5). Moreover, whilst both factors agree that some services should be delivered digitally (28: Factor A +2 / Factor E +5) there is a nuanced difference in the way they view a public library's purpose in relation to information. Factor E asserts that "books aren't the only way to get information now a days" (NU29) so public libraries need to innovate and modernise their services (44: Factor A 0 / Factor E +5) in order that they can "move with the times" (NU6) to keep up with organisations like Amazon. In contrast, Factor A recognises that information can be loaned in print or digital form (U1; U10; U25) but argues a public library's "core purpose is to loan reading materials" (U3) and to enable people to access books (U1; U5; U10; U17; U19; U22; U25; U26; 7: +5). Factor A is concerned "that message has been lost" (U3).

Both factors agree it is "not the job" (NU6) or "remit" (U8) of a public library to specifically address wider social agendas (32: Factor A - 5 / Factor E - 5; 13: Factor A -4 / Factor E -5; 16: Factor A -4 / Factor E -3; 20: Factor A -3 / Factor E -4). Nor is it the duty of a public library to promote prosperity (45: Factor A -5 / Factor E -3). Factor A and Factor E equally assert that a public library "can't be everything to everyone" (NU29) or "all things to all people" (U22). They both suggest that other services should be supporting these needs (NU29; U10; U14; U19; U22; U26). Moreover, Factor A suggests that public libraries do not have the capacity or funding to divert resources to services which are not related to books, reading and information (U8; U17; U22; U26). This shared view reflects Coates' (2019) argument that public libraries have been forced to support social welfare strategies, by local authorities, to the detriment of delivering core services. Pickard et al. (2019) argue that this diversification of agendas has led to misconceptions about the public library service. This is a notion that is supported by both Factor A and Factor E, as illustrated in Figure 23.

Figure 23: participant comments from Factor A and Factor E relating to public library purpose

Factor A: "The core purpose is to loan reading materials. And maybe that message has been lost which is why I also think they need to work smarter at promoting themselves and what they offer" (U3).

Factor E: "I suspect the core purpose of a library has changed over time or should have changed. They were places to get books but books aren't the only way to get information now a days so they probably need to look at what there core purpose is. I don't know what it is. Which means it's not being communicated very well" (NU29).

6.10 Key findings

Across both Q studies the outputs have shown there are five distinct perceptions held by the thesis' participants: Factor A and Factor B for library users (Q Study 1) and Factor C, Factor D and Factor E for library non-users (Q Study 2). Fewer factors for the library user study implies there is less variation in the perceptions of participants who use the library than those who do not.

The Q Study 1 outcomes indicate some library users perceive that public libraries should maintain a service which concentrates on people's information and reading needs (Factor A) whilst other library users perceive that public libraries have a role to play in supporting some wider social issues, such as social isolation and employment (Factor B). The distinction between the two library user views captured in Q Study 1 reflect the tension between opposing views explored in the grey literature presented in Chapter 4.2.3. Despite the distinct viewpoints, the library user factors also presented shared perceptions. Public libraries should prioritise *reading and literacy*, focus on *meeting the needs of people and children*, be *accessible*, and *employ professional staff*. Moreover, public libraries should not be expected to *demonstrate impact and value*, explore *alternative service models*, *provide leisure based services*, or rely on *volunteers*.

The Q Study 2 outcomes demonstrate a broader range of perceptions in the library non-user participant group. Some library non-users (Factor C) share the viewpoint expressed in the Factor A library user group that public libraries should help individuals to access information and reading materials, but specifically with the support of professional staff. Other library non-users think information and reading materials should be provided by a library service that is accessible and trustworthy (Factor D). Moreover, there are library

non-users who assert that public libraries need to modernise how they deliver information and reading materials to the public (Factor E). The common ground between the factors is the expectation that public libraries *link people to information* and *promote their services*. Furthermore, the non-user factors also agreed that public libraries should not be responsible for *promoting prosperity*, *supporting employment*, or *supporting public health and wellbeing.*

There are a limited number of shared views across all factors within both Q studies. Table 31 summarises these similarities.

Table 31: similar viewpoints across all factors in both Q Studies

	Factor and rank				
Item	A	B	C	D	E
22: employ and develop professional staff	+3	+2	+5	+3	+1
4: provide cultural opportunities	-2	0	-2	-1	-3
14: work with the community	0	-1	+1	+1	-2
17: provide clear guidance about the library service	+1	-1	0	0	+1
21: provide spaces for different needs	-1	0	0	-2	0
26: provide specialist services	-3	-1	-3	-2	-1
30: offer a range of facilities	-1	+1	0	0	-1
36: arrange events and activities	-1	-1	0	+1	0
39: operate effectively and viably	0	-2	-2	-1	+1

With the exception of *employ and develop professional staff*, it is interesting to note that the shared perceptions across all factors in both the library user and non-user studies do not relate to actions public libraries should undertake. Instead, the majority of the views shared by all factors in both Q studies either relate to actions about which the participants are ambivalent or to those with which they disagree. It implies that participants have a clearer shared sense of what public libraries should not be rather than a sense of what they should. For instance, the comparison suggests that the user and non-user participants agree that public libraries should not focus on *providing specialist services*, nor should they *provide cultural opportunities*.

Whilst not universal across both studies, there are some dominant views shared by factors in both studies. For instance, there is a strong perception that public libraries should focus on linking people to information in Factor A (Q Study 1) and Factors C, D and E (Q Study 2). Moreover, the same factors also share the conviction that public libraries are not responsible for providing services to support employment, public health and wellbeing, or prosperity.

6.11 Conclusion

This chapter concludes Phase Two of the thesis and provides a response to Research Question 1: what are public perceptions of public libraries in England, both user and non-user? It has provided an explanation of the approach used to interpret the factors extracted during factor analysis for both Q studies. Moreover, it has presented the outcomes as commentary style interpretations for Q Study 1 (Factor A and Factor B) and Q Study 2 (Factor C, Factor D and Factor E).

The chapter has also provided comparisons of the factors within each study to extrapolate shared views across the library user participants and then the library non-user participants. In addition, a comparison of the factors across both studies was carried out. This comparison demonstrated that there are some similar viewpoints held by library user (Q Study 1) and library non-user (Q Study 2) participants, specifically in terms of what public libraries should not focus on.

The outcomes from Phase Two, which are presented in this chapter, will be discussed in greater depth in Chapter 9. Moreover, the participant responses collected during the post-Q sort questions in this phase are used as the foundation for the next stage of the

research in Phase Three (Chapter 7), when addressing the question of public library definitions (Research Question 2) and when comparing how different stakeholders define public libraries (Research Question 3). Thereafter, the data captured in this phase also support the exploration of the legislation's adequacy (Research Question 4) in Phase Four of the thesis (Chapter 8).

PHASE THREE: EXPLORING THE CORE PURPOSE OF PUBLIC LIBRARIES

CHAPTER 7: STAKEHOLDER DEFINITIONS OF PUBLIC LIBRARIES

This chapter situates Phase Three within the overall research plan before explaining the process of qualitative coding used in Phase Three to establish the definition of public libraries from the points of view of central government, local government, the public library sector and the public participants. The chapter concludes by comparing the definitions.

7.1 Introduction

At the end of Phase Two, the researcher reviewed the thesis' aims, evaluated the progress towards addressing the research questions and identified which needed further exploration. As such, this phase is designed to fulfil any gaps in responding to Research Questions 2 and 3:

- Research Question 2: How do different stakeholder groups define public libraries: the public, central government, local government and the public library sector?
- Research Question 3: How do these different stakeholder definitions compare?

Phase One made some progress towards addressing Research Question 2, leading to an understanding of the central government, local government and sector positions on the context and purpose of public libraries. In addition, Phase One began to discuss key issues with current legislation in response to Aim 2: exploring the adequacy of the current 1964 Act for a contemporary public library service. Phase Two primarily focused on Aim 1 and Research Question 1: the public perceptions of public libraries, both of library users and non-users. Establishing a detailed picture of the public view of public libraries also helped to address Research Question 2, as the public represents one of the four stakeholder groups in this thesis. It was evident that this phase of the thesis needed to explore and compare the definition of public libraries from the perspective of all four stakeholder groups (central government, local government, the public library sector and the public) in order to fully consider Research Questions 2 and 3. In addition, this phase needed to establish stakeholder group definitions so that they could be used in Phase Four to explore the adequacy of the Public Libraries and Museums Act (1964) for a

contemporary public library service (Aim 2). Figure 2 (Chapter 2.3) demonstrates how the phases connect and how they were designed to respond to the research aims and questions.

This chapter clarifies the research design and methodology of Phase Three, presents the findings and comparisons between them, as well as some discussion about their significance. Additional discussion and analysis are then presented in Chapter 9, in which the findings of all the phases are amalgamated.

7.2 The stakeholder groups

As established in Chapter 1, the four stakeholder groups include central government and local government as decision makers, the public library sector as service providers, and the public participants as service users. For each of the stakeholder groups, a corpus of materials was compiled for use in both the qualitative coding (part one) and framework analysis (part two) of Phase Three. Each corpus represented the stakeholder group's current perception of public library services in England. What follows is an explanation of the choice of materials for each stakeholder group.

Four documents were chosen to represent the Government's view of public library services in England. First, the Department for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport [DCMS] (2021) presents an annual report to parliament which provides an overview of public library activity in England. The version published for 2020 - 2021 (DCMS, 2021) was the most up to date report at the time of beginning the qualitative coding for Phase Three. Since then, DCMS (2022) has published its 2021 - 2022 report. Most of its content mirrors the earlier report but there are some differences in the concluding sections of the two reports (DCMS, 2022 & 2021); therefore, the newer version was added to the corpus. In addition, DCMS (2015) provides local councils with guidance to better understand their statutory duty to provide a public library service. This was first published in 2015 and the updated version of April 2022 is included in the corpus (DCMS, 2015). Finally, DCMS states that their strategic planning toolkit (DCMS, 2017f) should be used alongside the aforementioned guidance to "deliver corporate priorities through a library service that will meet the needs of their local communities" (para.3). The four documents form a corpus that represents the Government's most current reporting of public library activity and guidance about how councillors and library managers can deliver the most effective library service.

The Local Government Association (LGA) published *Delivering local solutions for public library services: a guide for councillors* in 2017 as guidance for councillors to ensure their library services "deliver the very best" (p.4) when meeting community needs and supporting local priorities. This document was chosen to illustrate the local government viewpoint because LGA is a national membership organisation, representing 99% of all councils in England (LGA, 2023). Moreover, it is the organisation's only publication focused on public library services (true at the point of undertaking Phase Three).

The corpus for the public library sector is formed of four documents published or commissioned by the two leading sector organisations. The Chartered Institute of Library and Information Professionals [CILIP] is a membership organisation for library and information professionals across the UK, including those who work in public library services, and "the only independent voice for the UK's information profession" (CILIP, n.d.c, para. 2). Libraries Connected is a national charity and membership organisation supporting the heads of public library services in England, Wales and Northern Ireland. CILIP campaigns and advocates for all library sectors and information professionals in the UK, including public libraries and their workers, whereas Libraries Connected is an Arts Council England [ACE] sector support organisation, which advocates for public libraries at a local and national level.

In 2019, CILIP worked with The Big Issue (a UK charity which supports and campaigns for people living in poverty) to publish "Public libraries: the case for support". This report was intended to evidence the "positive impact of libraries on their users, communities, locality and local economy" (Macdonald, 2019, para.3) to the Government; as such, it is included in the corpus because it provides details about the sector's description of what public libraries do. In 2013, Libraries Connected produced a framework of Universal Library Offers to support a "core public library offer" (Libraries Connected, n.d.b, para. 4) and to show how public library services "enrich the lives of individuals and their communities" (Libraries Connected, n.d.b, para. 3). The framework was most recently updated in 2019. Its associated handbook (Libraries Connected, 2020c) is included in the corpus because it provides detailed information about the framework in its current form and how each of the Universal Offers is demonstrated by public libraries. In addition to the Universal Library Offers, Libraries Connected has begun work on reinstating a form of public library standards (Table 8, Chapter 4.2.2) because there is "a clear appetite for this across the sector" (Libraries Connected, 2020d, p.2). The pandemic interrupted the

process but Libraries Connected (2020d) published an interim report when the consultation phase was concluded. In addition to summarising the methods used to consult with various stakeholders about the nature of a standards framework, the report also includes findings which illustrate what the sector thinks quality means for public libraries. The report was included in the corpus and coding was focused on the relevant sections to capture the sector perspective.

Finally, prior to exploring the potential for a new standards framework, Libraries Connected and CILIP co-commissioned a scoping study to test "a number of initial ideas about the possible components of a support system for a confident and sustainable public library network" (Independent Mind, 2019, p.4). In addition to exploring issues such as national funding or alternative service models, the report was included in the corpus because it presents many sector opinions about what public libraries already do, should do and should not do.

The corpus for the public viewpoint of public libraries is formed of statements collected from the participants of both Q studies during Phase Two. In the final stage of the Q studies, participants were asked "What is the core purpose of a public library?" and guided to type their responses into a freeform text box. Of the 68 participants in Phase Two, 49 provided a response to the question: 21/27 library users and 28/41 library non-users (Table 14, Chapter 5.6). In the Q study outcomes presented in Chapter 6, only comments from those participants who loaded onto a factor were included in its interpretation. For the qualitative coding in Phase Three, all participant responses were included in the corpus. In addition to these responses, the two most valued items from each factor across both Q studies (statements ranked at +5) were also included. For instance, *loan physical print items* and *link people to information* were both positioned at +5 in the factor array for Factor A of Q Study 1 (Figure 10, Chapter 5.7.2). The participant responses and factor array +5 items were compiled into a single document and used for the qualitative coding process.

7.2.1 Corpora limitations

The researcher recognises that the nature of each stakeholder groups' corpus is different and that this could affect analysis and outcomes. First, the question presented to the public participants directed them to provide statements which consider the definition of a public library service; in contrast, the corpora for each of the other

stakeholder groups is formed of documents which do not overtly provide a definition because their fundamental purpose is different. The documents were chosen to capture the current viewpoints of local government, central government and the public library sector about the nature of public libraries. Whilst the documents collected from the three stakeholder groups are in different formats and have different communication styles, they all focus on one or more of three purposes: describing the activities of public libraries in England, providing guidance to local authorities about the running of public libraries, or planning for the future service of public libraries.

When coding, and also when undertaking the framework analysis in Phase Four (Chapter 8), the researcher's role was to be mindful of how similar ideas could be differently expressed or worded across the four corpora because of their different formats, purposes and foci. It was important to consider whether the intention or meaning was the same. This is factored into the analysis and comparison in Section 7.5. To provide an example, whilst both the public and public library sector corpora refer to libraries helping the public, the meaning is not the same. The public corpus states that public libraries should "help people to read" (NU37) or "help people to find the books and info they need" (NU15); the helpfulness in this corpus links to information access. In comparison, the public library sector corpus discusses help in a broader, more socially minded manner: public libraries can "help create better places to live, work and prosper" (CILIP & The Big Issue, 2019, p.2). The meaning behind the use of 'help' is different and therefore coded differently (see Sections 7.4.3 and 7.4.4). On the other hand, sometimes ideas are expressed differently but with the same intention. For instance, "keep up with the world in order to stay relevant" (NU10) from the public corpora and "ensure the library service can adapt in an agile way" (DCMS, 2017f, para.18) from the central government corpora were both coded as *be dynamic* (see Sections 7.4.1 and 7.4.4). Although phrased differently, both examples speak to the idea of public libraries purposefully changing to better serve the public.

7.3 The qualitative coding process

Each corpus of materials was separately treated to a coding process which began with descriptive coding (Saldaña, 2016), whereby the topics of the corpus were identified and labelled using NVIVO software. The researcher focused on the aspects of each corpus which described public libraries' responsibilities and ignored content which solely

referred to the duties of other stakeholders, such as sector bodies or local councillors. Once a corpus had been coded descriptively, the researcher returned to NVIVO to undertake pattern coding (Saldaña, 2016). Pattern coding means the researcher seeks explanations, uses inference and begins to place the initial codes into groups or themes. At this point, the researcher took time to establish how best to respond to Research Question 2, establishing how the different stakeholders define public libraries. The researcher considered the question, 'what is a public library?' to be insufficient on its own because public libraries are services not objects and, thus, multifaceted. Initially the researcher considered using the following questions to inform the process of pattern coding:

1. What are public libraries?
2. What do they do?
3. How should they be?
4. What should they not do?

Only the public corpus contained material that could speak to the fourth question because the other three corpora were formed of documents which did not frame any content in the negative. The researcher revisited the descriptive coding of the central government and local government corpora because they had been the first to be coded. By reviewing their initial codes, it was clear that both corpora could provide a definition of public libraries by answering three questions:

1. What should public libraries be?
2. What should they provide for the public?
3. What else should they do?

As a result, during pattern coding, the initial codes for the central government and local government corpora were grouped and organised in response to these questions, forming three tentative categories. The researcher then trialled the process with the public corpus. In line with the reflexivity and interpretivism of the thesis (presented in Chapter 2.2.2 and 2.2.3), the researcher was willing to abort the three categories if they did not suit the public corpus, rather than force the data into this approach. It was clear that the same triad did work for the public corpus but that the spread of codes between the three categories was different; this is further explored in Sections 7.2.2 and 7.2.3.

Finally, the process was also applied to the public library sector corpus with similar success.

Reflexive, interpretative research approaches recognise that the researcher is integral to establishing meaning through analysis. However, it is still important to ensure that the data, and not the researcher, is foregrounded in this process. To this end, the researcher undertook three practices to ensure the data drove the analysis. First, the frequency of codes was recorded to monitor their potential significance; a further explanation of the purpose and process follows in Section 7.4. Second, the researcher inserted time between the coding of each stakeholder corpus to minimise closed thinking and encourage more thorough coding, particularly when testing out the potential for the triad of categories. Some ideas were evident in more than one corpus but were expressed differently; it was important this nuance was not lost through oversimplification during pattern coding. For instance, both the local government and central government corpora refer to the idea that libraries should be *more than* books; moreover, in both cases, a high proportion of the textual references in the *provide* category related to this code (central government: 27% and local government: 34.7%) so they regarded the idea with a similar level of importance. However, what this exactly meant for each stakeholder group was different. Table 32 demonstrates the degree of difference, which was only detected by the researcher because time had been inserted between the coding of these corpora.

Table 32: example of the subtle differences between the coding of two stakeholder groups

	Local government	**Central government**
Coded phrase	be "much more than a depository for books" (LGA, 2017, p.12) (47 examples from 151 textual references in the category *provide*)	“be more than bricks and mortar or even the people, stock and resources sitting within a building” (DCMS, 2017f, para.56) (59 examples from 188 textual references in the category *provide*)
Similar subcodes	- access to culture - education and learning - improve lives and prospects - outreach - support public wellbeing	- provide cultural and creative enrichment - education and learning - improve lives and prospects - outreach - support public wellbeing
Different subcodes	- become community hubs - bring people together - combine traditional and additional services - cradle to grave service	- offer makerspaces

Finally, the researcher reviewed and checked codes at multiple points of the process:

1. once all corpora had been descriptively coded;
2. when all corpora had been pattern coded;
3. at the point the researcher created spreadsheets and documents to log all the codes against their textual references;
4. again when the researcher was establishing similarities and differences to reflect on Research Question 3 (Section 7.2.3);
5. more than once during the framework analysis used in part two of this phase (Section 7.3);
6. at the point the researcher undertook the writing of this chapter.

During the fourth review, the researcher discovered DCMS had released a newer annual report (DCMS, 2022) which superseded the version included in the central government corpus (DCMS, 2021). The researcher decided to keep the original and add the newer report to the corpus and, thus, had to repeat the processes of descriptive and pattern

coding and adapt the logs and records of coding outcomes. Without the repetition of reviewing and checking, this additional report would have been missed.

7.4 The qualitative coding outputs

The process of coding resulted in the aforementioned model of three categories, which was applicable to all four stakeholder groups (Figure 24). The model demonstrates that all four stakeholder groups are concerned with values, services for the public and other actions when considering what a public library service should be, although the balance between these aspects is different for each stakeholder group.

Figure 24: public libraries should be, should provide and should do

BE	values public libraries should uphold or demonstrate
PROVIDE	services provided to the public and community and/or actions directly involving the public and community
DO	actions public library services should undertake which are not directly focused on interactions with or services for the public

As previously mentioned (Section 7.2.1), in addition to coding, the researcher paid heed to, and recorded, the frequency with which codes and subcodes were present within each corpus; in short, the number of textual examples for each code. This meant that the researcher could review the codes in order of frequency to indicate a rank importance. Without this, the outcomes would be potentially misleading. For instance, the central government and local government corpora both mention that libraries should be free to use; twice in the case of central government and four times in the case of local government. By comparison, the public corpus mentions it 13 times. It would be spurious to present free access as equally important to all three stakeholder groups. In addition, it enabled the researcher to consider the weighting of the three categories for each stakeholder group, which helped when interpreting the coding and extrapolating each stakeholder group's definition of public libraries. It is important to note that frequency does not always denote importance and the researcher was also mindful of individual and idiosyncratic codes and textural references when coding and analysing

the data. The overall approach balanced both the frequency of examples with a reflexive awareness of the overall intention and content of each corpus.

In the ensuing subsections, the coding outputs are provided in the following structure for each stakeholder group. First, a summary figure which demonstrates the main codes in each category, presented in the rank order generated through frequency of examples. Second, a pie chart which visually shows how the three categories (*be, provide* and *do*) are weighted for the stakeholder group, with associated commentary to explain its significance. Next, a more detailed description of the coding outputs which inform the definition, focused on the most dominant codes in each category and supported by evidence from the corpus texts. This provides a narrative to illustrate the qualitative coding findings for each stakeholder group. Finally, each subsection concludes with the stakeholder group's definition of public libraries in England. The full codebooks and associated frequency scores are presented in Appendix 11.

The summary figure, pie chart of category weightings, descriptive narrative and final definition for each stakeholder all serve to respond to Research Question 2: How do different stakeholder groups define public libraries: the public, central government, local government and the public library sector? Moreover, each subsection evidences how the researcher established the definition for each stakeholder group. The detail provided is to promote transparency in line with the thesis' methodological approaches (Chapter 2). Further analysis and comparison of the definitions is offered in Section 7.5.

7.4.1 Central government coding output and commentary

Figure 25: central government coding summary

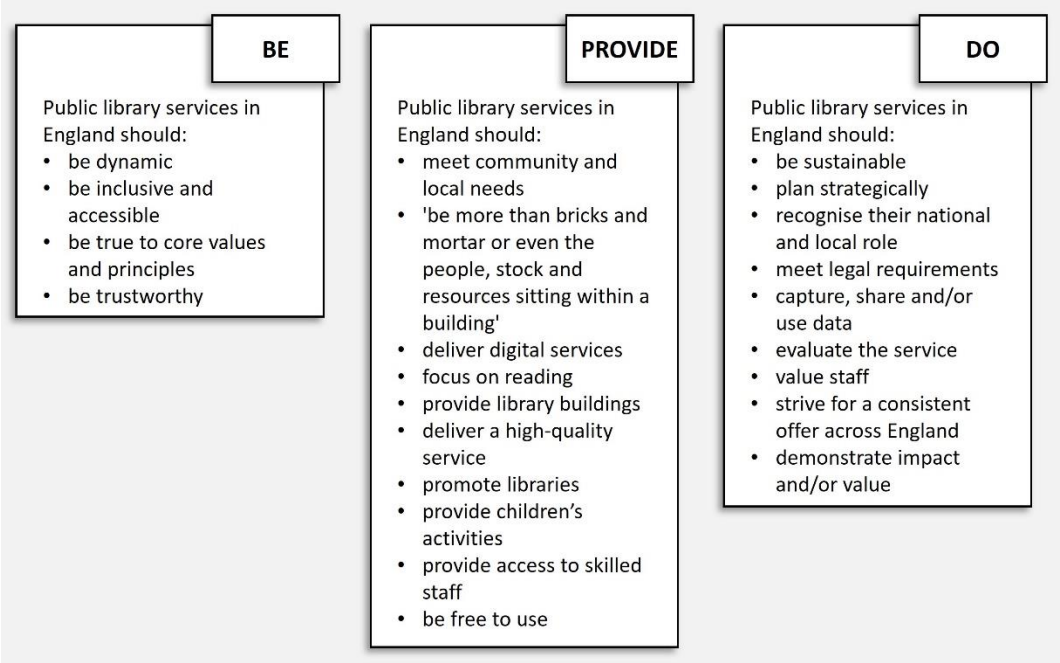
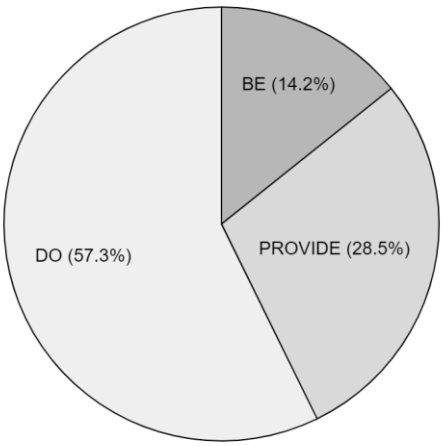


Figure 26: central government category breakdown



With 57.3% of the textual references coded to the *do* category, it is evident that the central government view of public library services is most focused on the actions they should undertake which are not directly focused on interactions with or services for the public. Textual references to values (*be* category) and services provided to the public (*provide* category) constitute less than half (42.7%) of the total textual references across the corpus.

BE: be dynamic and inclusive

According to the central government corpus, the public library sector requires dynamism to face difficulties such as "pressures on resources" (DCMS, 2017f, para. 6), and "financial, technological and demographic challenges" (DCMS, 2017f, para. 6). In addition, public libraries must be adaptive to "meet changing user demands" (DCMS, 2021, p.3); for instance, public library services should consider "alternative delivery models and revenue streams" (DCMS, 2015, para.28) so they are able to "adapt to changing communities and needs" (DCMS, 2017f, para. 42). Moreover, public libraries need to "radically rethink" (DCMS, 2017f, para. 42) and modernise their offer to "provide modern services and facilities" (DCMS, 2021, p.9).

A public library should be "a safe, trusted environment open to all" (DCMS, 2021, p.3). Public libraries have a duty to ensure their services are "accessible and available to all who need them" (DCMS, 2015, para. 36 & 2017f, para. 34). Furthermore, any planned transformation of the service requires an "equality analysis and assessment" (DCMS, 2015, para. 78) in order to "demonstrate that decision-makers are fully aware of the impact that changes may have on users" (DCMS, 2015, para. 78).

PROVIDE: meet local and community needs, and "be more than… a building"

Public library services should "assess the needs of their local communities and design library services to meet those needs" (DCMS, 2021, p.5 & 2022, p.3) to ensure their offer is "rooted in the positive and essential contribution that effective libraries can make to the communities they serve" (DCMS, 2017f, para.45). Moreover, public libraries need to "balance resources with local needs" (DCMS, 2015, para.127). When libraries change or redesign their service, it should be through "consultation" (DCMS, 2017f, para.24) and "engagement" (DCMS, 2015, para. 36; DCMS, 2017f, para. 34) with the public, so the service is informed by "what the local community looks like now, is expected to become, and its needs" (DCMS, 2017f, para.110).

According to the central government corpus, "library services are more than bricks and mortar or even the people, stock and resources sitting within a building" (DCMS, 2017f, para.56). For example, during the pandemic, "while access to library buildings was limited, libraries continued to provide essential services" (DCMS, 2021, p.3). Public libraries should offer services beyond providing "stock and resources" (DCMS, 2017f, para.56), for example they have a "fundamental role in supporting local education

provision" (DCMS, 2017f, para. 163), including "work undertaken in the school setting" (DCMS, 2022, p.6) and "through homeschooling" (DCMS, 2021, p.3). They also arrange "activities and events" (DCMS, 2022, p.1), organise "outreach" (DCMS, 2017f, para.30) with "skilled people taking services out into communities" (2017f), and provide "makerspaces" (DCMS, 2017f, para.56) and access to "cultural and creative enrichment" (DCMS, 2017f, para.23). Public libraries also have a "vital role" (DCMS, 2022, p.1) to play "in improving people's life chances" (DCMS, 2022, p.1): the "skilled and experienced workforce" (DCMS, 2017f, para.103) are well positioned to "engage with communities to deliver outstanding services that support and enhance the prospects of all citizens" (DCMS, 2017f, para.103); the library service should find "innovative ways to support some of the most vulnerable groups in their communities" (DCMS, 2021, p.3); and libraries can "contribute to the Levelling up agenda" (DCMS, 2022, p.7). Moreover, libraries should "combat social isolation and its mental health effects" (DCMS, 2021, p.3) and help the public to have "healthier and happier lives" (DCMS, 2017f, para.23), through "specialist book collections and reading group activities" (DCMS, 2021, p.3).

DO: be sustainable, plan strategically and recognise their national and local role

The central government view of libraries is that they should focus on "developing innovative, needs-led and sustainable services" (DCMS, 2017f, para.8) so that provision is viable "in the long-term" (DCMS, 2017f, para.69). Against a backdrop of "competing priorities across a wide portfolio of local service provision" (DCMS, 2015, para.18), libraries need to explore a "growth strategy, and ways to increase income to offset any future funding reductions" (DCMS, 2017f, para.78), including "alternative delivery models" (DCMS, 2015, para.28) and "revenue streams that could unlock additional investment" (DCMS, 2017f, para.39). Public libraries should also secure their futures by garnering "understanding, buy-in and commitment to a sustainable and thriving library service from senior council leaders" (DCMS, 2017f, para.1), as well as "working with communities and other partners to put new solutions in place, drawing on learning from elsewhere" (DCMS, 2015, para.26).

Public libraries need "a clearly articulated strategic approach to library service provision" (DCMS, 2017f, para.61) to "help councillors, library professionals, stakeholders, communities and library users work together to achieve shared strategic outcomes which benefit their communities" (DCMS, 2017f, para.61). In addition, public libraries should demonstrate "how well the strategy meets local needs, now and in the future"

(DCMS, 2015, para.26). Strategic plans should also "include a clear vision for the library service" (DCMS, 2015, para.26) which clearly demonstrates "how it connects to the vision, mission and corporate strategy of the council" (DCMS, 2017f, para.62). As well as indicating how its service is "embedded in others' strategies (other departments or partners)" (DCMS, 2017f, para.62), public libraries should also ensure its strategic plan is "based on their analysis and assessment of local needs" (DCMS, 2015, para.19), using "robust data and evidence" (DCMS, 2017f, para.62). Strategic planning should be informed by data, "evidence-based decision making" (DCMS, 2017f, para.74) and "robust risk assessments" (DCMS, 2021, p.7).

Public libraries should recognise both their local and national role. Locally, a public library is a "powerful asset for councils" (DCMS, 2017f, para.103) because there are many services and "priorities" (DCMS, 2017f, para.3) they can "help deliver on behalf of the council" (DCMS, 2017f, para.62). Public libraries can support local authorities to develop "the overall health and well-being of their areas" (DCMS, 2017f, para.7) by undertaking "economic, environmental and social value" (DCMS, 2017f, para.41) duties. Furthermore, libraries are able to assist "local economic development" (DCMS, 2017f, para.94), particularly through "business support offers" (DCMS, 2022, p.7) for "local small businesses" (DCMS, 2017f, para.154). Equally, a public library service should demonstrate how it "fits with national policies" (DCMS, 2017f, para.62), "a range of important agendas" (DCMS, 2022, p.2) and "government projects and policies" (DCMS, 2022, p.2). For example, "Libraries are vital to the national recovery" (DCMS, 2021, p.3) in light of the pandemic. Core to this is the expectation that public library services will keep DCMS "informed of their work" (DCMS, 2021, p.3), including the provision of "such information as the Secretary of State may require for carrying out their duties" (DCMS, 2015, p.20). Moreover, as part of their national position, public libraries should work with sector bodies such as ACE, CILIP and LGA (DCMS, 2015), as well as subscribing to national guidelines and principles, such as the Universal Offers from Libraries Connected.

Central government definition of public libraries

The central government view of public library services is that they should be dynamic, open to change and inclusive. Furthermore, public library services should meet community needs by being more than buildings stocked with resources. Moreover,

public library services should ensure their own sustainability by planning strategically and recognising both their national and local role.

7.4.2 Local government coding output and commentary

Figure 27: local government coding summary

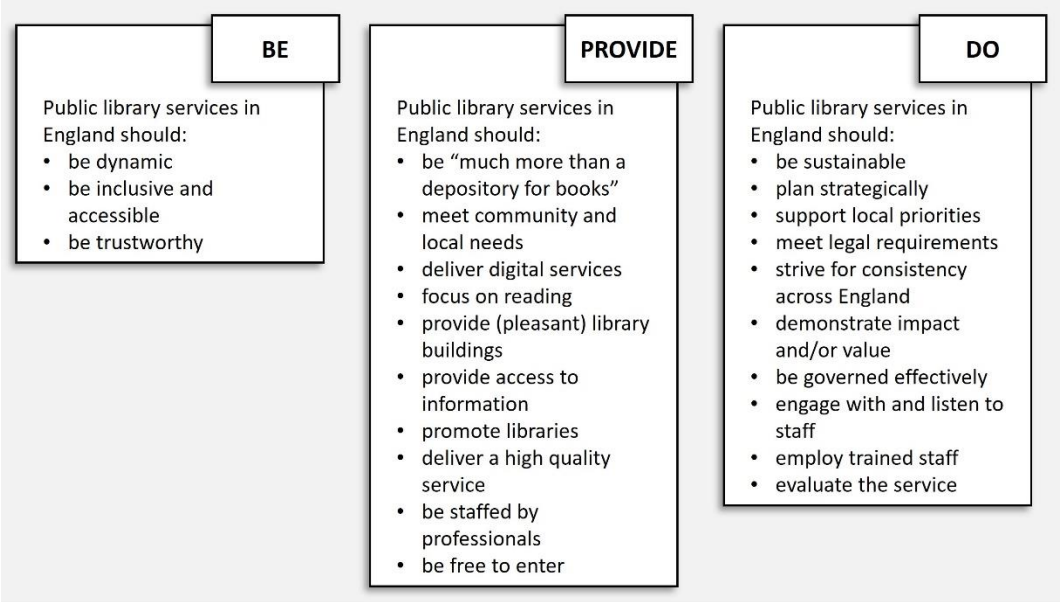
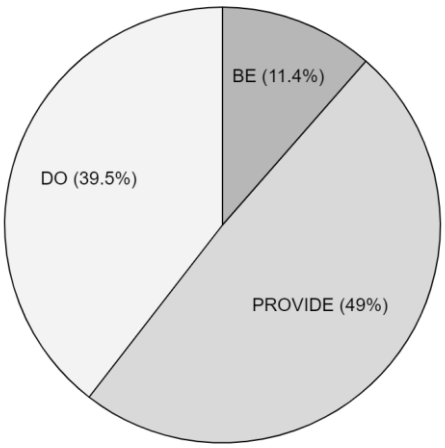


Figure 28: local government category breakdown



49% of the coded references relate to the *provide* category, 39.5% relate to the *do* category, and 11.4% relate to the *be* category. The local government corpus indicates that this stakeholder group comments almost equally on what a public library service should directly provide for the public and what it should do beyond that, with a slight bias towards public services.

BE: be dynamic and inclusive

The local government position is that public library services need to embrace change and adaptation, not only to react to "unprecedented pressures" (LGA, 2017, p.4) such as financial challenges but also to "meet new circumstances and changing customer need" (LGA, 2017, p.6).

Because public library services are "open to all" (LGA, 2017, p.4), they should be inclusive and available to "all social groups" (LGA, 2017, p.37). It is the "duty" (LGA, 2017, p.33) of a public library service to "maximise accessibility for everyone" (LGA, 2017, p.14), providing "free" (LGA, 2017, p.33) access to reading materials for people "regardless of age, disability, wealth or education" (LGA, 2017, p.37).

PROVIDE: be "much more than a depository for books", and meet community and local needs

The local government viewpoint is that a public library should be "much more than a depository for books" (LGA, 2017, p.12). Being "community hubs" (LGA, 2017, p.5) means libraries are well placed to "bring people together" (LGA, 2017, p.38) and connect them to "a greater breadth and depth of services and support" (LGA, 2017, p.6). Moreover, they can offer a "cradle-to-grave service" (LGA, 2017, p.6) providing opportunities for "cultural and creative enrichment" (LGA, 2017, p.37), "local events" (LGA, 2017, p.38) and education, from "school readiness" (LGA, 2017, p.6) to "lifelong learning" (LGA, 2017, p.6). Public library services can also "reach into communities" (LGA, 2017, p.4) and provide "outreach activities" (LGA, 2017, p.7). As well as being a "depository for books" (LGA, 2017, p.12), a public library can support public health, happiness, wellbeing (LGA, 2017, p.37) and prosperity (LGA, 2017, p.25) by "helping everyone achieve their full potential" (LGA, 2017, p.37) and improve their "life chances" (LGA, 2017, p.37).

According to the local government corpus, public libraries can help to develop "stronger, more resilient communities" (LGA, 2017, p.38) by actively understanding its "needs in general and the specific needs of particular sections of the community" (LGA, 2017, p.19). The services should be "shaped by local needs" (LGA, 2017, p.15) and "designed to meet a wide range of real user needs and outcomes for everyone" (LGA, 2017, p.14). Such needs can be better understood and met through "public feedback, consultation and engagement" (LGA, 2017, p.18).

DO: be sustainable, plan strategically and support local priorities

Public library services need to make sure they are "'fit for the future'" (LGA, 2017, p.41), not only through "financial resilience" (LGA, 2017, p.15) but also by "ensuring that there is internal capacity to support change, external support and challenge" (LGA, 2017, p.41). Public library services will not be sustainable if they focus on "trimming" (LGA, 2017, p.10) budgets, so they must also "explore the potential for other ways to share services or costs to improve efficiency and effectiveness for local people" (LGA, 2017, p.27). For instance, public library services should consider "other sources of finance and funding" (LGA, 2017, p.16) as well as exploring alternative delivery models to "reduce costs, share risks and generate new sources of income" (LGA, 2017, p.6). Working with other organisations not only develops sustainability through the sharing of resources, it also helps public library services to "achieve more impact" (LGA, 2017, p.6) and "to successfully deliver the library strategy" (LGA, 2017, p.41).

A public library service should plan strategically to focus on "goals (objectives), relative priorities and desired outcomes for the service" (LGA, 2017, p.19). Strategic plans should be "realistic" (LGA, 2017, p.19), "deliverable" (LGA, 2017, p.19) and "long-term" (LGA, 2017, p.32). Public library services should avoid "adhoc [sic] or reactive" (LGA, 2017, p.19) planning, instead focusing "on a solid strategic assessment of need" (LGA, 2017, p.19). They should consider "the makeup of the local community, what it is expected to become, and what it wants" (LGA, 2017, p.20). Moreover, planning and decision making must employ "the very best evidence" (LGA, 2017, p.25), including "data and analysis of good practice from the UK and overseas" (LGA, 2017, p.15).

