

A photograph of a man with a beard, wearing a dark blue beanie and a denim jacket, standing in a library. He is reaching up to touch a book on a high shelf. The shelves are filled with books of various colors and sizes. The lighting is warm and focused on the man and the books he is interacting with.

# Library User Research

Findings, Ideas, Next  
Steps

February 2020

# Debrief Summary

This research was done to understand how to increase the number of people borrowing books from Brent's council-run libraries and using the wider suite of available services. This debrief explores the following:

- 1  
What we did
- 2  
What we discovered
- 3  
What it means
- 4  
What could be different
- 5  
What happens next

# Top Five Learnings

The five most important things we discovered during this project were:

1. Libraries are valued “third places” used for self-improvement, mental wellbeing, and socialising.

2. Libraries are associated with powerful memories of childhood and family.

3. Children and young people love stories and are therefore not a lost cause.

4. Residents want a service – stock, events and a digital offer – that reflects their needs.

5. Inactive library users are often avid readers, but are not coming to the libraries for a range of reasons.

# What we did



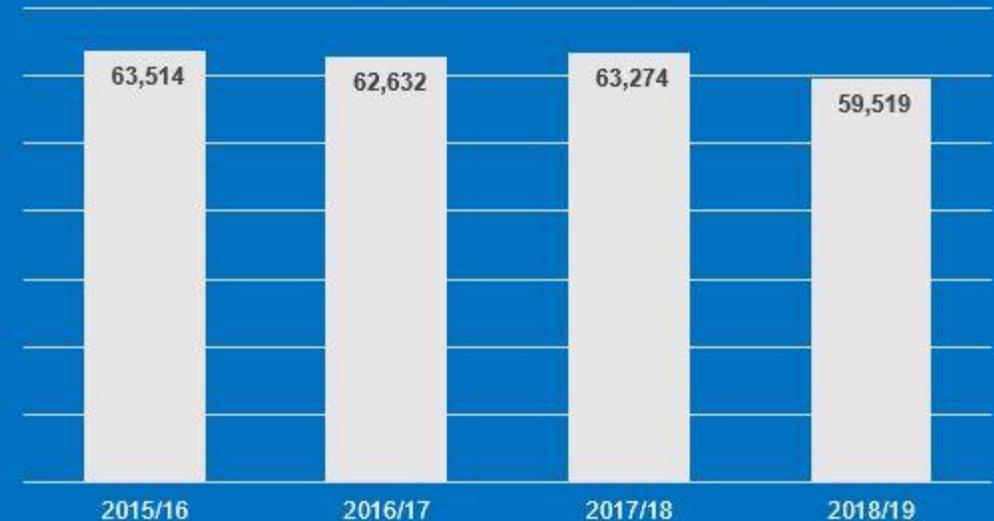
# Scene Setting – The Status Quo

The number of people actively using Brent's libraries is gradually declining.

Plus, active user numbers are mid-table when compared with other London boroughs.

While use of the library service's digital offer is rising.

Active Library Users in Brent



# Main Research Objectives – The Challenge

With the decline of active library users in mind, Brent's library service set the following main objectives for this research:

- 2020/2021 and beyond – Increase the number of people actively borrowing library resources and using other library services.
- Better equip staff to engage with service users, and potential service users, about stock and resources.
- Improve the ways in which stock and services (including marketing) reflect customer needs.

# Research Methodology – The Journey

We spoke to  
100+ people.

A mix of children and young people, active and inactive adult borrowers, teachers, Brent staff, and experts from the National Literacy Trust.

These represented a range of the demographic groups in Brent.

We ran 12 focus groups, and half a dozen one-to-one interviews.

We did six interactive library visits, each with a different person.

We held a co-creative ideas generation session.

We ran four ideas testing focus groups.

What we  
discovered



We discovered that people think libraries are a force for good.

And that they are places where powerful personal experiences happen.

