

INVERCLYDE COUNCIL CITIZENS' PANEL NEWSLETTER

WINTER 2021/22

Dear Panel member

Welcome to the latest Citizens' Panel Newsletter.

Thank you for responding to the Survey issued in Autumn 2021. Fifty-nine per cent of you completed a questionnaire and provided valuable feedback that we will use to improve services provided by the Council.



Topics in the Autumn 2021 Survey were:

- *historic links to slavery in Inverclyde*
- *Inverclyde's libraries.*

The Winter 2021/22 questionnaire focuses on participatory budgeting - roads and footpaths; Inverclyde Council hybrid meetings and events; and satisfaction with Council services. We look forward to receiving your completed Survey.

This Newsletter outlines the key results from the Autumn 2021 Survey and our response to your feedback.

1. Historic links to slavery

We provided background information to the first part of the Survey by advising that, while slavery has existed, and continues to exist, in most societies, the Atlantic slave trade of the 16th to 19th centuries was unique in its scale and long-term consequences. Slavery in mainland America and in the Caribbean was introduced and practised by Europeans who had established plantations and wanted cheap labour. Men, women and children were taken from their own countries and communities in West Africa to be used as forced labour to create the wealth of the plantations. Children born to the enslaved were automatically enslaved themselves and could be sold whenever their owner wished. The enslaved were beaten, branded and abused, without access to the law.

We then informed Panel members that London, Liverpool and Bristol were the main UK ports for the beginning and end of slaving voyages, while other smaller ports such as Greenock and Port Glasgow also had their involvement. The wealth and opportunities that slavery brought permeated across the whole of the British Isles, and can still be seen in local street names such as Jamaica Street, Virginia Street and Antigua Street. The social and economic development of Greenock and Port Glasgow rested on colonial tropical produce and that depended on slavery.

We advised respondents that the Council was examining the historical connections between Inverclyde and the transatlantic slave trade. As part of this work, we wanted to find out what Panel members thought about the best way to tell the story of that relationship. We concluded by saying that, while living individuals are in no way implicated in the abuses inflicted by their ancestors, it is important for us to consider how historical figures are understood and remembered.

Panel members were firstly asked for their views - choosing a maximum of three answers - on the best way to tell the history of the Inverclyde area and its relationship to the

transatlantic slave trade; the top three responses were:

	%
• Artistic interpretation (film, media, plays, poetry etc)	51
• History walks	50
• Plaques/information boards	37.

We introduced the next question by informing Panel members that the Council intended to conduct an audit of features within the Inverclyde area that may have links to the slave trade, adding that this might include statues, monuments, memorials, gravestones, street names, buildings, private residencies etc. The Panel was asked if they were aware of any such features within the area and if they would assist us with our research by identifying them; respondents made a number of suggestions including street names like Tobago Street and buildings like the Sugar Sheds and the Municipal Buildings.

Lastly, we advised Panel members that the Council intended to hold one (or more, depending on level of interest) on-line focus groups/listening events on this subject matter, to allow us to discuss it in greater depth with interested individuals. Fifty-nine Panel members indicated that they would like to take part in these meetings.

Our response to your feedback

Questions on the public views of Inverclyde's historical links to slavery were included in the Autumn 2021 Citizens' Panel Survey because Inverclyde's Historical Links to Slavery Working Group was running a public consultation at around the same time (August-September 2021) and it was therefore an additional route to consult with local residents on this subject.

The Citizens' Panel findings were similar to the responses gathered as part of the public consultation, with 50% and 37% respectively of those polled believing that history walks

and plaques/information boards in relevant places are the best way to tell the story of Inverclyde's relationship to slavery. In contrast, the most popular option in the Citizens' Panel – artistic interpretation – was the least popular option in the public consultation. Many excellent suggestions were received for features within the Inverclyde area that could potentially be added to an audit of such features' historical link to slavery.