A public library service should support local priorities as the "'front door'" (LGA, 2017, p.33) for its local authority, signposting or co-locating with "the broadest range of public, voluntary and commercial services locally" (LGA, 2017, p.9). The public library service should be "an asset not a cost" (LGA, 2017, p.9): an uneconomic, inefficient or ineffective library service will negatively impact its local authority's "scarce resources" (LGA, 2017, p.43), whereas a library service which meets the needs and priorities of its locality "will help the council fulfil its duties more effectively and efficiently" (LGA, 2017, p.18). Public library services should also support local prosperity by helping "businesses to start up and grow by providing information and working with local economic development organisations to signpost businesses to online sources of support and advice" (LGA, 2017, p.37).

Local government definition of public libraries

According to the local government corpus, public libraries should be dynamic, particularly in relation to changing public expectations and needs. Moreover, public libraries should be inclusive, provide more than books and meet community needs. Finally, they should ensure their sustainability by planning strategically and aligning their services with local priorities.

7.4.3 Public library sector output and commentary

Figure 29: public library sector coding summary

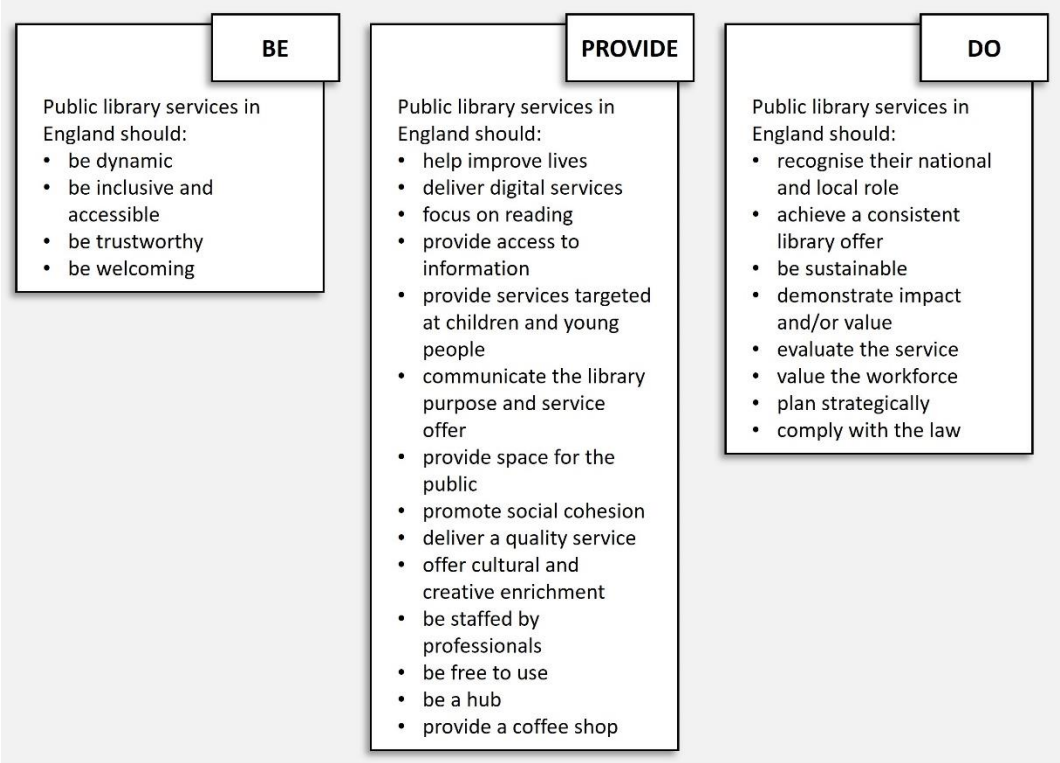
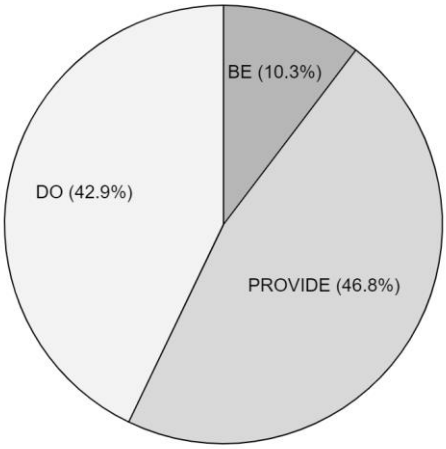


Figure 30: public library sector category breakdown



46.8% of the coded references relate to the *provide* category, 42.9% relate to the *do* category, and 10.3% relate to the *be* category. The category weightings indicate that the public library sector comments equally on what a public library service can provide for the public and what it can or should do beyond that.

BE: be dynamic and inclusive

To "future proof against the scale of change" libraries are facing (Libraries Connected, 2020d, p.11), the public library sector argues that public libraries should be "confident, dynamic" (Independent Mind, 2019, p.23) and "adaptable" (CILIP & The Big Issue, 2019, p.10). This includes being open to "new governance and delivery models" (Independent Mind, 2019, p.4) like "integrated services" (Independent Mind, 2019, p.20). Moreover, public libraries should pursue "new ways of working" (Independent Mind, 2019, p.11), "innovation and development" (Libraries Connected, 2020c, p.2) because "something new is needed" (Independent Mind, 2019, p.11). The public library sector recognises that "public libraries are facing unprecedented challenges" (Independent Mind, 2019, p.10) with "profound consequences" (Independent Mind, 2019, p.6), primary of which is "a financial challenge" (CILIP & The Big Issue, 2019, p.3) on a "scale [that] may put hundreds of vital library services directly in the firing line" (CILIP & The Big Issue, 2019, p.3). Ergo, public libraries need to "transform" (Independent Mind, 2019, p.3) and "library workers need to continue to adapt to contemporary challenges" (Independent Mind, 2019, p.5), reviewing the "way the service is designed, delivered, monitored and promoted" (Independent Mind, 2019, p.6).

Public libraries are inclusive because they have a “strongly diversified audience” (CILIP & The Big Issue, 2019, p.3) and “they reach all sections and demographics of the community” (CILIP & The Big Issue, 2019, p.10). Furthermore, public libraries have a “role in promoting an equal society” (Libraries Connected, 2020c, p.2) by “providing caring, welcoming and inclusive spaces” (CILIP & The Big Issue, 2019, p.21), offering “support for underrepresented communities” (CILIP & The Big Issue, 2019, p.13) and connecting people to “diverse and inclusive reading resources” (Libraries Connected, 2020c, p.3). A public library should be “accessible to all” (Libraries Connected, 2020c, p.5), providing “information in accessible formats and signposting to other provision” (Libraries Connected, 2020c, p.5), offering “an exciting accessible environment” (Libraries Connected, 2020c, p.4), supplying resources and reading matter in “alternative formats of all kinds including large print, ebooks and audio” (Libraries Connected, 2020c, p.5) and ensuring the “accessibility of digital technology” (Libraries Connected, 2020d, p.18).

PROVIDE: help improve lives, provide digital services and activities, focus on reading

The public library sector asserts that public libraries improve lives by “helping people to prosper and flourish” (CILIP & The Big Issue, 2019, p.3). Their “services and dedicated professional staff” (CILIP & The Big Issue, 2019, p.2) are able to “enrich the lives of individuals and their communities” (Libraries Connected, 2020c, p.2) by helping to “create better places to live, work and prosper” (CILIP & The Big Issue, 2019, p.2). Public libraries are championing “social mobility and encouraging people to develop to their full potential throughout their lives” (Independent Mind, 2019, p.29), for instance, public library services across England form a “trusted, cost-effective platform for inclusive local economic growth and social mobility” (CILIP & The Big Issue, 2019, p.19). In addition to social mobility, public libraries are “encouraging people to develop to their full potential'' (Independent Mind, 2019, p.29) through personal improvement. Using a public library can help people to feel “more confident” (CILIP & The Big Issue, 2019, p.3) or they can “be introduced to new ideas and opportunities” (CILIP & The Big Issue, 2019, p.5) so that they “increase their understanding of the world, stretch their imaginations and think differently” (Libraries Connected, 2020c, p.3). Public libraries are “the original streetcorner University” (CILIP & The Big Issue, 2019, p.13) because they are “places of informal learning: where people can be introduced to new skills in a non-threatening environment and potentially start ‘learning journeys’ that may take them on to formal

education or new careers" (Independent Mind, 2019, p.9). By helping the public to improve their lives in many different ways, public libraries contribute to "the growth of a literate, empathetic and confident society" (Libraries Connected, 2020c, p.3).

Public libraries also "ensure local communities have access to quality information and digital services" (Libraries Connected, 2020c, p.3). A public library should be a "data-rich service" (Independent Mind, 2019, p.8) with "a strong online presence" (Independent Mind, 2019, p.8) to provide the public with "24/7 access to library services via online services" (CILIP & The Big Issue, 2019, p.16). Public libraries provide access to IT equipment and the internet "through 40,000 PC's [sic] and free public wifi" (CILIP & The Big Issue, 2019, p.3), "printing and scanning services" (CILIP & The Big Issue, 2019, p.17). More than just digital access, however, public libraries also support "essential skills development for the 21st Century, including literacy, digital literacy and creative digital skills" (Independent Mind, 2019, p.8). Libraries provide "Basic digital skills and literacy sessions" (CILIP & The Big Issue, 2019, p.17), trained staff who "help customers access online information" (CILIP & The Big Issue, 2019, p.16), support for the public to "get the most out of their devices" (CILIP & The Big Issue, 2019, p.17) and "Opportunities to explore new technology and build skills" (Libraries Connected, 2020c, p.4). Moreover, a public library can help the public to "feel safe online" (Libraries Connected, 2020c, p.3) by "Educating people about how to keep themselves and their data safe online" (CILIP & The Big Issue, 2019, p.17).

It is the public library sector's view that libraries commit to "Maintaining the central role of reading and information" (Independent Mind, 2019, p.8) so that "users can access books" (CILIP & The Big Issue, 2019, p.2), "in a range of formats" (Libraries Connected, 2020c, p.4), for "free" (Libraries Connected, 2020c). Books should be available as "digital resources" (CILIP & The Big Issue, 2019, p.2) as well as in print. Moreover, libraries should stock "a range of inclusive and diverse fiction and non-fiction books and other information resources" (Libraries Connected, 2020c, p.4). In addition to providing reading materials, public libraries have a responsibility to "encourage individuals of all ages to read for pleasure" (Libraries Connected, 2020c, p.3) through "Book-based and cultural events" (Libraries Connected, 2020c, p.4), "Books and reading focused promotions, events and displays" (Libraries Connected, 2020c, p.4) and "an exciting accessible environment which makes reading and seeking information a pleasure" (Libraries Connected, 2020c, p.5). Public libraries should also deliver services to support

"literacy and reader development" (Independent Mind, 2019, p.4) to help "build a literate and confident society" (Libraries Connected, 2020c, p.3).

DO: recognise their national and local role

The public library sector asserts that public libraries have a role to play in contributing to regional and national "agendas and strategies" (Libraries Connected, 2020d, p.18) by putting "productive partnerships in place at both local and national levels" (Independent Mind, 2019, p.8). For example, public library services can "Join occasional task and finish groups to deliver regional or national projects" (Libraries Connected, 2020c, p.11). At a local level, public libraries should "reflect the contribution of the service to local need and priorities" (Libraries Connected, 2020d, p.20) to "improve local outcomes" (CILIP & The Big Issue, 2019, p.4). Moreover, "meeting local and community need is important as it allows for local variation and prioritising around local authority priorities" (Libraries Connected, 2020d, p.14), as well as "enhancing and extending the Council's support for local people" (CILIP & The Big Issue, 2019, p.3) through the library service. Delivering a service that is "rooted in community" (Libraries Connected, 2020c, p.2) as a "hub at the heart" (CILIP & The Big Issue, 2019, p.3) of the local area means that libraries help to work towards "stronger, more resilient communities" (CILIP & The Big Issue, 2019, p.5). For instance, there is "a correlation between public libraries and safer communities" (CILIP & The Big Issue, 2019, p.11); they "enhance the liveability and attractiveness of places" (CILIP & The Big Issue, 2019, p.12); they make a "strong contribution to the economy, placemaking and regeneration" (Independent Mind, 2019, p.8); and they serve "as a catalyst for local economic development through business and enterprise support" (CILIP & The Big Issue, 2019, p.18).

Public libraries are able to "amplify the impact of national policy" (CILIP & The Big Issue, 2019, p.4) on "education, culture, health, society, economy and wellbeing" (Independent Mind, 2019, p.5). Public libraries also support public "wellbeing, including reducing social isolation and loneliness" (Independent Mind, 2019, p.29). Through libraries, the public are able to attend "events and activities which encourage people to come together, make friends and participate in their community" (CILIP & The Big Issue, 2019, p.3), thus "reducing social isolation and loneliness" (Independent Mind, 2019, p.29). Moreover, public libraries can provide "effective signposting and information to reduce health, social and economic inequalities" (Libraries Connected, 2020c). Libraries further support public "health and wellbeing" (Independent Mind, 2019, p.4) through

the “Books on Prescription programme” (CILIP & The Big Issue, 2019, p.15), “successful collaborations” (CILIP & The Big Issue, 2019, p.15) with “charities or organisation promoting health and wellbeing” (CILIP & The Big Issue, 2019, p.15), and even access to “healthcare services, health information and bookings” (CILIP & The Big Issue, 2019) via library buildings. By “helping people build the skills and confidence they need to improve their employability” (CILIP & The Big Issue, 2019, p.20) and providing “job-hunting support” (CILIP & The Big Issue, 2019), including help “with CV’s [sic], careers advice and online applications”(CILIP & The Big Issue, 2019, p.17), public libraries have a “direct and indirect” (CILIP & The Big Issue, 2019, p.12) impact on prosperity and economic growth.

Public library sector definition of public libraries

The sector corpus states that public libraries should future proof their services by being dynamic, responding to challenges and managing change. Public libraries should be inclusive and trustworthy. Moreover, their services should improve the lives of the public. In addition to services focused on reading, public libraries have a responsibility to provide digital services and activities. Public libraries should also recognise they have a role to play in supporting local priorities and wider national agendas.

7.4.4 Public coding output and commentary

Figure 31: public coding summary

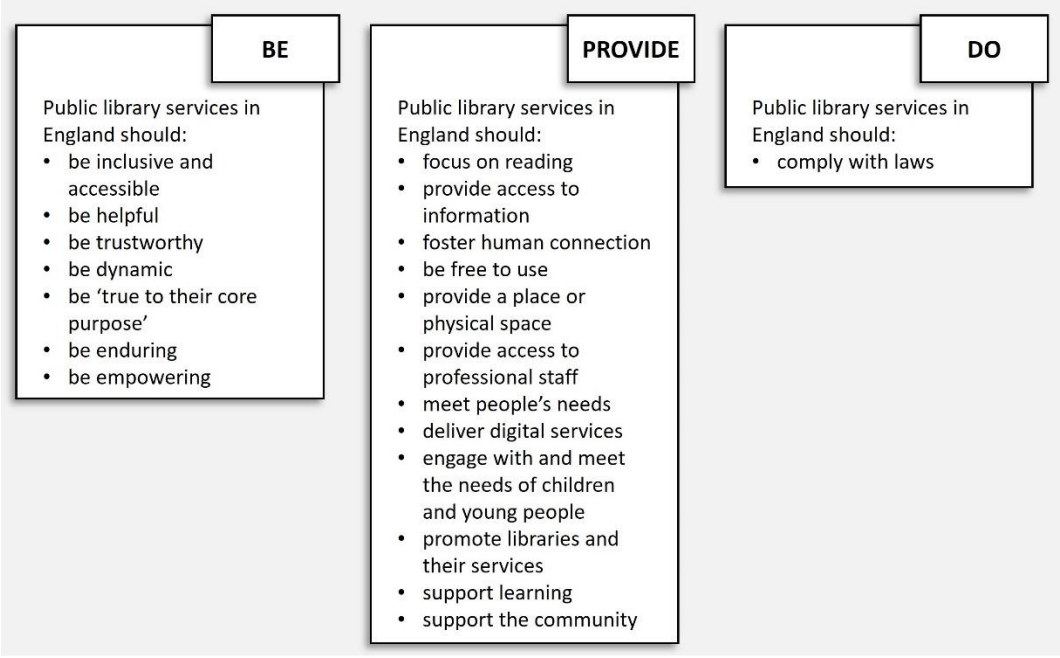
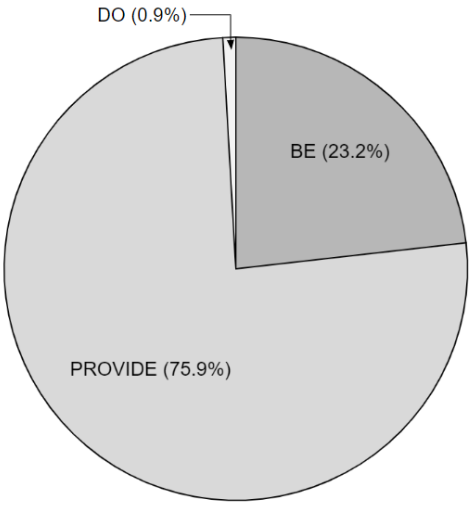


Figure 32: public category breakdown



The majority of coded references (75.9%) relate to the *provide* category and just a single code is covered by the *do* category (*comply with laws*). Not surprisingly, this suggests that the public are most invested in the services public libraries can provide them. Services related to reading and information which account for over 40% of all the textual references in the public corpus (92/224). However, 23.2% of the coded text relates to the *be* category which also shows there is an interest in the values a public library should demonstrate or uphold.

BE: be inclusive, helpful, trustworthy and dynamic

Based on the public corpus, public libraries should be "inclusive" (U4, Q Study 1; Factor B +5 item, Q Study 1) and "free and for everyone" (NU16, Q Study 2). A public library should "offer a space where everyone is welcome" (U24) and should strive to be a "truly accessible public resource" (NU24, Q Study 2). As an "inclusive, accessible space" (U4), a public library "should be welcoming to all" (U6). Public libraries "help" (U12 & U24, Q Study 1; NU3, NU15, NU22, NU27, NU31, NU36, NU37, NU38, NU39, Q Study 2) the public by providing "support" (U16, Q Study 1) and "assistance" (U16, Q Study 1) with finding information, particularly for people "who struggle" (NU8, Q Study 2) and who "may not otherwise have access to books/computers for a variety of purposes" (U16, Q Study 1). Underpinning the inclusivity and helpfulness of public libraries is the notion that they are "safe, neutral and trustworthy spaces" (NU24). A public library should be a community's "sign post or neutral apolitical mouth piece" (NU28), whilst also offering "impartial information" (U24, Q Study 1) in a place "where people can meet and not feel intimidated" (NU8, Q Study 2).

Public libraries should also be dynamic. “Modernisation” (U14, Q Study 1; NU10, Q Study 2) is key to making sure the service is “relevant” (U14, Q Study 1; NU10, NU13, Q Study 2). Public libraries need to “keep up” (NU10. Q Study 2) with “ever evolving” (NU25, Q Study 2) technologies and ensure they are providing “a book lending service that matches current needs” (NU6, Q Study 2) and “public interest” (U14, Q Study 1).

PROVIDE: focus on reading and provide access to information

According to the public, public libraries “should have a focus on reading” (NU8, Q Study 2) because their main purpose is to “spread information and literature for free” (U17, Q Study 1). Reading related services should be prioritised above all others because “everything else is bells and whistles” (NU1, Q Study 2). Public libraries “help people to find the books and info they need” (NU15, Q Study 2), including “a wide range” (NU1, Q Study 2) of “quality reading material” (U10, Q Study 1). The public should be able to “borrow books for free” (NU37, Q Study 2) from public libraries, “as defined in the Libraries Act” (U19, Q Study 1). As well as providing reading materials “in print or electronic form” (U25, Q Study 1), public libraries should “encourage everyone to read” (NU19, Q Study 2) by “promoting” (U11, Q Study 1) and “nurturing a love of reading” (U22, Q Study 1), particularly by getting people “hooked when their young!” (NU31, Q Study 2). Public libraries should also strive to address “the appalling literacy levels in the UK” (NU5, Q Study 2) by “promoting literacy to communities” (U8, Q Study 1) and “helping those who struggle” (U8, Q Study 1) with reading and literacy.

Public libraries should also “connect people to the info they need” (NU3, Q Study 2) by employing “professional staff who are trained to best help connect people to information” (NU36, Q Study 2). Public libraries are well positioned to help the public to “access free, impartial information” (U24, Q Study 1) which, in turn, helps them to “acquire” (U24, Q Study 1) and “better their knowledge” (NU19, Q Study 2).

DO: comply with laws

The public do comment that public libraries should “operate” (U19, Q Study 1) within the parameters of the Public Libraries and Museums Act (1964) (U19, U26, Q Study 1), but there are only two textual references to this in the public corpus. Moreover, it is the only code within the *do* category.

Public definition of public libraries

The public view is that public libraries should be inclusive and helpful. Moreover, above

all else, the core purpose of a public library is to provide free services to the public which focus on reading, literacy and information access.

7.5 Comparing the stakeholder groups' definitions of public libraries

Although the four stakeholder corpora were formed of documents with different purposes (Section 7.2.1), the model of three categories (Figure 24) established during the coding process demonstrates consensus that public libraries should embody and uphold values, provide services to the public and commit to some other actions beyond the scope of directly serving the public. The prioritisation of categories is, however, different for each stakeholder group. In terms of category weightings (previously presented in Figures 26, 28, 30 & 32), the local government and public corpora have the most in common. In both cases, almost half of the textual references are associated with the *provide* category, describing public libraries through the services they should deliver directly to the public. By comparison, only 28.5% of the textual references in the central government corpus relate to the *provide* category. Central government is overwhelmingly focused on what public libraries should be doing beyond or in addition to directly serving the needs of the public (57.3% of textual references coded to the *do* category). Conversely, the public corpus refers to just one action which can be grouped in the *do* category (0.9%): *comply with laws*. It is fair to assume that the public's lack of comment about the range of other actions public libraries undertake beyond serving the public is not due to a lack of awareness; participants in this research were comprehensively exposed to this content in the Q sorting activity in Phase Two of the research. Instead, it is possible that the public's prioritisation of service values (*be* category) and service provision (*provide* category) is due to the fact they were specifically asked to comment on the core purpose of public libraries. Moreover, it is unsurprising that public participants would focus on what the library service can deliver for the public. In terms of the *be* category, the central government, local government and the public library sector corpora all share a similar weighting. In contrast, the public's corpus has 23.2% of all textual references coded to the *be* category, which is twice the weighting of the other groups. It indicates that the public is more concerned about defining public libraries by the values they should embody and uphold than any other stakeholder group.

Table 33 depicts the codes which were shared by three or more stakeholder groups to provide a broad picture. For the purpose of comparison, the language has been synthesised across stakeholder groups; in reality, there are instances where the original codes are worded differently because of nuanced meaning. Where necessary, these differences are extrapolated within the following comparisons. Whilst the table shows shared ideas of the purpose of public libraries, the researcher has considered the rank importance of the codes for each stakeholder group during the process of comparison because many are shared but not valued to the same extent. Furthermore, comparisons between pairs of stakeholders are also considered.

Table 33: similar coding outcomes for stakeholder groups

	Code	Central government	Local government	Public library sector	The public
BE	be dynamic	✓	✓	✓	✓
	be inclusive	✓	✓	✓	✓
	be trustworthy	✓	✓	✓	✓
PROVIDE	be free to use	✓	✓	✓	✓
	be more than a loaning service	✓	✓	✓*	
	deliver digital services	✓	✓	✓	✓
	focus on reading	✓	✓	✓	✓
	provide library buildings/space	✓	✓	✓	✓
	promote libraries	✓	✓		✓
	provide access to information		✓	✓	✓
	provide access to skilled staff	✓	✓	✓	✓
	provide services for children/young people	✓		✓	✓
DO	achieve a consistent library offer	✓	✓	✓	
	be sustainable	✓	✓	✓	
	demonstrate impact and/or value	✓	✓	✓	
	evaluate the service	✓	✓	✓	
	meet legal requirements	✓	✓	✓	✓
	plan strategically	✓	✓	✓	
	recognise local role	✓	✓	✓	
	value staff	✓	✓	✓	

* presented as ‘help improve lives’

7.5.1 Be: values public libraries should uphold or demonstrate

In terms of values, across all four stakeholder groups, there is agreement that public library services should be dynamic. Central government, local government and the public library sector share the view that dynamism is required to respond to the challenges faced by public library services. The central and local government viewpoint is that dynamism is also needed to meet changing user needs and expectations. Introducing alternative service models is one way that public libraries can demonstrate dynamism, according to the central government, local government and public library sector corpora. A second way is through modernisation and innovation, which features in the central government and public library sector corpora. Modernisation is also the primary focus of the public's view of dynamism because they want a service which can "move with the times" (NU6, Q Study 2). There is further consensus across all four stakeholder groups in terms of inclusivity as a value, including the expectation that public libraries and their services are accessible. Moreover, it is agreed by all the stakeholder groups that public libraries should be trustworthy services. Within the notion of trustworthiness, the public and public library sector concur that libraries should be neutral spaces and services. Equally, the public agrees with the central government position that libraries should be safe spaces.

Within the *be* category, the local government corpus does not make mention of any values relating to *being true to a core purpose*. Despite this, there are 27 textual references which relate to aspects of a library service which could be considered core: reading, literacy and access to information. These textual references represent 16% of codes within the *provide* category (27/167) and 7.6% of all codes across all three categories (27/354). Conversely, the central government corpus does state that public libraries should *be true to core values and principles* (*be* category), to "guard against losing the distinctive value of public libraries" (DCMS, 2017f, para.86) and becoming "simply a customer service point for other services" (DCMS, 2017f, para.86). Yet only 8% of the textual references within the *provide* category refer to reading and literacy services (18/216), which represent just 2.3% of all textual references (18/768) across all three categories. Moreover, there are no examples referencing information access. Whilst the local government corpus does not state that *being true to a core purpose* is important for public libraries, it does clearly illustrate the notion with many examples. In

contrast, the central government corpus asserts *being true to a core purpose* is important but provides few examples to substantiate the claim, so it appears superficial.

Overall, the public expressed more interest in public libraries upholding values, with not only a far larger weighting in this category (23.2%) compared to the other stakeholder groups but also a higher number of different values (7).

7.5.2 Provide: services provided to the public and community

There are many shared views between the stakeholder groups about the services public libraries should *provide* the public, for instance *delivering digital services* and *providing library buildings and spaces*. There are distinct differences, however, between how these services are prioritised by different stakeholder groups.

The central government corpus most frequently refers to meeting community and local needs (35.2% of the provide category textual references) and being more than bricks and mortar or even the people, stock and resources sitting within a building (27.3% of the provide category textual references). Similarly, the local government corpus most frequently refers to being much more than a depository for books (34.7% of the provide category textual references) and meeting community and local needs (21% of the provide category textual references). In comparison, the public overwhelmingly refers to a focus on reading (39.4% of the provide category codes) and providing access to information (14.7% of the provide category textual references). The public library sector's provide category is equally dominated by the codes help improve lives (14.6% of the provide category textual references), deliver digital services (14.4% of the provide category codes) and focus on reading (14.2% of the provide category textual references). The public's view of the priorities for public library provision are traditional and focused on serving individuals' needs. The sector's view is broader: public libraries should provide services for individuals but also services focused on social justice for groups of people. By comparison, the priorities presented by the central government and local government corpora are broader still, suggesting public libraries are a tool to serve the community. This breadth can be evidenced in their claim that public libraries should be more than a loaning service, offering services related to culture, education, wellbeing, health and social isolation. The middle ground is held by the public library sector which agrees that a public library should not only loan reading material because it is also able to help improve lives and act as a hub for local authority services and

community endeavours. In contrast, the public are certain that a public library should focus on core delivery for individuals rather than being more (U3, U19, Q Study 1; NU1, NU5, NU32, Q Study 2) otherwise it runs the risk of being "a poorman version of other services like health services or benefits services or social care" (NU32, Q Study 2).

The central government corpus is clear that public libraries should undertake public *consultation* about the service (33 textual references); this is a subcode linked to *meeting local and community needs* (76 textual references) within the *be* category. By comparison, the local government corpus only mentions public *consultation* three times. On the surface, this suggests that working with the public is not considered as important by the local government. However, the local government materials argue that "there is a huge difference between engaging with communities on the future delivery of services and consulting with them on a set of proposals" because the "dynamics of the processes are entirely different and produce significantly different outcomes" (LGA, 2017, p.22). Many of the textual references coded to *meet local and community needs* in the local government corpus are inclined towards community engagement and understanding people's needs. The public corpus also does not comment on *consultation* but does state that public libraries should *meet people's needs*. By comparison, the public library sector corpus states that public libraries should *help improve lives*, such as *enabling social mobility* and offering *learning/education/skills opportunities*, but does not refer to public *consultation* or *meeting people's needs*. The lack of public consultation or engagement decentres the public and, as the local government approach suggests, implies doing something *to* or *for* the public rather than *with* them.

All stakeholder groups stated that public library services should *be free* or that the spaces should be free to enter. However, it was not valued highly for central government (covering just 0.1% of the *provide* category textual references), local government (covering just 2.4% of the *provide* category textual references) or the public library sector (covering just 2.4% of the *provide* category textual references). In contrast, *being free to use* was ranked fourth in the public *provide* category, accounting for 7.6% of the textual references in this category. Moreover, the importance of a *free* service is intrinsically linked to the value of *inclusivity* (*be* category) for the public; this is partially reflected in the local government corpus, but not in the central government and public library sector corpora.

Giving the public *access to skilled or trained staff* is a service that all stakeholders expect public libraries to provide. The public think that *professional staff* are what distinguishes public libraries from other ways to access books (U1, Q Study 1; NU3, NU27, Q Study 2). In addition, *value staff* is coded within the *do* category of the central government, local government and public library sector corpora because it relates to how public library services should work with their own staff, rather than the services library staff should provide to the public.

The central government, local government and public corpora indicate that service promotion should be a focus for public libraries. The local government view is that *promoting the library* will "bring in new customers" (LGA, 2017, p.4). Both the central government and public corpora link library promotion to a need for clarifying exactly what public libraries can offer the public (DCMS, 2017f, 2021; U3, U23, Q Study 1; NU29, Q Study 2). Whilst the public library sector corpus does not stipulate service *promotion* as a required provision of public libraries, it does claim that they should *communicate the library purpose and service offer*. Communicating its purpose is either referred to without a target audience, such as "articulate what a library does and does not offer" (Libraries Connected, 2020d, p.20), or it specifies that the audience should be "decision-makers" (Independent Mind, 2019, p.24), "colleagues, directors and politicians" (Libraries Connected, 2020d, p.6). The public library sector suggests the focus should be on working in-sector to define the public library offer and on service advocacy. In contrast, the service *promotion* described by the other three stakeholder groups is underpinned by the idea of helping the public to better understand the service offer and of encouraging them to use it.

7.5.3 Do: actions public library services should undertake beyond services to the public

Within the *do* category, the public corpus does not mention any actions beyond *meet legal requirements*. With the exception of the public corpus, the other three stakeholder groups agree on eight different codes within the *do* category. The most highly ranked is the notion that public libraries need to take action to *be sustainable*. They all consider sustainability to be important for public libraries in terms of future proofing the service and achieving fiscal effectiveness. Moreover, all three stakeholder groups state that public libraries should *demonstrate impact and value*. The central government corpus states that *demonstrating impact and value* is needed so public libraries have evidence

for their service advocacy and to inform their *strategic planning*. In comparison, the public library sector links *demonstrating impact and value* to *being sustainable* because it is "easier to get funding if you can show outcomes" (Libraries Connected, 2020d, p.7). The local government corpus takes this idea further, warning that a public library should be "explicit" (LGA, 2017, p.15) about its *impact and value*, to ensure it is seen as an "asset not a cost" (LGA, 2017, p.19) for its local authority, which will be struggling with economic pressures.

Strategic planning is considered a priority by both the central government and local government corpora: 22.6% and 17.9% of *do* category textual references, respectively. In contrast, it is mentioned in the public library corpus but to a lesser extent: just 3.3% of the *do* category textual references. Both the central government and local government view is that *strategic planning* can bring together a range of stakeholders, including decision makers, service providers and users. Moreover, it is important that public libraries involve communities in *strategic planning*, which should be "based on a solid strategic assessment of need" (LGA, 2017, p.19) so that the service is designed "to meet those needs" (DCMS, 2021, p.5 & 2022, p.3). Both corpora also assert that *strategic planning* should be evidence-based and also include the communication of a clear vision and aims for the service. By comparison, the references to the purpose of *strategic planning* within the public library sector corpus are more operational, such as "to plan the year ahead" (Libraries Connected, 2020c, p.6) or "to plan workforce development" (Libraries Connected, 2020c, p.6). There is also no mention of establishing and meeting local need, although it does reference the importance of "user experience" (Libraries Connected, 2020d, p.17).

With the exception of the public, there is consensus across the stakeholder groups that public libraries should *recognise their local role* and *support local priorities*. The central government and public library sector view is that public libraries should also *recognise their national role* but this is not reflected in the local government corpus. Both the central government and local government position is that a "libraries first" (DCMS, 2017f, para.8; LGA, 2017, p.9) approach should be embraced, meaning that public libraries are aligned to "the broadest range of public, voluntary and commercial services locally" (DCMS, 2017f, para.40). The idea is presented that public libraries can help their local authorities to deliver a wide range of services and priorities: "reconceptualise our libraries as the council's 'front door', delivering a whole range of council services" (LGA,

2017, p.9). The central government corpus lacks examples to illustrate what this means in practice, with the exception of commenting that public libraries should support local businesses and, by association, the local economy. The local government corpus provides some description about what *recognising their local role* actually means: support local businesses and the economy, supporting political activity within library premises, supporting the "social and environmental wellbeing of their local area" (LGA, 2017, p.18) and co-locating public services. Rather than depicting public libraries as the "front door" (LGA, 2017, p.9) for other public services, the public library sector corpus describes a supportive role; one that can make a "contribution to other agendas and strategies" (Libraries Connected, 2020d, p.18). Just like the central government and local government viewpoints, the public library sector corpus states that supporting local businesses and local economic growth are ways in which public libraries can *recognise their local role*. The public library sector claims that "no other public network provides the same platform for place-shaping or inclusive local economic growth" (CILIP & The Big Issue, 2019, p.10). However, it also considers that public libraries can contribute towards making sure communities are "thriving" (Independent Mind, 2019, p.9) "safer" (CILIP & The Big Issue, 2019, p.11), "stronger [and] more resilient" (CILIP & The Big Issue, 2019, p.10).

7.6 Conclusion

This chapter explained the qualitative coding process undertaken by the researcher to establish the definition of public libraries according to the four stakeholder groups (Research Question 2): central government, local government, the public library sector and the public. It also provided a comparison of the four definitions (Research Question 3). There are similarities across the stakeholder groups; for instance, the three category model (Figure 24) created during the coding process indicates that all the stakeholder groups consider values (*be* category), services provided to the public (*provide* category), and the other actions they carry out in providing a library service (*do* category) when defining public libraries. Equally, there is explicit agreement across the stakeholder groups with regards to some of the duties of public libraries, such as the need to *be dynamic* and *inclusive*, to *provide free services* and to *meet legal requirements.* However, there are also clear differences between the stakeholder groups. Both local and central government are interested in how public libraries can be more than a loaning service, whereas the participants were clear that they should focus on being reading services.

The public library sector occupied the ground in between; its definition is centred on helping to improve lives as well as on reading and information access.

Furthermore, the comparison shows a more nuanced tension between the stakeholder groups' views. Whilst there is agreement on some duties like *provide free services* and *focus on reading* which appear in all stakeholder group corpora, they are ranked differently by each stakeholder group. On the surface, it implies a consensus but the differences in the frequency of examples suggests a different prioritisation between the stakeholder groups. For instance, participants are adamant public libraries should provide free services which focus on the reading aspects of their provision. In comparison, reading and free services appear to rank lower than sustainability, meeting local needs or being more than a loaning service for the stakeholder groups that can fund, change or influence public library services: local government and central government. It is noteworthy because reading and stipulations about which services should be free of charge are priorities within the Public Libraries and Museums Act (1964). This is further explored in Phase 4 (Chapter 8).

PHASE FOUR: COMPARING PERCEPTIONS TO THE LEGISLATION

CHAPTER 8: FRAMEWORK ANALYSIS AND THE PUBLIC LIBRARIES AND MUSEUMS ACT (1964)

This chapter begins by situating Phase Four within the overall research plan. It then explains each step of its bi-directional framework analysis with accompanied results. The framework analysis was used to compare stakeholder group perceptions of public libraries to the Public Libraries and Museums Act (1964).

8.1 Introduction

Phase Three established definitions of public libraries from the four stakeholder groups: central government, local government, the public library sector and the public participants. Following this, Phase Four was designed to use these definitions to explore the adequacy of the current legislation for a 21st century public library service (Research Aim 2) by addressing the fourth and final research question: to what extent do the public and stakeholder views of public libraries correspond to the Public Libraries and Museums Act (1964)?

The rationale for the use of framework analysis is provided in Chapter 2 (Section 2.4.3). This chapter provides an explanation of how the method was specifically adapted and applied in this thesis. In this thesis, framework analysis is used as a tool to explore whether current stakeholder perceptions do or do not map onto the content and intention of the Public Libraries and Museums Act (1964) (Research Question 4). The process of framework analysis is broken into steps: data familiarisation, framework identification, indexing, charting, mapping and interpretation (Srivastava and Thomson, 2009, p.75). How the process was undertaken in this thesis is presented in the subsequent sections, alongside the ensuing findings and interpretations. As stated in Chapter 7, further discussion and analysis are then presented in Chapter 9, in which all the phases are amalgamated to address the research aims.

8.2 Framework analysis: data familiarisation and framework identification

Both the qualitative coding process undertaken in Phase Three and the literature review in Phase One afforded the researcher the opportunity to be thoroughly immersed in the

data, “gaining an overview of the substantive content and identifying topics and subjects of interest” (Spencer et al., 2014a, p.282). For the framework analysis of Phase Four, the dataset consisted of the Public Libraries and Museums Act (1964) and the four stakeholder group corpora and codebooks established in Phase Three: central government, local government, public library sector and public.

In framework analysis, the framework is usually developed from the “themes or issues” (Srivastava & Thomson, 2009, p.76) evident across the entire dataset, discovered during the data familiarisation stage. However, in this thesis, the different aspects of the dataset needed to be treated separately in order that each stakeholder group’s views could be compared to the legislation. Therefore, the framework was derived solely from the Public Libraries and Museums Act (1964). Moreover, the purpose of an initial framework is “identifying key issues, concepts and themes by which further data could be referenced” (Kiernan & Hill, 2018, p.251); in this thesis, the framework was used to test the stakeholder groups’ compatibility with the current legislation. To establish the framework, those elements within the Public Libraries and Museums Act (1964) which pertain to actions undertaken by, controlled by, or involving public library services were extracted. The extracts can be viewed in Appendix 12 and the decisions about which extracts were included can be viewed in Appendix 13. These extracts were subjected to the same coding process that was undertaken in Phase Three. This process of coding was used to synthesise the statutory duties of public library services according to the legislation. As with the coding process in Phase Three, the first cycle of coding was descriptive and carried out with no preconceptions of content. In the second cycle, codes were grouped into broader categories. Unlike the coding outcomes in Phase Three, there were many Public Libraries and Museums Act (1964) codes left in isolation rather than grouped with others; this is because in an Act statements or ideas are not necessarily repeated or explored in different manners. There are some standout exceptions to this, such as *provide a loaning service* with 11 references and *engage in intra-sector collaboration* with 4 references.