# The library is...

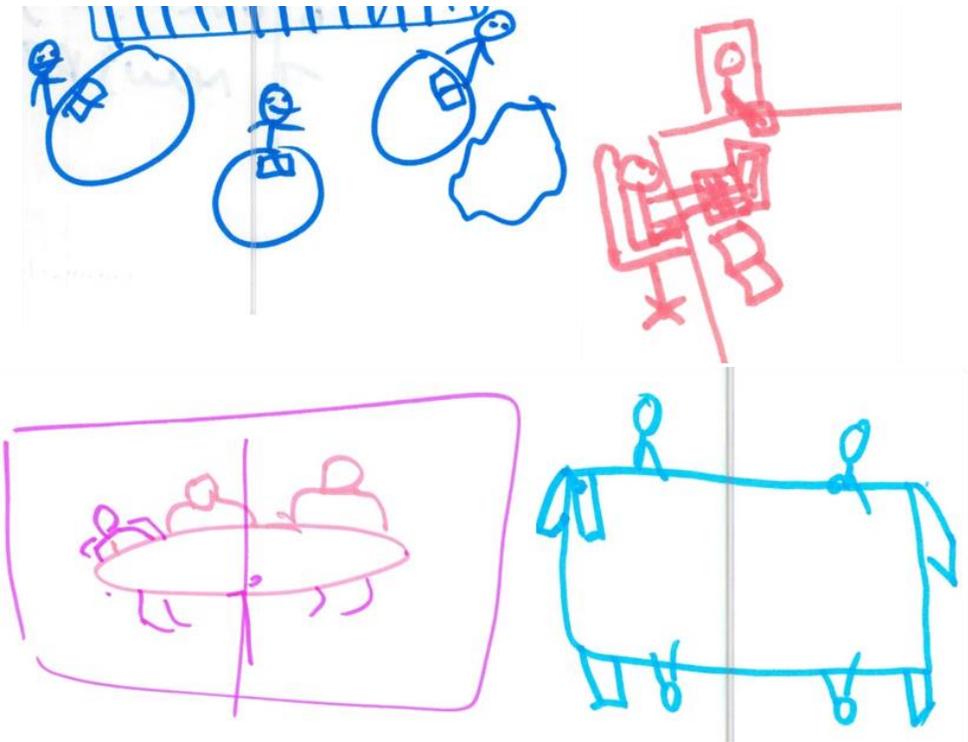
**...an important community hub.**

**...a powerful symbol of civilisation, freedom and education.**

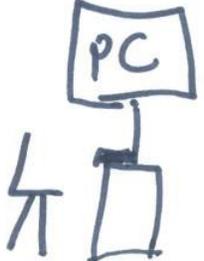
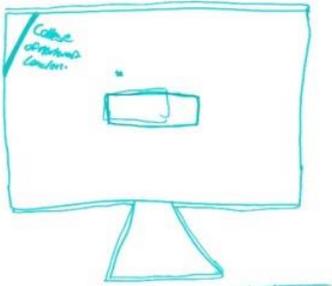
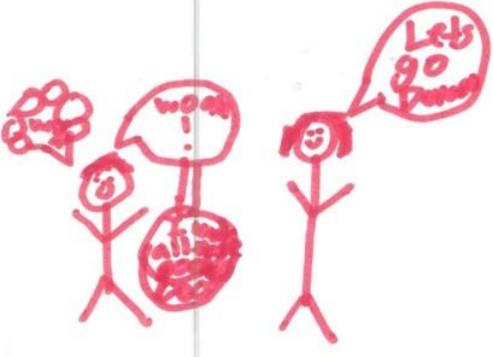
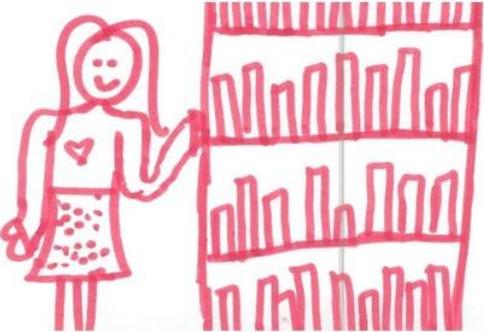
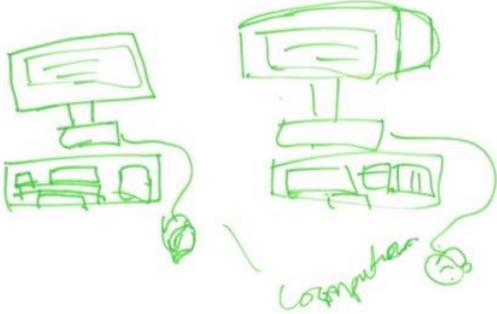
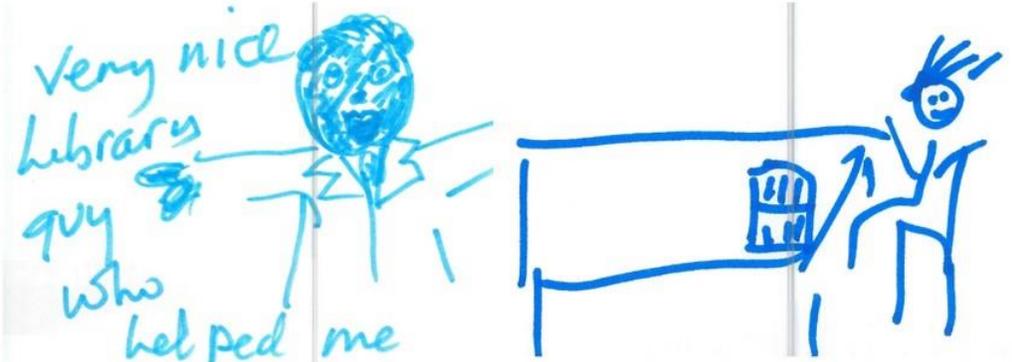
**...a place for formative childhood experiences, where positive memories are made.**

**...a safe space for activities that might be difficult elsewhere.**

# These themes came through in the drawings participants did of their first and last library visits



# As did participants' positive feelings for libraries, and the theme of computers with young people



Just as people were positive about the libraries, we also heard that reading has a number of beneficial effects.

# Reading is...

**...an integral part of education and self-improvement.**

**...a release valve from the strains of everyday life.**

**...an immersive form of escapism.**

**...a way for migrants to connect with their heritage, while also integrating into their new community.**

We heard a couple more  
positive things that made a  
big impact on us.

# The library is...

**...a service that would be trusted to curate content, informing users about the major issues of the day.**

“These are dangerous times. It’s really important to get well put together information you can trust. People need guidance, not just soundbite stuff.”  
Inactive Borrower, Brent Civic Centre

“If everyone at your work is talking about a book, then you want to be in on the conversation. It’s got a social currency.”  
Active Borrower, Willesden Green

**...a place where for parents connect with their kids.**

“I’m looking for useful wisdom I can share with my sons. It fits my job spec of being a dad.” Inactive Borrower, Brent Civic Centre

“I used to come with my kids when they were young. It was a sweet thing to do with the kids.” Active Borrower, Ealing Road

“The library is a place I go with my kids. It brings me together with them.” Active Borrower, Willesden Green

So far, so good. But we also found barriers to reading, borrowing books and visiting the libraries.

# Barriers to reading, borrowing books and visiting the library include...

**...the explosion of easy-to-access and individually targeted digital content.**

**...while free is a big draw, it can be more convenient to buy books online.**

**...people are busier than ever.**

**...a perceived lack of relevant activities and stock.**

# Barriers to reading, borrowing books and visiting the library include...

**...limited communications about new buildings, available services, and the digital offer.**

**...most people struggle with aspects of the current digital offer.**

**...people think there are too many leaflets and posters on display, and doubt the library spaces are all efficiently used.**

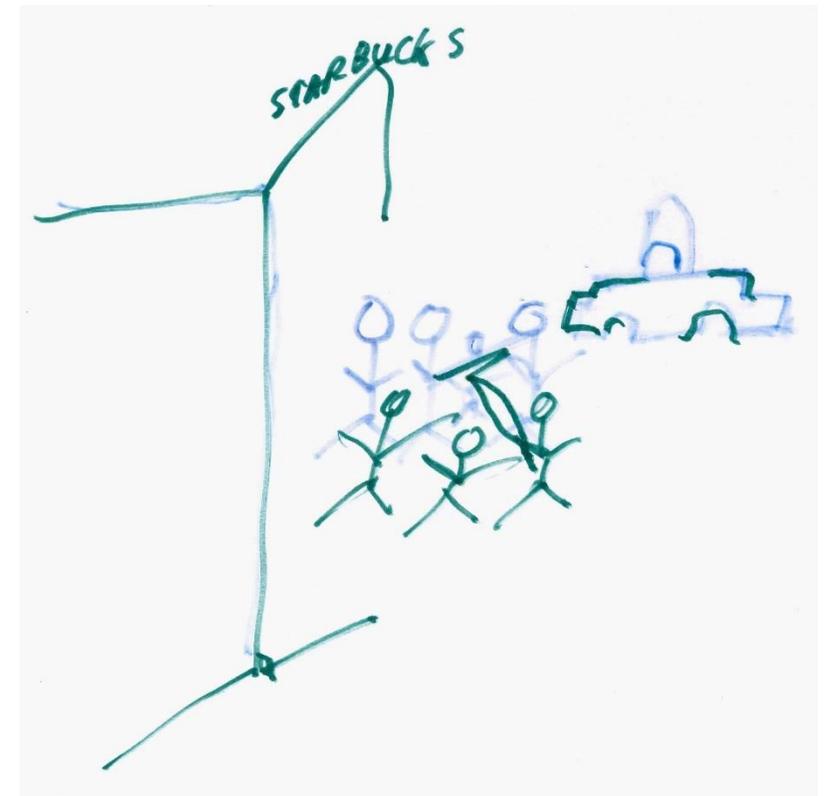
**...users thought the stock was inconveniently displayed and lacked effective signage.**

# Anti-social behaviour also impacted user experience, and deterred younger readers and borrowers

**A few participants have been in anti-social incidents. While children and young people can find Brent's libraries intimidating places to be, and are put off by local curfews.**

“This is Brent's most challenging library. We need to communicate that the library is a safe place to be.” Library Staff

“At local libraries we don't know the staff. If we knew the staff it would be better.” Active Borrower, Ark Elvin Academy



## What it means

[Latin: related to *dictator*]  
**dictatorial** /ˈdɪktəˈtoʊrɪəl/  
like a dictator. 2 overbearing  
**dictatorially** *adv.* [Latin: *dictator*]  
**diction** /ˈdɪkʃ(ə)n/ *n.* n. pronunciation in speaking or writing. *dictio* from *dico* *dict-* say  
**dictionary** /ˈdɪkʃənəri/  
book listing (usu. alphabetically) explaining the words of a language. 2 reference work giving corresponding words in two languages. 3 reference work giving the terms of a particular science or profession.