In addition to a general public consultation and the Citizens' Panel Survey, the Council Working Group also held two listening events and ran a further consultation specifically on the subject of the Gourock Burgh coat of arms.

Officers prepared the Working Group's Final Report and Recommendations for presentation to the Council's Education and Communities Committee; the report is available to view here: <https://www.inverclyde.gov.uk/meetings/meeting/2421> (agenda item 5). To request a paper copy of the report, please contact Karen Barclay at Inverclyde Council on 01475 712065 or via email: karen.barclay@inverclyde.gov.uk.

2. Inverclyde's libraries

The second section of the Survey comprised questions about library provision in the local area.

We advised the Panel that Inverclyde libraries offer a range of services to people who live and work in the area. These include book and audio book lending for all age groups in both physical and e-format; a programme of activities and events for all ages, both online and in person; learning opportunities; PC use; free Wi-Fi; book groups; clubs for children and adults. We aim to provide all services in a friendly and safe environment.

We began by asking respondents if they have used a public library service in Inverclyde in the last 12 months. Thirty-two per cent of Panel members said they had used the service in person in the last year, while a quarter (25%) did so on-line.

The most popular day for Panel members' last physical visit to a library was Thursday (24%), followed by Tuesday and Friday (both 19%), while the least popular day was Wednesday (9%). The most common time of day for physical visits to libraries was 10-11 am (28%), followed by 2-3 pm (18%), while the least common time was 9-10 am (1%). No respondents said they visited libraries between 5 and 6 pm or 6 and 7 pm.

We introduced the next part of the Survey by advising Panel members that libraries had to adapt and change during the Coronavirus pandemic, adding that, initially, due to Covid-19 restrictions, branches were closed and the Council moved as much service delivery on-line as possible. We invested in our e-book stock and offered e-mail and telephone support to customers. When the restrictions eased, the book delivery service was reinstated and expanded. Additionally, from June 2020, access to libraries for PC use was allowed and the book collection (Connect and Collect) service began, while browsing in branches was reinstated in May last year.

When Panel members were asked about the purpose of their visit(s) to Inverclyde libraries, whether in person or on-line, the top three reasons that people visited a library on every visit were:

	%
• Borrow books	60
• Browse for books	38
• Collect books	27.

When asked, prior to the introduction of the Covid-19 restrictions in March 2020, which Inverclyde library they visited most often, the responses were: Greenock Central – 29%; Greenock South West – 11%; Port Glasgow – 11%; Gourock – 10%; Inverkip and Wemyss Bay – 7%; and Kilmacolm – 5%.

The next question included a list of words that could describe Inverclyde libraries, with Panel members invited to indicate the extent to which they agreed or disagreed with each one; the most popular descriptions that people strongly agreed with were:

	%
• Essential for society	65
• Approachable staff	50
• Helpful	43
• Knowledgeable staff	43.

We then invited respondents to indicate what would encourage them to use a local library more often and the results were:

	%
• To attend an interest group or course (for example, art class, computers, local history)	76
• Covid-19 safe procedures and environment	59
• Book events/meet the author signings	57
• Proximity to home or workplace	57
• For help to set up an interest group (e.g. on local history, craft, Chatty Cafés)	55.

Our response to your feedback

The library service welcomes the many positive comments about Inverclyde's libraries in response to the Autumn 2021 Citizens' Panel Survey.

Despite a very difficult period for libraries with closures, disruption, reduced hours and reduced access brought about by the Covid-19 pandemic, the service is pleased to see that just under a third (32%) of Panel members have used library services in person and quarter (25%) of respondents have used the libraries online; however, it is clear from the figures and comments that service use is by no means back to normal.

The service will conduct further research into why this may be and take action, where possible. The results show that book borrowing is still the most popular activity to take place in libraries and we have invested more in our eBooks and eAudiobooks service in the last year in order to continue meeting this need, even while closed during the lockdowns.

Finally, the data on preferred days and times for library use by the public is helpful and will inform future service planning.