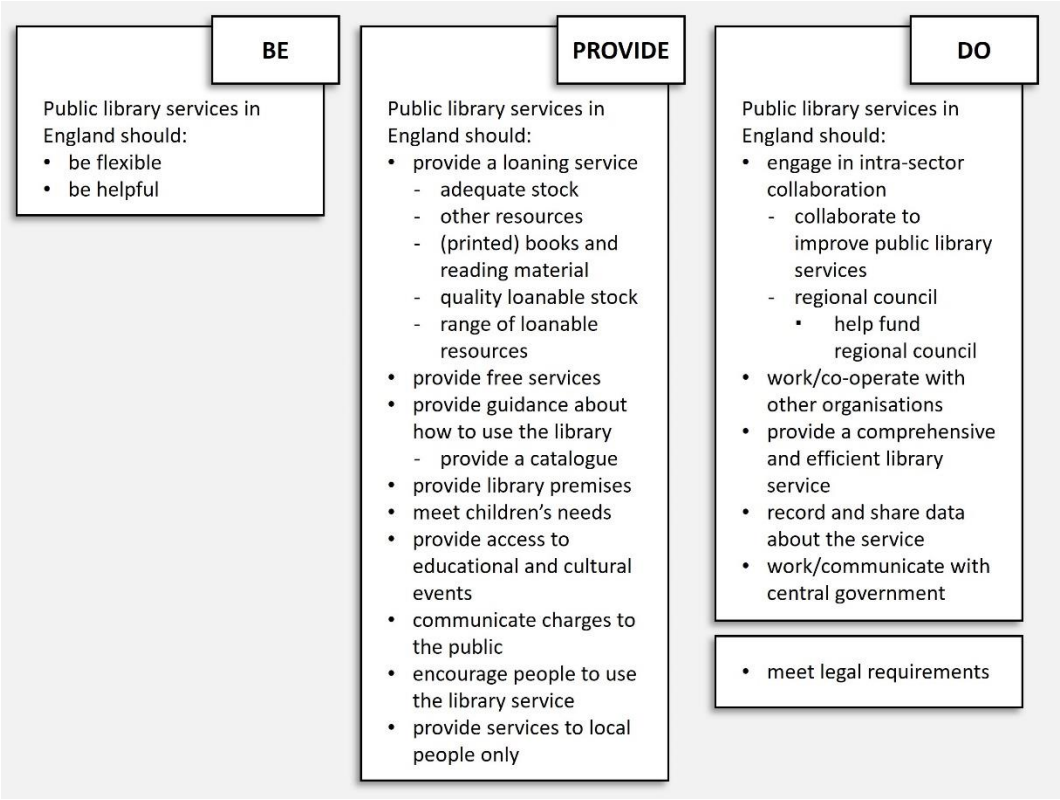
8.2.1 Framework identification results

When reviewing and grouping codes into categories, it was clear that the three category model (*be, provide, do*) established in Phase Three (Figure 24) could also be applied to the legislation. Although there is no specific mention of *meet legal requirements* in the

legislation, the nature of the Act is that it represents the sum of the legal requirements which must be met by all public library services in England; therefore, it was added within the *do* category of the framework. Moreover, *provide a comprehensive and efficient library service* is coded within *meet legal requirements* within the *do* category for other stakeholder groups (central government, local government and public library sector); this is because the literature review (Chapter 4) flagged it as the most significant phrase within the legislation (Section 4.3.2). Therefore, despite the fact it could plausibly be categorised as a service provided to the public (*provide* category), it was categorised as an action (*do* category) within the Public Libraries and Museums Act (1964) framework to better support comparisons between the legislation and stakeholder views (Section 7.3.3).

The framework is presented in Figure 33 and a full description follows.

Figure 33: Public Libraries and Museums Act 1964 framework



BE: be flexible and helpful

The Public Libraries and Museums Act (1964) states that public library services should be flexible, offering "different provision for different cases, including different provision in relation to different persons, circumstances or localities" (Section 8(5)(e)). Moreover, a

public library should be helpful by “providing advice” (Section 7(2)(b)) related to using the library.

PROVIDE: provide a free loaning service

Above all else, the legislation stipulates that public libraries must “make facilities for borrowing available” (Section 7(1)) to the public who live, work or study in the locality. Public libraries must loan “books and other printed matter, and pictures, gramophone records, films and other materials, sufficient in number, range and quality to meet” (Section 7(2)(a)) the needs of children and adults. Public libraries must provide this loaning service for free; where exceptions are necessary, charges must be clearly communicated to the public. Public libraries must encourage “both adults and children to make full use of the library service” (Section 7(2)(b)) and must also support them by providing “catalogues, indexes” (Section 8(4)(b)) and “bibliographical and other information” (Section 7(2)(b)) so they can find reading material. Furthermore, the legislation repeatedly refers to public libraries as being physical “premises” (Section 1(2); Section 8(3)(b); Section 8(4)). Whilst the Act stipulates that the “premises” (Section 1(2); Section 8(3)(b); Section 8(4)) can be used to provide access to cultural events, it does not mandate that the library should be providing these. It merely states that local authorities can “allow them to be used (whether in return for payment or not) for the holding of” (Section 20) cultural activities.

DO: engage in collaboration within and beyond the sector

According to the legislation, it is the expectation that public library services engage in intra-sector collaboration, “with a view to improving the efficiency of the public library service or promoting its development” (Section 3(5)) and also to make “arrangements with other library authorities” (Section 7(2)(a)) to ensure “adequate stocks” (Section 7(2)(a)) of loanable materials. Public libraries are also expected to work with other organisations, specifically with regard to “functions in relation to libraries” (Section 3(2)(a)). Public libraries should be “comprehensive and efficient” (Section 7(1)) and should capture information about the service to share with the Secretary of State.

8.3 Framework analysis: indexing and charting the data

Indexing and charting are separate processes but they work together to produce outcomes; ergo, they are both explained in this subsection. Indexing means the framework is “systematically applied to the data in their textual form” (Ritchie &

Spencer, 2011, p.316). In this thesis, the stakeholder groups' corpora were first indexed against the Public Libraries and Museums Act (1964) framework. Thereafter, the Act was also indexed against each of the stakeholder group's codebooks generated in Phase Three (Appendix 11). This bi-directional approach was to achieve a fuller exploration of the extent to which public and stakeholder views of public libraries correspond to the current legislation (Research Question 4). It was important indexing was undertaken in this order, with stakeholders indexed against the Act first, because indexing "involves numerous judgements as to the meaning and significance of data" (Kiernan & Hill, 2018, p.251). As described in Chapter 7.2.1, the four stakeholder groups' corpora were formed of documents or text with different formats, styles and foci. This was accounted for in the coding and analysing in Phase Three (Chapter 7). Equally, as an Act of Parliament, the format, style, tone and foci of the legislation is also different to the documents in the aforementioned corpora. By first foregrounding the Public Libraries and Museums Act (1964) framework, it helped the researcher to better evaluate whether or not indexing content from the stakeholder corpora against the framework was a fair interpretation of the Act's intention. For instance, in the *be* category of the framework, the Public Libraries and Museums Act (1964) refers to *being helpful* specifically in relation to "encouraging both adults and children to make full use of the library service, and of providing advice as to its use" (Section 7(2)(b)). Examples from the four stakeholder corpora indexed to this notion of helpfulness needed to relate specifically to accessing library services, such as "its team should help people find the reading material / information they need" (NU27 in Q Study 2) from the public corpus. However, examples which presented a more generalised notion of helpfulness or helpfulness which did not relate to using the library service were not indexed; for example, the sector corpus states that libraries are "helping everyone achieve their full potential" (Chartered Institute of Library and Information Professionals [CILIP] and The Big Issue, 2019, p.5) but this is a much broader scope of helpfulness not reflected in the Act.

Given the different natures of the legislation, the public corpus, and the corpora of the other three stakeholder groups, it would be possible for analysis to confuse style or communicative differences with differences in opinion. To avoid this, the researcher must interpret during the process of indexing, much in the same manner described in Chapter 7.2.1. In line with this thesis' methodological approaches (see Chapter 2), it is recognised that the researcher is actively involved in all processes within framework

analysis, particularly the indexing and charting stages; however, it is "the level of transparent and potentially replicable indexing and labelling of all data that systematically adds robustness to this method of data analysis" (Kiernan & Hill, 2018, p.251). To ensure transparency and to manage researcher bias during indexing, the researcher undertook four actions. First, to ensure that indexing interpretations and decisions were reasonable, the researcher did not solely rely on the framework or the corpora codebooks but also cross referenced the original text. This was to avoid surface level interpretations which misrepresented the nuanced meaning of the original documents. Second, the researcher kept a journal of notes which documented the aforementioned indexing decisions and helped to inform interpretations presented in Section 8.4. Third, as with the qualitative coding in Phase Three, the researcher inserted time gaps, both between each cycle of indexing and the indexing of each stakeholder group. Finally, the researcher undertook a process of checking and reviewing by returning to the indexing process multiple times, including at the point of writing the findings in this chapter.

Grant (2019) recommends an intermediary stage between indexing and charting, whereby the researcher collects and presents all textual references for each category or theme to ensure the researcher is not "overwhelmed by the quantity of data" (p.133) or "unduly influenced by the more extreme or interesting examples" (p.133) in the data. This intermediary stage was carried out for each stakeholder group indexed against the framework by collecting all codes and all indexed textual references. It was also repeated for the Act four times, as it was indexed separately against each stakeholder group's codebook.

Charting is usually the process whereby the initial framework is then adapted and summarised based on the outcomes of indexing all of the data against it (Goldsmith, 2021, pp.2068-2069; Kiernan & Hill, 2018, p.255); this was not the case in this thesis as the Act's framework was static and not subject to adaptation. Charting allows for the flexibility to present outcomes in any manner to suit the research aims and purpose because there is "no single form of product from framework analysis" (Goldsmith, 2021, p.2071). Often a chart or matrix is created so that the outcomes can be "examined systematically and in totality" (Goldsmith, 2021, p.2068). In this thesis, charting took the form of the creation of tables which provide an overview of the comparisons between the Act and the stakeholder group views.

8.3.1 Indexing and charting results

In this thesis, the outcomes were presented in two ways. The first outcome, Table 34, presents the results of the first stage of indexing, matching the stakeholder groups' codebooks to the Public Libraries and Museums Act (1964) framework.

Table 34: intensity chart mapping stakeholder views against public library legislation

	Public Libraries and Museums Act (1964)	**Central government**	**Local government**	**Public library sector**	**The public**
BE	be flexible (1)	●	◖	◖	⦸
	be helpful (1)	⦸	◖	⦸	●
PROVIDE	provide a loaning service (11)	●●	●●	●●	●●●
	provide library premises (5)	●	●●	●●	●
	provide free services (4)	◖	●	◖	●●
	provide guidance about how to use the library (4)	⦸	⦸	⦸	⦸
	meet children's needs (2)	●	⦸	●	◖
	provide access to educational and cultural events (2)	◖	◖	●	⦸
	communicate charges to the public (1)	⦸	⦸	⦸	⦸
	encourage people to use the library service (1)	●	●	◖	◖
	provide services to local people only (1)	⦸	⦸	⦸	⦸
DO	engage in intra-sector collaboration (7)	●●	●	●	⦸
	work/co-operate with other organisations (4)	●●	●●●	●	⦸
	provide a comprehensive and efficient library service (2)	●●●	●●	◖	⦸
	record and share data about the service (1)	●	●	●	⦸
	work/communicate with central government (1)	●	◖	◖	⦸
	meet legal requirements	●●●	●●	●	◖

Key: how many references are found within each corpus

⦸ = none ◖ = very few ● = some ●● = several ●●● = many

Table 34 is an intensity chart (Goldsmith, 2021, p.2072) which indicates the extent to which each of the stakeholder groups' viewpoints could be indexed against the legislation (Research Question 4). Moreover, it enables the four stakeholder groups' views to be simultaneously compared to the legislation and to one another (Research Questions 3 and 4). The intensity chart is divided into the three categories of *be, provide* and *do*, based on the model established in Phase Three (Figure 24, Section 7.4) and the framework presented in Figure 33 (Section 8.2.1). The bracketed numbers indicate how many references to each code were present in the Act. As with the framework, Table 34 includes *meet legal requirements*. Each corpus included references to following the law or meeting legal requirements, as captured in the qualitative coding of Phase Three and presented in Chapter 7.4.1 to 7.4.4.

Table 34 suggests that the four stakeholder groups have a similar level of correspondence to the Act in terms of *be* and *provide* codes, but that the central and local government corpora have more in common with the Act in relation to *do* codes. Had the framework analysis ended at this point, the results would imply that the Act and the governmental stakeholder groups are quite aligned with the Act, in comparison to the public library sector and the public. However, as the subsequent sections of this chapter will demonstrate, further scrutiny and interpretation was needed to understand the full picture.

The second outcome, Table 35, captures the second style of indexing used in this thesis. It illustrates all of the codes, organised by category, which were found in the four corpora during the qualitative coding part of Phase 3 but which are not found in the legislation. The tick indicates in which stakeholder group corpus the code originally featured. For instance, *be inclusive* was not evident in the Act but was found in all four corpora and *foster human connection* was also absent from the Act but was found in the public corpus. In essence, it is the inverse of Table 34 and serves to reflect upon whether the current legislation is adequate for a 21st century public library service (Research Aim 2).

Table 35: codes from the four stakeholder groups which are absent from the legislation

	Code	Central government	Local government	Public library sector	The public
BE	be dynamic	✓*	✓*	✓*	✓
	be inclusive	✓	✓	✓	✓
	be trustworthy	✓	✓	✓	✓
	be true to core purpose and values	✓			✓
	be welcoming			✓	
	be enduring				✓
	be empowering				✓
PROVIDE	deliver digital services	✓	✓	✓	✓
	employ professional staff	✓	✓	✓	✓
	meet local and community needs	✓	✓		✓
	be more than a loaning service	✓	✓**	✓	
	deliver a high quality service	✓	✓	✓	
	foster human connection				✓
	help improve lives			✓	
	promote social cohesion			✓	
	be a hub			✓	
	provide a coffee shop			✓	
DO	value and train staff	✓	✓	✓	
	plan strategically	✓	✓	✓	
	recognise national role	✓***		✓	
	recognise local role	✓	✓	✓	
	evaluate the service	✓	✓	✓	
	demonstrate impact and/or value	✓	✓	✓	
	achieve a consistent library offer		✓	✓	
	be governed effectively		✓		

* with the exception of alternative service models
** with the exception of *access to cultural events*
*** with the exception of *communicating with DCMS*

Whilst the full codebook for each corpora was used during the indexing process, only the main codes are presented in Table 35 because this step of framework analysis is focused on data synthesis and reviewing "variation across the entire dataset" (Goldsmith, 2021, p.2071). The full details of subcodes can be viewed in Appendix 11 for the four stakeholder group corpora and in Figure 33 for the Act.

Table 34 suggests the participants have the least in common with the Act because their corpus includes the fewest examples of codes found within the Act's framework. However, Table 35 shows that the participants have fewer of their own codes omitted from the Act, suggesting that their corpus has more in common with the Act than the other stakeholder groups. Further exploration and interpretation are undertaken in the following subsection.

8.4 Framework analysis: mapping and interpreting the data

Mapping and interpreting the data is "the stage at which the key objectives of qualitative analysis are addressed" (Ritchie & Spencer, 2002, p.311). It should not be approached in a "mechanical way" (Ritchie & Spencer, 2002, p.321) because the researcher must convey the narrative of the data through "intuition" (Ritchie & Spencer, 2002, p.321) of interpretation rather than simply "aggregating patterns" (Ritchie & Spencer, 2002, p.321). Whilst mapping and interpretation often results in a final, revised framework, that was not the case in this thesis. The purpose of using framework analysis was not to form a single theory or typology for public libraries but, rather, to consider the extent to which different stakeholder views of public libraries correspond to the legislation (Research Question 4). To that end, the researcher chose to focus on "finding associations" (Ritchie & Spencer, 2002, p. 323) through comparisons, coupled with explanations of the observed patterns (Ritchie & Spencer, 2002, p. 325). The stakeholder groups were kept separate because they do not form a homogenous viewpoint of public libraries.

In response to Research Question 4, this section compares the views of each stakeholder group to the Public Libraries and Museums Act (1964) in turn (Sections 8.5.1 - 8.5.4). When interpreting the comparisons of each stakeholder group to the legislation (Research Question 4), the researcher also drew on the definitions from each stakeholder group established in Phase Three, in addition to the outcomes from this phase.

Each comparison in the following subsections is similarly structured for ease of reading and to ensure each stakeholder group is subject to the same interpretation. First, a comparison of the category weightings with commentary. Second, an explanation about the intensity chart (Table 34) and its implications. Next, a discussion about the codes from the stakeholder corpora which did not correspond to the legislation; these are

presented in Tables 36 - 39. Finally, an overall comment about the compatibility of the legislation and the stakeholder group in question. This mapping and interpretation section concludes with overall comparative observations (Section 8.4.5).

8.5.1 The legislation compared to central government views

The central government corpus and the Public Libraries and Museums Act (1964) framework have very different category weightings. For instance, 14.2% of the textual references in the central government corpus are associated with the *be* category, whereas the Act provides much less guidance about public library values and principles (4.5%). Moreover, the central government corpus asserts that public libraries should be more focused on wider actions (*do* category: 57.3%) than on the services it provides directly to the public (*provide* category: 28.5%). This is inverted for the Act, with nearly double the content in the *provide* category (61.4%) compared to the *do* category (34.1%). It suggests that the priorities of the central government are different to those of the Act.

Indexing the central government corpus onto the Act's framework

The intensity chart (Table 34) shows that the central government corpus provides some examples of one of the two codes within the legislation framework's *be* category: *be flexible.* Although there is a difference in the implied importance of the *do* category, according to the intensity chart, it is this category with which the central government corpus most resonates. The central government corpus can be indexed to every code within the Act's *do* category. This means that with regards to actions that public libraries should undertake beyond public services, the central government's position encompasses all of the stipulations within the legislation. In terms of the *provide* category, not only does the central government corpus differ from the legislation in terms of the weighting, but the intensity chart also presents further divergence. Of the six stipulations made in the legislation about public services onto which the central government corpus could be indexed, most include only some or very few examples. For example, the legislation determines that public library services should include *premises* but there are only some examples of this within the central government corpus. Equally, the legislation is clear that public libraries should *provide free services* but the central government corpus provides very few examples of this.

Table 36: comparing the content of the legislation with the views of central government

	Present in the Act but not clearly evident in the central government corpus	**Present in the central government corpus but not evident in the Act**
BE	be helpful	be inclusive be true to core values and principles be trustworthy
PROVIDE	provide guidance about how to use the library communicate charges to the public provide services to local people only	meet community and local needs deliver digital services deliver a high-quality service provide children's activities provide access to skilled staff
DO	N/A	plan strategically recognise their local role evaluate the service value staff strive for a consistent offer across England demonstrate impact and/or value

Unlike the Public Libraries and Museums Act (1964), the central government corpus does not include any references to *being helpful* (*be* category) in terms of assisting the public with their use of the library (Table 36). Moreover, the Act includes two codes which relate to aiding the public with the functions of a public library: *provide guidance about how to use the library* and *communicating charges to the public.* Neither is present in the central government corpus; nor does this corpus include any references to services provided to the public at this level of operational detail. For instance, across the corpus, there are five references to *loaning books and printed materials* but they are broad in description, simply presenting the idea that books can be borrowed from the library with no further detail. In comparison, the Act mentions the *provision of a loaning service* 11 times and specifically states that "adequate stock" (7(2)(a)), a "range" (7(2)(a)), "quality" (7(2)(a)) and reading materials to meet the "requirements both of adults and children" (7(2)(a)) should be available.

Indexing the Act onto the central government corpus

There are a number of codes across all three categories of the central government corpus which are not evident in the legislation. For example, the central government view is that public libraries should be inclusive and trustworthy (*be* category). Equally,

the central government corpus asserts public libraries should be *true to core values and principles*, by "retaining the distinctive role and value of the library" (DCMS, 2017f, para. 86) to avoid "undermining the public's perception of the library" (DCMS, 2017f, para. 86). This notion is not explicitly reflected in the Public Libraries and Museums Act (1964) but it is reasonable to assume that the content of the Act represents the totality of those core values and principles, in the same way as it represents the code, *meet legal requirements* (as described in Section 8.2.1). Therefore, it is equally reasonable to deduce that any values and principles not stipulated by the Act are not core. On one hand, the values and services listed in the second column of the *be* and *provide* categories in Table 36 (evident in the central government corpus but absent from the Act) are potentially not core according to the legislation. On the other hand, these values and services are considered core in a twenty-first century context, according to the central government view; thus, it could be argued the legislation should be updated to reflect this. *Delivering digital services*, for instance, was not relevant in the 1960s because computers for personal use simply did not exist. Moreover, *inclusion* and its subcodes of *accessibility* and *equality* (see central government codebook in Appendix 11) are core tenets of any public service in twenty-first century England due, in part, to the Equality Act 2010.

Whilst the central government corpus does present examples of *meeting children's needs* from the Public Libraries and Museums Act (1964) framework, the legislation does not include examples of *provide children's activities* (see Table 36, *provide* row) from the central government codebook. In the legislation, children are mentioned only in relation to having access to reading material and to being encouraged to use the library. The onus is different in the central government corpus because it suggests that public libraries should be organising and leading a range of activities targeted at children. Similarly, the 1964 Act is indexed against the central government code, *be more than bricks and mortar…*, however, only one, specific element is found in the act: *provide cultural and creative enrichment*. Even so, in the Act, this is framed as something a library can be used for and not something the library should organise or manage. The legislation does not include examples of the other facets of the central government view that libraries should be more than a loaning service, such as *address social isolation*.

There are six actions present in the *do* category of the central government corpus which are not evident in the legislation. In addition, it is worth noting that *recognise national*

role is predominantly absent from the Act; only the subcode *communicate with DCMS* is covered. The central government corpus expects public libraries to *demonstrate their impact and/or value*; this is not asked of public libraries by the Act. Moreover, it is the view of central government that public libraries should take an active role in broad "national policies" (DCMS, 2017f, para. 62) as well as delivering local priorities "on behalf of the council" (DCMS, 2017f, para. 62), well beyond the scope of a loaning service. Whilst the Act does encourage partnership working and intra-sector collaboration, these are only in respect of "having functions in relation to libraries" (3(2)(a)) and not in service of the strategic aims of other organisations or public services.

Conclusion

Overall, the central government corpus encapsulates most of the content of the Public Libraries and Museums Act (1964), as evidenced by Tables 34 and 36. However, the legislation is very clear that the focus of public libraries should be providing a free loaning service and helping the public to use it. These elements are either underrepresented in the central government corpus (see Table 34) or absent (see Table 36). Instead, as described in Section 7.4.1, the central government view is more focused on what else public libraries can deliver beyond their original remit.

8.5.2 The legislation compared to local government views

Whilst the category weightings for the local government corpus are not the same as those of the Public Libraries and Museums Act (1964) framework, the difference is less extreme than with the central government corpus. In terms of the *be* category, 11.2% of the textual references in the local government corpus are grouped here compared to 4.5% for the Act. Well over half (61.4%) of the Act's textual references feature in the *provide* category in comparison to just under half (49%) for the local government corpus. The weightings for the *do* category are similar: 34.1% for the legislation and 39.5% for local government. Overall, the weightings imply that the local government priorities are more similar to the Act than those of central government.

Indexing the local government corpus onto the Act's framework

As with the central government corpus, the intensity chart (Table 34) indicates that the local government corpus has the greatest affinity with the legislation's *do* category compared to *be* and *provide*. Moreover, there is evidence that the local government corpus can be indexed to every code within the *do* category of the Public Libraries and

Museums Act (1964) framework, with a strong intensity. Compared to the central government position, the intensity chart reports fewer textual examples within the local government corpus in four areas: *engage in intra-sector collaboration*, *provide a comprehensive and efficient library service*, *work/communicate with central government* and *meet legal requirements.* With the *provide* category, the local government corpus presents more examples related to *provide library premises* and *provide free services*, in comparison to the central government corpus. However, the frequency by which the local government corpus can be indexed against the *provide* category of the framework indicates a different level of prioritisation between the local government position and that of the legislation. The local government corpus does demonstrate textual examples of *providing a loaning service* and *providing libraries premises*, but only provides some examples of *providing free services* and *encouraging people to use the library service.*

Table 37: comparing the content of the legislation with the views of local government

	Present in the Act but not clearly evident in the local government corpus	**Present in the local government corpus but not evident in the Act**
BE	N/A	be inclusive be trustworthy
PROVIDE	provide guidance about how to use the library communicate charges to the public provide services to local people only meet children's needs	meet community and local needs deliver digital services deliver a high quality service be staffed by professionals
DO	N/A	plan strategically support local priorities strive for consistency across England demonstrate impact and/or value be governed effectively engage with / listen to staff employ trained staff evaluate the service

The local government corpus was successfully indexed against all the codes within the legislation's *be* and *do* categories. Discrepancies only arise within the *provide* category. Just like the central government corpus, the local government corpus does not include

textual references focused on *providing guidance about how to use the library* or *communicating charges to the public.* In addition, where the central government corpus describes the *provision of activities for children* and the legislation stipulates that public libraries should *meet children's needs* in terms of reading*,* the local government corpus does not mention children at all.

Indexing the Act onto the local government corpus

Table 37 demonstrates that the local government corpus includes a number of duties public libraries should undertake which are not present in the Act. As with the central government value statements, the local government view is also that public libraries should be *inclusive* and *trustworthy*; these values are not reflected in the Act. The duties described within the *provide* category of the local government corpus, and which are not evident in the legislation, are very similar to those of the central government corpus: *meeting community and local needs*, *delivering digital services*, *delivering a high quality service* and *being staffed by professionals.* The legislation is focused on providing services to individuals in relation to borrowing reading material and other items; in comparison, the local government's claim that public libraries should be *meeting community and local needs* is a much broader remit, including "community relations" (Local Government Association [LGA], 2017, p.16), being "vital community hubs" (LGA, 2017, p.5) and supporting local issues "such as obesity or the provision of digital skills training" (LGA, 2017, p.19). This view of public libraries is also included in the *do* category, *support local priorities*, but is not reflected within the legislation. The local government position is that a public library service can be integrated into the local authority's aims to "ensure the economic, social and environmental wellbeing of their local area" (LGA, 2017, p.18) with a "'Libraries First'" (LGA, 2017, p.9) approach. In contrast, the Act offers a very streamlined view that public libraries should offer a loaning service, working with other organisations and across the sector to achieve this. Just like the comparison between central government and the legislation, the Act is indexed against the local government expectation that libraries are *much more than a depository for books* solely because the Act mentions the "Use of premises for educational or cultural events" (Public Libraries and Museums Act, 1964, Section 20). The Act does not provide examples of the full range of this idea, such as *become community hubs* or *improve lives and prospects*.

A further seven actions are evident within the *do* category of the local government corpus which are not present in the Act. Three relate to service performance: *plan strategically*, *demonstrate impact and/or value*, *be governed effectively* and *evaluate the service.* The Public Libraries and Museums Act (1964) does reference *capturing and sharing data about the service*, specifically being called upon to pass on service information to the Secretary of State (1(2)), and also comments that the Secretary of State can force collaborations "with a view to improving the efficiency of the public library service" (3(5)). However, it does not stipulate any other actions relating to public libraries self-monitoring and self-evaluating their performance.

Conclusion

Overall, just like the central government corpus, the local government viewpoints are successfully indexed onto most of the Public Libraries and Museums Act (1964), particularly in the *be* and *do* categories. The local government corpus has the strongest affinity with the *do* category, providing examples for all but one code (Table 34). Whilst the legislation primarily focused on the free loaning service that public libraries must provide, the local government corpus is most focused on how public libraries can be "much more than a depository for books" (LGA, 2017, p.12) by *meeting community and local needs* and being the "front door" (LGA, 2017, p.33) for other local services. Moreover, most of the duties which are present in the *provide* category for the legislation but absent in the local government corpus relate to meeting the needs of the public in relation to specific library duties: *provide guidance about how to use the library, meet children's needs* and *communicate charges to the public*. By comparison, the local government corpus is concerned with how public needs can be met in a much wider sense and consider a public library service as a tool to achieve this, ensuring it is "an asset not a cost" (LGA, 2017, p.9) to its local authority.

8.5.3 The legislation compared to public library sector views

The comparison of category weightings between the public library sector and the Public Libraries and Museums Act (1964) framework are similar to those of the local government. For instance, the public library sector has more examples of values in the *be* category (10.3% of textual references) compared to the Act (4.5%). Moreover, the Act has more textual references in the *provide* category (61.4%) than the sector (46.8%), whereas the *do* category is quite aligned: with the Act presenting 34.1% of textual

references in this category compared to 42.9% in the public library sector corpus. The weightings suggest that the public library sector priorities are quite similar to those of the Act, and certainly more aligned that those of central government. However, the public library sector priorities are even more closely matched to those of the local government corpus than the Public Libraries and Museums Act (1964).

Indexing the public library sector corpus onto the Act's framework

Unlike the other three stakeholder groups, the intensity chart (Table 34) indicates that the public library sector corpus does not demonstrate *many examples* for any of the codes within the Act's framework. The public library sector corpus was indexed against 13 of the Act's 17 codes but most often as only *some* or *few examples.* This suggests that despite broad coverage, there lacks a strength in intensity or similarity. Whilst the public library sector has more in common with the *do* category, in terms of number of codes successfully indexed, it holds the strongest affinity to the two most highly ranked *provide* codes in the Act's framework: *provide a loaning service* and *provide library premises*. This implies that the public library sector agrees with the legislation's mandate that public libraries should first and foremost provide a loaning service to the public.

Table 38: comparing the content of the legislation with the views of the public library sector

	Present in the Act but not clearly evident in the public library sector corpus	**Present in the public library sector corpus but not evident in the Act**
BE	be helpful	be inclusive be trustworthy be welcoming
PROVIDE	provide guidance about how to use the library communicate charges to the public provide services to local people only	help improve lives provide digital services promote social cohesion delivery a quality service be staffed by professionals be a hub provide a coffee shop
DO	N/A	recognise their national and local role achieve a consistent library offer demonstrate impact and/or value evaluate the service value the workforce plan strategically

Like the local government corpus, Table 38 shows the public library sector demonstrates examples of all of the codes within the Act's *do* category. The differences are found in the *be* and *provide* categories. For instance, the Act includes textual references under the code *be helpful* and these specifically relate to guiding the public about how to use the library and its facilities. In contrast, the helpfulness mentioned in the public library sector corpus relates to social justice, such as improving lives or supporting employment. Therefore, the public library sector corpus was not indexed against the Act's *be helpful*.

The three codes within the Act's framework under the *provide* category which are not evident in the public library sector corpus are also absent in the central and local government corpora: *provide guidance about how to use the library*, *communicate charges to the public* and *provide services to local people only*. The latter could be omitted from the stakeholder groups' corpora because the contemporary shared view is that public libraries are for everyone. Moreover, with the provision of digital content to borrow, compared to the 1960s when the Act was written, geographic boundaries may

be less relevant. Whilst the public library sector corpus is not indexed against either *provide guidance about how to use the library* or *communicate charges to the public*, the sector is clear that public libraries should be staffed by professionals. This implies a level of support for library users but it is not as specific as the Act's content.

Indexing the Act onto the public library sector corpus

In the other direction, in terms of indexing the Act onto the sector corpus, the framework analysis demonstrated there are a number of codes in each category which are not reflected in the legislation. As with the central government, local government and public corpora, *be inclusive* and *be trustworthy* are featured in the sector codebook under the *be* category but not included in the Act. Inclusivity is now legislated for with the Equality Act (2010) so this might be sufficient to ensure public libraries, as public services, maintain an inclusive and accessible approach to their offer. In a departure from the other stakeholder groups, the public library sector codebook also includes *be welcoming* in the *be* category which is not reflected in the 1964 Act. Being trustworthy and welcoming could be viewed as values which are hard to specify and therefore legislate. They may be better stipulated within professional standards (Table 8, Chapter 4.2.2) if Libraries Connected (2019b) do provide a new framework.

The public library sector considers *delivering digital services* as equally important to *helping improve lives* and *focusing on reading*. It is a code shared with the other stakeholder groups but absent from the 1964 Act (Figure 33). As previously stated, this relates to the age of the Act and the development of modern technologies. There are a number of other actions within the public library sector's *provide* category which are not apparent within the legislation: *help improve lives*, *promote social cohesion*, *be a hub*, and *provide a coffee shop*. These examples suggest that the sector wants public libraries to be situated in the centre of public life, providing a wider social impact. In comparison, the Act is streamlined to focus on the loaning and reading duties of public libraries.

The six codes in the *do* category which did not index onto the Act are very similar to those in the central and local government corpora. They relate to strategic planning, service monitoring and evaluation, providing a role wider than a loaning service and striving for national consistency. It is possible the Act does not include the first two examples because it is focused on what public libraries should do and not the manner in which they should achieve these stipulations. As mentioned earlier, the legislation

presents public libraries as a reading and loaning service; this explains the lack of content pertaining to a wider *national and local role* because it exceeds the stipulated remit. Finally, until 2014, the Public Libraries and Museums Act (1964) Section 2 stated that national advisory councils were mandatory and would serve to advise the Secretary of State. This implies that older iterations of the legislation did consider a national approach or consistency to be important. Something the sector, local government and central government still perceive as necessary for public libraries.

Conclusion

Overall, the public library service corpus was not as well indexed against the Act's framework, in terms of coverage or intensity, as the corpora of both central and local government. Moreover, the public library service codebook is far more extensive than the Act's framework or the codebooks of the other stakeholder groups. This suggests that compared to the very streamlined service described in the legislation, the sector thinks public libraries should have a much broader remit going beyond loaning services to include, for example, *helping improve lives*, *promote social cohesion*, *supporting local priorities* and *wider social issues*. In part, the corpus indicates this is to support the public but it also to "attract sustainable, long-term funding to the sector" (Independent Mind, 2019, p.10) and so libraries can "demonstrate their impact to their communities and local authorities" (Libraries Connected, 2020d, p.14).

8.5.4 The legislation compared to public views

The public corpus demonstrates the most similar weighting in terms of the Act's *provide* category: 75.9% public corpus compared to 61.4% Public Libraries and Museums Act (1964). Moreover, the *provide* category is the most dominant in both the public corpus and Act's framework. None of the other stakeholder groups share this prioritisation. It suggests the public and the legislation share the position that services delivered to the public (*provide* category) should be the priority of public libraries. The other categories are not so similarly matched. The Act's framework is 34.1% related to the *do* category, compared to just 0.9% for the public corpus. Equally, only 4.5% of the Act's codes are grouped within the *be* category compared to 23.2% for the public. The public corpus does not reflect much in the *do* category because it includes a solo code: comply with laws.

Indexing the public corpus onto the Act's framework

The most dominant code in the Act's framework relates to the *provide* category: *provide a loaning service*. This is well matched to the most dominant code in the public corpus: *focus on reading*. The public corpus also provides more examples of *provide free services*, within the Act's framework, than any of the other stakeholder groups. It demonstrates that the participants agree with the Act's focus that public libraries should deliver free loaning services as their main priority.

Table 39: comparing the content of the legislation with the views of the public

	Present in the Act but not clearly evident in the public corpus	**Present in the public corpus but not evident in the Act**
BE	be flexible	be inclusive be trustworthy be dynamic be 'true to their core purpose' be enduring be empowering
PROVIDE	provide guidance about how to use the library provide access to educational and cultural events communicate charges to the public provide services to local people only	foster human connection provide access to professional staff deliver digital services support learning support the community
DO	engage in intra-sector collaboration work/co-operate with other organisations provide a comprehensive and efficient library service record and share data about the service work/communicate with central government	N/A

The public corpus was not indexed against the same three codes missing from the other stakeholder groups' corpora: *provide guidance about how to use the library, communicate charges to the public*, and *provide services to local people only*. Just like the public library sector view, the public are very clear that public libraries are for everyone and, therefore, a locals-only approach would likely be perceived as exclusionary. Whilst the public do not specify that public libraries should *provide*

guidance about how to use the library, they are clear that the public should be helped by professional staff. For this reason, the public corpus is indexed against the Act's *be helpful* code in the *be* category. The public corpus phrases this more generically as staff helping the public to access books and reading matter rather than specific guidance about the library and how it functions. Nevertheless, it is similar in terms of intention and desired impact: support the public within the library setting. In comparison, the public library sector corpus presents the notion of helping as something wider than the library setting, such as *help improve lives* through social mobility.

The public corpus is not indexed against the Act's *be flexible* because the public corpus states that a "library can't be all things to all people" (U22). This does not correlate to the Act's statement that provision should be altered "for different cases, including provision in relation to different persons, circumstances or locations" (Public Libraries and Museums Act, 1964, Section 8(5)(e)). Rather than a service that continually adapts to individual needs or situations, the public are more concerned with the library service being *dynamic* for the whole population so it can "move with the times and provide a book lending service that matches current needs" (NU6).

Indexing the Act onto the public corpus

When reversing the framework analysis and indexing the Act onto the public corpus, a striking difference is the *be* category. Values are clearly important to the public; there are six codes in this category which are not evident within the Act. Three of these relate to how the public want to feel when using a library: that it is a trustworthy, inclusive and empowering service. The Act's framework has one example of such a value: it should *be helpful* so that the public feel supported when accessing the library. The other three codes in the public corpus *be* category relate to qualities the public think libraries need: to be dynamic, enduring and true to their core purpose. The Act also has one example of this kind of value: *be flexible* so the service can modify its provision as needed. It is possible there are so few value statements within the legislation because the purpose of the Act is to stipulate what a public library should be doing rather than specifying how it should be done. Although it would be reasonable to assume that the Public Libraries and Museums Act (1964) was broad and general, it does provide specificity in other areas, such the list of items a public library must make available to borrow: "books and other printed matter, and pictures, gramophone records, films and other materials" (Section 2(a)). It is possible, therefore, that more value statements could be included in the Act

to reflect the stakeholder groups' views, particularly those values shared by all four groups: *be dynamic*, *be inclusive* and *be trustworthy*.

In a similar manner to the other stakeholder groups, the Act is not indexed against *deliver digital services* or *employ professional staff* in the *provide* category. Regarding the former, this chapter has already argued that the lack of digital content in the Act is symptomatic of the era in which it was written. Despite a lack of explicit references to professional staff, the Act does mention actions which imply the need for staff in order to fulfil them: maintaining adequate stock (Section 7(2)(a)), encouraging people to use the library (Section 7(2)(b), and providing guidance about how to use the library (Section 7(2)(b). The public, by comparison, are far more overt in their conviction that "you need professional staff" (NU3) in a public library.