It means Brent's libraries need stronger communications about their offer and that it's free.

What are the best ways for the libraries to let people know what is available and that it can save them money?



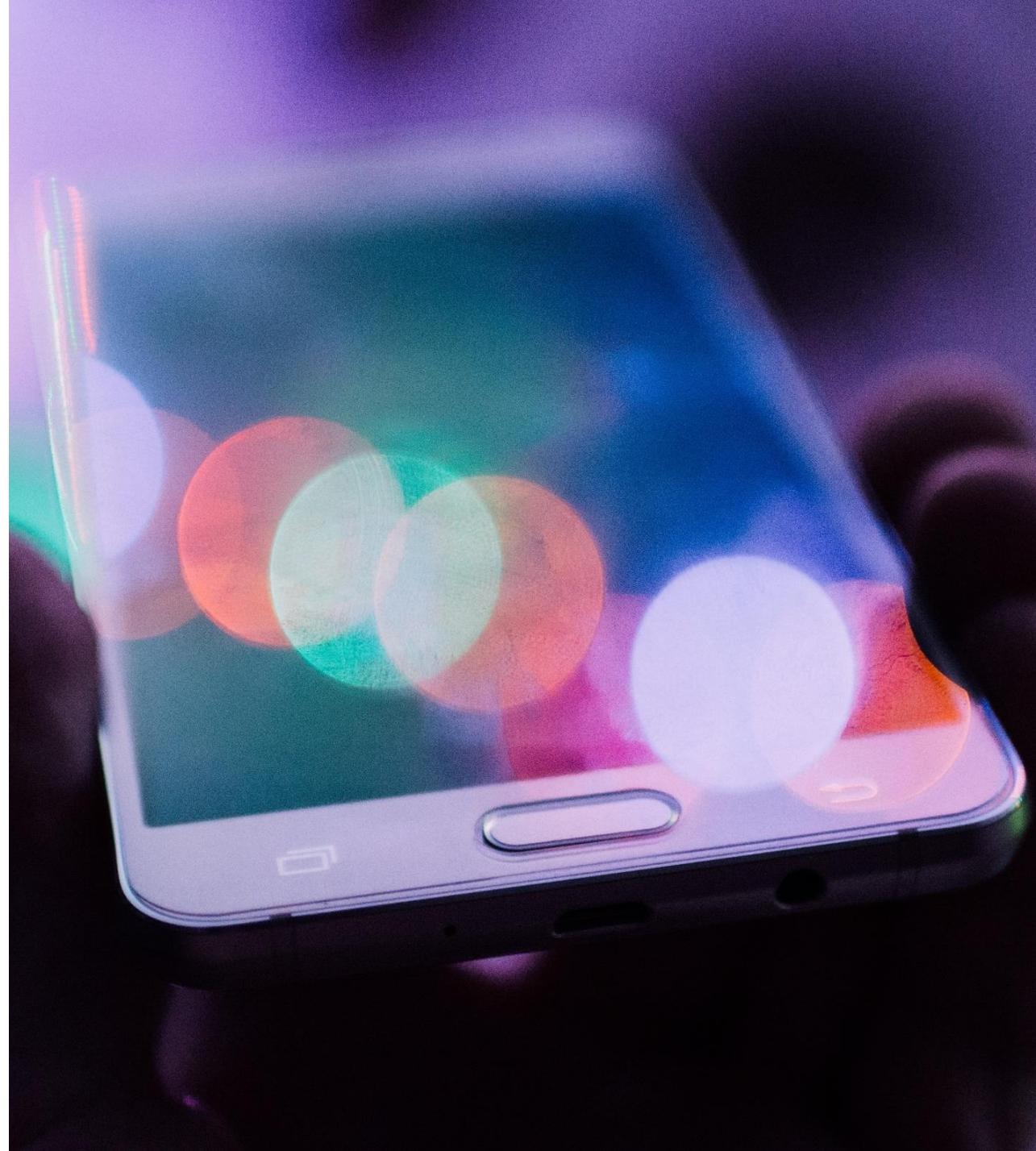
It means Brent needs to tweak the library environments.

How can the libraries be more pleasant, and also convey what each zone of the building is for?



It means Brent's libraries need a better digital "game" and a user-friendly interface.

**How can the libraries increase their online presence, and make getting hold of content via its app and website more convenient?**



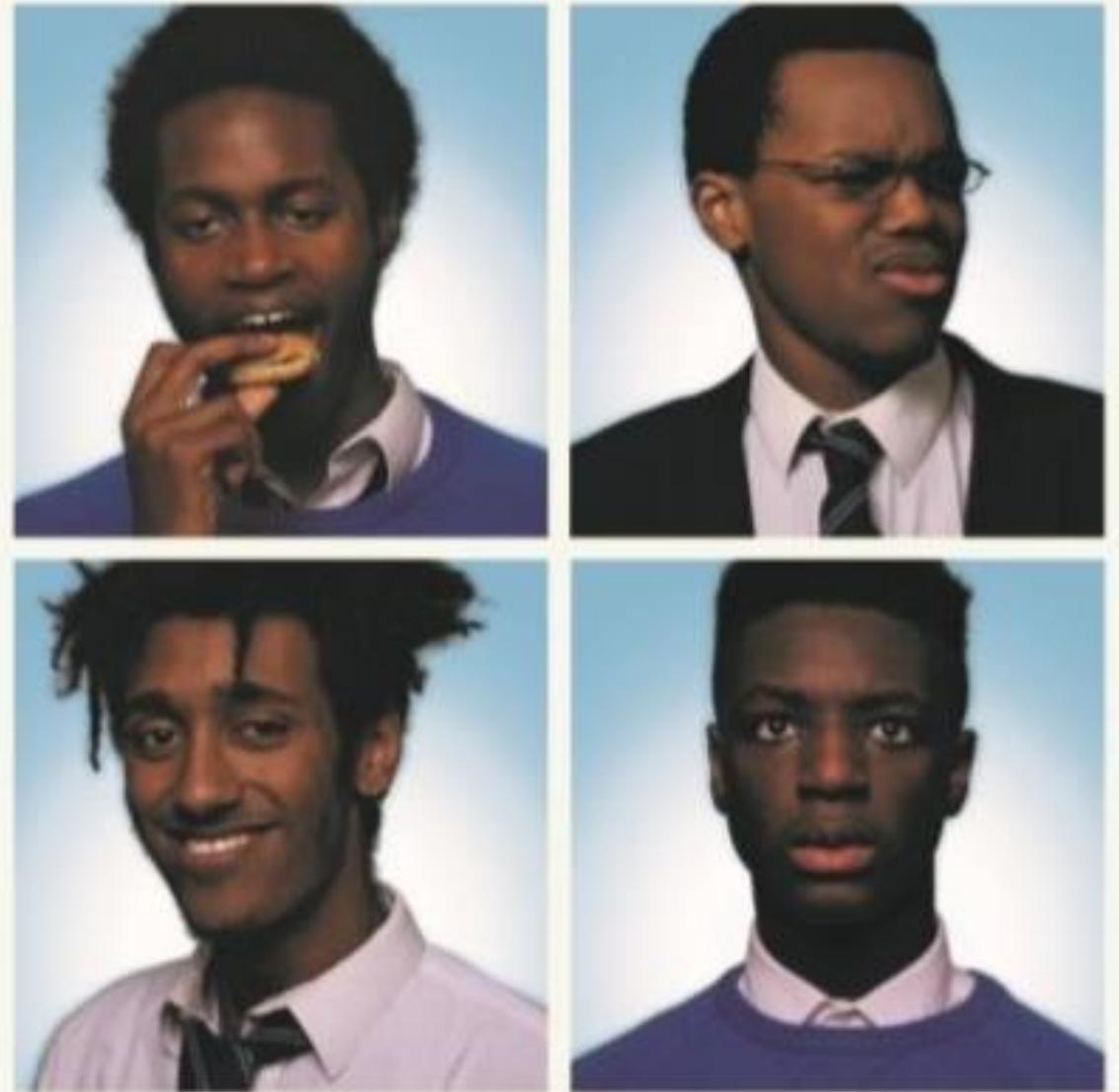
It means Brent's libraries have permission to curate content for users.

**What would it take for the libraries to curate and recommend content for its borrowers and users?**



It means Brent libraries' stock and outreach should respond to varying community needs.

**How can publishing in other parts of the world inform what stock Brent buys? And how can outreach with schools and other organisations be targeted with more precision?**



**the  
inbetweeners**

Lastly, it means that children and young people are not a lost cause.

**How can Brent's libraries become local children and young people's go-to place for their storytelling needs?**



What could be  
different



# We did a co-creative ideas session, and tested the ideas it generated.

This brought together people from the focus groups with Brent employees.

This team came up with ideas to improve the libraries, and voted on them so we could see which were the most popular.

We tested people's favourite ideas with library staff, young people, and adult borrowers. We crafted the ideas further based on this feedback.

Manchester A...

What's the big idea?  
Give it a name... **library Youtubers**

recommen books/other useful things.

<p>Show us what it looks like...</p> 	<p>Describe it! - Podcast on important topics (e.g. health) Tell us about all its important features...</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- weekly mini episodes about what has been going on at Brent libraries.</li> <li>- Showing what's going on during the week. e.g. events, social groups.</li> <li>- Behind the scenes (interesting bits).</li> <li>- Ads on Brent websites (not just library) that direct you to youtube channel.</li> </ul>	<p>What's so good about it? Tell us what needs it answers for library users...</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Interact with youths.</li> <li>- cultivating future users.</li> <li>- Provides them with skills.</li> <li>- Good publicity which can lead to opportunities/donations.</li> <li>- Larger internet presence.</li> <li>- offers insight into how the library works and the role it plays in societies.</li> <li>- highlighting importance of libraries.</li> </ul>
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New North.

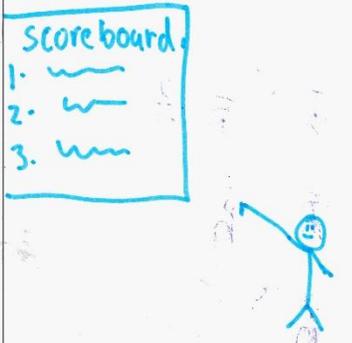
- Visit schools/colleges.
- Ads on Social Media.
- Famous ex Brent residents.



# People need rewards that encourage repeat visits to the libraries

AL

What's the big idea?  
Give it a name... **Monthly Rewards.**

<p>Show us what it looks like...</p> 	<p>Describe it! Tell us about all its important features...</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>By giving them an incentive to read, will encourage them.</li> <li>For every book they read they have a chance of winning a prize.</li> </ul>	<p>What's so good about it? Tell us what needs it answers for library users...</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Encourages them to read.</li> <li>Makes more people want to read.</li> </ul>
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(omas 2 entertainment.

OVI

What's the big idea?  
Give it a name... **Incentives/Loyalty Scheme.**

<p>Show us what it looks like...</p> 	<p>Describe it! Tell us about all its important features...</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>The more books you borrow, the more points you get.</li> <li>Good rewards - in touch with demand.</li> <li>App should ask age in order to personalise rewards.</li> <li>Keep track of progress so when you reach an achievement, you get an encouraging notification.</li> <li>Book borrow time to read.</li> <li>Beat the st - what time to read.</li> </ul>	<p>What's so good about it? Tell us what needs it answers for library users...</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Gives people an incentive to read books.</li> <li>Makes people feel valued.</li> <li>Increase the different ages attending the library.</li> <li>Good publicity.</li> <li>People/friend groups may get competitive which leads to increased borrowing.</li> </ul>
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+ WHAT WOULD IT TAKE?

# Points Makes Prizes

## What Is It?

Users get points for borrowing books and using library services, and can use the points to claim rewards. For example, money off at local shops.

Users can also receive encouraging notifications as with Fitbit, and like Strava can compare scores with friends and family.

A easy way of doing this would be with a card and stamp system like the loyalty schemes run by coffee shops. This was the most popular idea with both library staff and members of the public.



# People need the library environments to be better utilised for a wider range of purposes

★
★

ENV

<p>What's the big idea? Give it a name... <span style="float: right; color: blue;">Summer Outdoor Reading</span></p>		
<p>Show us what it looks like...</p> 	<p>Describe it! Tell us about all its important features...</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Activities / Events</li> <li>- more enjoyment</li> <li>- Brent and local newspaper</li> <li>- Different seating areas in groups 4 for events</li> <li>- Activities such as Book club, Talks, Workshop with canopy</li> <li>- Seating areas for library users only with access through the library not public access.</li> </ul>	<p>What's so good about it? Tell us what needs it answers for library users...</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Wellbeing</li> <li>- Great interaction about community events</li> </ul>

<p>What's the big idea? Give it a name... <span style="float: right; color: purple;">The Future ???</span></p>		
<p>Show us what it looks like...</p> <div style="display: flex; align-items: center;"> <div style="margin-right: 10px;"> <p style="color: purple;">Micro-chip</p> <p>↓</p> <p>contains personalized info (latest stocks updated)</p> <p>- Targeted</p> </div>  </div>	<p>Describe it! Tell us about all its important features...</p> 	<p>What's so good about it? Tell us what needs it answers for library users...</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Space to be used for community activities</li> <li>- Workshops</li> <li>- Meetings</li> <li>- Public Rental</li> <li>- Training</li> <li>- local business process from the public</li> </ul>