The public corpus also demonstrates the participants want public libraries to support the community and foster human connection. These codes are absent in the legislation, which focuses on the duty of public libraries to lend reading materials and other matter. Moreover, the public corpus asserts that public libraries should *support learning* but the 1964 Act merely states that cultural and educational events can take place in public libraries (Section 20), not that the libraries should take an active role in delivering them.

Conclusion

Overall, the public is more concerned with the nature of public libraries in comparison to the Act. The public want libraries which are inclusive, trustworthy and empowering, as well as enduring, dynamic and true to their core purpose. In comparison, the Act only mentions flexibility and helpfulness. Moreover, the legislation stipulates a number of mandated activities (*do* category) which should help a library to maintain its core function of a loaning service, such as intra-sector collaboration. In contrast, the public corpus focus is on those services which are delivered directly to the public (*provide* category) and, consequently, the *do* category holds only one code: *comply with laws*. As such, there is little correlation between the public corpus and legislation beyond the *provide* category. In summary, the public corpus and Public Libraries and Museums Act (1964) appear well matched regards the core business of public libraries: providing a free loaning service focused on reading. However, in respect of values (*be* category) or activities which underpin the service but are not in direct service of the public (*do* category), the public and legislation are less compatible (Table 34 and Table 39).

8.5.5 Comparisons between the legislation and the stakeholder groups

In addition to the previous stakeholder by stakeholder commentary, this section explores the stakeholders' shared comparisons with the legislation. Table 40 provides a synthesised overview of the correlation between the legislation and the stakeholder groups as a whole. To this end, the first column represents all the codes within the Public Libraries and Museums Act (1964) framework which do not appear in at least one stakeholder group corpus. The second column presents all of the codes across the four stakeholder groups which do not appear in the legislation.

Table 40: comparing the content of the legislation with the views of all the stakeholder groups

	Present in the Act but not clearly evident in the stakeholder perceptions	**Present in the stakeholder perceptions but not evident in the Act**
BE	N/A	be enduring be empowering be inclusive be trustworthy be true to core purpose and values be welcoming
PROVIDE	provide guidance about how to use the library communicate charges to the public provide services to local people only	be a hub deliver a high quality service deliver digital services employ professional staff foster human connection help improve lives meet local and community needs promote social cohesion provide a coffee shop
DO	N/A	achieve a consistent library offer be governed effectively demonstrate impact and/or value evaluate the service plan strategically recognise local role recognise national role* value and train staff

* with exception of work / communicate with central government

Table 40 suggests that the way in which the legislation describes the values (*be* category) and additional duties (*do* category) of public libraries in England is in line with

stakeholder perceptions. Equally, there are only three public facing services (*provide* category) which are not reflecting in the stakeholder corpora. However, it is worth nothing that the stakeholder groups do not represent a homogenous viewpoint, as demonstrated in the earlier previous sections of this chapter. That said, it does suggest that the content of the Public Libraries and Museums Act (1964) is still relevant. Conversely, the number and range of codes in the second column suggests that the Act might still be relevant but it is not adequate for contemporary stakeholders.

The Act stipulates that public libraries should *provide guidance about how to use the library* and *communicate charges to the public;* these duties have been discussed in the earlier sections of this chapter. All the stakeholder groups present the idea that public libraries should be for everyone through a number of different *be* and *provide* codes; however, the legislation stipulates that public libraries only need to *provide services to local people*, who live, work or study in the area. While the central government, local government and public library sector position is that public libraries should meet the needs of their local communities, none of their corpora refer to excluding non-local people from their service.

Be dynamic is evident in all four stakeholder corpora and it is the most important value in the central government, local government and public library sector *be* category (see 7.2.3). Whilst it is present in the Public Libraries and Museums Act (1964), it only relates to *alternative service provision*. In the stakeholder groups, it also covers *modernisation*, *innovation*, *responding to challenges*, *embracing change* and *responding to changing public expectations*. *Be inclusive* is another absent value in the legislation (*be* category) but which is highly ranked by all four stakeholder groups. It includes *accessibility* and *equality*. Not only is it not evident in the Act, but there are also three extracts which are antithetical to accessibility and inclusion. First, the Public Libraries and Museums Act (1964) twice stipulates that no charge can be made when reading material is accessed or borrowed as long as it is "readable without the use of any electronic or other apparatus" (8(3)(c) and 8(4)(a)); this implies that a charge can be applied if the reading material does need some form of equipment. Second, the Act also comments that charges can be applied if the library user has "required such apparatus" or needs the reading material to be put "into such a form in order that he may borrow it" (8(3)(d). In current public libraries, library users can access reading material in large font books, eBooks, audiobook format and published in braille, for free. It is reasonable to comment that

society has changed since the 1960s and this is why *inclusion* is missing from the Act. However, other aspects of the Public Libraries and Museums Act (1964) have been repealed or amended since 1964. In light of the Equality Act 2010, it seems incongruous that the aforementioned sections of the Act have not been amended nor have stipulations about *inclusion* and *accessibility* been added.

Trustworthiness is an absent value from the *be* category of the legislation but it is evident in all stakeholder corpora; it is most highly ranked by the public library sector. The central government, local government and public library sector corpora all state that public libraries should *be trustworthy*, but it is only the public corpus that considers why this value is needed. The public attest that public libraries should *be trustworthy* because people need access to "impartial information" (U24, Q Study 1), in spaces which are not intimidating (NU8, Q Study 2) and which provide "apolitical" services (NU28, Q Study 2).

All four stakeholder groups are clear that public libraries should *provide access to trained or professional staff.* In the case of the central government, local government and public library sector corpora, clear reference is also made to the use of volunteers to support the library staff. The Public Libraries and Museums Act (1964) does not mention staff at all, even when describing duties which would need staff to perform them. For example, "… a library authority shall in particular have regard to the desirability— (a) of securing, by the keeping of adequate stocks, by arrangements with other library authorities, and by any other appropriate means, that facilities are available for the borrowing of, or reference to, books and other printed matter" (7(2)(a)). A library authority is an abstract figure; staff would be needed to select, acquire and present "books and other printed matter" (7(2)(a)) so that the public could borrow them.

Whilst the Public Libraries and Museums Act (1964) refers to regional councils to encourage "inter-library co-operation" (3), there is no mention of a *consistent library offer* across England. This is a code present in the *do* category of the central government, local government and public library sector corpora; moreover, it is ranked as the second most important duty in the *do* category of the public library sector. Until 2015, Section 2 of the Public Libraries and Museums Act (1964) stipulated that there should be National Advisory Councils to advise the Secretary of State "upon such matters connected with the provision or use of library facilities" (2(1)). This repealed

section did not specifically mention a *consistent library offer* but the very notion of such a council would imply a broad, national purview of public libraries and their services.

8.6 Conclusion

Overall, this chapter explains how a modified, bi-directional framework analysis was used to consider how the stakeholder definitions map onto the Public Libraries and Museums Act (1964), in response to Research Question 4: exploring the connection between stakeholder perceptions of public libraries and the Act. In doing so, this phase provides the data needed to address the second research aim of the thesis: considering the legislation's adequacy for a 21st century service.

Phase Four has established there are some similarities about the expectations of public libraries between each stakeholder group and the legislation. For example, they all agree that access to books and/or information is a duty of public libraries, as stipulated in the legislation. However, where this is the dominant feature of the legislation and the public corpus, it is mentioned much less than other services in both the central and local government corpora. Ergo, each stakeholder group appears to prioritise access to reading material and information differently. Equally, some aspects of the Act's framework were not evident in the stakeholder corpora, particularly three codes in the provide category: *providing guidance about how to use the library*, *communicating charges to the public* and *providing services to local people only.* It is noteworthy that the first two codes were absent from the stakeholder corpora, particularly the public corpus, given that they relate to how the public can better understand and access public libraries.

In the obverse, examples where the content of the stakeholder corpora were not reflected in the Act were far more frequent. For example, *deliver digital services* is a perceived duty of public libraries shared by all stakeholder groups. In this instance, the disconnect between the legislation and the stakeholder corpora can be explained in terms of the era in which the Act was passed: since 1964, a digital transformation has since taken place with the advent of computers, the world wide web, and WiFi. Whilst contextually explicable, it does also highlight a more fundamental issue about the relevancy of the Act for a contemporary service, more than half a century after it was enacted. The stakeholder groups also share the view that *employ professional staff* and *be inclusive* are important to public libraries but these codes are absent in the

legislation. The former might be absent because the Act was written in a period before consumerism and neoliberalism had influenced the delivery of public services like libraries (Chapter 4), so professional staff were considered a given. There are elements of the Act which are worded in such a way as to imply staff, such as "encouraging both adults and children to make full use of the library service" (Public Libraries and Museums Act, 1964, Section 7(2)(b)). Unlike the public corpus, the corpora of central government, local government and the public library sector all demonstrate an inclination for public libraries to work beyond the core library service described in the 1964 Act. For instance, central government, local government and the sector all expect public libraries to embrace a wider, local role, to be more than a library service, and to meet community needs. Also, all four stakeholder groups refer to a number of values in the *be* category which are not stipulated in the legislation. It is possible that an Act of Parliament is not meant to encompass values and behaviours such as *dynamism* and *trustworthiness.* In which case, the question is whether these could or should be mandated for public libraries, particularly given the lack of current public library standards (Chapter 4.2.2).

Sometimes the similarities and differences with the 1964 Act were shared across the stakeholder groups, with the most commonalities evident between the central government and local government positions. Table 34 shows the public corpus had the most in common with the legislation across some of the most dominant codes in the Act's *provide* category: *providing a loaning service* and *providing free services*. The inference is that the Act, rather than the ever-changing central and local government agendas and policy directives (Chapter 4.2.3), actually continues to reflect the core essence of what the public believes a public library service should provide. In this way, it can be argued that the 1964 Act is still at least partially adequate for a contemporary public library service. However, the public also had almost nothing in common with the Act in terms of the *do* category. This is possibly reflective of the participants' prioritisation of the services that public libraries provide to the public, rather than the processes by which they operate and demonstrate their compliance with policy and legislation. Equally, Chapter 7.2 explained that the nature of each stakeholder group's corpus is different and that this can impact analysis. The same is true in this case, where the public corpus is different in purpose and communication style to the content of an Act of Parliament.

In response to the second research aim, Phase Four has demonstrated that the 1964 mirrors many of the stakeholder groups' perceptions of what public libraries should *be*, *provide* and *do*. However, there are a number of perceptions which are not reflected in the Act. Further discussion and analysis about what the data suggests in terms of the adequacy of the legislation is provided in the subsequent chapter. Chapter 9 also combines the implications of the outputs and interpretations from Phases Two, Three and Four and discusses them in more detail. Moreover, the analysis is presented in relation to the findings of the literature review in Phase One, as well as both research aims.

CHAPTER 9: THE DISCUSSION

This chapter draws together the findings from the multiple phases of this thesis. The chapter is structured around the two research aims: each is discussed in turn, reflecting on the associated research questions, findings from the relevant phases, and apposite literature.

9.1 Introduction

Chapter 9 brings together the findings from the multiple phases of this thesis. The findings are novel because no prior study has mapped the public perceptions of public libraries in England against the content and intention of the Public Libraries and Museums Act (1964). Equally, no previous study has drawn together public perceptions with the positions of central government, local government and the public library sector, and subsequently used the comparisons to consider the adequacy of the Act for a contemporary public library service.

The empirical research undertaken in this thesis has established that there is some divergence between the perceptions of the participants about what public libraries should offer and the priorities of central government, local government and the public library sector. It has also demonstrated the participants' perceptions have much in common with the legislation. By comparison, the findings show that central government, local government and the sector present priorities for public libraries which exceed the statutory expectations of the Act, and this is often not desirable according to the participants in this research.

This chapter is structured around the two research aims. The first aim is to identify public perceptions of public libraries in England and the services they provide, explored through Research Question 1 (restated in Section 9.2). The second aim is to establish whether the current public libraries legislation is adequate for a 21st century service, explored through Research Questions 2, 3 and 4 (restated in Section 9.3). Each aim is discussed in turn and then the chapter concludes with recommendations for how the Act and the sector could better serve public needs and behaviours.

The outcomes from Phases Two, Three and Four are explored in light of the apposite literature findings from Chapter 4. This is because the research adopts an interpretivist

theoretical approach rather than a specific theoretical framework (Chapter 2.2.2), the literature review in Phase One "acts as a proxy for theory" (Bryman, 2016, p.20). Moreover, the social constructionist epistemology of the thesis means that it is the researcher's position that perceptions and reality cannot be isolated from sociopolitical, cultural or historical structures (Chapter 2.2.1); thus, the findings of this thesis are reviewed against the literature to consider whether they support or contradict academic studies, sector publications, governmental policy and guidance, and legislation.

9.2 Aim 1: to identify public perceptions of public libraries in England and the services they provide

In Phase Two, perceptions of the public who live, work or study in West Sussex were captured during Q Study 1 and Q Study 2. This phase specifically responded to the first research aim by answering Research Question 1: what are public perceptions of public libraries in England, both users and non-users? The research question was necessary to fulfil two research gaps established in Phase One (Chapter 4.3): a lack of research into public perceptions of public libraries which considers the entire service rather than a specific element of it and a lack of research into the perceptions of library non-users (Table 11, Chapter 4.3). Moreover, it was important to establish the current public perceptions of public libraries so they could then be viewed against the content and intention of the Act, when addressing the second research aim.

9.2.1 Library user perceptions

Research Question 1 seeks to understand public perceptions of public libraries in England from the perspective of library users and non-users. Q Study 1 presents an answer to the question by demonstrating that the library user participants hold two distinct views (Chapter 6.6.6), as well as a number of shared views within these (see Figures 18 and 19, Chapter 6.6). Overall, the library user participants agree that public libraries should deliver an accessible, professionally staffed service focused on reading. Moreover, they agree that volunteers should not replace professional staff. Library user participants are disinterested in alternative delivery or cross-organisation models, and do not believe that public libraries should have to demonstrate their impact or value.

The first shared view is that public libraries should focus on reading as their core purpose. This supports Coates' (2019) claim that there "is no evidence anywhere that

English people have lost interest in reading" (p.4) and Usherwood's (2007a) assertion that public libraries should stick to the core business of loaning books rather than becoming "amusement arcades with a few books attached" (p.65).

Against a backdrop of an increasing number of volunteers in public libraries (Chartered Institute of Public Finance and Accountancy [CIPFA], 2017, 2018b; Richards, 2016), library user participants are also clear that services within libraries should be delivered by professional staff rather than volunteers: "Volunteers are nice well-meaning people. But if I want to talk to someone in a library i want them to know what their doimng" (U5). This sentiment is reflected in the study by Appleton et al. (2018) where "several participants reported a lack of confidence in the ability of unqualified library staff to support them with enquiries particularly in respect of access to digital resources and computer use" (p.279). Goulding (2013) argues that volunteers are being used in libraries as a necessity to forestall library closures and that this approach is potentially "condemning them to a slow and lingering death" (p.489). Goulding (2013) presents two models for volunteer use in public libraries in England: an involving model and a devolving model. In the former, volunteers "add value to the core service" (p.485) through community and civic engagement, and in the latter, they "take over the service" (p.485) via community managed libraries. Casselden et al. (2019) present a similar idea, concluding that the use of volunteers in libraries is "moving from a value-added role… to a staff replacement role" (p.879). Casselden et al. further caution that the use of volunteers in lieu of professional staff leads to issues with service quality, user-expectations, and de-professionalisation (p.879). The library users in Q Study 1 are clear that they do not want volunteers in lieu of professional staff, as per Goulding's (2013) devolving model or Casselden et al.'s (2019) replacement role. Instead, they want a service where they can engage with professional staff.

The library user participants share the view that public libraries should be people-focused and accessible. This view underpins the library user participant shared perception that the public library's "main role is to support people" (U16) as "an inclusive, accessible" (U4) service that is "welcoming to all people" (U6). This finding reflects Appleton et al.'s (2018) research which draws a link between professional staffing and inclusive services: "non-discriminatory access to expert staff available to assist the general public with a range of tasks was acknowledged as one of the benefits of public library use" (p.280).

The library users of Q Study 1 do not think that public libraries should pursue alternative service models or work with other organisations and services. The work of Casselden et al. (2019) explores the use of volunteers in libraries but does not delve into alternative provision like community-led or volunteer-led libraries. Goulding (2013) reviews the issues and benefits of community-managed libraries but does not undertake direct research with the public on the matter. The Libraries Taskforce (2016) outlines a range of alternative provision, including outsourced and commissioned library services, but does not provide any research about the impact of these models. The strong view held by library users in Q Study 1 against alternative models and co-production with other organisations suggests that empirical research into such public library approaches is needed.

Some of the library users appreciate that public libraries now "have to run on a business model" (U16) but despite this, they agree that public libraries should not offer leisure based services because "a library can't be all things to all people (unless they get a lot more funding)" (U22). Moreover, they remain neutral about public libraries offering a range of facilities: "I don't think a cafe or shop is essential to what a library service is" (U17). Whilst Anstice (2015) argues that libraries should be cautious about providing fancy facilities within the context of austerity (para.2) and McMenemy (2009a) comments that the public want a commercialised experience from public libraries, the library user participants are ambivalent about such provision. They would prefer other services were prioritised by libraries such as meeting the needs of children and young people or employing professional staff.

The literature indicates that the issue of demonstrating the impact and value of public libraries (Chapter 4.2.4) is complex. There are concerns that value is framed in neoliberal terms (Jaeger et al., 2013; McMenemy, 2007b, 2009b), criticisms about over-reliance on quantitative data (Halpin et al., 2015; Jaeger et al., 2013; McMenemy, 2007b, 2009b; Rooney-Browne, 2011), and even differences of opinion about what and how libraries should measure (Appleton et al., 2018; BOP Consulting, 2009; Lawton, 2015; Walker et al., 2011). According to Q Study 1, library user participants are very clear that libraries should not have to demonstrate their impact and value because public libraries "are a statutory right" (U6). Rather than proving its impact and value, library user participants comment that a public library should be reflexive by ensuring its provision is "reviewed regularly in response to users either using or requesting certain services" (U23). Rather

than measuring the performance of the service, the library users in this thesis want a service that responds to user needs.

In addition to the shared perceptions of the library user participants, the two factors demonstrate there are key differences in their perceptions of public libraries. For instance, participants related to Factor A want a more traditional service compared to participants in Factor B who want a broader, more socially minded service. These two viewpoints reflect the two positions about diversifying the public library offer evident in the literature (Section 4.2.3). The diversification of the service and its potential connection to the declining use of public libraries, argued by Coates (2019), matches the perception presented in Factor A. Equally, the notion that public libraries should return to their fundamental purpose of loaning print items (Coates, 2019; Usherwood, 2007a, 2007b) to avoid "Mission drift" (Goulding, 2013, p.482) is also similar to the library user perceptions represented by Factor A. By comparison, the perception captured by Factor B relates to the idea that public libraries have the potential to support social justice and inclusion: a view that the literature shows is held by some researchers, the sector and government (Appleton et al., 2018; Arts Council England [ACE], 2015; Department for Culture, Media & Sport [DCMS], 2003; Libraries Connected, 2020d; Local Government Association [LGA], 2017; Independent Mind, 2019; Museums, Libraries and Archives Council [MLA], 2010; McCahill et al., 2020). Although Factor B posits that public libraries can meet wider social agendas to support the public, there are some examples excluded from this perception: the promotion of prosperity, cultural opportunities, working with the community, and education and learning opportunities.

9.2.2 Library non-user perceptions

The findings of Q Study 2 present an answer to the first research question of capturing public perceptions of public libraries by focusing on library non-users. The study demonstrated that the library non-user participants hold more diverse views than the library user participants, illustrated by the fact the factor solution yielded three different perceptions (Table 23, Chapter 6.7). Overall, library non-user participants agree that public libraries should provide and promote a free, professionally staffed service which connects people to information. They also agree that other organisations are better suited to delivering wider social agendas and question "why are libraries trying to do it?" (NU29).

Library non-users in this thesis share a strong conviction that public libraries must provide a free service that links people to information. This means providing a "book lending service that matches current needs" (NU6) whilst also recognising that "books aren't the only way to get information" (NU29) now that "most books/academic papers are online" (NU25). Connecting people to information for free helps them to "better their knowledge" (NU19). This supports the research by Appleton et al. (2018) whose findings indicate that "the primary functions of the public library service relate to its epistemic role" (p.279), delivered by providing "access to information in print and online formats, and expert knowledge in the form of library staff" (p.279). The results of Q Study 2 show no consensus among the library non-user participants about the position of volunteers within the library service but, in line with Appleton et al. (2018), they do agree that "you need professional staff" (NU3) to "help" (NU22, NU34, NU38) connect people with information and "encourage everyone to read and better their knowledge" (NU19).

Poole (2015) argues that the unique selling point of public libraries is how they combine "staff expertise, the wide resources of the library and the trust of users and a wide range of delivery partners" (para. 13). He further argues that this combination means "public libraries are critical for the creation of productive, healthy communities and a vital delivery channel for local and national government agendas" (Poole, 2015, para.13). The library non-users in Q Study 2 clearly agree with the first part of his assertion, but they do not agree with the idea that public libraries should have to support wider, social agendas. For instance, they hold very negative views about the notion of public libraries supporting unemployment, prosperity, or health and wellbeing agendas. One non-user indicatively commented, "the responsibility for promoting these sits elsewhere in our public services" (NU24), whilst another noted there is "no need for library's to have to fund this as well" (NU25) because it is not their "job" (NU6). Moreover, library non-user participants were neutral about public libraries supporting social justice, indicating that they think other services and actions should be a higher priority. This supports Coates' (2019) comment that "caring, social or educational" (p.11) services cannot be the only focus of a public library because the public will not use the library more in lieu of the services and organisations whose core purpose it is to deliver these (NU24, NU25, NU29).

Whilst the Q Study 2 library non-users are clear they do not want libraries to provide services beyond those they deem core to library business, they do want public libraries to better communicate and promote their purpose:

> I suspect the core purpose of a library has changed over time or should have changed [...] so they probably need to look at what there core purpose is. I don't know what it is. Which means it's not being communicated very well. (NU29)

This perception relates to the advice of Hariff and Rowley (2011) that public libraries need to take great care in communicating a clear purpose which not only explains what public libraries offer but also how they are different from other services (p.358). Furthermore, the report commissioned by DCMS (BOP Consulting, 2009) concludes that the "general public's 'common sense' understanding of the breadth of experiences and support now available from libraries is far less developed" (BOP Consulting, 2009, p.50) than that of the sector and government. The report is specifically referring to the fact that services related to wider social agendas, such as health and wellbeing, have become "part of the core public library offer" (p.30) but that this is not well known by the public. This might not be the case, according to the library non-users, who do show an awareness of service and facility diversification; it leads to their subsequent concern that a library can be "full of people who aren't actually using the library" (NU39).

Non-user participants say they would be more likely to use the library if the range of books included more of the kind they wanted to borrow (NU30). Macdonald's (2012) report for the Carnegie UK Trust reported similar findings: participants commented that 'improving the range and quality of books' was one of the top three ways in which more people could be encouraged to use the service (pp.35-6). Coates (2019) asserts that the public library sector's choice to turn the phrase "Libraries are more than about books" (p.6) into a strategic approach has alienated those who were already committed to using libraries and led to a "confusion of vision" (p.14). Whilst the findings of this thesis cannot substantiate the claim that service diversification has turned library users into non-users, the issue of libraries being presented as a service that is "more than about books" (Coates, 2019, p.6) is a repeated idea in this thesis' findings. It appears again when bringing library user and non-user participant views together (Section 9.2.3); moreover, it is a theme of the Phase Three and Four findings, when reviewing the

central government, local government and public library sector positions in relation to both the public perceptions and the legislation (see Section 9.3.2).

Hariff and Rowley's (2011) findings indicated that at a national level, public libraries need to work on promoting "a clear identity for the library brand" (p.358) and at a local level, they should communicate "the specific services within their portfolio" (p.357) but by promoting them "in terms of benefits to users" (p.357). Although the library non-users do not engage with the public library service, they remain aware that it is "valuable" (NU33) and "would also hate for it not to be there" (NU8). This library non-user viewpoint is similar to that which was reported about non-users by MLA (2010a): over half of their library non-user participants viewed public libraries as "essential or very important" (p.58) to their communities. Library non-user participants in this thesis and the MLA (2010a) report appear to appreciate the enduring value of public libraries, however, it does not translate into public action such as using the service or being involved in campaigning for their sustainability (Belbin, 2018).

9.2.3 Aim 1: perception commonalities of library users and non-users

Q Study 1 and Q Study 2 from Phase Two provide a response to Research Question 1: what are public perceptions of public library services in England, both users and non-users? The outcomes suggest that not only do library non-user participants have a greater range of perceptions than the library user participants, but there is less similarity between them (Figures 20 and 21, Chapter 6.8). There are areas of common ground between library user and non-user participants at the micro level of single factor to single factor comparison, particularly between Factor A and Factor D. These commonalities were extrapolated and explained in Chapter 6.9. Library user and non-user participant perceptions also compare at the macro level of study-to-study comparison. These macro level findings will now be explored in relation to relevant themes from the literature.

A public library's core purpose

Library users and non-users in this research share the perception that public libraries should "spread information and literature for free" (U17). This finding supports the work of Appleton et al. (2018) whose participants viewed "the primary function of public library services as being a core place to access information and knowledge" (p.281). It is equally similar to findings presented in the MLA (2010a) report 13 years ago which

stated that one of the core purposes of a public library was its role in helping the public to find information (p.65). The link between this thesis and the MLA (2010a) report implies that the public's view of the fundamental purpose of a public library has remained the same over time.

Commercialism and neoliberalism in public libraries

Library user and non-user participants both hold a neutral view of public libraries offering a range of facilities like clean toilets, cafés, shops and equipment hire. The participants show concern that "library's keep trying to be different things" (NU2) which can put people off using them, with one noting, "I stopped going to mine when it opened a cafe" (NU2). Some participants do not disagree with offering such facilities and some even comment that they can "get a book and sometimes [...] grab a coffee or use the loo at the same time" (U5). However, offering a range of facilities is ranked neutrally by all five factors, implying the public do not want facilities to be prioritised over other services. As one participant explained, "I don't think a cafe or shop is essential to what a library service is. It's about sharing resources and literature" (U17). This viewpoint reflects the findings of Macdonald's (2012) report, which found mixed views about on site cafés with non-users being even less likely than users to consider them an influence on their potential use of the library (p.34).

Library user and non-user participants also hold a neutral-to-negative view about the idea that public libraries should operate effectively and viably by writing investment plans, reducing costs or generating income. Whilst some participants recognise public libraries "have to run on a business model" (U16) in the current financial climate, they do not think it should distract from their primary purpose "to support people that may not otherwise have access to books/computers" (U16).

The participants are well aware that funding is a concern (U22, NU25) to avoid library closures (NU25). However, Usherwood (2007a) cautions that "following the commercial road" (p.51) can lead to public libraries seeking funding that is "associated with services and projects that are not consistent with the library's mission and purpose" (p.51). His argument is supported by Anstice (2015) who claims it is irresponsible for public libraries to spend capital on "shiny" facilities whilst dealing with pervasive funding cuts: he likens it to thinking about buying a Ferrari when you are unable "to afford the Mini any more" (para.2). The views of Usherwood and Anstice resonate with those of the participants in

this thesis who not only demonstrate frustration about public libraries “trying to be different things” (NU2) but also express concern that providing a range of services “does not allow staff / resources to focus on the core services libraries should provide” (U8).

McMenemy (2009a) asserts that “the public now interact with and expect the same levels of service from their public services as they do from any commercial service they deal with” (p.16); however, the public response in this thesis is mixed. Where the MLA (2010a) report presented findings that good customer service is “valued” (p.20) and key to retaining library users (p.43), the library users in this thesis did not view good customer service as a priority. However, the library non-user participants in this thesis do want good customer services and, thus, have more in common with library non-users in the MLA (2010a) report, who “thought that customer service standards amongst library staff had dropped over the years” (p.55). The findings of this thesis support the MLA (2010a) report in suggesting that improving customer service could be an “incentive”(p.35) for encouraging non-users to use public libraries.

McMenemy’s (2009a) further argument is that it seems public libraries increasingly need to ensure that the use of their services seems like an “attractive” (p.16) choice, whereas Coates (2019) asserts that public libraries fail to recognise the “need to persuade people to visit” (p.4). McMenemy (2009a) considers choice to be a paradigm because it is predicated on the idea “that a viable alternative to the service exists elsewhere” (p.17). Usherwood (2007a) shares this view, arguing that a “commercial model is not one to be followed if the public library service is to enable equality of access” (p.51). Their argument does resonate with the participants in this thesis who state there is no alternative, for example, for people who “may not otherwise have access to books/computers for a variety of purposes” (U16) or who cannot afford to buy them. They are not keen to have public libraries linked to commercial entities because, as one explained, “it is a public service and shouldn't focus resources on promoting the private sector” (U17). Moreover, they assert that public libraries should not be trying to deliver services which are already catered for by other organisations (NU29). The idea of a choice between a public library and a commercial alternative also implies a competition between them. But participants who commented that they could choose to access reading material by buying books, also emphasise the other unique aspects of a public library service. For instance, one relayed, “Although I can pick up a book in Tesco, it's unlikely the cashier will want to talk about it or share his/her recommendations based

on my choices. I've often spoken to other library users and the staff about the books I'm choosing" (U1). Moreover, the participants are quite certain that when it comes to "Amazon vs library - Amazon is going to win" (NU6). This viewpoint supports Coates' (2019) argument that public library book collections, opening hours and buildings cannot compete with bookshops and vendors like Amazon (p.4). Equally, the thesis findings disagree with the MLA (2010a) report conclusions that library non-users "may be potentially attracted to the service in future, if libraries can find ways to compete with commercial booksellers" (p.30).

Whilst library user and non-user participants do not agree on the necessity for good customer service, there is agreement that public libraries should prioritise the core service of linking people to information rather than trying to emulate commercial enterprises, offer a range of facilities, or generate income.

The role of professional staff in public libraries

Although there is a mixed response to the role of volunteers in public libraries, there is consensus across all the factors in Q Study 1 and Q Study 2 (Chapter 6.10) that public libraries "need" (NU3, NU27, NU38) to be professionally staffed. The view is most strongly illustrated by Factor C, whose participants argue a public library service's core purpose of linking people to information and reading materials can only be delivered by professional staff. Factor E is unique in its positive view of the involvement of volunteers; the rest of the participants in this thesis are clear that volunteers should not be "replacements" for library staff (NU3, NU37) because a library is "a professional service" (NU27) and whilst volunteers are "well-meaning" (U5) that does not mean they "know what their doimng" (U5). Appleton et al. (2018) report that access to "expert staff" (p.280) is linked to a public library's role as a "Safe, inclusive community" (p.279) space because they are skilled to help library users with a range of needs. Moreover, professional staff are associated to the "epistemic role" of a public library (Appleton et al., 2018, p.279) because they are viewed as "adding most value when answering enquiries and facilitating access to the print stock" (p.279). The public views in this thesis are similar, as illustrated by one library non-user:

> Charity shops are great but they're not John Lewis. You know there's a difference in the service at both and John Lewis prides itself on its professional staff. Libraries are the same - I'm sure those run by volunteers are nice enough

> but they'll be the charity shop version rather than the John Lewis version. I'd rather deal with trained staff, who are reliable and knowledgable. (NU22)

Library users and non-users share the perception that professional staff are integral to a public library service, but CIPFA data (Table 7, Chapter 4.2.1) indicates that the number of employed staff in British libraries has been in continual decline for a decade. Prior to the pandemic (2019/20), staff rates were steadily reducing and volunteer rates were increasing. Since the record high set in 2017/18, volunteer rates have halved, particularly exacerbated by the onset of the pandemic in 2020 (CIPFA, 2022, 2023). That said, volunteers still outnumber professional staff (CIPFA, 2022).

Government and sector priorities vs public perceptions

The literature review in Phase One (Chapter 4.3.3) presented evidence that there is tension in terms of multiple agendas influencing and shaping public library service. The shared views of library users and non-users illuminate some of this tension. At a government level, for instance, the national role of ACE is to promote creativity and culture, and it was positioned as the executive non-departmental public body (NDPB) responsible for public libraries in 2010. Therefore, the Government at that time declared public libraries as bastions of art, culture and creativity. Public libraries have had to "collaborate" (Fletcher, 2019, p.575) with arts organisations to deliver DCMS' mandated objectives related to "cultural and creative enrichment" (Libraries Taskforce, 2016, p.21). Despite this policy direction, the Q Study 1 and Q Study 2 factors indicate the participants in this research are not interested in public libraries providing cultural opportunities (Chapter 6.10) above other services, including working with other cultural organisations, because it is "not the job of a library" (NU6). At a sector level, the opportunity to "access and participate in a variety of quality and diverse arts and cultural experiences through local libraries" (Libraries Connected, 2020c, p.3) is one of the four Universal Library Offers presented by Libraries Connected. However, not only do the factors in Phase Two indicate a disinterest in a cultural offer from public libraries, they also depict neutral views about a public library's duty to arrange activities and events because they remain adamant that "libraries should focus on their core activities, essentially around READING" (U10).

One way of considering the priorities demonstrated by the factors of Phase Two is to compare the data to the Universal Library Offers (Chapter 4.2.2) presented by Libraries

Connected (2019a, 2020c). Coates (2019) argues that the Universal Library Offers are "promises that are not universally fulfilled" (p.15). He also argues that the public would have a poor view of the Universal Library Offers had they been shown them, speculating their response would be if libraries "are short of money why are they pretending to be expert in health care or financial services, or careers or even digital activities, which they could never be?" (p.16). Since Coates' (2019) article was published, the Universal Library Offers were refined from the eight items he mentions to just four (Libraries Connected, 2019a, 2020c). During Phase Two of this thesis, the four Universal Library Offers were shown to the public as part of the Q set they were asked to organise on the distribution model. Table 41 reflects on how the Phase Two factors correlated to the Universal Library Offers.

Table 41: Universal Library Offers mapped against Q Study outcomes

Universal Offers	**Related Q Study 1 and Q Study 2 outcomes**
Culture and creativity: - arts and cultural experiences - work with cultural providers - enable creative skills - meet the needs of children	● Library users and non-users are either neutral or negative about **culture** related services. ● Library users and non-users are universally ambivalent about **events and activities**. ● Library users are positive that **children's needs** should be met but library non-users hold a neutral view.
Information and digital: - information services - digital services - develop learning skills - meet the needs of children	● Some library users and non-users think supporting **digital inclusion** is important. ● Some library users and non-users think delivering **digital services** is important. ● Strong agreement that linking people to **information** is important, except Factor B which is neutral. ● Library users and non-users do not think that **learning and education** related services are important. ● Library users are positive that **children's needs** should be met but library non-users hold a neutral view.

Table 41 – continued

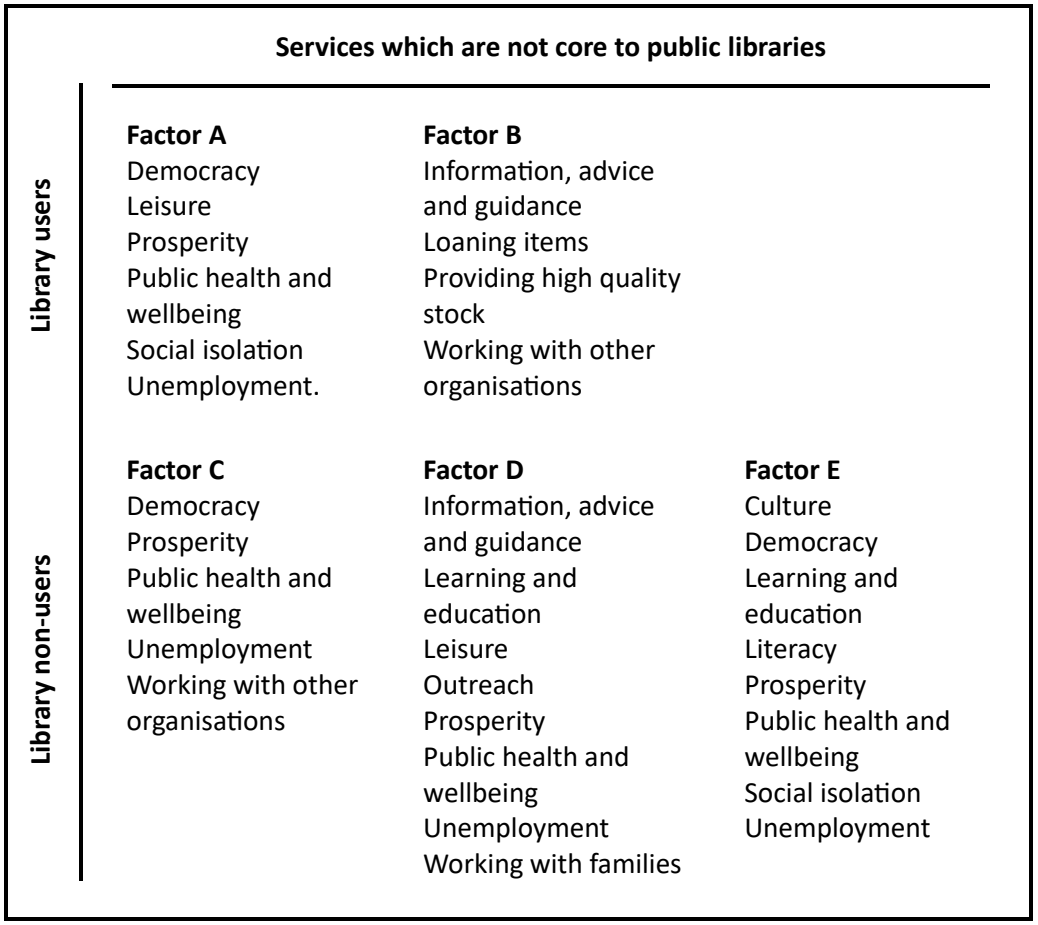
Universal Offers	**Related Q Study 1 and Q Study 2 outcomes**
Health and wellbeing: - promote healthy living - signpost health information - address social isolation - improve wellbeing	● Library users and non-user disagree that public libraries should support **public health and wellbeing**, with the exception of Factor B. ● With the exception of Factor B, library users and non-users are not convinced that libraries are well situated to address **social isolation**.
Reading - support literacy - provide reading resources - encourage reading - meet the needs of children	● Library users and non-users agree that **reading** is the core focus of libraries, with the exception of Factor E. ● There are mixed positive and negative views about other services associated with reading: **loan** print items, **promote literacy**, provide **high quality stock**. ● Library users are positive that **children's needs** should be met but library non-users hold a neutral view.