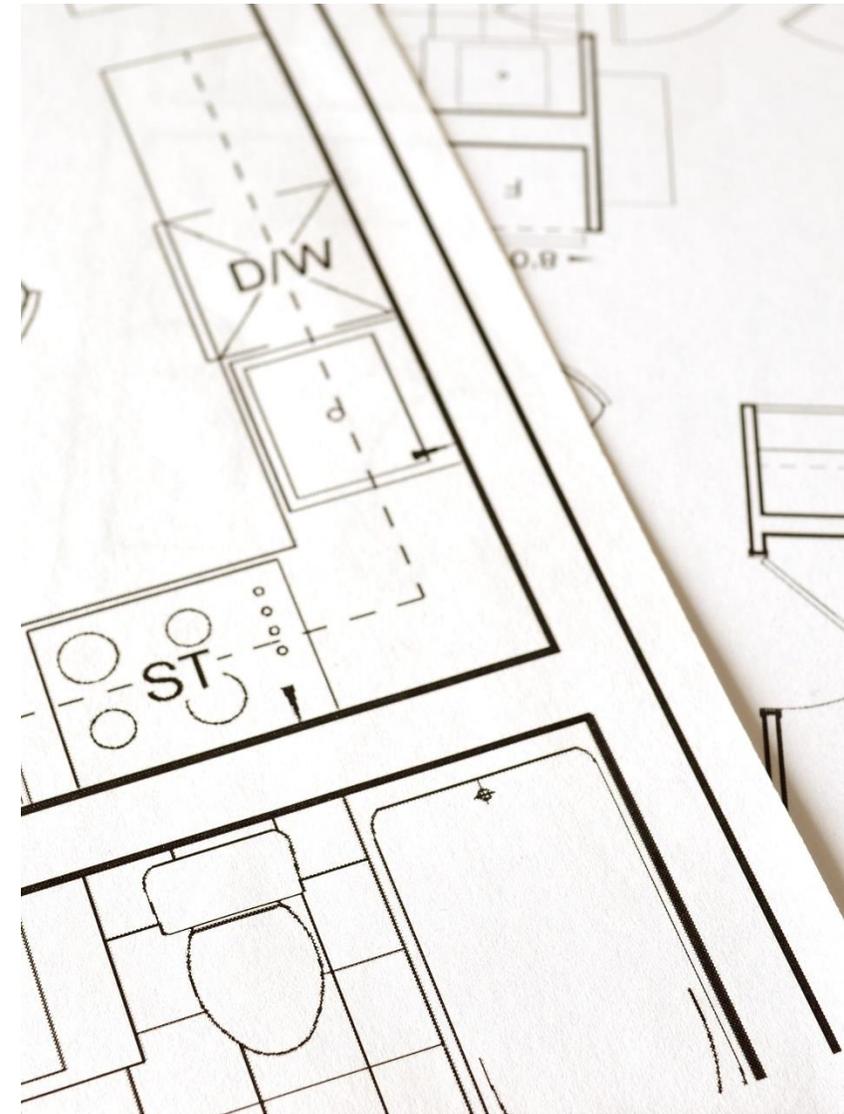
★
STOUK/ENV.

# Space Is the Place

## What Is It?

Better organisation of library interiors. For example, designated areas for specific users/uses such as safe, relaxing spaces for young people, and improved mobility areas for older users.

This would increase use of under-utilised spaces, e.g. Kilburn's garden, Harlesden's meeting rooms.



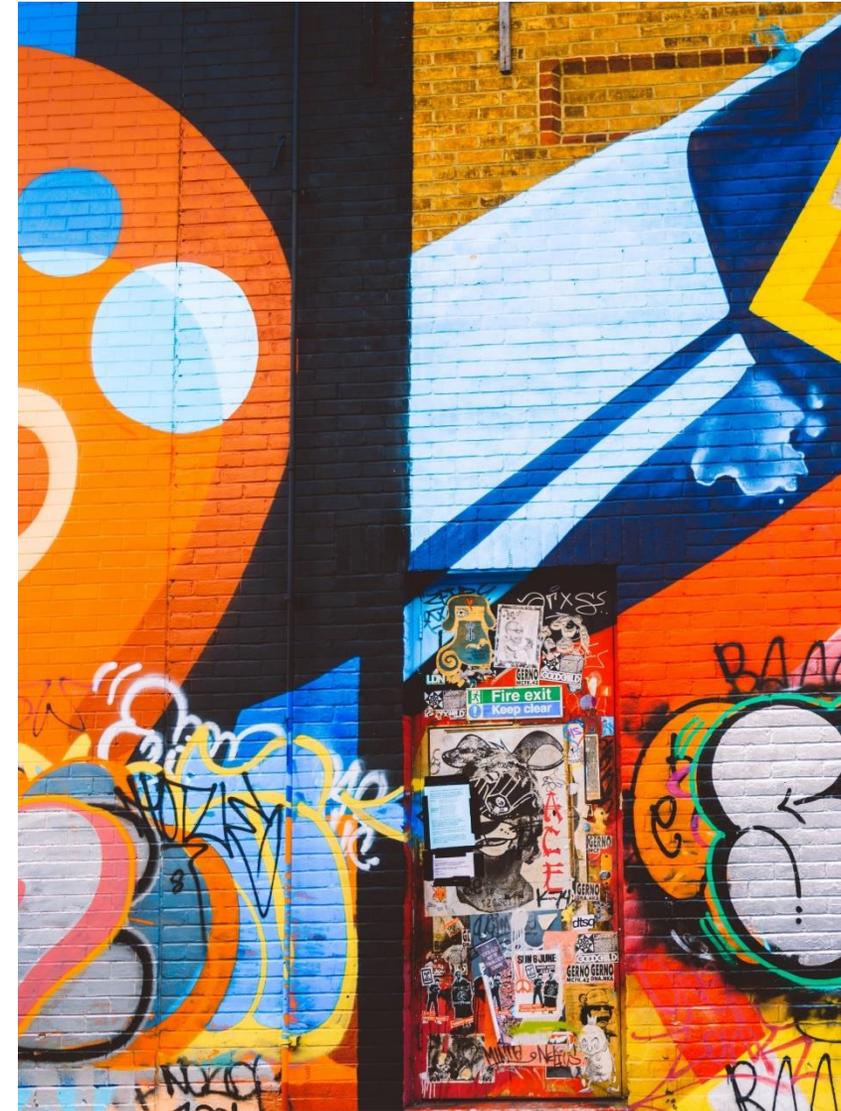
# Library Make-over

## What Is It?

A way of making Brent's libraries more welcoming to all members of the community.

It could include exciting interiors and design features that entice people into the libraries. For example, warmly-coloured walls, secret doors into the children's section, a mural for kids on the ramp in Willesden Green library, more window displays.

This might also include fit for purpose furniture, e.g. narrower chairs that are easy to move, soft furnishings for relaxation zones, etc.