(Libraries Connected, 2020c, p.3)

Table 41 demonstrates that factor outcomes in Phase Two of this thesis partially support Coates' (2019) assertion that the public would not agree with the Universal Offers. There are some overlaps between the perceptions captured in the five factors and the content of the Universal Offers, such as reading and information, but there are also mixed views about some offers such as culture or social isolation. Moreover, participants in this thesis are concerned about funding scarcity (U8, U22, U23, NU10, NU25, NU33) and, thus, question "why they [libraries] should have to provide more free services" (NU25) like the cultural opportunities or events mentioned in the Universal Offers.

All of the factors established in Phase Two express concerns about libraries offering services or activities which either exceed their "remit" (U8), should be considered a "by-product rather than an aim or goal" (U3) or should be the responsibility of other public services and organisations (U4, U14, U19, U22, U26, NU24, NU25, NU29). Library user and non-user participants agree with the premise that there are services which are not the purview of public libraries; however, there is variation about which services are and which are not the responsibility of public libraries. This is illustrated in Figure 34.

Figure 34: services considered not core to public libraries, by factor outcomes from Phase Two



Whilst the participants in this thesis partially concurred with Coates' (2019) speculation that the Universal Offers are not what the public want from their libraries, his own list declaring what he imagined "the public would probably say that their local library should" (p.15) provide also produces mixed responses. For instance, the outcomes from Phase Two provided strong evidence to support his claim that the public want professional staff (Coates, 2019, p.16; Table 31, Chapter 6.10) but four of the five factors across both studies show indifference towards the need for pleasant environments with toilets, which he estimates would be important (Coates, 2019, p.16; Chapter 5.7.2 – 5.7.3). Whilst this thesis worked with a small participant sample, its findings demonstrate the importance of empirically informed studies, rather than assuming what the public would "probably" (Coates, 2019, p.16) want from public libraries.

The findings further suggest an empirical approach is important in terms of policy because some of the services identified by participants as being "a by-product rather than an aim or goal" (U3) of public libraries are linked to government and sector priorities, for instance providing learning opportunities, supporting digital inclusion and reducing social isolation (Libraries Taskforce, 2016; Macdonald, 2012). Pateman and Vincent (2010) argue that by supporting government objectives, public libraries can meet the needs of the public, but Goulding (2013) argues that local government is not "open" (p.485) when it comes to involving the public in decisions about public library priorities. The participants certainly dispute that their needs are met by public libraries delivering wider social agendas. Their responses mirror the caution from Boughey and Cooper (2010), who argue that local authorities are at risk of telling the public what they need rather than reacting to what the public say they want, with libraries responding to "designated needs, rather than realised demands" (p.197). Moreover, Usherwood (2007a) asserts that public libraries need to reinforce their "unique service that meets long term needs rather than simply satisfies quick fix demands [...] that can be easily satisfied elsewhere" (p.65). Goulding's (2013) position is that tying public library delivery so tightly to governmental social agendas does not protect them from cuts or closures (p.489), which mirrors the participants' preference that public libraries direct their funding and resources towards core library provision (U8).

In addressing Research Aim 1, this thesis has established that library user and non-user participants agree that public libraries should employ professional staff to link people to information for free. They also agree that public libraries are not responsible for delivering cultural opportunities, promoting prosperity, offering specialist services, supporting health and wellbeing, or providing information, advice and guidance. Equally, participants do not think that public libraries should prioritise a range of facilities, events and activities, or community engagement above core services. Ultimately, the shared view is that public libraries, as one participant articulated, "can't be everything to everyone. Ask yourself is this provided by another service or organisation? If it is why are libraries trying to do it?" (NU29). This concurs with the positions of Casselden et al. (2019), Coates (2019), Goulding (2013) and Usherwood (2007a, 2007b) presented in the literature review (Chapter 4.2.3), who express concerns about a "mission drift" (Goulding, 2013, p.482) and over-diversification of the public library offer.

Central and local government (BOP Consulting, 2009; LGA, 2017) and sector support bodies (Chartered Institute of Library and Information Professionals [CILIP] & The Big Issue, 2019; Davey, 2013; Libraries Connected, 2020c, 2020d) advocate that public libraries should offer services to support sociopolitical priorities which are primarily delivered by other public services and organisations. An example is public health and wellbeing. The position of the three stakeholder groups involved in delivering the service is in conflict with the shared views of user and non-user participants in this thesis, who want a service more focused on books, reading and information. According to Beyer & Hänni (2018), democratic responsiveness should be causal and "dynamic" (p.S16) reflecting a continuous relationship between public perceptions and policy change. The findings of this thesis suggest that there is a disconnect between policy, service delivery, and what the public want from their libraries. The thesis outcomes suggest that the "dynamic" relationship described by Beyer and Hänni (2018, p.S16) is needed, alongside further empirical research, to ensure policies and priorities are "at least minimally responsive to what a majority of people want" (Linde & Peters, 2020, p.292), and also to ensure that funding is most effectively targeted.

In drawing these conclusions, it is important to consider the degree to which the findings from this study can be generalised – a question that is addressed in the next chapter.

9.3 Aim 2: to establish whether the current public libraries legislation is adequate for a 21st century service

The second research aim of this thesis considers whether the Public Libraries and Museums Act (1964) is adequate for a contemporary public library service. To consider its adequacy, it was first necessary, in Phase Three, to examine the ways in which different stakeholder groups define public libraries (Research Question 2) and how these definitions compare to one another (Research Question 3). Once these perceptions were established, Phase Four of the thesis responded to Research Question 4 by mapping them against the Public Libraries and Museums Act (1964), using bi-directional framework analysis. To that end, this section first discusses the outcomes from Phase Three before exploring those of Phase Four.

Section 9.3.1 presents the stakeholder groups' definitions established in Phase Three (Research Question 2) and an exploration of how they compare (Research Question 3).

Following this, Section 9.3.2 discusses how the definitions mapped onto the Act in Phase Four (Research Question 4) and considers how the findings relate to the existing literature and studies presented in Chapter 4. The section also explains how the content of the Act is coherent with the views of the participants of this thesis. Finally, Section 9.3.3 posits a definition of "comprehensive and efficient" (Public Libraries and Museums Act, 1964, Section 7(1)) that could be added to the legislation, based on a requirement for meaningful and iterative engagement with the public. This thesis argues that providing a clarified definition which aligns with the Localism Act (2011), Ranganathan's (1931) public library tenets, and the findings from this thesis could reaffirm the Act's adequacy for a contemporary public library service.

9.3.1 Stakeholder definitions of public libraries

This section begins with a summary of the key points from the four stakeholder definitions established and reported in Phase Three (see Chapter 7.4 for full definitions). As explained in Chapter 7, the definitions are based on each stakeholder group's corpus and they encapsulate what public libraries should be, provide and do (Figure 24, Chapter 7.4). The definitions are summarised here for three reasons. First, the summaries serve as a reminder for the reader. Second, the definitions established in Phase Three provide an answer to Research Question 2: how do different stakeholder groups define public libraries? Finally, the summaries better facilitate the comparison with the Act and the existing literature (presented in Section 9.3.2). Following the definition recaps, the section proceeds to discuss and compare the definitions in relation to existing literature and studies.

9.3.1.1 Central government

The full central government definition from Phase Three is presented in Chapter 7.4.1; what follows is a summary of those findings.

Central government defines the core purpose of public libraries as meeting community needs by being "more than bricks and mortar or even the people, stock and resources sitting within a building" (DCMS, 2017f, para.56). For example, public libraries should support local education provision, arrange activities and events, offer maker spaces, "support some of the most vulnerable groups in their communities" (DCMS, 2021, p.3), provide cultural and creative enrichment, contribute to the levelling-up agenda, and address social isolation. Moreover, service design should be executed through public

consultation so that it is informed by “what the local community looks like now, is expected to become, and its needs” (DCMS, 2017f, para.110).

Further, central government asserts that public library services should plan strategically by using evidence and robust risk assessments to demonstrate a “clear vision for the library service” (DCMS, 2015, para.26) and articulate “how well the strategy meets local needs, now and in the future” (DCMS, 2015, para.26). Strategic planning should demonstrate how public libraries will meet local government priorities, wider national agendas and be cognisant of exploring “revenue streams that unlock additional investment” (DCMS, 2017f, para.39). According to central government, public libraries should be dynamic, considering “alternative delivery models and revenue streams” (DCMS, 2017f, para. 42) and radically rethinking their offer to “provide modern services and facilities” (DCMS, 2021, p.9). They should also be inclusive and accessible services, “open to all” (DCMS, 2021, p.3).

9.3.1.2 Local government

The full local government definition from Phase Three is presented in Chapter 7.4.2; what follows is a summary of those findings.

The local government corpus defines public libraries as “community hubs” (LGA, 2017, p.5) because a public library should be “much more than a depository for books” (2017, p.12). Furthermore, public libraries can create “stronger more resilient communities” (LGA, 2017, p.38) by supporting culture, creativity, events, learning, and public health and wellbeing. Moreover, the local government view is that public library services should be shaped by local needs through “public feedback, consultation and engagement” (LGA, 2017, p.18).

According to the local government viewpoint, public libraries should undertake evidence-led strategic planning to “explore the potential for other ways to share services or costs to improve the efficiency and effectiveness for local people” (LGA, 2017, p.27). This includes different models of delivery and strategies to ensure they are resilient from a financial and change management perspective. Furthermore, a public library service should support its local authority to “fulfil its duties more effectively and efficiently” (LGA, 2017, p.18). The local government corpus defines public libraries as free services which must be accessible to the whole community. They should also be

dynamic, able to respond to the changeable funding landscape and changing customer needs.

9.3.1.3 Public library sector

The full public library sector definition from Phase Three is presented in Chapter 7.4.3; what follows is a summary of those findings.

The public library sector defines libraries as a service which helps to improve lives by "creating better places to live, work and prosper" (CILIP & The Big Issue, 2019, p.3) and helping people to "increase their understanding of the world, stretch their imaginations and think differently" (Libraries Connected, 2020c, p.3). Public libraries achieve this by providing access to "inclusive and diverse fiction and non-fiction books and other information resources" (Libraries Connected, 2020c, p.4) but also by providing access to professional staff who help people to "prosper and flourish" (CILIP & The Big Issue, 2019, p.3). According to the sector, public libraries focus on reading and connecting people to information. They are also digitally inclusive services that ensure people have the access and skills they need to be digitally literate and connected.

The public library sector also defines public libraries as services with local and national roles to play, contributing to wider social agendas set by local and central government. Public libraries can support local government priorities like "economic development" (CILIP & The Big Issue, 2019, p.18) and at the same time align themselves with wider, national agendas about "education, culture, health, society, economy and wellbeing" (Independent Mind, 2019, p.5). According to the public library sector, public libraries are "confident, dynamic" (Independent Mind, 2019, p.23), "adaptable" (CILIP & The Big Issues, 2019, p.10) services which need to "future proof against the scale of change" (Libraries Connected, 2020d, p.11) they are facing. Public libraries must also be inclusive and accessible to all in terms of services, digital technologies and collection development.

9.3.1.4 The public

The full public definition from Phase Three is presented in Chapter 7.4.4; what follows is a summary of those findings.

The participants in this thesis clearly define the core purpose of public libraries as "a focus on reading" (NU8) and disseminating "information and literature for free" (U17),

in “print or electronic form” (U25). Moreover, public libraries should have “professional staff who are trained to best help people connect with information” (NU36) and books (NU15). The participants also view libraries as tangible spaces where people feel “welcome” (U24) and “not intimidated” (NU8), and where they can “get assistance” (U16). Moreover, public libraries are different from other services related to books and reading because they foster “human connection” (U1) which is why “books stuffed into phone boxes” (NU3) will never be libraries.

Participants also define public libraries as inclusive, accessible services which empower their users. Whilst they should “deliver on their original core purpose” (NU5) of providing free access to books, they also need to be dynamic so that they keep abreast of “an ever evolving technological world” (NU25) and “stay relevant” (NU10). The public defines public libraries as “trustworthy” (NU24), “apolitical” (NU28), “safe” (NU24) and “impartial” (U24).

9.3.1.5 Comparing the stakeholder definitions

The stakeholder definitions of public libraries established and compared in Phase Three demonstrate that central government, local government, the public library sector and the public all view the purpose of public libraries in three ways. First, they all consider the values that public libraries should uphold or embody. Second, they all comment on the services that public libraries should directly provide to the public. Third, the definitions also present the other actions public libraries carry out in providing a library service: the type of actions which are not in direct service to the public but are considered necessary by the different stakeholder groups, such as strategic planning. This approach to defining public libraries was illustrated in a model (Figure 24, Chapter 7.4): the *public libraries should be, should provide and should do* model.

The definitions illustrate that central government, local government, the sector and the public participants all agree that public libraries should be dynamic, inclusive and trustworthy. They equally agree that services should be free to use and that professional staff should be a feature of the service. All definitions refer to public libraries providing the public with access to tangible spaces or buildings but also comment that they deliver digital services. In response to the second research aim of this thesis, these shared views are compared to the legislation in Section 9.3.2.

Whilst all definitions mention the role of public libraries in delivering reading related services, only the public participants think this should be the top priority of public libraries. The public participants are clear about the purpose of public libraries and what they should *not* do. One participant illustrates this by commenting, "I know what it isn't... it shouldn't be a poorman version of other services like health services or benefits services or social care. It might do some of that on the side but it shouldn't be the main pointt" (NU32). By comparison, the central government and local government definitions lead with the idea that public libraries should be *"*be more than bricks and mortar or even the people, stock and resources sitting within a building*"* (DCMS, 2017f, para.56). The outcomes of Phase Three indicate that the stakeholders responsible for making decisions about public libraries at a legislative and policy level want the public to see libraries as "much more than a depository for books" (LGA, 2017, p.12). They argue that public libraries should support education, public health, culture, creativity, employment, social isolation, socio-economic inequality, local businesses, and political priorities at a local and national level (Chapter 7.5.2). Coates (2019) firmly asserts that the Public Libraries and Museums Act (1964) does not permit local authorities to insist that public libraries deliver such non-reading focused services (p.10). This is a viewpoint that appears to be supported by the public participants in this thesis (Chapter 7.4.4), suggesting that the Act may be in line with public opinion. This is further explored in Section 9.3.2.

The public library sector's own definition of public libraries values their reading and information focused services, as well as their capacity to "improve people's life chances" (CILIP, n.d.d., para.3) through a service that addresses education, social mobility, poverty, health and social care, and individual personal development. The sector definition of public libraries established in Phase Three upholds Coates' (2019) criticism that the sector considers the public library service to be "more than about books" (p6). Coates (2019) suggests that this view is flawed and based on the sector's unnecessary "desire to change the idea of libraries to something they thought was more worthwhile" (p.9). In this thesis, the public participants appear to support his argument because they view the kinds of services mentioned by the sector, and by local and central government, as "bells and whistles" (NU1).

Instead, participants want public libraries to be "space[s] to access and borrow reading material and information, with the help of professional staff" (NU34); any other kind of

provision should be a “by-product rather than an aim or goal” (U3) of a public library. This correlates with the findings of existing studies which also explore this idea. For instance, the participants in the Appleton et al. (2018) research comment that public libraries can positively impact their lives educationally (p.279) or civically (p.281) but specifically through the library’s primary function of linking people to information and literature. Furthermore, the findings of this thesis support those of Macdonald’s (2012) report which indicates the public in England would be more incentivised to use a library if the information and book services are improved rather than if they provided “other council services in library buildings” (p.34). Like those in this thesis, the MLA (2010a) participants are clear that the purpose of public libraries is the provision of free access to information, reading related services, and a loaning service for books and other items (MLA, 2010a, p.18). Much like Appleton et al.’s (2018) research, the MLA (2010a) report indicates that the public value the educational provision of public libraries but it is firmly connected to its core purpose of providing free access to information and reading materials (p.22 & p.24). Section 9.3.2 discusses how the reading and information focused outlook of the public participants in this thesis is well matched to the content and intention of the 1964 Act.

In 2010, DCMS published a modernisation review of public libraries, commissioned by the previous Government, which made it clear that in addition to core information and reading services, public libraries should offer services with other foci, such as health, education, employment, community initiatives and even childcare (pp.5-6). Since this review, there has been a sustained expectation from central government, local government and the sector that public libraries will deliver a greater range of services which go beyond their foundation of information, reading and loaning. As demonstrated in the stakeholder definitions, this includes health, wellbeing, social isolation, education, art and culture, social inclusion and enterprise. Despite this, participants in both the MLA (2010a) research and this thesis are clear that public libraries can provide other services as a “by-product” (U3), or “sign post” (NU28) them, but not as their “main pointt” (NU32) because they are not “important to the function” (U9) or “job of a library” (NU6): they must avoid running the risk of “pushing out core services” (MLA, 2010a, p.68). Moreover, participants in this thesis support the findings of the MLA (2010a) research: the public library service should respond to and focus on public needs, rather than prioritise wider agendas. The MLA (2010a) report concludes that “a more

sophisticated understanding of users and potential users would help libraries to develop effective strategies to broaden participation" (p.69); participants in this research mirror the notion when commenting that public library services "should be reviewed regularly" (U23) in response to public use and need.

The outcomes from Phase Three illustrate a difference in views of those governing and delivering the public library service compared to those who use (or could use) the service. In turn, this demonstrates a tension in the perceived purpose of public libraries, therefore suggesting the Public Libraries and Museums Act (1964) cannot satisfy all of the contrasting views. This was further explored in the bi-directional framework analysis of Phase Four.

9.3.2 Stakeholders vs the Public Libraries and Museums Act (1964)

Research Question 4 is answered by the framework analysis (Phase Four, Chapter 8) that compared the legislation to the different stakeholder definitions of public libraries. This current section discusses how well the Public Libraries and Museums Act (1964) corresponds to the views of the public, sector, local government and central government.

The framework analysis in Phase Four demonstrates that most of the content of the Act is reflected within the stakeholder definitions of public libraries (Table 34, Chapter 8.3.1), with three exceptions. First, the Act stipulates that public libraries should provide guidance about how to use the library; second, the legislation mandates that potential charges are clearly communicated to the public; and third, public libraries are only expected to provide services to people who live, work or study in the area. Of the three responsibilities within the Act which are omitted from the stakeholder definitions, there is only evidence that one would cause tension. All stakeholder groups present the idea that public libraries should be inclusive and the participants, in particular, are adamant that public libraries should be for "everyone" (U1, U4, U10, U24, NU16, NU19) and "welcoming to all" (U6). Limiting access to only those who live, work or study in the area would contravene this and is a part of the Act which could be potentially removed for a 21st century service.

Given much of the Act is reflected in at least one of the stakeholder groups' corpora (Table 34, Chapter 8.3.1), the thesis findings could support the assertion of Isobel Hunter

(CEO of Libraries Connected) that there is no "problem with the Act itself" (in Anstice, 2018, para.26). However, the bi-directional framework analysis in Phase Four also indicates that the stakeholder groups have a number of expectations of public libraries which are not mandated by the Act (Table 35, Chapter 8.3.1). Ergo, the thesis findings also partially uphold the contrasting view presented by McMenemy (2009c): there are omissions in the Act, many of which stem from the fact it was written in a pre-digital era. Indeed, all stakeholder groups assert that public libraries should provide access to digital services and resources.

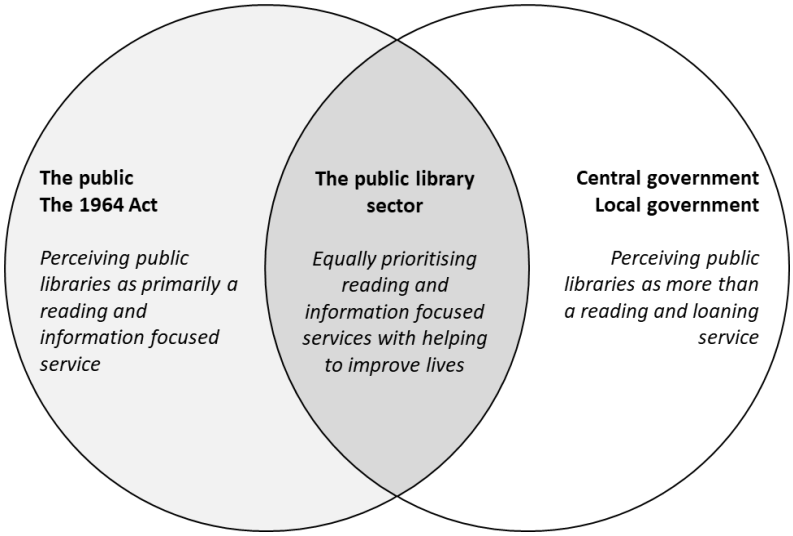
Another omission is that all four stakeholder groups define public libraries as inclusive, accessible and trustworthy services (Table 35, Chapter 8.3.1). This correlates with Appleton et al.'s (2018) findings that public libraries are viewed as "safe, inclusive" (p.276) services. Participants in this thesis (Chapter 7.4.4) describe libraries as inclusive, accessible, safe, neutral, welcoming, trustworthy spaces (U4, U10, NU24), "where everyone can access the materials and information they need" (U4). Their comments echo the sentiments of the participants in Appleton et al. (2018) who state that libraries "are for everyone" (p.280) and should demonstrate "no prejudice" (p.280). Furthermore, the participants in this thesis comment that libraries are unique because they serve "people that may not otherwise have access to books/computers" (U16) to "enable everyone to have access to quality reading material" (U10). This depiction of accessibility is reflected in Usherwood's (2007b) argument that public libraries have a duty to ensure they support "disadvantaged" (Usherwood, 2007b, p.22) people or "those without the ability to pay" (Usherwood, 2007b, p.22) for resources from commercial outlets. Phase Four outcomes indicate that the principles of inclusivity and accessibility are omitted from the Public Libraries and Museums Act (1964) (Table 35, Chapter 8.3.1). That said, like all public services, public libraries in England are now expected to adhere to the Equality Act (2010). Future research could consider whether the Equality Act (2010) provides sufficient guidance for public libraries about delivering inclusive, accessible public services or whether it should be described within the Public Libraries and Museums Act (1964). This is further considered in Chapter 10.5.2.

The framework analysis of Phase Four reveals that much of the definition of public libraries from the thesis participants is reasonably covered within the Act (Tables 34 and 35, Chapter 8.3.1). In fact, the participants' definition has less in common with the other stakeholder groups than it does the Act (Chapter 7.5). It is the public library sector

definition that is most at odds with the content of the Act (Table 35, Chapter 8.3.1). Moreover, compared to the legislation, the central government, local government and sector corpora all feature many more references to the other actions public libraries can undertake, relating to the *do* category from the *Public libraries should be, should provide and should do* model (Figure 24, Chapter 7.4). This suggests that the three stakeholder groups, unlike the public participants, perceive the purpose of public libraries exceeds that which is mandated in the legislation.

Furthermore, whilst there is common ground in terms of the overall content of the stakeholder groups' definitions, the prioritisation therein is different. Both the Act and the thesis participants prioritise public libraries as reading and loaning services. In comparison, the coding of the central and local government corpora indicates that these stakeholder groups are focused on how public libraries can be more than a loaning service rather than a reading and information service. The public library sector corpus recognises equally the reading and loaning responsibilities of public libraries and their potential to help people to improve their lives in a range of social, political and economic ways. Figure 35 illustrates how the stakeholder groups and Act perceive different priorities for public library services. The findings suggest that from the perspective of the public participants in this thesis the Act is reasonably adequate for a 21st century service.

Figure 35: comparing the stakeholder groups' priorities for public library services



9.3.3 Defining a "comprehensive and efficient library service"

In considering the adequacy of the Public Libraries and Museums Act (1964), Phase One (Chapters 3 and 4) of the thesis established that there are a number of issues with the current legislation but, in particular, with the way in which a key phrase therein is not defined: "a comprehensive and efficient library service" (Public Libraries and Museums Act, 1964, Section 7(1)). Phase One (Chapter 4.2.2) demonstrates that the lack of definition has led to issues in judicial settings when members of the public or sector organisations try to challenge proposed service changes by local authorities. The phrase is defined differently by court judges and in the Secretary of State inquiry (Charteris, 2009). Phase One also indicates that the public library sector calls for this phrase to be defined, both to provide better guidance and to modernise the service (Chapter 4.2.2). Moreover, in Phase Four, this thesis asks to what extent public and other stakeholder views (established in Phase Three) correspond to the legislation (Research Question 4). As explained in the previous section of this chapter (Section 9.3.2), the results of this thesis show the 1964 Act is compatible with many of the stakeholder perceptions but there are gaps; for instance, a modern comprehensive service should include digital services.

This thesis, therefore, argues that it is possible to define "comprehensive and efficient" (Public Libraries and Museums Act, 1964, Section 7(1)) within the Act as follows:

> a dynamic public library service that can prove it is continually responsive and relevant to public needs at a local and national level.

What follows is a discussion of how this definition works with Ranganathan's library laws (Phase One, Chapter 3.3), the literature (Phase One, Chapter 4), and the results from Phase Two (Chapter 6), Phase Three (Chapter 7) and Phase Four (Chapter 8). Moreover, this section will argue that a revised definition could improve the adequacy of the 1964 Act for a contemporary public library service (Aim 2).

Ranganathan's (1931) library laws were introduced in Phase One (Chapter 3.3) as part of the process of contextualising and explaining the foundations of public library services. The laws are presented in Figure 36 to ease the readability of the analysis in this section. Several writers still consider his philosophy to be pertinent for public libraries today (Carr, 2014; Connaway & Daniel, 2014; McMenemy, 2007c). The framework analysis of

the Public Libraries and Museums Act (1964), as part of Phase Four of this thesis, demonstrates that four of Ranganathan's (1931) five laws are evident in the current legislation.

Figure 36: Ranganathan's five laws of librarianship

Law One	Books are for use.
Law Two	Every person his or her book.
Law Three	Every book its reader.
Law Four	Save the time of the reader.
Law Five	A library is a growing organism.

(Ranganathan, 1931)

Ranganathan's (1931) first three laws clearly echo the four stakeholder group's definitions of public libraries (Table 33, Chapter 7.5), which state that public libraries should focus on free services related to reading. They are also coherent with the definitions of local government, the public library sector and the public which specify that public libraries should connect people to information, as well as stock and loan a quality range of reading materials. Moreover, they correspond to the first two findings of Appleton et al.'s (2018) recent research about the purpose of public libraries: the epistemic role of libraries that involves them "in the generation and exchange of knowledge and information" (p.279) and the "primacy of print" (p.279). The analysis of the Public Libraries and Museums Act (1964) in Phase Four (Chapter 8) indicates that the first three of Ranganathan's laws are equally present in the legislation: public libraries must provide access to "books and other printed matter, and pictures, gramophone records, films and other materials, sufficient in number, range and quality to meet" (Section 7(2)(a)) the needs of children and adults.

Ranganathan's (1931) fourth law means that libraries should establish systems to organise and ease the book finding process; this includes providing access to bibliographic records and help with understanding how to use them. In relation to Ranganathan's fourth law, the framework analysis indicates that the Act stipulates public libraries must ensure that they provide advice about how to use the library (Figure 33, Chapter 8.2.1); however, it is not present in any of the stakeholder definitions (Table 34, Chapter 8.3.1) established in Phase Four. It is also plausible to

consider the Act's notion of an "efficient" (Public Libraries and Museums Act, 1964, Section 7(1)) service akin to Ranganathan's fourth law of saving the reader's time. However, without further explanation or guidance at a government level, it is not possible to know what the Act meant by "comprehensive and efficient" (Public Libraries and Museums Act, 1964, Section 7(1)) and the intention of the phrase is likely to have changed since 1964 (McMenemy, 2009c, p.559).

Within his fourth law, Ranganathan (1931) explains that professional staff, with different roles, are imperative for helping the reader by managing libraries, organising their collections and assisting library users with their search for books and information (p.356, pp.360-69). Both the public perceptions captured in Phase Two and the public's definition of public libraries established in Phase Three stress the necessity for professional staff. Central government, local government and the public library sector also mention professional staff in their definitions. Within the literature (Phase One), even those commentators with differing views about library services concur that professional staff are necessary for an effective service (Appleton et al., 2018; Casselden et al., 2019; Coates, 2019; McMenemy, 2009a, 2009c; Usherwood, 2007a). The participants in the research by Appleton et al. (2018) echo the sentiments of the participants in this thesis: "Non-discriminatory access to expert staff available to assist the general public with a range of tasks was acknowledged as one of the benefits of public library use" (p.280). Moreover, the participants in Peachey's (2017) study for the Carnegie Trust were content for volunteers to support professional staff but not to replace them (p.10). The framework analysis in this thesis demonstrates that providing access to professional staff is not an explicit stipulation of the Act, although it could be argued it is implicitly covered by Section 7(2)(a-c) because the listed actions therein would require staff to perform them. Given that CIPFA (2016, 2018b, 2022) reports the number of employed staff in British public libraries has been falling for over a decade (Table 7, Chapter 4.2.1) and that the library user and non-user participants in this thesis evidently value professional staff, the Act's implicit reference to employing professional staff is potentially inadequate and could be made an overt statutory requirement.

Ranganathan's (1931) fifth law relates to a principle or value: a library is a growing organism (p.382). The *Public libraries should be, should provide and should do* model presented in Phase Three (Figure 24, Chapter 7.4) demonstrates that principles or values are also frequently evident and explicit in all stakeholder group definitions. In particular,

all four stakeholder groups reference *be dynamic* (Table 35, Chapter 8.3.1) which directly mirrors Ranganathan's fifth law. Not only is it a core, guiding tenet of libraries according to Ranganathan, the thesis findings illustrate it is a shared value in the different stakeholder group definitions. However, the process of framework analysis shows that references to principles or values are sparse and implicit within the Act. There are just two examples: *be helpful* and *be flexible* (Chapter 8.2.1). There is no reference within the 1964 Act to the notion of growth and change presented by Ranganathan (1931) and the stakeholder groups in this thesis (Table 35, Chapter 8.3.1). Moreover, the fifth law states that "An organism which ceases to grow will petrify and perish" (Ranganathan, 1931, p.382). This links directly to the dynamism within the public participant corpora (Chapter 7.4.4) which calls for "modernisation" (NU10) so that public libraries remain relevant (NU10, NU13) and keep abreast of technology (NU25).

It is also interesting to compare Ranganathan's (1931) version of public library growth and dynamism to one of the points of tension in the literature and in participant responses: adaptations to the current library service based on commercialism, neoliberalism and social justice are often criticised because they are not the core purpose of public libraries (Chapter 4.2.3).

Ranganathan (1931) advises that growth is effective when it is "slow continuous change" (p.383) because it leads to "the evolution of new forms" (p.383). Fletcher's (2019) commentary that public libraries are subjected to "a continual flavour of the month policy and funding merry-go-round" (p.579) implies that change for public libraries is often sudden and dictated by external forces. According to the outcomes of Phase Two and Phase Three, many of the services public libraries now provide go beyond the sharing of information and are not universally wanted by the thesis' public participants in a library setting: providing cultural opportunities, addressing social isolation, organising events and activities, offering a range of facilities, providing leisure based services, offering outreach, supporting democracy, supporting public health and wellbeing, providing learning and education opportunities, and providing information, advice and guidance (Table 41 and Figure 34, Section 9.2.3). Coates (2019) argues that the Public Libraries and Museums Act (1964) does not permit local governments to "use libraries to suit their strategies and purposes" (p.10) and that doing so is "a bad mistake" (p.10) for the public library service. The analysis in Phase Four supports Coates (2019) by demonstrating the Act permits a public library service to work with other organisations,

library authorities and central government but only for “improving the efficiency of the public library service or promoting its development” (Section 3(5)), not in support of local or national government priorities. Despite this, public libraries continue to be the “front door” (LGA, 2017, p.33) for many local and national government initiatives. For example, as ACE has been the NDPB for libraries for over a decade, public libraries have had to deliver culture and arts based services. Although the Act mentions cultural events (Figure 33, Chapter 8.2.1), it is specifically in relation to allowing public library premises to be used for cultural events (Section 20), rather than a stipulation that public libraries should organise, host or promote them. The findings in both Phase Two and Phase Three show that the public do not strongly agree with public libraries offering cultural opportunities or arranging events and activities (Table 31, Chapter 6.10).

In Phase Three, when asked to define public libraries, the public participants provide a unified response: a trustworthy, helpful, professionally staffed service that focuses on reading and providing access to information for free (Chapter 7.4.4). In Phase Two, when given the full range of things public libraries *can* do (in the form of a Q set) and asked to consider what they *should* do, the public participant views are more varied and nuanced. This suggests that the participants are clear about the core purpose of a public library (Phase Three) - providing access to reading materials and information - but disagreement arises when considering what else a public library service can deliver (Phase Two). The findings imply that legislating what else a public library should do beyond reading and information based services might fail to universally meet public needs; therefore, a more localised and dynamically responsive approach is needed. This is further discussed in Chapter 10 (Section 10.5).

McMenemy (2009c) argues that “comprehensive and efficient” (Public Libraries and Museums Act, 1964, Section 7(1)) should be explained so that the phrase and its implications are not “simply interpreted by councillors and chief executives of local authorities as they see fit” (p.560); it is an argument echoed by other voices within the sector (CILIP, 2015; Conway, 2008; Culture, Media and Sport Committee, 2012; Davies, 2014; Dolan, 2007; Information Professional, 2018a; Halpin et al., 2015). By comparison, Charteris (2009) claims that “comprehensive and efficient” (Section 7(1)) can be implicitly and explicitly understood to mean a service that “is based on local needs” (p.57). Indeed, DCMS (2013) advises that local authorities use Charteris interpretation to guide decisions about changes to public library services. However, the literature review

shows that the use of the Charteris (2009) report in judicial proceedings was dismissed by Judge McKenna in the case against Gloucestershire and Somerset County Councils (R. (Green) v Gloucestershire CC and Somerset CC., 2011, point 30).

The findings of this thesis suggest there is scope for the 1964 Act to be adapted so that it satisfies all of the following: the public library sector's call for clarification; the DCMS guidance that public libraries should design their services based on an assessment of local needs (Charteris, 2009; DCMS, (2020a); the intention of the Localism Act (2011); Ranganathan's (1931) fifth law about the necessity of growth; the notion of "dynamic" (Beyer and Hänni, 2018, p.S18) democratic responsiveness; and the perceptions of the public participants presented in Phases Two and Three. The Act could mandate that "comprehensive and efficient" (Section 7(1)) means a dynamic service that can prove it is continually responsive and relevant to public needs at a local and national level. In this way, public libraries would be delivering a service which not only upholds the principles of the Localism Act (2011) in enabling local decision-making, but also one that is perceived as "relivant" (NU13) because it "matches current needs" (NU6). This approach would provide clarity and certainty and, at the same time, opportunity for growth and dynamism (Ranganathan, 1931, p. 382; Table 35, Chapter 8.3.1). Defining "comprehensive and efficient" (Public Libraries and Museums Act, 1964, Section 7(1)) in this way also reflects the research by Halpin et al. (2015), which reports "there should be a concerted effort to develop services around community needs, for example family-friendly opening hours and better localised targeting of services" (p.37). Those needs should be empirically established through continuous public engagement and not just speculated, as in the case of Coates (2019), or dictated by local government (Boughey & Cooper, 2010).

Not only should local needs be regularly established, the literature also indicates that the initiatives used to meet these needs should be clearly communicated to the public (Hariff & Rowley, 2011) and their impact evaluated (Boughey & Cooper, 2010). The public participants in this thesis agree, as one library user explained, "People should be aware of what they is available from the outset. this should be reviewed regularly in response to users either using or requesting certain services" (U23). Defining a "comprehensive and efficient service" (Section 7(1)) as one that maintains a cycle of assessing public needs, evaluating its delivery, and communicating its offer, would mean the 1964 Act reflects Ranganathan's (1931) fifth law of "slow continuous" (p.383)

growth, instead of a “merry-go-round” (Fletcher, 2019, p.579) of services borne of “flavour of the month” (Fletcher, 2019, p.579) policy and funding decisions. The definition would demonstrate a greater commitment to democratic responsiveness rather than telling the public what they want from their public libraries (Boughey & Cooper, 2010). Moreover, the views of central government, local government and the sector, established in Phase Three (Chapter 7.4.1 – 7.4.3), demonstrate that there is already a commitment by decision-making and service-providing stakeholders to undertake meaningful public consultation.

In addition to the local assessment of needs, guidance about how to engage with the public and assess needs at a national level would be required to engender a “dynamic” (Beyer & Hänni, 2018, p.S18) democratic responsiveness and avoid what Goulding (2006) calls “a postcode lottery in the public’s experience” (p.24) of public library services. According to Poole, public libraries should be “led locally, supported regionally and developed and promoted nationally” (in Libraries Connected, 2019b, para.9) to ensure that the public “receive a consistently excellent library service, wherever they live” (in Libraries Connected, 2019b, para.9). To deliver a proactive service that is responsive to public needs, Libraries Connected (2022) assert that “the sector needs accurate and close to real time data to drive local planning and decision making” (para.7). For instance, during the pandemic in 2020, the number of in-person visits fell by 72% compared to the previous year, the number of books loans decreased by 56%, and the number of web visits increased by 18% (CIPFA, 2022, paras.2-4). By the following year, however, in-person visits had increased by 68%, book loans had increased by 58%, and web visits had fallen by 8% (CIPFA, 2023, para.3). This demonstrates how public behaviour, and associated needs, can rapidly change depending on context. Being inflexible with services or the funding for them could run the risk of not meeting public needs. McMenemy (2009c) recognises that the legislation cannot stipulate “how library services are managed” (p.560) or dictate their funding but the Act should function to reassure the public that “their right to a high quality library service is not damaged by short term financial concerns” (p.560).

9.4 Conclusion

In summary, this chapter set out to discuss the findings of this thesis in relation to the two research aims and the existing literature. The first part of the chapter reviewed the

thesis findings from Phase Two, related to Aim 1: identifying public perceptions of public libraries in England, both library user and non-user. The second part of the chapter dealt with Aim 2, an exploration of the 1964 Act's adequacy to legislate for a 21st century public library service. After recapping the different stakeholder perceptions of public libraries (Research Question 2) and comparing them to one another (Research Question 3) as well as the literature, this second part of the chapter then discussed the stakeholder views in relation to the content and intention of the Act (Research Question 4).

Overall, the stakeholder groups disagree, to some degree, about the purpose of public libraries and the manner in which their services should be delivered (Phase Three). In turn, this means that the extent to which the 1964 Act satisfies each stakeholder groups' perceptions of public libraries differs (Phase Four). This thesis posits that it does not naturally follow that the legislation is inadequate. Rather, the Public Libraries and Museums Act (1964) could be refined through a particular conception of its key phrase, "comprehensive and efficient library service" (Section 20), which mandates a greater responsiveness to public opinion and behaviours.

In Phase One, Chapter 3 defines key concepts and Chapter 4 explores the existing literature; in doing so, the phase establishes the current public library landscape in England. Acting in "proxy for theory" (Bryman, 2016, p.20), this phase also corroborates that the research aims were relevant and lays the foundation for the research questions, which were refined after Phase Two (see Chapter 2.3).

Phase Two demonstrates there are differences between the views of the library user and non-user participants; for instance, library users rank meeting the needs of children and young people higher than library non-users; and non-users rank promoting the library service higher than users. However, the findings of Phases Two and Three also demonstrate there were many commonalities. For instance, participants agree that public libraries should not prioritise the provision of cultural or educational opportunities, nor should they support prosperity or democracy, provide different spaces for different needs or focus on working with the community. Instead, participants agree that public libraries should focus on providing a free service which prioritises reading and information access. In contrast to this, the views presented in the central and local government corpora state that public libraries should be "more than"

(DCMS, 2017f, para.56; LGA, 2017, p.12) a loaning service by being the "front door" (LGA, 2017, p.9) for a range of services and activities that deliver government priorities. Phase Four demonstrates that this is not a sentiment reflected in the Public Libraries and Museums Act (1964). Equally, whilst the sector corpus agrees with the participant perceptions of a public library service which focuses on reading and information access, it also presents public libraries as a service which helps people to improve their lives in a number of ways. The sector views presented in Phase Three (Chapter 7.4.3) bridge the space between, on one hand, participant perceptions and the 1964 Act and, on the other hand, those of central and local government (Figure 35).

The empirical research of this thesis has demonstrated that the library user and non-user participants hold perceptions of and define public libraries in a manner that suggests the Public Libraries and Museums Act (1964) is partially adequate for a 21st century service. Not only does the Act embody many of the foundations of a public library service (Ranganathan, 1931), it reflects the perception of the public participants in this thesis who believe that public libraries should first and foremost be a loaning service which connects people to information. The relevance of the Act to the public's view of public libraries could, however, be strengthened and modernised with the inclusion of references to digital technologies, professional staff, inclusivity and accessibility because these should be priorities according to the participants (Chapter 7.4.4). The importance of digital technologies is a perception also held by the other three stakeholder groups. Moreover, inclusivity, accessibility, and the role of professional staff are also mentioned by the other stakeholder groups. Overall, the results of this thesis illustrate that both public participant views and the content of the 1964 Act are more aligned with views in the literature that call for a traditional service (Coates, 2019; Usherwood, 2007a, 2007b) or caution against drifting away from the core purpose of public libraries (Dolan, 2007; Fletcher, 2019; Goulding, 2013), rather than with the views that argue public libraries can support wider social issues (DCMS, 2017f; LGA, 2017; Pateman & Vincent, 2010).

Further, it is clear that the Act only appears inadequate in determining the way public libraries operate when it is read in the light of the priorities of central and local government, and the responses of the sector to those directives. In short, the Act is adequate in terms of delivering what this thesis' participants want from a public library service; however, it does not correlate as effectively to the central and local government

expectations of public libraries. Moreover, it does not currently provide sector bodies with a means to realise the needs of the public rather than be obligated to deliver the priorities set by local and central government. This thesis recommends that the Public Libraries and Museums Act (1964) is updated to include a definition of "comprehensive and efficient" (The Public Libraries and Museums Act, 1964, Section 7(1)): a dynamic public library service that can evidence it is responsive and relevant to public needs at a local and national level (see Section 9.3.2). This adaptation would allow local authorities to be flexible in their service delivery whilst mandating that they keep up to date with public behaviours and needs. It would also turn the DCMS (2013) recommendation that local authorities use the findings of the Charteris (2009) report as guidance into a statutory expectation which has merit in judicial proceedings. The recommendation is further explained in Chapter 10 (Section 10.5).

Whilst central government cannot dictate how local authorities spend their budgets on public services (McMenemy, 2009a), particularly since the introduction of the Localism Act (2011), the findings indicate it is necessary for local and central government to dismantle the "funding merry-go-round" (Fletcher, 2019, p.579) so that public libraries can actively respond to public needs through iterative and thorough local assessment. Such a change would enable public libraries to secure funding for the services their public value or request, rather than turning their "attention and advocacy to those departments of national and local government from whom they seek endorsement or funding" (Coates, 2019, p.14).

CHAPTER 10: CONCLUSION

This chapter first provides a recap of the thesis aims and research questions before explaining its contributions in terms of key findings and methodological approaches. Following this, the limitations of the research are discussed. Finally, recommendations are presented for updating the content of the Public Libraries and Museums Act (1964) and for areas of further research.

10.1 Restating the thesis aims and research questions

This thesis was designed in multiple phases so that the findings of each phase could support the next in answering the research aims and questions (Figure 2, Chapter 2.3). Phase One of the thesis (Chapters 3 and 4) established the current public library landscape in England and, subsequently, determined two research aims with associated research questions. Figure 37 restates the aims and research questions to aid the reading of this chapter.

Figure 37: recap of research aims and research questions

Aim 1: To identify public perceptions of public libraries in England and the services they provide

> Research Question 1: What are public perceptions of public library services in England, both users and non-users?

Aim 2: To establish whether the current legislation is adequate for a 21st century public library service

> Research Question 2: How do different stakeholder groups define public libraries: the public, central government, local government and the public library sector?
>
> Research Question 3: How do these different stakeholder definitions compare?
>
> Research Question 4: To what extent do the public and stakeholder views of public libraries correspond to the Public Libraries and Museums Act (1964)?

The first aim was related to the current research gaps established in Phase One. Since 2010, there has been little research into public perceptions of public library services which exposes participants to their full offer rather than a specific concern or single feature of the service (Chapter 4.3). Furthermore, there has been a distinct lack of

research into public perceptions of public libraries which encompasses the views of library non-users. The first aim was explored in Phase Two of the research by using Q methodology to address Research Question 1 (Chapter 5 and Chapter 6).

The second aim of the thesis was the focus of Phases Three and Four. In Phase Three (Chapter 7), qualitative coding was used to explore how the public, central government, local government and public library sector define public libraries and their services (Research Question 2). Moreover, Phase Three compared these definitions to establish commonalities and tensions in the way that the stakeholder groups perceive public libraries (Research Question 3). Subsequently, Phase Four (Chapter 8) mapped the stakeholder definitions of public libraries to the legislation through a process of framework analysis (Chapter 8) so that it was possible to consider the Act's adequacy for a contemporary public library service (Research Question 4).

10.2 Contributions: key findings

This thesis provides a number of novel empirical contributions in terms of key findings relating to the public library landscape, public perceptions of public library services, the ways different stakeholder groups define the service, and the overall adequacy of the 1964 Act. The key findings are presented below by phase.

Phase One

The literature review of Chapter 4 combined grey and academic literature, and identified tensions between the priorities of central government, local government and the public library sector. Moreover, it indicated that there were concerns, from the public library sector, regarding a lack of clarification about a key term in the Public Libraries and Museums Act (1964): "comprehensive and efficient library service" (Section 7(1)). Overall, the literature indicated several gaps in public perceptions research about public libraries: the lack of inclusion of library non-users; a focus on specific elements rather than a more holistic view of public libraries and their services; and a lack of investigation into the adequacy of the current legislation.

Phase Two

The second phase of the thesis addressed Research Question 1 to establish public perceptions of public libraries. The resulting factors in the Q methodology study for library users showed that the participants in this thesis are unified in their conviction

that volunteers should not replace staff, supporting the literature's concerns (Appleton et al., 2018; Casselden et al., 2019; Goulding, 2013; Peachey, 2017) about the increasing use of volunteers in public libraries (Chartered Institute of Public Finance and Accountancy [CIPFA], 2017, 2018b; Richards, 2016).

The factors in the second Q methodology study captured the perceptions of library non-users. The results indicated that library non-user participants assert that other organisations are better suited to delivering wider social agendas like promoting public health and wellbeing; library non-user participants question "why are libraries trying to do it?" (NU29). Instead, library non-user participants would prefer good customer service, supporting the findings of the Museums, Libraries and Archives Council [MLA] (2010a) report which suggest that improving customer service could be an "incentive"(p.35) for encouraging non-users to engage with public libraries.

There was also consensus between the library user (Q Study 1) and non-user participants (Q Study 2) that public libraries "need" (NU3, NU27, NU38) to be professionally staffed; this challenges local and central government's enthusiastic support of alternative delivery models (Local Government Association [LGA], 2017; Libraries Taskforce, 2016). Moreover, the research showed that both library user and non-user participants are disinterested in neoliberal or commercial approaches in public library services, contradicting the findings of the MLA (2010a) report which argues that library non-users could be persuaded to use public libraries if they "can find ways to compete with commercial booksellers" (p.30).

Overall, whilst the literature shows that the local and central government position is that public libraries should be "more than" (Department for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport [DCMS], 2017f, para.56; LGA, 2017, p.12) a loaning service, the results of this thesis demonstrate that library user and non-user participants share the view that public libraries "can't be everything to everyone. Ask yourself is this provided by another service or organisation? If it is why are libraries trying to do it?" (NU29).

Phase Three

The third phase of the thesis addressed Research Questions 2 and 3 to explore and compare how different stakeholder groups define public libraries, including central government, local government, the public library sector and the public. Findings from the qualitative coding of Phase Three have been synthesised into the *public libraries*

should be, should provide and should do model (Figure 7.4, Chapter 7.4). The model demonstrated that despite differences, all four stakeholder groups define public libraries in terms of the values they uphold, the services they provide to the public, and the other actions they carry out in providing a library service.

Whilst all stakeholder definitions mentioned the role of public libraries in delivering reading related services in Phase Three, only the public participants thought this should be the top priority of public libraries. The definitions of central and local government led with the notion that public libraries should be "more than" (DCMS, 2017f, para.56; LGA, 2017, p.12) their reading services; whereas the definition from the public library sector stated that services should support reading and information whilst also helping to improve people's lives educationally, socioeconomically, and in terms of health and wellbeing. This difference in the definitions reflects the tensions explored in Phase One (Chapter 4.2.3): the multiple agendas which shape and influence public library services, described by Fletcher (2019) as a "continual flavour of the month policy and funding merry-go-round" (p.175). The viewpoint of the public participants on this matter are more in line with the argument of Coates (2019) than Pateman and Vincent (2010). Where Pateman and Vincent (2010) posit that public libraries must accept they "exist within a strategic context which is wider than library services" (p.8) and have a responsibility to deliver wider social agendas, the participants and Coates (2019) caution that the public does not want reading and information to take a backseat to social welfare priorities mandated by local and national government agendas.

Phase Four

The final phase of the thesis established that the public participant perceptions of public libraries align quite closely with the content of the 1964 Act, in contrast to the views of central government, local government, and the public library sector. Essentially, this is because the Act and the participants primarily focus on the core functions of a service that connects people to reading material for free, whereas the other stakeholders describe a wide range of other services a public library should also deliver. The findings also indicated that the 1964 Act could be modernised and strengthened in two areas, according to all four stakeholder groups: the inclusion of stipulations relating to professional staff and to digital services and materials (Table 35, Chapter 8.3.1).

Summary

Overall, the findings of the multiple phases demonstrate there are some disparities between the participant perceptions of public libraries and those of the other stakeholder groups. The difference is most evident in the participants' emphasis on the purpose of public libraries as a reading and information based service, in contrast to the central and local government positions that public libraries are a vehicle for delivering wider social agendas. By comparison, the public library sector bridges the space between these perceptions by asserting public libraries are all about reading but also about helping people in a range of ways unrelated to reading. Just like the views of the participants, the content of the 1964 Act mandates that public libraries must focus on reading and loaning materials.

Moreover, the findings of Phase Three indicate that the perceptions of the stakeholder groups, and in particular those of the participants, are in line with Ranganathan's (1931) five core librarianship tenets: books are for use; every person his/her book; every book its reader; save the time of the reader; and a library is a growing organism. In Phase Four, it was established that the first four of Ranganathan's (1931) laws were also evident within the legislation; the omission was the fifth law, relating to the need for libraries to grow and develop so they do not "petrify and perish" (Ranganathan, 1931, p.382). The discussion (Chapter 9) combined the thesis findings from all the research phases with Ranganathan's philosophy to posit that the 1964 Act should be updated to meet the stakeholder groups' views that public libraries should be dynamic and Ranganathan's (1931) argument that they should be growing organisms. The subsequent recommendations are presented in Section 10.5.1.

10.3 Contributions: methodological approaches

The thesis also provides a number of methodological contributions: the use of Q methodology to capture public perceptions of public libraries; the development of a public library concourse and associated Q set to expose participants to the full breadth of a public library service; and the juxtaposition of public views with both the positions of central and local government, the sector, and the content of the legislation.

Using Q methodology to capture public perceptions of libraries (Phase Two) is an uncommon research approach, limited to very few examples. Of the three library focused studies found by the researcher, none specifically relate to public libraries in

England. VanScoy (2021) employs Q methodology to explore reference and information services in South African, Slovenian and American libraries. Young and Kelly (2017) use the method to capture the perceptions of undergraduate library users in an academic library setting in the USA. The researcher also explores the perceptions of different stakeholders about FE college libraries in England (McKenna-Aspell, 2018). It is equally rare for research studies capturing public perceptions about other public services in England to use Q methodology. There is an example regarding policing (Vo et al., 2017), another about social care (Aitken et al., 2019), and an ongoing project to look at public services in Bradford (Vulnerability and Policing Futures Research Centre, 2023). This thesis posits that Q methodology is a rich and effective tool for capturing public perceptions of public libraries. Furthermore, local authorities would benefit from employing Q methodology when undertaking the recommended public consultation and assessment of local needs described in Section 10.4.

Comparative Q methodological studies, like those of Phase Two in this thesis, are feasible but uncommon. When comparisons are evident, they primarily demonstrate one of three approaches, as described in Table 42.

Table 42: approaches to comparative Q methodological research

Approach	**Example**
Researchers duplicate an existing Q study with a new participant group (P set) at a later stage.	Rhoads and Brown (2002, pp.104-5)
Researchers provide more than one Q sorting task, on a different but related topic, to the same P set.	McHugh et al. (2019, pp.6-7)
Researchers apply a secondary analysis of their data by disassembling the originally pooled P set into separate groups based on a specific characteristic.	van Exel et al. (2015, p.132)

Phelps et al. (2021) explain that although the method is used to capture and explain different perspectives, Q methodology results "do not routinely differentiate those perspectives according to respondents' individual characteristics" (p.3). It is unusual for Q methodological research to be designed in the manner used in this thesis: simultaneously executed identical Q studies, involving P sets with distinct characteristics specific to the research subject, which are factor analysed separately before being

subjected to a secondary analysis and holistic comparison (Chapter 5.5). Whilst an explanation of the comparative approach followed in this thesis is published by Watts and Stenner (2012, pp.53-54), the researcher was only able to find one other study that used the same process (Van Damme et al. 2017). Ergo, the particular use of Q methodology in this thesis is not entirely novel but it is rare. Phase Two provides a contribution to Q methodological literature by demonstrating that the replication of identical Q studies with multiple P sets, coupled with both separate and comparative analysis, is an effective approach for addressing specific research questions and generating meaningful findings.

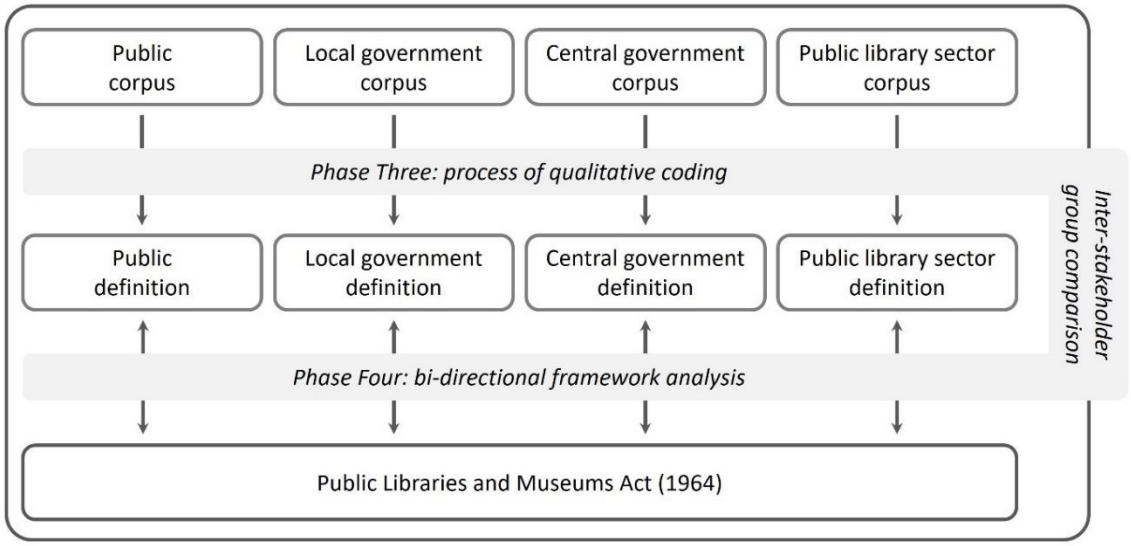
A perceived limitation of the method within the field of public library research could be that it provides multiple insights which may conflict with one another. Whilst this critique may lead some to dismiss it, in this research it was the very nature of Q methodology that made it a suitable choice: Q methodology appreciates that public opinions can be diverse, inconsistent and contradictory (Zaller, 1992, p.93). The findings show that public libraries need to navigate how best to respond to and meet diverse public needs. A second potential limitation of using Q methodology to capture public perceptions of public libraries is that it is a time-consuming method because of the design (concourse and Q set) and delivery to participants. That said, once the Q set is designed, the execution of a Q sorting task can be no more time intensive than an interview or survey. Equally, with the support of software, the subsequent analysis and interpretation of Q methodology outcomes is no more onerous than the analysis and interpretation of interviews and surveys. Moreover, as evidenced in this thesis, with the right support materials for participants, it is possible to administer a Q sorting task digitally. This means members of the public can participate in their own time and space, without the facilitation of a researcher. Furthermore, once the Q set is established, it can be adapted (items removed or added) to reflect any changes to the public library service provision.

During Phase Two of the thesis an extensive concourse was generated to create the Q set for the Q methodology studies (Chapter 5.3). The concourse was derived from publications written about the sector and by the sector: academic literature about public library provision; reports commissioned by Arts Council England [ACE], DCMS, and the Libraries Taskforce; reports produced by public library sector bodies, such as the Chartered Institute of Library and Information Professionals [CILIP]; reports produced by

related bodies, such as CIPFA; and public library strategy and service documents from local authorities within the same CIPFA comparative group as West Sussex County Council. The concourse of 500+ statements, and the resulting Q set of 45 items (Table 13, Chapter 5.4), form a comprehensive and current depiction of public library services in England. The concourse and Q set provide a significant dataset for other scholars and practitioners to use in future research. Unlike previous studies which explore library user and non-user perceptions of public libraries in England (MLA, 2010; Macdonald, 2012), the concourse and subsequent Q set created for Phase Two exposed public participants to the full breadth and range of public library services and then captured their perceptions thereof. By comparison, the Macdonald (2012) study was predominantly based on a survey of five questions (pp.61-63). The fifth was the only question to ask participants to consider the specific deliverables of a public library service and, unlike the Q set of 45 items in this research, the response options were limited to 10 examples. Moreover, the qualitative research undertaken by MLA (2010a) with library users, lapsed users and non-users provided a broad topic guide in focus group settings to direct the discourse (p.4). Equally, during the quantitative survey of the MLA (2010a) research, participants were not "read a list of services", but asked for "unprompted, 'top-of-mind' answers" (p.18). The extensive literature review (Chapter 4) identified no other studies of English public libraries which explore the perceptions of library users and non-users by providing participants with materials that demonstrate the full scope of a public library service.

In addition to the use of Q methodology, this thesis provided a novel approach in Phase Three when the perceptions of public participants, captured in the previous phase, were compared with the viewpoints of the public library sector, local government and central government. The literature review (Chapter 4) ascertained that no previous study about public libraries in England has undertaken a similar approach. Equally, no prior study has mapped public perceptions of public libraries in England against the Public Libraries and Museums Act (1964) as this thesis did in response to Research Question 4. In Phase Four, bringing together the perceptions of the public, the sector, central government and local government in relation to public libraries, to juxtapose them with the legislation examining its adequacy for a contemporary service, was also an original approach. These novel approaches are presented in Figure 38 to demonstrate how the processes, comparison and juxtaposition of Phases Three and Four were achieved.

Figure 38: the novel juxtaposition of stakeholder groups and legislation



10.4 Research limitations and considerations

This thesis has revealed how the public perceive public libraries and their core purpose in England. It has also provided insight into the adequacy of the Public Libraries and Museums Act (1964) for legislating a contemporary public library service. However, the researcher recognises three important limitations with this work. First, the documents used in Phases Three and Four from central government, local government and the public library sector are a fair and up-to-date representation of the viewpoints held by those stakeholder groups; however, the participant group representing public perceptions in Phases Two, Three and Four was small (n=68) and selected from one specific geographic area of England (West Sussex). The small sample size was deliberate and justified in Chapter 5.5. However, it does mean the thesis cannot and does not make generalised claims about reporting the public perceptions of an entire nation. An important objective for future research will therefore be to replicate and extend the methodological template provided in this thesis. It is possible for other local authorities and their public library services to replicate the Q studies, capturing the perceptions of their local communities and comparing them to the findings in Phase Two. First, this would create the opportunity for an explicit comparative study, reviewing whether people in different local authorities hold similar views to the participants in this thesis. Second, such studies could also map their participant outcomes to the reported findings in Phases Three and Four: the positions of local government, central government and the public library sector, and the content and intention of the 1964 Act.

The second point is that demographic data was not collected about the participants because, in line with data minimisation, it was not necessary for the analysis of the data nor was it relevant to the consideration of the two research aims of this thesis (Chapter 5.5). What was relevant was the status of participants as public library users or non-users. Whilst this is not a limitation of this thesis, it is worth consideration for local authorities or public libraries that may use Q methodology in their own areas. For instance, future Q studies might want to consider how the perceptions of public library services differ between different groups of people, or public library services might want to work with specific groups of people to ensure their voices are heard and needs are met.

The third limitation of the research was the impact of the Covid pandemic on the data collection of Phase Two. Due to lockdown restrictions and public healthcare measures, it was not possible to recruit participants in person or carry out the Q sorting activities with the public in a face-to-face setting. Instead, participants were recruited through social media platforms and undertook the Q sorting tasks online (Chapter 5.5 and 5.6). Therefore, the researcher had no choice but to accept that participants had met the criteria as adults who lived, worked or studied in West Sussex. There was no way to affirm this with anonymous, online recruitment and data collection; had the recruitment and data collection taken place in person, the researcher could have double-checked with each participant. In part, the researcher mitigated this issue by targeting social media recruitment through community groups based in West Sussex. Another mitigation was the creation of support materials for participants to use during the online Q sorting tasks (Chapter 5.6). This meant that the Q studies could go ahead despite the lack of face-to-face interaction with the public. With Q methodology, it is recommended that the researcher carries out a post-Q sort interview to find out more about the participants' choices and opinions (Chapter 5.6). As this could not happen in this thesis, the online Q sorts included a two question survey at the end of the task, so that participants could reflect on their lowest ranked items and consider the core purpose of public libraries. These responses not only helped with the interpretation of the factors in Phase Two but also provided the public participant data for Phases Three and Four. Because the Q sorts did not take place in the presence of the researcher, it was not possible to ensure all participants responded to the questions; as such, 19 of the 68 participants did not provide responses.

10.5 Recommendations

Whilst the research was not theory-driven or problem-based in design (Chapter 2.2.2), and thus did not seek to establish a solution to a problem, the cumulative findings from the multiple phases of the thesis offered a range of empirical and methodological insights which generated plausible recommendations in two areas. First, recommendations relating to the Public Libraries and Museums Act (1964) and the governance of public libraries in England, and second, recommendations for future research.

10.5.1 Public library legislation

In terms of the adequacy of the current legislation (Research Aim 2), the outcomes of Phases Three and Four lead to the recommendation that the Public Libraries and Museums Act (1964) is updated to include a stipulation that public libraries are staffed by professionals and provide digital services and reading materials. The research findings of Phases Three and Four bring into question whether or not inclusion and accessibility should be written into the 1964 Act; this is addressed as a point for further research in Section 10.5.2.

The most significant recommendation of the thesis, in relation to the adequacy of the 1964 Act, is that a "comprehensive and efficient library service" (Section 7(1)) should be defined as follows:

> a public library service that can prove it is continually responsive and relevant to public needs, both locally and nationally.

As established in Phase One (Chapter 4.2.2), this meets the demand from the public library sector for the key phrase to be defined (CILIP, 2015; Conway, 2008; Culture, Media and Sport Committee, 2012; Davies, 2014; Dolan, 2007; Information Professional, 2018a; Halpin et al., 2015; McMenemy, 2009c), particularly so that local authorities can be held to account when making changes or reductions to their public library services. The literature in Phase One showed precedent has been established for the phrase to be thus defined as the Charteris (2009) report states that a local needs assessment will tell a local authority whether or not their public library service is "comprehensive and efficient" (Public Libraries and Museums Act, 1964, Section 7(1)). Moreover, DCMS (2013) advises that local authorities use this guidance from Charteris (2009) when

making decisions about their service, despite the fact that it currently holds no grounding in a judicial setting (R. (Green) v Gloucestershire CC and Somerset CC., 2011, point 30). A definition based on a duty to monitor, engage with and meet the needs of the public supports the local and central government's position of a public library service which meets community needs (Chapter 7, Sections 7.4.1 and 7.4.2). It is also congruent with the notion of a "dynamic" (Beyer & Hänni, 2018, p.S18) democratic responsiveness, that "maintains a balance between citizens' demands for policy responsiveness and the need for responsibility" (Linde & Peters, 2020, p.293) in times of financial challenge.

Moreover, the proposed definition of "comprehensive and efficient" (Public Libraries and Museums Act, 1964, Section 7(1)) will also reduce the "bells and whistles" (NU1) approach to public library services which the participants in this thesis criticise because they want a "relivant" (NU13) service that "matches current needs" (NU6) rather than a "poorman version of other services" (NU32). Finally, the proposed definition speaks to Ranganathan's (1931) fifth law about growth coupled with the *be dynamic* value present in all four stakeholder groups' definitions of public libraries (Table 35, Chapter 8.3.1): a service that monitors and responds to public needs will be flexible and receptive to change.

This thesis also recommends that public libraries be removed from the remit of ACE as the executive non-departmental public body (NDPB) for public libraries sponsored by DCMS. Because of its own agenda, ACE will always suggest "designated needs" (Boughey and Cooper, 2010, p.197) for library users related to art and culture rather than a service that focuses on promoting reading, connecting people to information and loaning materials. Phase One (Chapter 4.2.1) demonstrated that just three years after ACE replaced MLA as the executive NDPB for public libraries, an independent report carried out by Sieghart (2014) for DCMS concluded that public libraries needed "coherence at a national level" (p.7). Moreover, Sieghart's (2014) report concluded that a libraries task force was required to work with local authorities to provide the strategic framework necessary to "revitalise" (p.5) or "change" (p.5) public library services. As the executive NDPB for public libraries, ACE should be providing the national coherence and strategic guidance needed to support local authorities in their delivery of public library services. Sieghart's (2014) recommendation that another body was established (a libraries task force) to undertake this work implies that ACE was not performing effectively as an NDPB for public libraries. The results of Phase Two indicate that the library user and

non-user participants in this thesis strongly disagreed with public libraries offering cultural opportunities or arranging events and activities (Table 31, Chapter 6.10). Moreover, the outcomes from Phase Three (Appendix 11) demonstrate that whilst a cultural offering featured in the public library definitions from the central government, local government and public library sector corpora, the same was not true of the public participants (Figure 31; Chapter 7.4.4). The public participants' definition was focused on a free, inclusive service that provides access to reading materials and information. Finally, the outcomes of Phase Four (Chapter 8.2.1 and 8.5.1) demonstrate that the Public Libraries and Museums Act (1964) does not mandate that public libraries should focus on providing culture based services, beyond offering a space which can be hired to hold "events of an educational or cultural nature" (Section 20). The Act does not stipulate that public libraries are responsible for a cultural offering or services, merely that the space can be used.

Therefore, in lieu of an NDPB with its own agenda to support "artistic and cultural experiences to enrich people's lives" (UK Government, 2012), this thesis argues that an executive NDPB dedicated to public libraries could be reintroduced, or the disbanded Libraries Taskforce could be reformed, or the national advisory boards which were cut from the Public Libraries and Museums Act (1964, Section 3) in 2015 could be re-established. As per the findings of this thesis, this would help to ensure the primary focus of national governance is on core public library provision before any other services designed to support local and central government priorities.

10.5.2 Future research

This thesis presents the argument for two further areas of research: legislating for inclusivity and accessibility in public library services and establishing and responding to public perceptions of the service.

The first research suggestion relates to the findings of Phases Three and Four, which demonstrate that all stakeholder groups contend public libraries should be inclusive and accessible for "everyone" (U1, U4, U10, U24, NU16, NU19). Moreover, the literature often refers to public libraries as being or needing to be safe, inclusive and/or accessible services (Appleton et al., 2018; Black, 2011; Casselden et al., 2019; Macdonald, 2012; McCahill et al., 2020; MLA, 2010). In comparison, there is no mention of inclusivity and accessibility in the Public Libraries and Museums Act (1964).

It is possible that the Equality Act (2010), and its associated public sector equality duty, sufficiently ensures that public libraries are inclusive and accessible. However, it is also possible that the Equality Act (2010) is insufficient to ensure the kind of inclusive service referenced in the literature, which describes how public libraries can support people from low socioeconomic backgrounds (CILIP & The Big Issue, 2019; Libraries Taskforce, 2016), "disadvantaged communities" (McMenemy, 2007a, p.275) and people with low levels of literacy (Libraries Taskforce, 2016). Moreover, the participants refer to public libraries helping people "that may not otherwise have access to books/computers" (U16). The Equality Act (2010) does not mention people with low literacy levels or low reading ages, or people for whom English is an additional language. Whilst the protected characteristics of the Equality Act (2010) do not include people from low socioeconomic backgrounds, Part 1 of the Act mandates that consideration must be applied to reducing "the inequalities of outcome which result from socio-economic disadvantage" (Section 1(1)). That said, much like the disputed "comprehensive and efficient" phrase of the Public Libraries and Museums Act (1964, section 7(1)), there is no elaboration about how public services should aim to reduce disadvantages for people from low socioeconomic groups.

The Equality Act (2010) also does not provide guidance for public services and their specific offerings, for instance, censorship and stock development in public libraries and how they relate to equality, inclusion and accessibility. Given the findings of Phases Three and Four, this thesis suggests that further research is required to ascertain whether the Equality Act (2010) is adequate to ensure public libraries in England are inclusive and accessible or whether the Public Libraries and Museums Act (1964) needs to be updated to include stipulations related to inclusive and accessible library services.

The second area of future research relates to the recommendation of this thesis that "comprehensive and efficient" should be defined in the Public Libraries and Museums Act (1964, Section 7(1)) as a dynamic service that is responsive to public needs at a local and national level. Public bodies and local authorities in England have a duty to gather and integrate public opinion into their decision making (Department for Communities and Local Government, 2015; Equality Act, 2010; Equality and Human Rights Commission, 2022; Health and Social Care Act, 2012; Local Government Act, 1999). This reflects an increasingly participative approach in many parts of government, such as the parliamentary approach to public engagement (Uberoi, 2017; Walker, 2017). Walker

(2017) asserts that “the quality of legislation and policy is improved if it is informed by citizens’ concerns, experiences, and views” (p.1). The empirical findings of this thesis evidence the value of gathering and integrating the voice of both library users and non-users into the 1964 Act and library service provision. In order to ensure local needs assessments are timely and accurate, local authorities and their public library services will need to utilise effective models for public engagement and data collection. This is particularly important against the backdrop of disputes about current public library data collections in England and the overreliance on CIPFA statistics (O’Bryan, 2018; Libraries Connected, 2022), as reported in Chapter 4 and discussed in Chapter 9. In addition to the potential for the use of Q methodology, further research should be undertaken about effective ways public libraries and local authorities can engage with their communities, including library non-users, to ensure they are effectively monitoring local needs and providing a service to meet them.

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Young, R.A. & Collin, A. (2004). Introduction: constructivism and social constructionism in the career field. *Journal of Vocational Behaviour, 64*(3), 373-388. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jvb.2003.12.005

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Appendices

Appendix 1: ethics approval

Letter of approval

The University Of Sheffield.

Downloaded: 16/10/2023
Approved: 14/10/2020

Joanna-Louise McKenna-Aspell
Registration number: 190260019
Information School
Programme: Information Studies (PhD/Info Studs (SSc) FT)

Dear Joanna-Louise

PROJECT TITLE: Public perceptions of public libraries in England, 2009 - 2020: an examination of the perceived effectiveness of the Public Libraries and Museums Act 1964, c75, section 7 in the 21st century
APPLICATION: Reference Number 036453

On behalf of the University ethics reviewers who reviewed your project, I am pleased to inform you that on 14/10/2020 the above-named project was **approved** on ethics grounds, on the basis that you will adhere to the following documentation that you submitted for ethics review:

- University research ethics application form 036453 (form submission date: 05/10/2020); (expected project end date: 28/02/2021).
- Participant information sheet 1082922 version 1 (05/10/2020).
- Participant consent form 1082923 version 1 (05/10/2020).

The reviewers have left the following comments reguarding the application:

An exemplary application (Peter Stordy)

If during the course of the project you need to deviate significantly from the above-approved documentation please inform me since written approval will be required.

Your responsibilities in delivering this research project are set out at the end of this letter.

Yours sincerely

Paul Reilly
Ethics Administrator
Information School

Please note the following responsibilities of the researcher in delivering the research project:

- The project must abide by the University's Research Ethics Policy: https://www.sheffield.ac.uk/research-services/ethics-integrity/policy
- The project must abide by the University's Good Research & Innovation Practices Policy: https://www.sheffield.ac.uk/polopoly_fs/1.671066!/file/GRIPPolicy.pdf
- The researcher must inform their supervisor (in the case of a student) or Ethics Administrator (in the case of a member of staff) of any significant changes to the project or the approved documentation.
- The researcher must comply with the requirements of the law and relevant guidelines relating to security and confidentiality of personal data.
- The researcher is responsible for effectively managing the data collected both during and after the end of the project in line with best practice, and any relevant legislative, regulatory or contractual requirements.

Ethics application

The University Of Sheffield.

Application 036453

Section A: Applicant details

Date application started:
Mon 7 September 2020 at 11:53

First name:
Joanna-Louise

Last name:
McKenna-Aspell

Email:
jmckenna-aspell1@sheffield.ac.uk

Programme name:
Information Studies (PhD/Info Studs (SSc) FT)

Module name:
INFR31
Last updated:
14/10/2020

Department:
Information School

Applying as:
Postgraduate research

Research project title:
Public perceptions of public libraries in England, 2009 - 2020: an examination of the perceived effectiveness of the Public Libraries and Museums Act 1964, c75, section 7 in the 21st century

Has your research project undergone academic review, in accordance with the appropriate process?
Yes

Similar applications:
- not entered -

Section B: Basic information

Supervisor

Name	Email
Briony Birdi	b.birdi@sheffield.ac.uk

Proposed project duration

Start date (of data collection):
Sat 31 October 2020

Anticipated end date (of project)
Sun 28 February 2021

3: Project code (where applicable)

Project code

- not entered -

Suitability

Takes place outside UK?
No

Involves NHS?
No

Health and/or social care human-interventional study?
No

ESRC funded?
No

Likely to lead to publication in a peer-reviewed journal?
Yes

Led by another UK institution?
No

Involves human tissue?
No

Clinical trial or a medical device study?
No

Involves social care services provided by a local authority?
No

Is social care research requiring review via the University Research Ethics Procedure
No

Involves adults who lack the capacity to consent?
No

Involves research on groups that are on the Home Office list of 'Proscribed terrorist groups or organisations?
No

Indicators of risk

Involves potentially vulnerable participants?
No
Involves potentially highly sensitive topics?
No

Section C: Summary of research

1. Aims & Objectives

PLEASE NOTE: this application relates only to the first stage of my data collection. It is stand-alone: participants in this first stage of data collection will not be involved in the later stages of the project. Due to Covid-19 restrictions on face-to-face research, the later stages of my study are yet to be finalised and it is impossible to provide the level of detail required here. An ethics application for Stages 2 and 3 will therefore be submitted in early 2021.
The information in this application only relates to the methodology and participants in the first stage of my study. I have provided all of the aims and research questions for the overall study in order to provide the full picture; however, those related specifically to Stages 2 and 3 are marked (>). The data collected in this first stage will help inform and shape the questions I ask in Stages 2 and 3 of my research.

***
AIMS
Aim 1: to identify public perceptions of public libraries in England (users and non-users) and the services they provide, evaluating which factors affect these perceptions and how.
Aim 2: to establish whether the current legislation is adequate in the 21st century according to public library user and non-user perceptions (>).

RESEARCH QUESTIONS

1. What has influenced public library user and non-user perceptions of public libraries in England since 2009?
1a. What are user and non-user public perceptions of public libraries in England?
2. To what extent does the public consider the Public Libraries and Museums Act 1964, c.75 adequate for the 21st century? (>)
2a. How do the public, central government, local government and the profession define public libraries and how do the definitions compare? (>)
2b. According to public perception, how should public libraries evidence and articulate their value and impact? (>)

This study will explore stakeholder perceptions about the role and purpose of public libraries, utilising West Sussex as a lens. The stakeholders in Stage 1 will include public library users and non-users. Utilising West Sussex as a vehicle to explore these aims is timely as the research might run concurrently with further local authority consultations. Whilst this offers a refined focus, the research could generate outcomes that are applicable to other local authorities in similar positions, as well as potentially providing a new model of public-consultation.

In later stages, stakeholders will also include senior library staff, local authority representatives and Members of Parliament. Moreover, Stage 2 will also examine the Public Libraries and Museums Act 1964, c.75 and to what extent the public perceive it to be suitable for the 21st century. As mentioned earlier, a separate ethics application form will be submitted when the details for Stages 2 and 3 are finalised. Supporting Document 1 is an overview of the research design, explaining how the stages interrelate and highlighting the focus of this application.

CONTEXT

In England, public libraries are a statutory service covered by the Public Libraries and Museums Act 1964, c.75. They are the responsibility of local authorities, within their broader remit of culture. The legislation is well over 50 years old and much of its content is antiquated at best and problematic or ambiguous at worst. It states that it is the statutory duty of library authorities to provide a "comprehensive and efficient" (Section 7(1)) library service to everyone who wants to use it and who lives, works or studies within the library catchment area. This includes encouraging adults and children to use the service and ensuring there is adequate stock to borrow, specifying pictures and gramophone records as examples (Section 7(2)(a)).

Sections 1 and 10 of the legislation make it clear that the role of the Government, through a Secretary of State, is to superintend and promote the improvement of public library services provided by local authorities. The Secretary of State has the power to enact a local enquiry if there is doubt that a local authority is fulfilling its statutory duty. Since the inception of the legislation, this power has been employed only once, in 2009, to investigate the proposed changes to the library service by Wirral Metropolitan Borough Council. The inquiry was led by Sue Charteris who published a seminal report in 2009. The local authority was found to be in breach of its statutory duty for a number of reasons: it "failed to make an assessment of local needs" (Charteris, 2009, p.57); it lacked a strategic, development plan for the service; it had not considered the needs of children; there were concerns regarding the provision for the most economically vulnerable communities; and the council's fundamental lack of understanding of the "extent and range" (Charteris, 2009, p.58) of its own library service. Charteris (2009) concludes that local authorities seeking to change their library provision must undertake a local needs analysis, should be able to articulate and evidence "a seamless story" (p.61) of decision making and ought to strive for transparency.