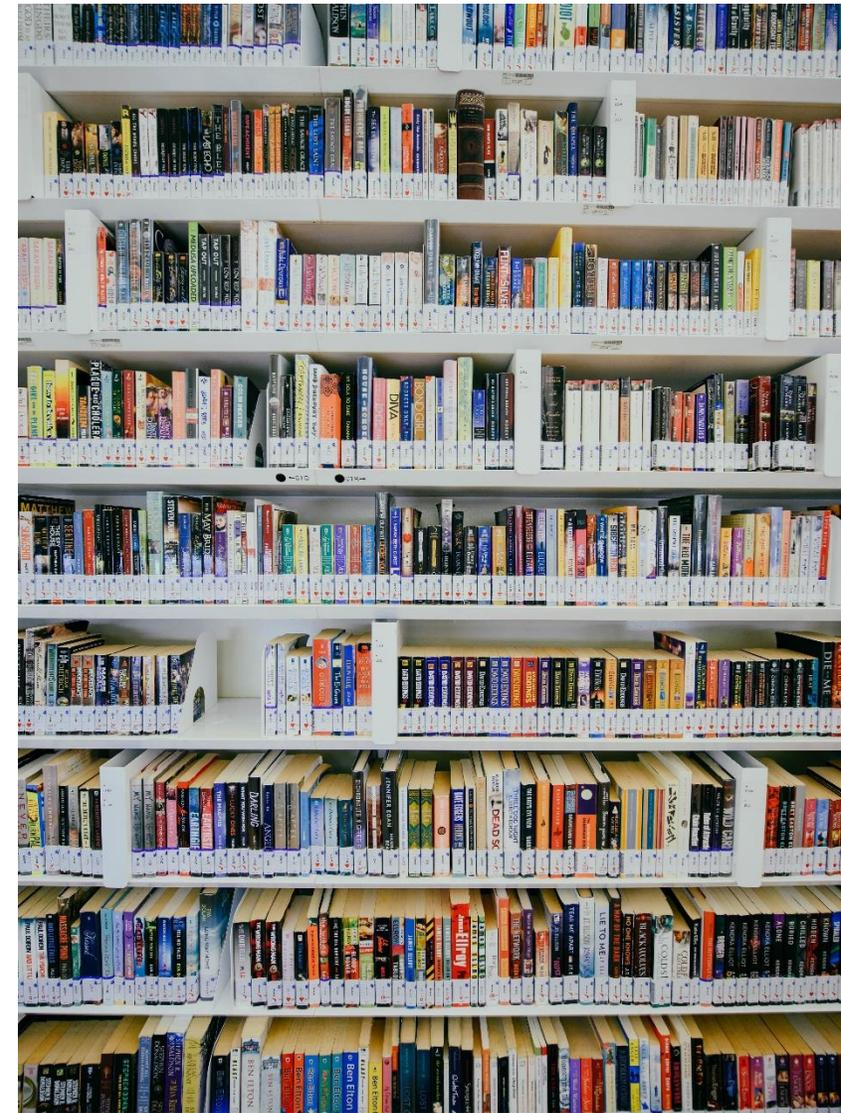
# Eye-line Is Buy-line

## What Is It?

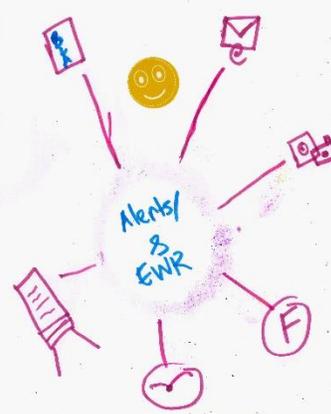
A popular idea with library staff, this would include better displays of stock at library entrances, and on walls and shelf ends. Plus improved signage to convey display themes.

Positioning of books also needs to be improved so that they better reflect the height of different readers.

Hand-written picks from local residents, library staff, and senior Brent employees and councillors would also go down well with library users.



# People need the library service to up its social media game and improve its communications

<p>What's the big idea? Give it a name... <b>Library Youtubers</b></p>		
<p>Show us what it looks like...</p> 	<p>Describe it! Tell us about all its important features...</p> <p>- podcasts on <sup>important topics (e.g. mental health)</sup> about what has been going on at Brent libraries.</p> <p>- Showing what's going on during the week. e.g. events, social groups.</p> <p>- Behind the scenes (interesting bits).</p> <p>- Ads on Brent websites (not just library) that direct you to youtube channel.</p> <p>- visit schools/colleges.</p> <p>- Ads on Social Media.</p> <p>- Famous ex Brent residents.</p>	<p>What's so good about it? Tell us what needs it answers for library users...</p> <p>Interact with youths. → cultivating future users.</p> <p>→ <b>Provides them With Skills.</b></p> <p>- Good publicity which can lead to opportunities/donations.</p> <p>- Larger internet presence offers insight into how the library works and the role it plays in societies.</p> <p>- highlighting importance of libraries</p> <p>recommend books/other useful things.</p> <p>Mantrony A...</p>
<p>stars</p>		
<p>What's the big idea? Give it a name... <b>Weekly Bites</b></p>		
<p>Show us what it looks like...</p> 	<p>Describe it! Tell us about all its important features...</p> <p><b>Alerts</b></p> <p>→ New books</p> <p>→ Events</p> <p>→ New spaces/Sound session/services</p> <p><b>End of Week Report</b></p> <p>→ History + recommendations</p> <p>→ Pick up on searches/interests and feed new books.</p> <p>→ General data on books borrowed, most popular books &amp; 'coming soon' books.</p> <p><b>Channel:</b> App (notification), email, Twitter (Alerts), Facebook, IG hashtag, interactive borrowing machines (of people with no internet/phone)</p>	<p>What's so good about it? Tell us what needs it answers for library users...</p> <p>* Current/on trend</p> <p>* Appealing to young users.</p> <p>* Encouraging older generation to use it.</p> <p>* More personal</p> <p>* Interactive</p> <p>* Inclusive</p> <p>* Practical &amp; efficient</p> <p>stars</p> <p>also with.</p>

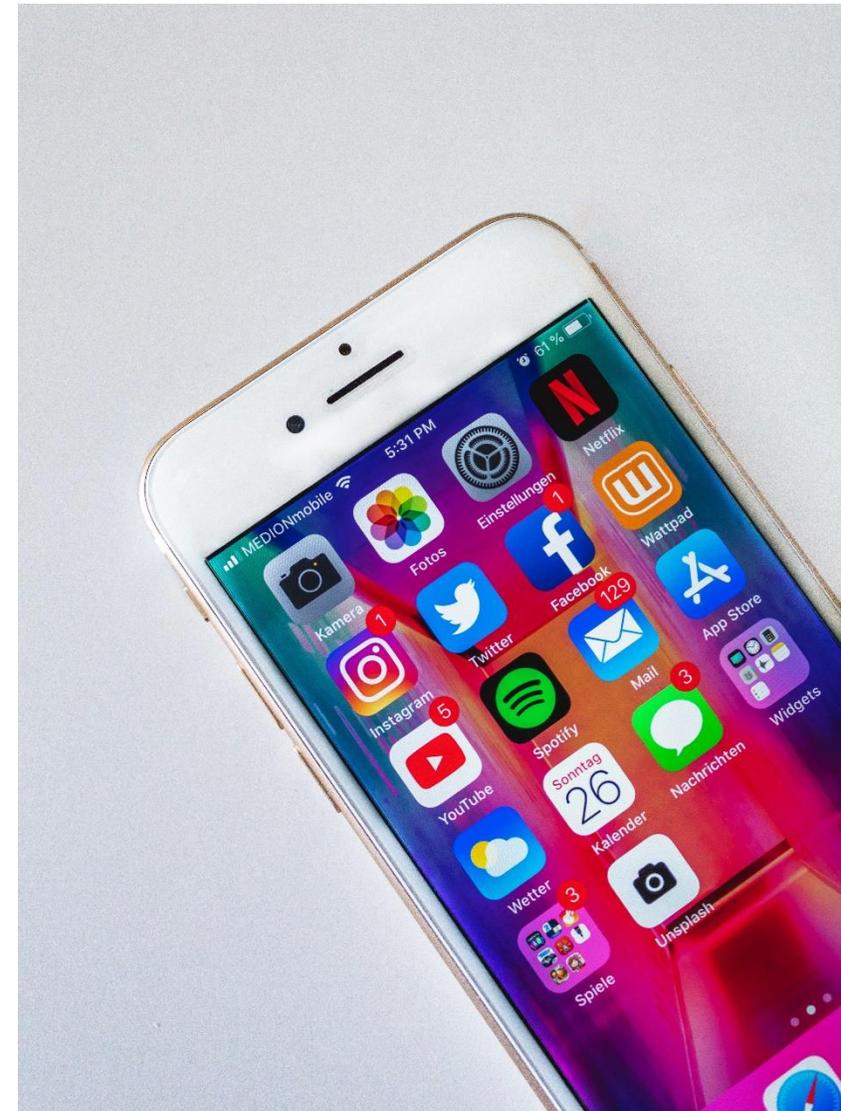
# #Visitthelibrary #Freeatthelibrary

## What Is It?

A social media strategy encouraging people to visit the library and borrow books/digital content. This idea was popular with anyone, young or old, who engaged with social media.