Since the 2009 inquiry and report, there has been debate and conflict surrounding the use, purpose, governance, management, funding and closures of public libraries. Moreover, public libraries continue to face myriad of ongoing issues: devolved funding, cutbacks and closures, a lack of guidance regards what constitutes a statutory service, the dissemination of conflicting information and the changing perceptions of the purpose and scope of public libraries from all stakeholders, including those people and organisations who work within and for the sector. A number of local authorities have not been "ready to engage with their electorate over library closures" (Goulding, 2013, p.485) and most research into public perceptions of public libraries is limited to library users. There are multiple agencies in England involved in supporting or leading public libraries which appear to have similar goals and aims that overlap, contradict or repeat one another. The research questions were created in response to the findings of the literature review and the public library landscape of 2009 to date.

This study will explore public perceptions of public libraries and the legislation by focussing on West Sussex County Council and its library service. In February 2019, the Council announced a £145 million budget challenge to be solved by 2023 The Council argues that the loss of the Revenue Support Grant, an increasing elderly population and higher demands for children and family services have all led to the economic situation. To mitigate the financial challenge, West Sussex County Council proposes an increase in council tax, a reduction in spend and an increase in income generation. One example currently being trialled is the development of more partnerships by establishing community hubs to group services together, including libraries. Between October and November 2019, the first library consultation took place reviewing the proposal to close the Mobile Library Service and to reduce library opening hours. Key takeaways from the consultation are that the process was only executed as an online survey, the consultation period lasted just a month and the full results have never been published. Moving forward, West Sussex County Council proposes to focus on the concept of community hubs to make further savings.

Working with the public and library service of West Sussex offers the chance to explore public perceptions of local authority led public libraries at a time of change. As detailed in the methodology section that follows, Stage 1 only involves West Sussex residents, workers and students; however, I would also like to reach out to West Sussex Library

Service during Stage 1 to make them aware of the research. This will be further explained in "D: about the participants."

REFERENCES

Charteris, S. (2009). Independent report: a Local Inquiry into the Public Library Service Provided by Wirral Metropolitan Borough Council. Retrieved February 18, 2019 from https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/a-local-inquiry-into-the-public-library-service-provided-by-wirral-metropolitan-borough-council

Goulding, A. (2013). The big society and English public libraries: where are we now? New Library World, 114(11/12), 478-493. doi: 10.1108/NLW-05-2013-0047

2. Methodology

This study embraces the epistemological stance of social constructionism and adopts an interpretivist theoretical perspective. This research will employ a mixed-methods design of three stages. Please note, as mentioned earlier, this ethics application relates solely to Stage 1 of the research. Superficial details of Stages 2 and 3 are provided for clarity only. A separate application will be submitted in early 2021 for Stages 2 and 3, when Covid-19 factors can be considered in terms of face-to-face research.

OVERALL RESEARCH DESIGN

Stage 1 data collection: Q-methodology with people who live, work or study in West Sussex.
Stage 1 analysis: factor analysis and descriptive statistics.
Stage 2 data collection: activity-led focus groups with people who live, work or study in West Sussex.
Stage 2 analysis: yet to be decided.
Stage 3 data collection: semi-structured interviews with decision makers such as senior library staff, local authority representatives and West Sussex Members of Parliament.
Stage 3 analysis: reflexive thematic analysis.

The study will form a cycle of inductive and deductive reasoning; each stage of data collection will be analysed to inform the design and direction of the subsequent stage. Finally, all results will be subject to an integrated analysis.

AN INTRODUCTION TO Q-METHODOLOGY

Coogan and Herrington (2011) describe Q-methodology as a method that aims to address the "elusiveness of subjectivity" (p.24) because it facilitates the quantitative capture and analysis of qualitative opinions and perceptions.

Participants sort cards, called the Q-set, to indicate what they value as meaningful or significant, on a sliding scale; this results in a Q-sort. The pre-arranged frequency distribution of a Q-sort forces the participant to make value judgements because there are a limited number of place holders and each place holder denotes a value (see Supporting Document 2).

STAGE 1: Q-METHODOLOGY IN THIS STUDY

In light of Covid-19, this study will utilise online software created by Dr Alessio Pruneddu that recreates the conditions of face-to-face Q-methodology. The software is accessed at www.qsortouch.com As Q-methodology is not a well-known method, I have provided a supporting document (Supporting Document 2) which details key terms, provides some visual aids and offers an insight into how the method is presented at www.qsortouch.com.

This tool is GDPR compliant; all data is accessible only by myself and once the subscription period is finished, all data is deleted from the software. The software does not collect personal data from participants (such as name or contact details) unless it is instructed to do so by the researcher. I will not be instructing it to collect any personal data, solely the participants' area codes, which will be further explained in Sections D and E of the application form. The software privacy policy can be found here: https://www.qsortouch.com/Upload/touchprivacy_policy.html

Through the literature review and reading of primary sources and grey literature, I will create a concourse of services delivered by public libraries in England. This concourse will be synthesised into a Q-set: 40 - 60 cards which represent the services. Participants will be asked to pre-sort these cards into three categories: most important, most unimportant and neutral. Following this, participants will continue to sort the cards into the frequency distribution (Supporting Document 2) to demonstrate specific values for each of the services. After sorting the cards, participants are able to explain their process and choices. I will also ask them to provide their definition of a public library. These questions would be asked in face-to-face Q-methodology data collections: the software offers text boxes as an alternative and there is also an option to insist on a response before the participant is able to submit.

Participants will first access a website I have created to explain the research before accessing the Qsortouch software. This will be further explained in Section D: About the Participants.

REFERENCES

Coogan, J. & Herrington, N. (2011). Q methodology: an overview. Research in Secondary Teacher Education, 1(2), 24-28. Retrieved March 10, 2019 from http://hdl.handle.net/10552/1414

3. Personal Safety

Have you completed your departmental risk assessment procedures, if appropriate?

In progress

Raises personal safety issues?

No

For Stage 1 of this research - to which this application relates - I will not directly make contact with or communicate with participants. As described in Section D, I will recruit participants by advertising the research. Participants will self-select whether or not they wish to be involved and will participate via anonymised, online software.

Section D: About the participants

1. Potential Participants

In addition to the participants of the Q-methodology Stage 1 of the research, I will make follow up contact with the Head of the West Sussex Library Service. Last year, I made initial contact to ask where I could find some information about the public libraries in West Sussex and to alert them to the PhD proposal. I think it is now important to make them aware that the PhD research project has been sanctioned through the Confirmation Review process. Details for how I would approach them are below in the "recruiting participants" section. Whilst it is not necessary to make contact with them for Stage 1 data collection, I would like them to be aware of the aims of my research and to elicit their support with recruiting participants for Stage 1.

Adults (18+) who live, work or study in West Sussex will be eligible to participate.
Potentially vulnerable participants will not be targeted in this study, however, I recognise that some participants who choose to undertake the Q-sort through self-selection could be deemed vulnerable by the University standards. The Q-sorting task does not ask about sensitive topics, but to mitigate against any potential harm or concerns, participants will be given information about the content of the task beforehand via the website detailed in the next subsection: recruiting potential participants.

The research will be advertised across West Sussex and potential participants will choose whether or not to participate. There will be no incentivisation.

2. Recruiting Potential Participants

CONTACTING THE HEAD OF WEST SUSSEX LIBRARY SERVICE
The Head of the West Sussex Library Service has a publicly available email address. I intend to email them to offer an initial conversation whereby I would explain my research proposal and also ascertain whether or not the research can be advertised in the public libraries and answer any questions they may have about the research (see Advertising for Participants, below). The research does not rely on support from West Sussex Library Service but it would be valuable nevertheless. The wording of my proposed email can be found in Supporting Document 3.

RECRUITING PARTICIPANTS

I will promote the research in four different ways. In each case, the same wording will be used: Supporting Document 4. The wording is basic because all the detailed information about the research and participation is provided on a separate website, as explained below (see Supporting Documents 5-8).

1) First, I will utilise social media platforms to promote the research across West Sussex.

I will employ the following strategies to advertise the research on social media platforms:

>> Twitter
* The full text of the recruitment post is too long for a tweet. Therefore, the strapline will be used (Have your say about public libraries and the services they could, should and do offer...), along with the link to the information website (www.publiclibraryresearch.org).
* The text full text for the recruitment post will then be attached as an image, with an aspect ratio of 16:9.
* Moreover, hashtags will be used to encourage visibility #PublicLibraries #PublicOpinion #WestSussex #HaveYourSay #PhDResearch
* The Twitter account has been created solely for the purpose of sharing this research project. My name, role and the University of Sheffield has been clearly identified: @PubLib_Research Once ethics approval has been achieved and the Q-sort is ready to use (post piloting), the URL for the research information site will also be included in the account's bio.

>> Instagram
* A similar approach to Twitter in that an image of the full text of the recruitment post will be used, this time in a 1:1 ratio.
* The same strapline, URL and hashtags will be used beneath the image.
* As with Twitter, a new account has been created solely for the purpose of sharing this research project. My name, role and the University of Sheffield have been clearly identified: @PubLib_Research Once ethics approval has been achieved and the Q-sort is ready to use (post piloting), the URL for the research information site will also be included in the account's bio.

>> Facebook
* I will seek to post the advertisement in a number of town and village community groups across West Sussex.
* West Sussex Library Services has categorised its libraries into 6 tiers, whereby tiers 1 - 3 libraries are the largest and most used. I will first look for local community groups where the tiers 1 - 3 libraries are based.
* I will identify these groups by performing a keyword search on Facebook: [name of town] + community group.
* The wording of the advertisement will be used in full on each Facebook post. I will check with community group moderators that posting an advertisement for research participants is within the group's rules.
* Unlike Twitter and Instagram, this process will use my existing account. However, I have taken steps to ensure maximum privacy settings which will minimise any potential harm. For instance, within community groups, the public will be able to engage with the Facebook post, however, they will not have access to the content on my own account.

2) Second, I will ask CILIP (Chartered Institute of Library and Information Professionals) to circulate the recruitment post with two of their networking groups: regional network - south east and special interest group - public and mobile libraries group. I will list the recruitment post on the members-only forums of these groups and ask interested parties to share it on, in the manner they deem most appropriate.

3) Third, I will reach out to contacts I have in community groups, businesses and educational organisations to ask them to circulate the advertisement within their organisations. I will provide the advertisement (Supporting Document 4) electronically and ask them to choose how best to share it.

4) Finally, subject to the success of my contact with the Head of West Sussex Library Services, I will ask the research to be advertised through the network of public libraries. I will provide the recruitment wording (as per Supporting Document 4) but will rely on the judgement of the West Sussex Library Service staff regarding the most effective method of sharing it.

PROVISION OF RESEARCH INFORMATION

If participants are interested in undertaking the Q-sort, they will access the detailed information about the research via the URL on the advertisement. This link will take them to a Wordpress site (www.publiclibraryresearch.org) which is not yet live: Supporting Document 5. I have chosen to pay a small fee to ensure the website as ad-free to provide a cleaner experience for participants and to minimise risk of inappropriate or harmful advertising content appearing to be associated with the project.

This site will include a single homepage with three pages:

1. What's the research all about?
2. How do I participate?
3. What do I do now?

The first web page will provide all the information about the purpose and scope of the research in lieu of a physical participant information sheet: Supporting Document 6 details the wording. It also providers the contact details of the researcher and supervision team.

The second web page will provide information about how the Q-sort software works: Supporting Document 7 provides this wording. In addition, there will be two short videos which demonstrate the different tasks on the software, Qsortouch. These have yet to be filmed because I will not have access to the software until I start my subscription - and I will do this once I have ethics approval. However, having used the software for a previous study, I know that it will be helpful for participants to see how the software works in advance of using it. The first video will show how to confirm consent, enter an area code and pre-sort the statement cards. The second video will show how to undertake the Q-sort process. I will use a random, unrelated topic such as most important and most unimportant foods. It will be filmed as a screencast so that participants can see the process and hear the commentary without seeing my face.

The third and final web page will indicate all of the consent statements: see Supporting Document 8. It will also explain the difference between library user and non-user so that participants can choose the link that relates to their self-identification. Each of the two links relates to a separate project on the Q-methodology online software. In this way, the data is collected separately for library users and library non-users.

2.1. Advertising methods

Will the study be advertised using the volunteer lists for staff or students maintained by CiCS? No

- not entered -

3. Consent

Will informed consent be obtained from the participants? (i.e. the proposed process) Yes

First, when participants access the information website, the first page provides them with all the details which would be on a physical participant information sheet (Supporting Document 6) in order that participants can give informed consent: research title, researcher and supervision team details, research purpose, participation information, confidentiality, details about data collection, storage and use.

Second, the third page of the website asks participants to decide whether or not they are library users or library non-users. It also provides all of the consent statements and indicates that proceeding to the online software means that participants are consenting to the terms of the research (Supporting Document 8). Moreover, the consent statements ask participants to confirm that they are over the age of 18.

Finally, once participants reach the online software, they land on a starting page. This will ask them to provide their area code (first 3 - 4 figures of their postcode) and will also repeat all of the consent statements from Supporting Document 8 along with the phrase "By clicking next, I agree with these statements and consent to participate in the research."

In this way, participants review and agree to the consent statements twice before participating, including to the minimum age of participation.

The consent statements make it clear that it is only possible for participants to withdraw up until they submit their answers. During the four different stages created by Qsortouch, participants will be asked to click "next" to proceed to the next task. After the last "next," participants are asked to "submit" their Qsortouch responses. At this point, the data is captured by the software; as the data is anonymised, it cannot be isolated in order to be deleted.

4. Payment

Will financial/in kind payments be offered to participants? No

5. Potential Harm to Participants

What is the potential for physical and/or psychological harm/distress to the participants?

There is nominal potential harm to participants during Stage 1 of the research because:
* there is no face to face contact between participant and researcher;
* the process is completely anonymised and no personal data will be collected;
* the research is non-invasive;
* the topic is not sensitive;
* contact details (both mine and those of my supervision team) have been clearly shared.

It is possible that participants will not appreciate how long participation will take which could be harmful if it is longer than expected.

How will this be managed to ensure appropriate protection and well-being of the participants?

It is possible that participants will not appreciate how long participation will take which could be harmful if it is longer than expected. This will be mitigated by providing likely times for each stage (see Supporting Document 7). At the moment, these are a prediction based on a previous study but I will update them once the pilot has been trialled and I have a more accurate estimate.

If participants do experience discomfort in undertaking the research, they are informed from the outset that they can withdraw from the study without detriment up until the point of pressing submit on the final software screen. If they withdraw by this point, all their data is removed from the project. After submitting, their data can no longer be isolated in order to be deleted because it is anonymised.

Section E: About the data

1. Data Processing

Will you be processing (i.e. collecting, recording, storing, or otherwise using) personal data as part of this project? (Personal data is any information relating to an identified or identifiable living person).
No

Please outline how your data will be managed and stored securely, in line with good practice and relevant funder requirements

The data collected for each participant:
* Area code (first 3 or 4 figures of their postcode)
* Library use status (library user or library non-user)
* The numeric values attributed to each statement card on Qsortouch.

The software does not capture or record personal data such as participants' names, contact information or identifying details. Participants are asked to confirm they are 18 by consenting to participating in the research. They first demonstrate this via the information website (www.publiclibraryresearch.org) by clicking on the URL to undertake the research. They are then reminded, again, that they must be 18+ to participate once they reach the online software page and they consent by clicking "next" to access the first task. Neither the website nor the online software capture this information.

Data format:
* Qsortouch enables the researcher to download the data in csv format.
* Each participant is represented by a row of data that indicates area code and then a numeric value for each statement card.
* The data will first exist as two csv files: one for library non-users and one for library users.
* Once analysis begins (factor analysis), additional graphs, charts and spreadsheets will be created in Excel.

Data storage:
* During data collection, the responses are encrypted and stored on Qsortouch. Responses can only be accessed by me and are password protected.
* Once the Qsortouch subscription period has expired, all data is deleted from the software.
* At the end of the data collection window, the downloaded csv files will be stored on the University's secure Google Drive.
* Moreover, the data will be backed up locally on a laptop and an external hard drive - both will be password protected.
* Once downloaded, the csv files will not change, therefore, backups will be checked once a fortnight. Analytic outcomes of the data will be subject to constant change; therefore, they will be backed up each time they are accessed or used.

Archiving data:
* My research is not subject to funder policies as it is self-funded.
* The raw csv files of participants' value judgements will be archived by myself on ORDA for the standard TUoS 10 year retention period.
* The factor analysis results - i.e. the interpretation of the data - will be published in my thesis, which will be held on WREO (the University's electronic thesis repository).

Section F: Supporting documentation

Information & Consent

Participant information sheets relevant to project?
Yes

Document 1082922 (Version 1) — All versions
Supporting Document 6: participant information sheet web page

Consent forms relevant to project?
Yes

Document 1082923 (Version 1) — All versions
Supporting Document 8: web page for informed consent and links to software

Additional Documentation

Document 1082874 (Version 1) — All versions
Supporting Document 1: research overview

Document 1082875 (Version 1) — All versions
Supporting Document 2: Q-methodology and Qsortouch

Document 1082876 (Version 1) — All versions
Supporting Document 3: email wording for initial contact with the Head of West Sussex Library Service

Document 1082924 (Version 1) — All versions
Supporting Document 4: wording for the participant recruitment posts

Document 1082879 (Version 1) — All versions
Supporting Document 7: how to participate web page

Document 1082878 (Version 1) — All versions
Supporting Document 5: the information website homepage

External Documentation

- not entered -

Section G: Declaration

Signed by:
Joanna-Louise McKenna-Aspell
Date signed:
Mon 5 October 2020 at 14:29

Offical notes

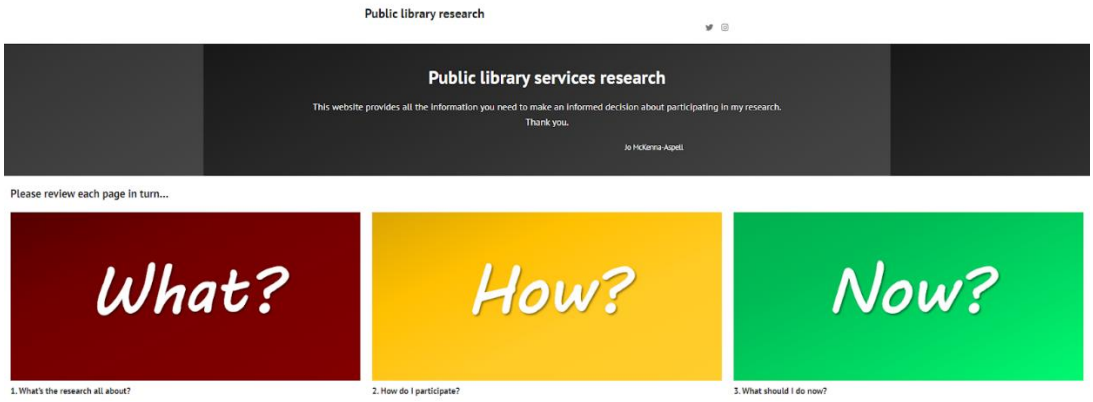
- not entered -

Final Decision on Application

Approved
Comments on approval:
An exemplary application (Peter Stordy)

Appendix 2: the Q studies website

Screenshot of the homepage



Sample of the "What?" page

What are the potential risks of participating?

There are no risks associated with participating as your views are anonymised and no personal data will be collected or stored.

What data will be collected?

- Qsortouch records where you placed each statement.
- Qsortouch will record if you are a library user or non-user because each type of participant is provided a different link to the task.
- Responses are anonymous.

Personal details, such as name, age, postal address or email address, will not be collected. The online platform does not require a login to access the task.

What will happen to the data?

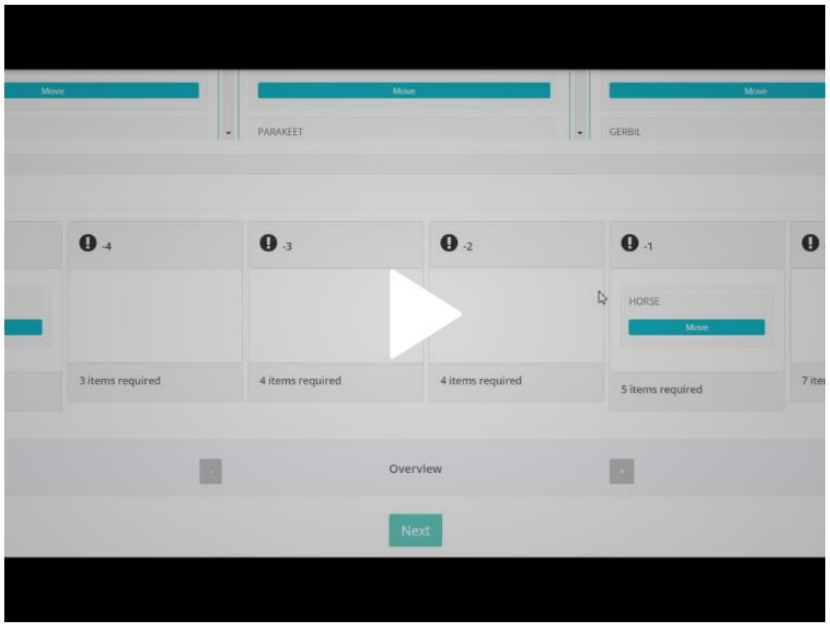
The data (your anonymous placement of the statements) will be stored on secure servers at the University of Sheffield. It will be password protected.

The anonymised data may be used for future research projects by myself, collaborators or other interested parties. Personal data will not be collected and, therefore, cannot be shared.

Sample of the "How?" page

You can move statements around if you change your mind. You should expect this to take **10 – 15 minutes.**

This video provides a demonstration of the second step.



Sample of the "Now?" page

Time to start...

To access the online software, please read the definitions of *library user* and *library non-user* below and click the link which relates to you.

Library user

- I am 18 years old or older.
- I live, work or study in West Sussex.
- **If one or more of the following statements is true, for the purpose of this research, you are a *library user*:**
  - I *have* visited a public library or public libraries in West Sussex within the last five years.
  - I *have* borrowed physical resources from a public library in West Sussex within the last five years.
  - I *have* borrowed eBooks, eMagazines or audiobooks from a public library in West Sussex within the last five years
  - My child / children *have* used the services in a public library in West Sussex within the last five years.
  - I *have* attended an event held at / organised by a public library in West Sussex within the last five years.
  - I *have* used the website, catalogue or online facilities of West Sussex Library Services within the last five years.

Appendix 3: sample of the reading plan used to review the literature

Strategies
I really like the work of Ellis & Haugan and Erdelez in terms of information seeking behaviours with the SCONUL pillars of information literacy >>> below, I've combined them.

- Planning: generate a list of topics, plausible search locations, key words and synonyms
- Starting / surveying: use Google and Google Scholar with keyword list / synonyms to carry out an initial sweep of what exists; reach out to people and organisations that might be able to signpost relevant materials (this includes asking people who have spoken on similar topics at conferences etc.)
- Scoping: figure out knowledge and information gaps and which gaps are starting to present themselves in the literature already out there… return to the plan and adapt as necessary
- Browsing: read summaries to see if they are relevant – for books, this can be reviews or contents pages or using ctrl+f in e-book; in articles, this can be abstracts / contents pages
- Chaining: look at the bibliographies and reference lists of read materials and then perform more browsing; also, chaining can further develop the language of a topic and add to key words and synonyms
- Differentiating: apply limitations to refine browsed materials (for instance, post 2009 as a date range or UK); depending on the activity, use filters or Boolean operators
- Extracting: working texts / materials one at a time to extract information – actively writing notes and pulling quotations
- Encountering: to be open to information encountering (for instance, it was when reading an example thesis for ELT6052 to look at research questions, I saw another student had dedicated a section within her methodology chapter to exploring philosophical assumptions. This inspired me to look at the same - although our philosophical assumptions are different, I liked her *take* on Burrell and Morgan's approach… I was able to find their research/writing by chaining the student's bibliography).

Topics (from which themes could develop) for the literature review
This is one example. Other example topics (coupled with public libraries) included: West Sussex Library Service, local authorities, public perceptions, governance, law, existing perceptions studies

What	**Where**	**Search terms**	**Synonyms / additional terms**
Public libraries - History - Definition - Funding - Purpose / ideology	Library catalogues ● *StarPlus (Sheffield)* ● *Library (Sheffield / Chichester - after pandemic!)* Library textbooks / academic	Filters / limitations… (all searches combined with these) - England / UK	History - Timeline Definition - Meaning Purpose - Function

- Closures - Changes - Professional bodies / organisations - Perceptions - Campaigns - Current landscape	texts ● *Librarianship: an introduction* ● *The public library* (McMenemy) ● *Ranganathan* ● *Minds Alive* (request for eBook copy to be purchased via StarPlus) Databases ● *LISA* ● *SCOPUS* ● *ASSIA* ● *Westlaw* Journals ● *JOLIS* ● *Library Management* ● *Library & Information Research* ● *Library Quarterly* ● *Library Trends* ● *The Bottom Line* ● *New Library World* ● *Library and Information Science Research* Directory *http://www.facetpublishing.co.uk/title.php?id=048019&category_code=601#.Xr6s52hKhPY* Websites / information published online ● *http://www.designinglibraries.org.uk/?PageID=80* ● Annual report to Parliament on public library activities [here] ● *https://www.gov.uk/search/policy-papers-and-consultations* ● *https://www.publiclibrariesnews.com/author/iananstice0412* ● *https://leonslibraryblog.com/reports-reviews-and-research-into-public-libraries/* ● *https://england.librarydata.uk/* ● *https://www.gov.uk/government/organisations/department-for-digital-culture-media-*	- Post-2009 - Public not academic libraries - "Public librar*" AND history AND England OR UK - "Public librar*" AND definition - "Public librar*" AND purpose - "Public librar*" AND ideology - "Public librar*" AND closure* - "Public librar*" AND funding AND England - "Public librar*" AND change* - "Public librar*" AND "professional bod*" [I want to see what they have published / commented re: purpose, definition, ideology, closures, funding and changes] - "Public librar*" AND perception* - "Public librar*" AND campaign* - "Public	- Scope Ideology - Mission - Aim(s) - Goal(s) - Objective(s) Closure - "Reduced hours" - "Reduced opening times" - "Opening times" AND change Funding - Funds - Budget - "Financial allocation" Change - Development(s) Professional bodies/ organisations - CILIP - JISC - Libraries Connected - Libraries Taskforce - IFLA (global) - ACE - Reading Agency Perceptions - View - Opinion - Value Campaigns - Promotion / promoting - Championing Current landscape - Use - Footfall - "Current

	sport ● *https://www.gov.uk/government/organisations/department-for-digital-culture-media-sport/about/research* ● *https://www.countycouncilsnetwork.org.uk/councils-reduce-their-expenditure-on-libraries-museums-and-arts-by-400m-in-the-last-decade/* ● *Leon's Library Blog* ● *http://www.librarycampaign.com/resources/* ● *https://readingagency.org.uk/about/impact/001-library-facts/*	librar*" AND "current landscape"	picture"

Appendix 4: full list of Phase Two concourse sources

Those sources marked with * are strategic documents from other library authorities within the same profile group as West Sussex County Council (CIPFA, 2018c).

- Appleton et al. (2018): UK public library roles and value: a focus group analysis.
- Axiell (2017): A review of UK public libraries in 2017: a guide for delivering sustainable, community-centred services.
- Black (2011): 'We don't do public libraries like we used to': attitudes to public library buildings in the UK at the start of the 21st century.
- BOP Consulting (2014): Evidence review of the economic contribution of libraries.
- Boughey & Cooper (2010): Public libraries: political vision versus public demand?
- Casselden et al. (2019): Keeping the doors open in an age of austerity? Qualitative analysis of stakeholder views on volunteers in public libraries.
- Chartered Institute of Public Finance and Accountancy (2018c): West Sussex County Council: CIPFAstats comparative profile.
- Charteris (2009): Independent report: a Local Inquiry into the Public Library Service Provided by Wirral Metropolitan Borough Council.
- Coates (2019): On the closure of English public libraries.
- Coates (2020): The Freckle report, 2020: an analysis of public libraries US, UK and Australia.
- Culture, Media and Sport Committee (2012): Library closures: third report of session 2012 - 2013: volume 1 HC587 2012-2013.
- Department for Culture, Media and Sport (2010): The modernisation review of public libraries: a policy statement.
- Department for Culture, Media & Sport (2016b): Taking part focus on: libraries.
- Department for Digital, Culture, Media & Sport (2017b): Full (recommended) Benchmarking Framework for library services (Version 1: September 2017).
- Essex County Council & Essex Library Services (2019): Essex future library services consultation.*
- Fletcher (2019): Public libraries, arts and cultural policy in the UK
- Fujiwara et al. (2015): The health and wellbeing benefits of public libraries: full report.
- Gloucestershire County Council (2012): A strategy for library services in Gloucestershire 2012.*
- Goulding (2013): The big society and English public libraries: where are we now?
- Halpin et al. (2015): Measuring the value of public libraries in the digital age: what the power people need to know.
- Hampshire County Council (2016): Library service transformation: strategy to 2020.*
- Hariff & Rowley (2011): Branding of UK public libraries.
- Hertfordshire County Council (2014): Inspiring libraries: a new strategy for Hertfordshire libraries 2014 - 2024.*
- Independent Mind (2019): Scoping towards a blueprint for public library development and sustainability in England.
- Involve & Dialogue by Design (2013): Envisioning the library of the future phase 3: understanding what people value about libraries.
- Ipsos MORI & Shared Intelligence (2012). Envisioning the library of the future phases 1 and 2: full report.

- Lee et al. (2019): Strategic review of the Universal Offers.
- Libraries Connected (2018a): Library activity in England 2017/08.
- Libraries Taskforce (2016): Libraries deliver: ambition for public libraries 2016-2021.
- Libraries Unlimited (2020): Annual report 2019/2020.*
- Library and Information Service (2018): East Sussex libraries: the way forward: strategic commissioning strategy 2018/19 to 2022/23.*
- Local Government Association (2017): Delivering local solutions for public library services: a guide for councillors.
- Macdonald (2012): A new chapter: public library services in the 21st century.
- McCahill et al. (2020): Investigating the public response to local government decisions to reduce or remove public library services.
- Mears (2019): Universal offers: next steps.
- McMenemy (2009b): Rise and demise of neoliberalism: time to reassess the impact of public libraries.
- McMenemy (2009c): Public library closures in England: the need to Act?
- North Yorkshire County Council (2020): Your library, your place 2020 - 2030: draft libraries strategy 2020 - 2030.*
- Opinion Research Services (2016): Hampshire County Council: library consultation 2015/2016.*
- Public Libraries and Museums Act (1964).
- Shared Intelligence & Ipsos MORI Social Research Institute (2010): What do the public want from libraries? User and non-user research - full research report.
- Sieghart (2014): Independent library report for England.
- Somerset County Council (2017): Somerset Libraries: vision, strategic direction and outcomes framework 2017 - 2021.*
- Suffolk Libraries (2019): Making lives better: our vision for 2019 - 2022.*
- Taylor (2010): Safer & stronger communities scrutiny committee.*
- Warwickshire Library & Information Service (2016): Warwickshire Library & Information Service stock policy 2016 - 2020.*

Local authorities within the same profile group as West Sussex County Council (CIPFA, 2018c)

Authority	**Included in concourse**
West Sussex	No relevant material at the time the concourse was generated
East Sussex	Yes
Hampshire	Yes
Essex	Yes
Gloucestershire	Yes
Devon	Yes
Warwickshire	Yes
Kent	No relevant material at the time the concourse was generated

Worcestershire	No relevant material at the time the concourse was generated
Oxfordshire	Yes
Suffolk	Yes
North Yorkshire	Yes
Hertfordshire	Yes
Dorset	No relevant material at the time the concourse was generated
Somerset	Yes
Buckinghamshire	No relevant material at the time the concourse was generated

Appendix 5: social media recruitment examples

Facebook post example

Hi. I'm still looking for people to participate in my PhD research - exploring public opinions of public libraries in England. I thought I'd provide some more info...

WHO?
Anyone 18+ who works, lives or studies in West Sussex.

WHAT?
It's an online card sorting activity. I've summarised all the things a public library can do in England to 45 statements. Participants are asked to sort these into a specific pattern which shows me how you value them. It's completely anonymous.

HOW?
Normally, we'd do this in person with a set of cards and I could bribe you with coffee, tea and cake! But *waves at Covid* we can't do that now, so I've found an online software that does the job. It behaves best on a laptop or PC so you have a mouse to drag and drop the statements. You can do it on a tablet or phone but it can be fiddly. I'll be honest, it takes between 20 and 30 minutes to complete so *waves at Covid again* I'm struggling to find enough participants.

CAN YOU HELP?
All the terms and conditions and some demo videos about how it works are at www.publiclibraryresearch.org

If you're someone who uses a public library, even infrequently, the link to the card sorting activity is here: https://tinyurl.com/y3s8ujyv

If you're someone who doesn't use a public library, the link to the card sorting activity is here: https://tinyurl.com/y4hvcto3

Jo

(PhD Student living in West Sussex and studying with the University of Sheffield.)

Instagram post example

Join in with my research into public opinions of public libraries.

For anyone who works, studies or lives in West Sussex.

Head to www.publiclibraryresearch.org for all the details

#PublicLibraries #HaveYourSay

Twitter post example

Paws up - who can help with my research?

WHO? Folks who live/work/study in #WestSussex

WHAT? Online card sorting activity about #PublicLibraries

HOW? For the project info and activity links, head to publiclibraryresearch.org

You'll need 30 mins and a laptop.

#PhDResearch

Appendix 6: Q Study 1 factor arrays in table format

No.	Item	Factor A	Factor B
1	be inclusive and support social justice	0	+5
2	provide learning and education opportunities	-1	-1
3	promote literacy	+3	+1
4	provide cultural opportunities	-2	0
5	support digital inclusion	-1	+2
6	provide a comprehensive and efficient library service	+1	-4
7	loan physical print items	+5	-5
8	loan a range of physical items	+2	-3
9	provide free services	+4	+1
10	work with other organisations and services	-2	-3
11	provide high quality stock	+3	-3
12	meet the needs of children and young people	+4	+3
13	support democracy	-4	+1
14	work with the community	0	-1
15	comply with relevant laws	+1	0
16	provide services to support employment	-4	+4
17	provide clear guidance about the library service	+1	-1
18	encourage the public to connect with others	-1	+4
19	link people to information	+5	0
20	address social isolation	-3	+5
21	provide spaces for different needs	-1	0
22	employ and develop professional staff	+3	+2
23	offer leisure based services	-3	-2
24	be people-focused	+2	+2
25	work with families	0	+4
26	provide specialist services	-3	-1
27	deliver core services	+4	0
28	deliver some services digitally	+2	+1
29	provide pleasant environments	+1	0
30	offer a range of facilities	-1	+1
31	promote the library service	+1	-1
32	support the health and wellbeing of the public	-5	+3
33	be accessible	+2	+3
34	demonstrate good customer service	0	-2
35	focus on reading as their core purpose	+3	+3
36	arrange events and activities	-1	-1
37	involve volunteers	-2	-2
38	provide alternative service models	-3	-4

39	operate effectively and viably	0	-2
40	be trustworthy	0	+2
41	provide information, advice and guidance	-2	-5
42	demonstrate impact and value	-4	-4
43	offer outreach services	+1	+1
44	innovate and modernise the library service	0	-3
45	promote prosperity	-5	0

Appendix 7: Q Study 2 factor arrays in table format

No.	Item	Factor C	Factor D	Factor E
1	be inclusive and support social justice	-1	-1	0
2	provide learning and education opportunities	-1	-3	-4
3	promote literacy	+2	+3	-4
4	provide cultural opportunities	-2	-1	-3
5	support digital inclusion	0	+5	+2
6	provide a comprehensive and efficient library service	-1	+3	-1
7	loan physical print items	+4	+4	+1
8	loan a range of physical items	+3	-3	+4
9	provide free services	+3	+1	+2
10	work with other organisations and services	-3	+2	0
11	provide high quality stock	+4	-1	+2
12	meet the needs of children and young people	+1	+1	-1
13	support democracy	-4	0	-5
14	work with the community	+1	+1	-2
15	comply with relevant laws	-1	+3	0
16	provide services to support employment	-4	-4	-3
17	provide clear guidance about the library service	0	0	+1
18	encourage the public to connect with others	-1	-2	-2
19	link people to information	+5	+4	+4
20	address social isolation	-2	0	-4
21	provide spaces for different needs	0	-2	0
22	employ and develop professional staff	+5	+3	+1
23	offer leisure based services	0	-5	+1
24	be people-focused	+3	0	0
25	work with families	+1	-5	-2
26	provide specialist services	-3	-2	-1
27	deliver core services	+3	+1	+3

28	deliver some services digitally	+1	0	+5
29	provide pleasant environments	+2	0	+1
30	offer a range of facilities	0	0	-1
31	promote the library service	+2	+2	+2
32	support the health and wellbeing of the public	-3	-4	-5
33	be accessible	0	+4	-1
34	demonstrate good customer service	+2	+1	+3
35	focus on reading as their core purpose	+4	+2	-2
36	arrange events and activities	0	+1	0
37	involve volunteers	-5	-1	+3
38	provide alternative service models	-4	-2	+4
39	operate effectively and viably	-2	-1	+1
40	be trustworthy	+1	+5	-3
41	provide information, advice and guidance	-1	-4	-1
42	demonstrate impact and value	-3	-1	+3
43	offer outreach services	+1	-3	0
44	innovate and modernise the library service	-2	+2	+5
45	promote prosperity	-5	-3	-3

Appendix 8: Q Study 1 crib sheet

Key		
	Highest ranked items	**Items ranked higher than other factors**
	Ranked at +5	Includes items ranked in -X
	Lowest ranked items	**Items ranked lower than other factors**
	Ranked at -5	Includes items ranked in +X
	Distinguishing items	
	$p < 0.1$	

Highest ranked items		**Factor A**	**Factor B**
7	**Loan physical print items** Examples: loan books, newspapers, periodicals and magazines	5	-5
19	**Link people to information** Examples: provide access to print and online information, provide access to academic journals, share information in all formats, provide access to reference materials, provide access to local history and information, collect different information resources, connect people to the information and knowledge they need	5	0
Items ranked higher than other factors			
27	**Deliver core services** Examples: allow renewals and reservations online or in person, respond to enquiries online and in person, provide systems for people to request specific items, enable users to reserve items across the network of libraries, provide free access to the catalogue in the libraries and online, loan items	4	0
9	**Provide free services** Examples: loan items, provide services for schools, connect people to information	4	1
12	**Meet the needs of children and young people** Examples: stock fiction and non-fiction for children and young people, work with schools, promote the library to young people, support learning and literacy development, organise reading challenges, provide age appropriate activities, clubs and events	4	3
22	**Employ and develop professional staff** Examples: employ skilled, helpful, knowledgeable staff, provide high quality training and workshops for staff, recruit a diverse workforce, ensure training is focused on improving the service for the public, share best practice with libraries across the UK and internationally	3	2
11	**Provide high quality stock** Examples: replace damaged stock, coordinate stock purchase and circulation across all the libraries, use public opinions to inform stock development, make sure the collection is extensive and includes different formats	3	-3
3	**Promote literacy** Examples: organise literacy focused activities, support communication skills for children	3	1
8	**Loan a range of physical items** Examples: loan CDs, DVDs, computer games, pictures, audiobooks, records, toys, CD-ROMs, learning packs, multi-media packs	2	-3

28	**Deliver some services digitally** Examples: loan eBooks, eAudiobooks and eMagazines, create a 24/7 library service with digital services, provide a useful website offer online reservations, respond to enquiries online, offer online renewals, send emails/text messages, promote the eLibrary	2	1
31	**Promote the library service** Examples: increase the visibility of libraries in the community, provide consistent branding, create display to engage different audiences, communicate the purpose of the library service, encourage more people to use the library service, promote the benefits of using a library, have a social media presence	1	-1
29	**Provide pleasant environments** Examples: provide library buildings, make sure signage is clear, make sure furniture, fittings and equipment are in good condition, carry out regular maintenance, make sure buildings are warm, clean, well-lit and attractive	1	0
17	**Provide clear guidance about the library service** Examples: communicate any charges for additional services, publish information about the service online, publicise the opening hours, provide advice about how to use the library service	1	-1
15	**Comply with relevant laws** Examples: Public Libraries and Museums Act 1964, data protection laws, Equality Act 2010	1	0
6	**Provide a comprehensive and efficient library service** Details: this is a key phrase from the public libraries legislation	1	-4
34	**Demonstrate good customer service** Examples: communicate with the public in a variety of ways, provide a click and collect service, ensure people receive efficient and prompt services, create feedback systems, offer facilities for customer convenience, consider library users as customers, employ managers who improve customer experience	0	-2
44	**Innovate and modernise the library service** Examples: embrace changing technologies, monitor future library trends, provide self-service terminals, improve the service to meet changing public needs, adopt ideas from other libraries	**0**	**-3**
14	**Work with the community** Examples: act as a hub, provide community spaces, support community events and activities, connect people to community groups, work with community mobilisers, involve the community in decision making	0	-1
39	**Operate effectively and viably** Examples: produce a strategy, write investment plans, reduce costs, generate income, communicate service value to funders, demonstrate good leadership	0	-2
41	**Provide information, advice and guidance** Examples: connect people to community resources, arrange NHS clinics, organise advice drop-ins, signpost other public services, help vulnerable people to access council services, stock self-help books, offer books on prescription, arrange therapeutic reading groups	-2	-5
10	**Work with other organisations and services** Examples: work with other public services, support local government priorities, provide access to council services online, provide interlibrary loans, link with charities, coordinate with libraries across the UK, support the NHS, partner with commercial businesses, work with other libraries	-2	-3

38	**Provide alternative service models** Examples: support community-led and volunteer-led libraries, offer unstaffed libraries, provide digital library services, facilitate co-production models, co-locate by sharing space with public services like Citizens Advice Bureau and the Job Centre	-3	-4
Lowest ranked items			
32	**Support the health and wellbeing of the public** Examples: promote health campaigns, provide access to health checks, help develop the confidence of individuals, buy stock that promotes health and wellbeing, arrange NHS clinics, arrange books on prescription, help combat loneliness and depression, provide health information	-5	3
45	**Promote prosperity** Examples: be involved in local regeneration, support small / new businesses, contribute to individual and community prosperity, benefit the local area by increasing footfall to local shops	-5	0
Items ranked lower than other factors			
16	**Provide services to support employment** Examples: offer meeting places, arrange employability training such as CV writing, display careers information, offer co-working and enterprise spaces	-4	4
13	**Support democracy** Examples: provide access to political information, support the development of citizenship, help people to fulfil their societal obligations, serve as a meeting place to help people to be active citizens	-4	1
23	**Offer leisure based services** Examples: stock leisure and recreational materials, offer entertainment opportunities, provide space to relax, help people to explore their interests	-3	-2
26	**Provide specialist services** Examples: accommodate special collections, provide digital making opportunities, loan choral and orchestral sets for music groups, arrange music courses, provide genealogy research materials, provide access to academic articles and research	-3	-1
20	**Address social isolation** Examples: arrange events and activities to tackle social isolation, stock resources aimed at social inclusion, provide outreach services, support independent living for older people, combat loneliness, provide safe and inclusive spaces	-3	5
4	**Provide cultural opportunities** Examples: host exhibitions, provide access to local heritage materials, work with other cultural organisations	-2	0
5	**Support digital inclusion** Examples: provide WiFi, provide access to the internet and computers, make sure there is assistive technology, offer IT support, provide digital skills training, organise coding clubs, provide access to computers, make sure IT provision is accessible, offer facilities to charge personal devices, loan CD-ROMs and software, provide access to printers, photocopiers and fax machines	-1	2
21	**Provide spaces for different needs** Examples: offer meeting spaces, provide maker-spaces, cater for groups, provide spaces for individual privacy, use zones for different purposes, provide space for reading, share space with other organisations	-1	0

30	**Offer a range of facilities** Examples: provide clean toilets, offer an on-site café, offer an on-site shop, hire out equipment like projectors, provide access to printers, maintain and fix facilities and equipment	-1	1
18	**Encourage the public to connect with others** Examples: provide meeting spaces, offer opportunities to develop friendships, support people to communicate with others, connect people to groups, act as a free third space (neither work nor home), help people share experiences, provide access to work, community and social networks	**-1**	**4**
40	**Be trustworthy** Examples: provide safe spaces, be supportive, provide trusted information and guidance, uphold ethical principles, provide non-judgemental spaces, provide uncensored and impartial access to information, demonstrate neutrality	0	2
25	**Work with families** Examples: loan toys, support disadvantaged families, arrange story time, organise reading challenges, provide children's activities, provide childcare or crèche facilities	0	4
1	**Be inclusive and support social justice** Examples: work with disadvantaged families, support vulnerable adults, design services for people with disabilities, provide services for non-English speakers, help reduce social exclusion, be inclusive, promote equality	0	5
33	**Be accessible** Examples: make sure buildings are accessible, offer extended opening hours, make sure IT provision is accessible, display stock accessibly, offer a postal book service, make sure people can easily get to a library, make sure service is consistent across the library network	2	3
Other			
35	**Focus on reading as their core purpose** Examples: organise reading groups, loan different kinds of books, create displays about reading, encourage young people to read, promote the benefits of reading, involve the public in stock choices, arrange books for reading groups, organise reading-related activities and events, focus on services related to reading, give advice about reading	3	3
24	**Be people-focused** Examples: understand the needs of users and non-users, prioritise public needs above funders' demands, offer a cradle-to-grave service, help users to satisfy their curiosities, meet the needs of older people, children and young people, involve the public in decision making, organise consultations, react to public voice	2	2
43	**Offer outreach services** Examples: visit schools, organise pop up libraries, arrange a postal book service, offer a mobile / home library service, loan book collections to community groups, visit community spaces, work with homeless centres, provide a prison library service	1	1
36	**Arrange events and activities** Examples: organise workshops, provide opportunities to meet authors, support reading groups, arrange live readings, provide space for community-led events, offer lectures, arrange activities for children, organise language classes, set up homework support	-1	-1

2	**Provide learning and education opportunities** Examples: arrange adult training courses, collaborate with education organisations, provide learning resources	-1	-1
37	**Involve volunteers** Examples: engage volunteers to support library activity, use volunteers to fill staff gaps, provide volunteering opportunities for a diverse range of people, support volunteer-led libraries, train and manage volunteers	-2	-2
42	**Demonstrate impact and value** Examples: measure user satisfaction, undertake performance self-assessment, communicate success criteria for the service, publish performance outputs, communicate service value to all stakeholders, make evidence-based decisions, measure footfall, book issues and event attendance	-4	-4

Appendix 9: factor interpretation for Q Study 2's Factor D^{-ve}

Factor D^{-ve} interpretation: public libraries are for families and fun

Public libraries should be places that encourage people to explore their interests (23: +5). Library non-users are ambivalent about public library services addressing social isolation (20: 0) but recognise public libraries are good spaces to encourage the public to connect with one another through groups, networks (18: +2) and common interests (23: +5). Whilst it is not essential that libraries are pleasant environments (29: 0) or that they offer a range of facilities (30: 0) like toilets and cafés, they should be spaces that cater to different needs (21: +2) and encourage people to relax (23: +5). Offering specialist services (26: +2) and alternative service models (38: +2), such as co-locating other public services, ensures different needs are met within public library spaces. That said, sharing spaces with other public services (38: +2) does not mean public libraries should work with organisations (10: -2) to support local government priorities.

It is the duty of public libraries to work with the whole family structure (25: +5), rather than to target the needs of children and young people (12: -1). The support offered to families should improve lives; for instance, public libraries can support the health and wellbeing of the public (32: +4), help people to find employment opportunities (16: +4) and promote prosperity (45: +4). Moreover, public library services are able to enrich lives through education (2: +3) and cultural opportunities (4: +1).

Furthermore, library non-users believe public libraries can be inclusive (1: +1) by supporting disadvantaged families, vulnerable people and those at risk of social exclusion. For instance, they should provide outreach services (43: +3) to community groups, prisons and homeless centres. Despite this, library non-users do not think public library services should aim to be accessible (33: -4), nor do they believe public library services should be trustworthy (50: -5) in terms of impartiality, neutrality or uncensored access to information. Additionally, library non-users are not convinced that public libraries should be concerned with complying with laws such as the Public Libraries and Museums Act 1964 or the Equality Act 2010 (15: -3).

The services provided by public libraries should not be limited to the loaning (27: -1) of printed reading materials (7: -4) or the promotion of literacy (3: -3) or reading (35: -2).

Instead, public libraries should ensure they loan a range of physical items (8: +3), keeping stock up to date and working with the public to make sure collections are desirable (11: +1). Rather than linking the public to information (19: -4) by providing access to information sources, public libraries should be more involved by directly offering information, advice and guidance (41: +4) through organising reading groups, offering books on prescription, signposting other services and arranging clinics and drop-ins. However, library non-users are ambivalent about the role of public libraries in supporting democracy (13: 0) by providing access to political information or helping people to be active citizens.

Because public libraries need to operate effectively and viably (39: +1), the involvement of volunteers (37: +1) can help to cost effectively support library activity, rather than the employment and development of professional staff (22: -3). Furthermore, public libraries should not engage with services, activities or changes which would incur extra costs (5: -5; 31: -2; 44: -2; 9: -1; 36: -1; 28: 0). In addition to being financially viable (39: +1), public libraries should demonstrate impact and value (42: +1) by measuring and communicating effectiveness. Evidencing strategic planning, income generation (39: +1) and performance outputs (42: +1) to their funding sources is moderately more important for public libraries than being people-focused, prioritising public needs (24: 0), working with the community (14: -1) or demonstrating good customer service (34: -1).

Appendix 10: inter-study comparison researcher notes

There's very little written on Q study comparison. Watts & Stenner (2012) offer three methods:

A. Qualitatively compare your interpretations.
B. Create a correlation matrix from your data to signpost similarities and differences in the studies' factors.
C. Undertake a second order factor analysis (SOFA), whereby the factor arrays become new data and are subjected to full factor analysis again to see if "super factors" (p.54) are created – in essence, it's a new Q study.
D. Pooled sample analysis - using all Q sorts from both Q studies as the new dataset.

Option B: correlation matrix v1
Study 1: Factor A and Factor B
Study 2: Factor C, Factor D and Factor E

Correlations between the factors (using their arrays as Q sorts in KenQ)...

		Q Study 1		**Q Study 2**		
		Factor A	**Factor B**	**Factor C**	**Factor D**	**Factor E**
Q Study 1	**Factor A**	100	1	87	55	38
	Factor B	1	100	6	0	-47
Q Study 2	**Factor C**	87	6	100	40	29
	Factor D	55	0	40	100	18
	Factor E	38	-47	29	18	100

38 = significance (as per 0.3847 significant loading)

Option B: correlation matrix v2
Study 1: Factor A and Factor B
Study 2: Factor C, Factor D+ve, Factor D-ve and Factor E

To create another correlation matrix that includes Factor D-ve, I had to enter the mirrored factor array as a Q sort.

Correlation matrix, viewing Factor D+ve and Factor D-ve as separate entities...

	Factor A	**Factor B**	**Factor C**	**Factor D+ve**	**Factor D-ve**	**Factor E**
Factor A	100	1	87	55	-55	38
Factor B	1	100	6	0	0	-47
Factor C	87	6	100	40	-40	29

Factor D+ve	55	0	40	100	-100	18
Factor D-ve	-55	0	-40	-100	100	-18
Factor E	38	-47	29	18	-18	100

Option C: second order factor analysis (SOFA)

- Factor arrays inputting as Q sorts
- Decisions as per Q studies
    - Varimax rotation
    - Significant loading at <p0.01 is 0.3847
- First iteration is with Factor D as a single factor = Factor A, Factor B, Factor C, Factor D, Factor E as the Q sorts

First iteration

Unrotated factor matrix

Participant	**Factor 1**	**Factor 2**	**Factor 3**	**Factor 4**	**Factor 5**
Factor A	0.9294	0.3983	0.2632	0.2108	-0.0336
Factor B	-0.1498	0.5259	-0.2738	0.1437	0.1237
Factor C	0.7031	0.341	0.1808	0.0792	0.1231
Factor D	0.4778	0.192	0.0605	0.0108	-0.1388
Factor E	0.5857	-0.526	0.2738	-0.1437	0.0633
Eigenvalues	1.952	0.8649	0.2555	0.0921	0.0549
% explained Variance	39	17	5	2	1

Results indicate a one factor solution is plausible.

Factor matrix with flagged sorts at <p0.01

Q sort	**Factor 1**	
Factor A	1.0579	flagged
Factor B	0.0736	
Factor C	0.7942	flagged
Factor D	0.5179	flagged
Factor E	0.2842	
% explained variance	42	

- Three original factors load onto one super factor.
- Factors B and E do not load.
- Not surprised C and D load onto the same factor because factor score correlation was above significance.
- Although Factor D has a low weighted score.
- Indicates A / C / D share similar views.

Q sort weights

Q sort	Weight
Factor A	10
Factor C	2.4225
Factor D	0.7971

SOFA is a useful way to view and compare the two studies. But as only one super factor was created which doesn't capture all the original factors, this isn't proving very useful. Therefore, I'll trial a 2nd iteration of the second order factor analysis - this time, inputting both Factor D-ve and Factor D+ve as separate Q sorts.

Second iteration

- Factor arrays inputting as Q sorts
- Decisions as per Q studies
    - Varimax rotation
    - Significant loading at <p0.01 is 0.3847
- Second iteration of the SOFA is with the bipolar factor's two factor arrays = Factor A, Factor B, Factor C, Factor D+ve, Factor D-ve and Factor E as the Q sorts
- This was a trial to see what happened because, ultimately, Factor D-ve only exists because I created it, in response to Factor D being bipolar

Unrotated factor matrix

Participant	Factor 1	Factor 2	Factor 3	Factor 4	Factor 5
Factor A	0.8481	0.1818	0.3319	0.3564	0.0582
Factor B	-0.1161	-0.1805	0.4957	-0.0442	0.2407
Factor C	0.6486	0.169	0.3386	0.3564	0.0513
Factor D+ve	0.7491	-0.57	-0.0943	0.1622	0.154
Factor D-ve	-0.7491	0.57	0.0943	-0.1622	-0.154
Factor E	0.4832	0.4369	-0.4961	0.2938	-0.2414
Eigenvalues	2.5094	0.935	0.7345	0.3661	0.1696

% explained Variance	42	16	12	6	3

Results indicate a single factor solution is plausible - with an Eigenvalue of 0.935, Factor 2 is narrowly insignificant. Just in case, I'll see what happens after rotation.

Factor matrix with flagged sorts at <p0.01

Q sort	**Factor 1**		**Factor 2**		**Factor 3**	
Factor A	0.8742	flagged	0.3019		0.0847	
Factor B	0.0993		-0.0287		-0.5302	flagged
Factor C	0.7262	flagged	0.1906		0.0087	
Factor D+ve	0.2528		0.9099	flagged	0.0563	
Factor D-ve	-0.2528		-0.9099	flagged	-0.0563	
Factor E	0.2795		0.0504		0.7681	flagged
% explained variance	25		30		15	

- Only Factor 1 is viable with an Eigenvalue > 1.
- The original correlation matrix already showed me that Factors A and C (loaded onto Factor 1) share similar viewpoints, so the SOFA didn't help with any new information.
- I'm a bit gutted about this as it was the most approved process in the Q community.

Option D: pooled sample analysis

- First step is to combine all 68 Q sorts from both studies and enter them into KenQ. U1-27 are the users from Study 1 and NU1-NU41 are the non-users from Study 2.
- I then ran factor extraction several times, using the same decisions as per the individual Q studies
    - Varimax rotation
    - Significant loading at <p0.01 is 0.3847

6 factor solution

- 17 Q sorts not included
- 5 non-loading Q sorts
- 12 confounded Q sorts
- Factor 2, Factor 3, Factor 6 all bipolar factors

	Factor 1	Factor 2	Factor 3	Factor 4	Factor 5	Factor 6
Total Q sorts	34	5	3	2	4	3

Eigenvalue	27.2889	3.2395	3.4894	1.885	1.8526	1.6045
% Variance (post rotation)	31	5	4	6	7	5

Looks plausible but too many factors have a significant correlation.

Factor score correlations for a 6 factor solution…

	Factor 1	**Factor 2**	**Factor 3**	**Factor 4**	**Factor 5**	**Factor 6**
Factor 1	1	0.335	-0.0826	**0.5407**	**0.6142**	0.216
Factor 2	0.335	1	0.013	**0.4259**	**0.5532**	0.099
Factor 3	-0.0826	0.013	1	-0.0553	-0.1637	0.0191
Factor 4	**0.5407**	**0.4259**	-0.0553	1	**0.5501**	0.0102
Factor 5	**0.6142**	**0.5532**	-0.1637	**0.5501**	1	0.2223
Factor 6	0.216	0.099	0.0191	0.0102	0.2223	1

Because of this, I ran more extractions to see outcomes.

Factor score correlations for a 5 factor solution…

	Factor 1	**Factor 2**	**Factor 3**	**Factor 4**	**Factor 5**
Factor 1	1	**0.5564**	0.1042	**0.4189**	0.1808
Factor 2	**0.5564**	1	0.0665	**0.4407**	0.1282
Factor 3	0.1042	0.0665	1	0.0803	-0.0226
Factor 4	**0.4189**	**0.4407**	0.0803	1	0.013
Factor 5	0.1808	0.1282	-0.0226	0.013	1

Too many significant correlations. Factor 4 only has one loading participant, so it's an invalid factor.

Factor score correlations for a 4 factor solution…

	Factor 1	**Factor 2**	**Factor 3**	**Factor 4**
Factor 1	1	**0.5751**	0.1301	**0.4054**
Factor 2	**0.5751**	1	0.048	**0.4412**
Factor 3	0.1301	0.048	1	0.0686

Factor 4	**0.4054**	**0.4412**	0.0686	1

Too many significant correlations. Factor 4 only has one loading participant, so it's an invalid factor.

Factor score correlations for a 3 factor solution…

	Factor 1	**Factor 2**	**Factor 3**
Factor 1	1	**0.5952**	0.2767
Factor 2	**0.5952**	1	0.1647
Factor 3	0.2767	0.1647	1

In terms of variance, eigenvalues and loading participants, it's fine but the correlation between Factor 1 and Factor 2 is too close.

Factor score correlations for a 2 factor solution…

	Factor 1	**Factor 2**
Factor 1	1	**0.5978**
Factor 2	**0.5978**	1

This solution doesn't capture 24/68 of the Q sorts. That's over a third of the data, which strikes me as unhelpful when the purpose is to use this factor analysis to help drive a comparison between the two studies… it's a gappy comparison if it only represents 35% of the data.

But this made me remember that not all the Q sorts loaded into the Study 1 and Study 2 factors.

So the next plan was to experiment by running the factor analysis again with only the Q sorts which were represented by the previous studies' factor solutions.

- Removing U2, U11, U12, U13, U15, U20, U24
- Removing NU1, NU4, NU5, NU8, NU9, NU20, NU28, NU30, NU32
- Reduces data to 52 Q sorts

A superficially plausible 3 factor solution worked but the correlation between Factors 1 and 2 was too high.

	Factor 1	**Factor 2**	**Factor 3**
Factor 1	1	**0.5784**	-0.0519
Factor 2	**0.5784**	1	-0.1216

Factor 3	-0.0519	-0.1216	1

The two factor solution was worse with a correlation of 0.5913 (36 loading Q sorts) In one way, this does show that 36 of the original 68 participants share similar viewpoints but when dealing with low numbers (the nature of Q), I don't think this is impactful.

REFLECTIONS

Ultimately, the most effective way to compare the two data sets, embracing the principles and positionality of Q methodology, is through the correlation matrix.

Appendix 11: full codebooks for Phase Three

Full codebooks for each stakeholder group's corpus, including frequency of coding references and category breakdown.

Brackets indicate the number of textual references related to that code parent code or category. For instance, in the central government coding, there are 83 textual extracts coded to 'be dynamic' and its subcodes. This is the most frequently mentioned code in the *be* category and, therefore, it is listed first to reflect that.

Central government codebook

BE: values and principles which public libraries should uphold or demonstrate. (**110**)

Public library services in England should…
• be dynamic **(83)**
  ○ alternative service models
  ○ modernise and innovate service and facilities
  ○ respond to challenges
  ▪ redeploy staff to support health crisis
  ○ respond to changing public expectations / needs
• be inclusive **(21)**
  ○ be accessible
  ○ uphold equality
• be true to core values and principles **(4)**
• be trustworthy **(2)**
  ○ safe space

PROVIDE: services public libraries should provide to the public and/or actions directly involving the public and community. (**216**)

Public library services in England should…
• meet community and local needs **(76)**
  ○ consultation
• 'be more than bricks and mortar or even the people, stock and resources sitting within a building' **(59)**
  ○ education and learning
  ○ improve lives and prospects
  ▪ address social isolation
  ▪ contribute to social value
  ▪ support the most vulnerable
  ○ offer makerspaces
  ○ outreach
  ○ provide cultural and creative enrichment
  ○ support public wellbeing
  ▪ support public health
• deliver digital services **(24)**
  ○ digital access
  ○ improve digital literacy and skills

- provide services through virtual means
- support digital inclusion

- focus on reading **(18)**
  - increase reading and literacy
  - loan books and printed materials
  - loan digital reading materials
  - reading activities
- provide library buildings **(12)**
  - place
- deliver a high-quality service **(9)**
- promote libraries **(7)**
- provide children's activities **(7)**
- provide access to skilled staff **(6)**
  - supported by volunteers
- be free to use **(2)**

DO: actions public libraries should undertake but which are not directly focused on interactions with or services for the public. (**442**)

Public library services in England should…

- be sustainable **(103)**
  - economic viability and effectiveness
    - secure income / funding
  - secure support from senior stakeholders
  - work with other organisations and partners
    - integrate with other services
- plan strategically **(100)**
  - articulate a vision / aims
  - assess local needs
  - create risk assessment(s)
  - demonstrate (evidence based) decision making
- recognise their national and local role **(92)**
  - local role / position
    - support local economy
    - support local priorities
  - national role / position
    - communicate with DCMS
    - comply with guidelines, standards and principles
    - support wider national agendas
    - support wider regeneration
    - work with sector bodies
- meet legal requirements **(60)**
  - comprehensive and efficient
- capture, share and/or use data **(23)**
- evaluate the service **(21)**
- value staff **(20)**
  - employ skilled staff
  - engage with staff
  - essential workers
  - recognise staff as assets

- train and develop staff

- strive for a consistent offer across England **(14)**
  - share best practice
- demonstrate impact and/or value **(9)**

(Corpus: DCMS, 2015, 2017f, 2021 & 2022)

Local government codebook

BE: values and principles which public libraries should uphold or demonstrate. (**42**)

Public library services in England should…

- be dynamic **(29)**
  - alternative service models
  - respond to challenges
  - respond to changing public expectations / needs
- be inclusive **(12)**
  - be accessible
- be trustworthy **(1)**

PROVIDE: services public libraries should provide to the public and/or actions directly involving the public and community. (**167**)

Public library services in England should…

- be "much more than a depository for books" **(58)**
  - access to culture
  - become community hubs
  - bring people together
  - combine traditional and additional services
    - offer a range of services
  - connect people to services
  - cradle to grave service
  - education and learning
  - improve lives and prospects
  - outreach
  - support public wellbeing
    - support health agendas
- meet community and local needs **(35)**
  - consultation
- deliver digital services **(19)**
  - range of digital resources
  - support digital inclusion
- focus on reading **(17)**
  - focus on literacy
  - lend books
  - range of books and reading material
- provide access to information **(10)**
  - help and support

- provide information, advice and guidance
    - range of other resources
- promote libraries **(8)**
    - bring in new or lapsed users
- deliver a high quality service **(6)**
- provide pleasant library buildings **(5)**
- be staffed by professionals **(5)**
    - supported by volunteers
- be free to enter **(4)**

DO: actions public libraries should undertake but which are not directly focused on interactions with or services for the public. (**145**)

Public library services in England should…

- be sustainable **(43)**
    - be cost effective
        - generate income - funding
    - work with other organisations
- plan strategically **(26)**
    - assess need
    - evidence based decision making
- support local priorities **(22)**
    - accommodate political activity in library premises
    - support economy
        - support local businesses
- meet legal requirements **(13)**
    - comprehensive and efficient
- strive for consistency across England **(9)**
    - respond to different standards and principles
    - share good practice
- demonstrate impact and/or value **(8)**
- be governed effectively **(8)**
- engage with and listen to staff **(7)**
    - empower staff
- employ trained staff **(5)**
- evaluate the service **(4)**

(Corpus: Local Government Association, 2017)

Public library sector codebook

BE: values and principles which public libraries should uphold or demonstrate. (**103**)

Public library services in England should…

- be dynamic **(50)**
    - alternative delivery models
    - be innovative
    - manage change
    - respond to challenges
- be inclusive **(31)**

- be accessible
- be trustworthy **(18)**
  - be neutral
- Be welcoming **(4)**

PROVIDE: services public libraries should provide to the public and/or actions directly involving the public and community. (**466**)

Public library services in England should…

- help improve lives **(68)**
  - enable social mobility
  - help people fulfil their potential
  - learning/education/skills opportunities
  - support personal improvement
- deliver digital services **(67)**
  - digital / IT access
  - support digital literacy and skills
  - support digital safety
- focus on reading **(66)**
  - books and reading materials
    - different formats
    - diverse and inclusive
    - range
  - promote / encourage reading
  - reader development
  - reading activities
  - support literacy
- provide access to information **(40)**
  - information literacy
  - provide information advice and guidance
  - quality information
- provide services targeted at children and young people **(39)**
  - services / activities for children
  - services / activities for young people
- communicate library purpose/service offer **(34)**
  - advocate for libraries
  - deliver core services
  - promote libraries
- provide space for the public **(32)**
  - co-working spaces
  - creative spaces
  - pleasant and welcoming spaces
  - safe and trusted spaces
- promote social cohesion **(31)**
  - connect people
  - encourage civic engagement
  - provide activities and events
  - provide opportunities for engagement with politics
  - provide opportunities to volunteer
- deliver a quality service **(31)**

- involve the public in decision making / coproduction
    - provide good customer service
    - meet user needs
        - outreach
- offer cultural and creative enrichment **(20)**
    - promote creativity
- be staffed by professionals **(14)**
    - supported by volunteers
- be free to use **(11)**
- be a hub (10)
    - signpost other services
- provide a coffee shop **(3)**

DO: actions public libraries should undertake but which are not directly focused on interactions with or services for the public. (**427**)

Public library services in England should…

- recognise national and local role **(237)**
    - support local priorities
        - meet local needs
        - place shaping / making
        - safer communities
        - support and/or benefit the community
        - support businesses
        - support local economic growth
    - support wider social issues (broader national agendas)
        - address poverty
        - address social isolation
        - support public employability
        - support public health
        - support public wellbeing
        - support social care
        - support the economy / encourage prosperity
- achieve a consistent library offer **(49)**
    - actively engage with the Universal Library Offers
    - engage with industry-led standards
    - share best practice across the sector
- be sustainable **(46)**
    - focus on the future
    - secure funding and fiscal sustainability
    - work with other organisations - partners
- demonstrate impact and/or value **(37)**
    - capture and use meaningful data and evidence
    - value for money
- evaluate the service **(24)**
    - improve the service
- value the workforce **(15)**
    - motivate staff
    - staff development
- plan strategically **(14)**

- evidence-based decision making
- leadership
- comply with the law **(5)**

(Corpus: CILIP and The Big Issue, 2019; Independent Mind, 2019; Libraries Connected, 2020c & 2020d)

Public codebook

BE: values and principles which public libraries should uphold or demonstrate. (**52**)

Public library services in England should…

- be inclusive **(16)**
  - accessible
- be helpful **(15)**
- be trustworthy **(8)**
  - be neutral
  - feel safe / comfortable
- be dynamic **(8)**
- be 'true to their core purpose' **(3)**
- be enduring **(1)**
- be empowering **(1)**

PROVIDE: services public libraries should provide to the public and/or actions directly involving the public and community. (**170**)

Public library services in England should…

- focus on reading **(67)**
  - reading material
    - quality books and reading material
    - range of books and reading material
  - prioritise books and reading
  - lend materials
    - books and reading material
    - other resources
  - promote / encourage reading (for pleasure)
  - provide digital reading materials
  - support people with literacy / reading
- provide access to information **(25)**
  - connect people to information
  - help people acquire knowledge
- foster human connection **(13)**
  - address social isolation
  - connect people to people
  - outreach
    - postal service
- be free to use **(13)**
- provide a place or physical space **(11)**
  - amenities
- provide access to professional staff **(9)**
- meet people's needs **(8)**

24-7 service   - evaluate and adapt services   - deliver digital services **(7)**   - access to computers / internet   - digital inclusion   - engage with/meet the needs of children and young people **(5)**   - promote libraries and their services **(5)**   - communicate their purpose / service offer   - support learning **(4)**   - educate   - support the community **(3)**   - be at the heart of a community
DO: actions public libraries should undertake but which are not directly focused on interactions with or services for the public. (**2**)
Public library services in England should…   comply with laws **(2)**

(Corpus: participant statements collected during Phase Two Q studies)

Appendix 12: extracts from the Public Libraries and Museums Act (1964) used in Phase Four

The following text is extracted from the Public Libraries and Museums Act (1964) and were used to form the framework in Phase Four of the thesis.

1 Secretary of State to superintend library service.

(2) Every library authority shall furnish such information, and provide such facilities for the inspection of library premises, stocks and records, as the Secretary of State may require for carrying out his duty under this section.

3 Regional councils for inter-library co-operation.

(2) The Secretary of State, after consultation with the library authorities within the region, shall make a scheme for each library region providing—

> *(a) for the constitution, incorporation and functioning of a library council for the region consisting of persons representing each of those authorities and such other persons as may be provided for by the scheme, and having a duty to make and supervise the working of arrangements for facilitating the co-operation of those authorities with one another and with other bodies within or outside the region having functions in relation to libraries; and*
>
> *(b) for the observance by each of those authorities of any requirements made by the library council, including requirements as to the payment by the authority of contributions towards the expenses of the council,*

and containing such other provisions directed to the promotion of inter-library cooperation within and outside the region as may appear to the Secretary of State to be expedient.

(3) At least a majority of the library council for a region shall consist of members of library authorities within the region, and an authority none of whose members is included in the library council shall be represented on the council by such of the persons so included as may be determined in accordance with the scheme establishing the council.

(5) The Secretary of State may, with a view to improving the efficiency of the public library service or promoting its development, require any library council established under this section to enter into and carry into effect arrangements with another such council or with any other body having functions in relation to libraries.

7 General duty of library authorities.

(1) It shall be the duty of every library authority to provide a comprehensive and efficient library service for all persons desiring to make use thereof, . . . [F8]

Provided that although a library authority shall have power to make facilities for the borrowing of books and other materials available to any persons it shall not by virtue of this subsection be under a duty to make such facilities available to persons other than those whose residence or place of work is within the library area of the authority or who are undergoing full-time education within that area.

(2) In fulfilling its duty under the preceding subsection, a library authority shall in particular have regard to the desirability—

(a) of securing, by the keeping of adequate stocks, by arrangements with other library authorities, and by any other appropriate means, that facilities are available for the

borrowing of, or reference to, books and other printed matter, and pictures, gramophone records, films and other materials, sufficient in number, range and quality to meet the general requirements and any special requirements both of adults and children; and

(b) of encouraging both adults and children to make full use of the library service, and of providing advice as to its use and of making available such bibliographical and other information as may be required by persons using it; and

(c) of securing, in relation to any matter concerning the functions both of the library authority as such and any other authority whose functions are exercisable within the library area, that there is full co-operation between the persons engaged in carrying out those functions.

8 Restriction on charges for library facilities.

(1) Except as provided by this section, no charge shall be made by a library authority (otherwise than to another library authority) for library facilities made available by the authority.

[F9(2) Subject to subsections (3) and (4) below, the [F10Secretary of State] may by regulations—

(a) authorise library authorities to make charges for such library facilities made available by them as may be specified in the regulations; and

(b) make such provision as regards charges by library authorities for library facilities, other than provision requiring the making of charges, as he thinks fit.

(3) Nothing in any regulations under this section shall authorise any charges to be made by a library authority for lending any written material to any person where—

(a) it is the duty of the authority under section 7(1) above to make facilities for borrowing available to that person;

(b) the material is lent in the course of providing such facilities to that person on any library premises;

(c) the material is lent in a form in which it is readable without the use of any electronic or other apparatus; and

(d) that person is not a person who has required any such apparatus to be used, or made available to him, for putting the material into such a form in order that he may borrow it;

but this subsection shall not prevent any regulations under this section from authorising the making of charges in respect of the use of any facility for the reservation of written materials or in respect of borrowed materials which are returned late or in a damaged condition.

(4) Nothing in any regulations under this section shall authorise any charges to be made by a library authority for making facilities available for any person to do any of the following on any library premises, that is to say—

(a) reading the whole or any part of any of the written materials for the time being held by the authority in a form in which they are readable without the use of any electronic or other apparatus or in microform;

(b) consulting (whether or not with the assistance of any such apparatus or of any person) such catalogues, indexes or similar articles as are maintained, in any form whatever, exclusively for the purposes of that authority's public library service.

(5) Without prejudice to the generality of subsection (2) above, the power to make regulations under this section shall include power—

(a) to confer a discretion as to the amount of any charge made under the regulations;

(b) to provide for such a discretion to be exercisable subject to such maximum amount or scale of maximum amounts as may be specified in or determined under the regulations;

(c) to require library authorities to take such steps as may be specified or described in the regulations for making the amounts of their charges for library facilities known to the public;

(d) to make such other incidental provision and such supplemental, consequential and transitional provision as the [F10Secretary of State] thinks necessary or expedient; and

(e) to make different provision for different cases, including different provision in relation to different persons, circumstances or localities.

9 Contributions and grants.

(1) A library authority may make contributions towards the expenses of another library authority or of any other person providing library facilities for members of the public.

(2) The Secretary of State may make grants to any body which maintains book catalogues or indexes to which all library authorities are permitted to refer, or otherwise makes available to all library authorities facilities likely to assist them in the discharge of their duty under section 7(1) above.

20 Use of premises for educational or cultural events.

A local authority maintaining premises under this Act may use the premises, or allow them to be used (whether in return for payment or not), for the holding of meetings and exhibitions, the showing of films and slides, the giving of musical performances, and the holding of other events of an educational or cultural nature, and in connection therewith may, notwithstanding anything in section 8 above, make or authorise the making of a charge for admission.

Appendix 13: creating the Public Libraries and Museums Act (1964) framework

The following table depicts the researcher's decision making process when evaluating which sections of the Public Libraries and Museums Act (1964) to include in the framework analysis of Phase Four.

Section	Description	Decision
1	"Secretary of State to superintend library service": details the duties of the Secretary of State.	**Not included** because it does not pertain to actions undertaken by public libraries or public library services.
2	"National Advisory Councils": this section was repealed in 2015.	**Not included**.
3	"Regional councils for inter-library co-operation": details how public library services should work together.	**Included** because it specifies actions that should be undertaken by "library authorities".
4	"Library authorities and areas": specifies how library authorities are defined.	**Not included** because it does not pertain to actions undertaken by public libraries or public library services.
5	"Joint boards": details how two or more library authorities can form a single board to govern their public library services.	**Not included** because it does not pertain to actions in the control of public libraries or public library services.
6	"Special provisions as to non-county boroughs and urban districts": this section was repealed in 1996.	**Not included**.
7	"General duty of library authorities": details about what a public library service should do and provide.	**Included** because it specifies actions that should be undertaken by "library authorities".
8	"Restriction on charges for library facilities": specifies what services should be free and what kind of service can be charged.	**Included** because it specifies actions that should be undertaken by "library authorities".
9	"Contributions and grants": describes how a "library authority" can fiscally support another.	**Included** because it specifies actions that should be undertaken by "library authorities".
10	"Default powers of Secretary of State": further details about the duties of the Secretary of State.	**Not included** because it does not pertain to actions undertaken by

		public libraries or public library services.
11	“Supplemental provisions as to transfers of officers, assets and liabilities”: details regarding the transfer of staff or assets.	**Not included** because it does not pertain to actions in the control of public libraries or public library services.
12 - 15	These pertain to museums and galleries.	**Not included** as not relevant to libraries.
16 - 17	These pertain to further duties and privileges of the Secretary of State.	**Not included** because it does not pertain to actions undertaken by public libraries or public library services.
18	“Compulsory acquisition of land”: repealed in 1972.	**Not included**.
19	“Byelaws”: describes how local governments can write and enact byelaws.	**Not included** because it does not pertain to actions in the control of public libraries or public library services.
20	“Use of premises for educational or cultural events”: details other uses for library spaces.	**Included.**
21 - 22	Sections repealed in 1996 and 1975 respectively.	**Not included**.
23	“Local Acts”: describes the tension between this national legislation and local Acts.	**Not included** because it does not pertain to actions undertaken by public libraries or public library services.
24	“Isles of Scilly”: describes how the Act is relevant to this area.	**Not included** because it does not pertain to actions undertaken by public libraries or public library services.
25	“Interpretation”: provides guidance about terms used in the Act.	**Not included** because it does not pertain to actions undertaken by public libraries or public library services.
26	“Short title, repeals etc., commencement and extent”: technical details about the Act.	**Not included** because it does not pertain to actions undertaken by public libraries or public library services.