It would create/share content via different channels for different audiences, e.g. Instagram, Facebook, Pinterest. It would produce YouTube videos with local residents as well as local celebrities, and feature behind-the-scenes footage of the libraries.

This idea could play on the themes mentioned above. E.g. people's childhood memories of libraries, and the library and reading as drivers of wellbeing.



# Less Is More/More Is More

## What Is It?

Reducing the number of posters and leaflets on display in the libraries so that users take more notice of the ones that are there.

The flipside of this is making sure that promotional materials for library services, events and Brent's digital offer are numerous enough and properly displayed.

This was the most popular idea with library staff.



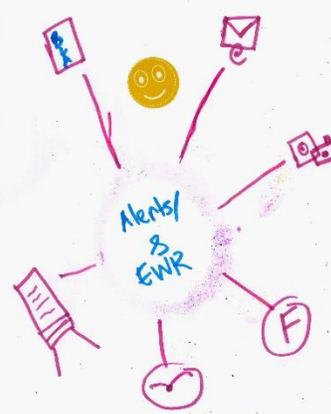
# People need library resources to keep them up to speed about events in the wider world

What's the big idea?  
Give it a name... **Stock responsive to Media trends.**

<p>Show us what it looks like...</p> <p>- Being responsive to trends &amp; topics. Allocating resources as a response. ↳ Also people &amp; services.</p> 	<p>Describe it! Tell us about all its important features...</p> <p>- Being able to predict trends. - Aware of annual events. - Aware of news/research - Library staff trainings - Quality assurance on stock e.g. don't recommend outdated research.</p>	<p>What's so good about it? Tell us what needs it answers for library users...</p> <p>It's responsive. It encourages communication.</p>
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part of a wider social conn. Seasonal trends. Stock.

What's the big idea?  
Give it a name... **Weekly Bites**

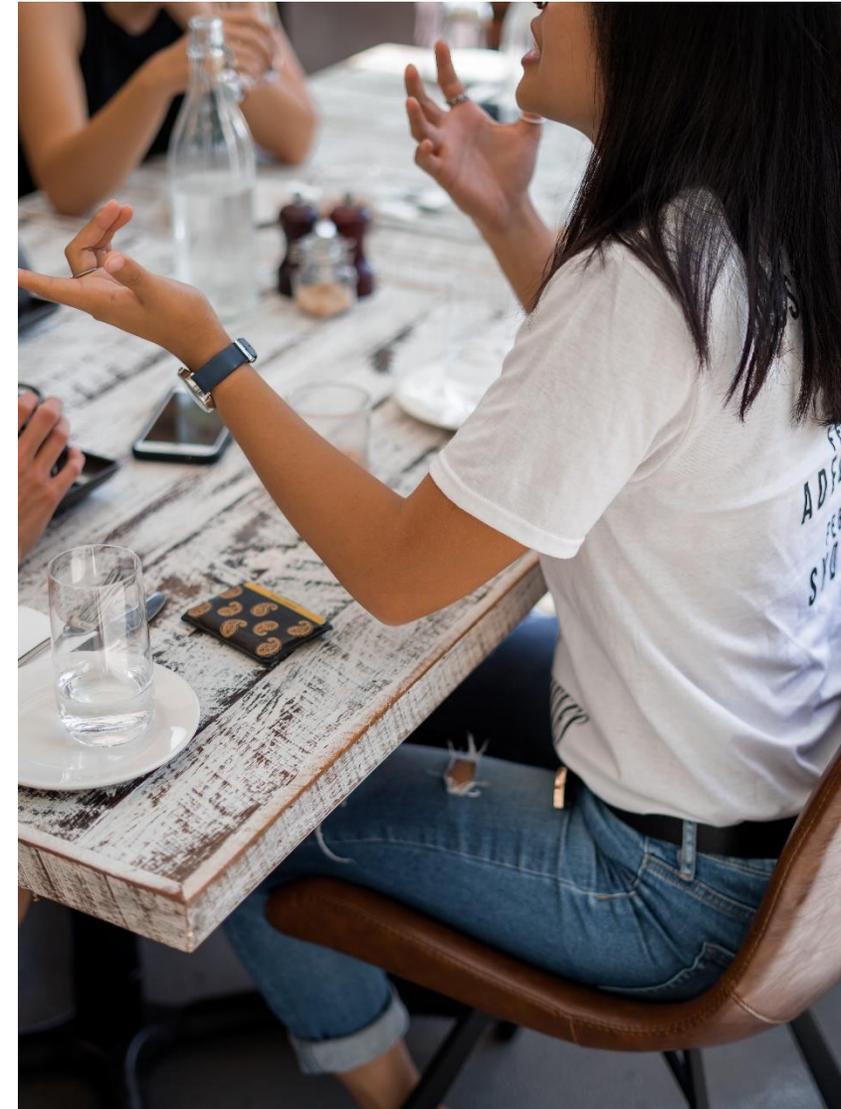
<p>Show us what it looks like...</p> 	<p>Describe it! Tell us about all its important features...</p> <p><b>Alerts</b> → New books → Events → New spaces/Sound session/services</p> <p><b>End of Week Report</b> → History + recommendations → Pick up on searches/interests and feed new books. → General data on books borrowed, most popular books &amp; 'coming soon' books.</p> <p><b>Channels:</b> App (notification), email, Twitter (Alerts), Facebook, IG hashtag, interactive borrowing machines (of people with no internet/phone)</p>	<p>What's so good about it? Tell us what needs it answers for library users...</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>* Current/on trend</li> <li>* Appealing to young users.</li> <li>* Encouraging older generation to use it.</li> <li>* More personal</li> <li>* Interactive</li> <li>* Inclusive</li> <li>* Practical &amp; efficient</li> </ul>
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# The Conversation

## What Is It?

Curates, promotes and displays stock to inform users about broader social and cultural trends. For example, fake news, celebrity chat, food fads, mental wellbeing. Like #visitthelibrary it could play on people's positive associations with libraries.

A popular idea with both library staff and members of the public, this might send emails to people who haven't visited the library for a while. Or recommend books for people to read based on previous choices. It could also promote new books.



# People need Brent to partner with schools and other libraries to provide a wider range of stock

Stock

What's the big idea?  
Give it a name... **Share Stock/Resource between Partner Libraries**

<p>Show us what it looks like...</p> <p>Share <b>resources</b></p>  <p>★</p> <p>★</p>	<p>Describe it! Tell us about all its important features...</p> <p>Build <sup>partnership</sup> <del>with</del> current <del>of</del> New private. Educational &amp; specialist <del>libraries</del> to share stock.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- utilise corporate/apprenticeship resources.</li> <li>- Links on "Elin cloud" so share partner links to Brent library stock (personal physical)</li> </ul>	<p>What's so good about it? Tell us what needs it answers for library users...</p> <p>Partnership. Save on fees Spread of resource Shared cost.</p> <p>★ ★</p>
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Utilise Early Negotiation re. New college in Brent

STO

What's the big idea?  
Give it a name... **Linking school lib + public lib stock.**

<p>Show us what it looks like...</p> 	<p>Describe it! Tell us about all its important features...</p> <p>Increased links between schools in Brent borough. Linking idle resources in schools to public libraries + vice-versa. eg. reading pens / large journal subscriptions.</p>	<p>What's so good about it? Tell us what needs it answers for library users...</p> <p><b>MORE FOR EVERYONE!</b></p>
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# Sharing Is Caring

## What Is It?

Partnerships between Brent and school/college/university libraries. For example, Ark Elvin Academy, College of North West London, University Campus of Football Business. This would give library users from these institutions better access to Brent's services, and vice versa. Other, non-educational, organisations could be involved, too.

Popular with both staff and library users, this idea prompted questions about Brent's libraries being part of the "sharing" economy. E.g. could the libraries become sharing hubs for more than just books?



# People need more personalised, user-friendly experiences from the apps and website

What's the big idea?  
Give it a name... **making online library more accessible**

<p>Show us what it looks like...</p> <p><i>Familiar layout - icons</i></p>  <p><i>one check concept.</i></p>	<p>Describe it! Tell us about all its important features...</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- less text.</li> <li>- more imagery.</li> <li>- instantaneous results.</li> <li>- more options (niche).</li> </ul>	<p>What's so good about it? Tell us what needs it answers for library users...</p> <p><i>part of UK.</i></p> <p><i>convenient</i></p> <p><i>"cleaner"</i></p> 
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What's the big idea?  
Give it a name... **Brent Library App**

<p>Show us what it looks like...</p> 	<p>Describe it! Tell us about all its important features...</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>→ Change the interface, so it's easier to navigate.</li> <li>→ Add more books.</li> <li>→ should have 'recommend' for people who read to keep people using it longer.</li> <li>→ Copy 'Kindle / Scribd'.</li> </ul>	<p>What's so good about it? Tell us what needs it answers for library users...</p> <p><i>prefer digital books</i></p> <p><i>this would be more attractive to people who otherwise pay for it e.g. kindle.</i></p> 
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AL

# Slick Digital Interfaces

## What Is It?

Easy-to-use interfaces for library webpages, app, and navigation to e-readers and e-audiobooks. This could also make it easier for people to suggest new stock, to reserve stock, and to give feedback.

It would remember users and make personal recommendations to keep them reading and engaged. It would also let people know how long they have to wait for certain books. Staff could answer questions via instant messenger, and users would be able to talk to each other via social media.



# People need better digital hardware in the libraries

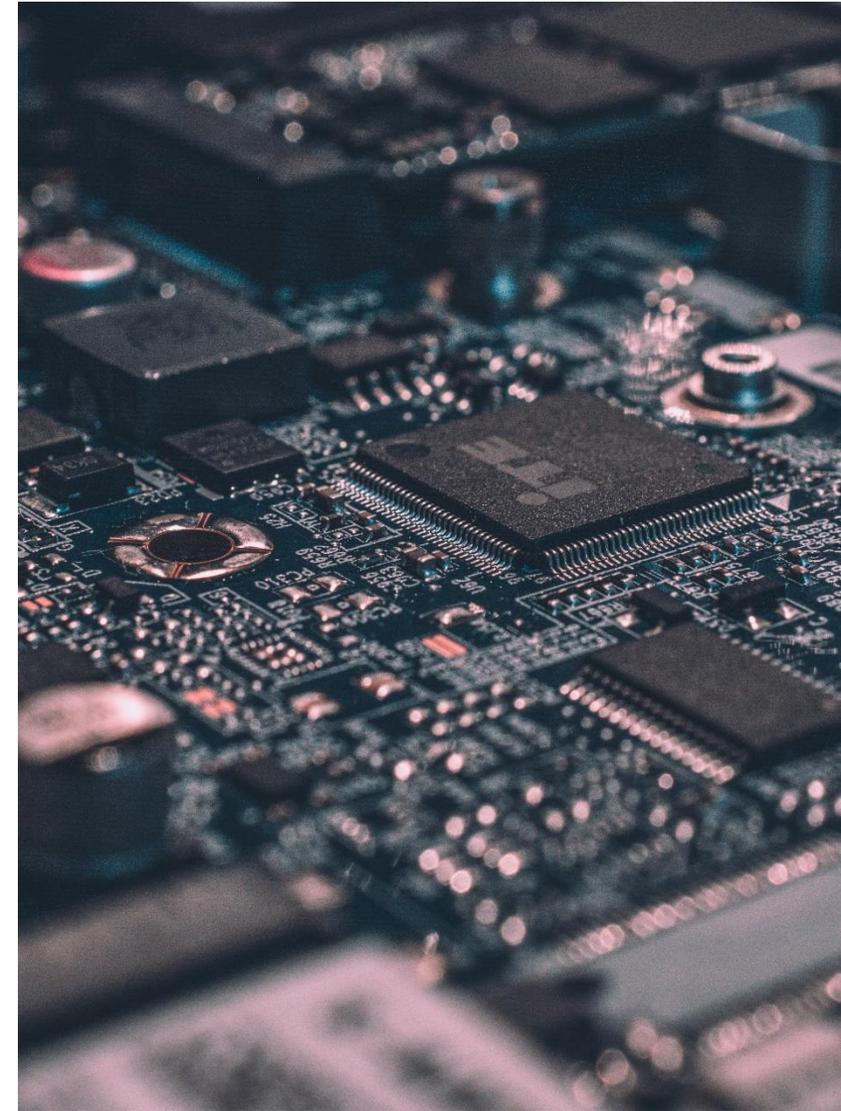
What's the big idea? Give it a name...		
<p>Show us what it looks like...</p> <p><i>High Spec</i></p> 	<p>Describe it! Tell us about all its important features...</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• laptops with high spec e.g. building apps, design software and anything else with a financial barrier.</li> <li>• This can be accompanied by 'how to' books or courses.</li> </ul>	<p>What's so good about it? Tell us what needs it answers for library users...</p> <p>It attracts young people into the library. It becomes more than just a place for books. It overcomes barriers for getting into STEM careers!</p>
What's the big idea? Give it a name...		
<p>Show us what it looks like...</p> <p><i>USB charging points</i></p>  <p><i>usb - credit now give 'charge'!</i></p>	<p>Describe it! Tell us about all its important features...</p> <p><i>usb charging points on the Tables</i></p>	<p>What's so good about it? Tell us what needs it answers for library users...</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- catering to users.</li> <li>- A more attractive place to spend time.</li> <li>- drawing in new service users</li> </ul>

# High Spec Tech

## What Is It?

High-end computers with vocational software such as Appy Pie, Photoshop and Python, and accompanying how-to guides.

This would be combined with USB chargers on library tables. Chargers for a range of mobile phones could also be available.



What happens  
next



# Brent's libraries have choices on how to move forward

In terms of improving library user numbers and better reflecting community needs, the following questions should be considered:

1. Given there is no extra budget or resource, which of the above ideas can be done?

2. How can inactive users be brought back into the libraries to borrow books and use other services?

3. Which of the above ideas need new or reviewed policies to be as impactful as possible?

4. How best to position the libraries in relation to easy-access digital content?

5. And what overall vision for the future do Brent's libraries need?

Thoughts?  
Comments?  
Questions?

Please contact [customer-  
insight@brent.gov.uk](mailto:customer-insight@brent.gov.uk).

**Thank  
You.**

