

Formal complaint by Birmingham Loves Libraries against Birmingham City Council

To the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport.

This is a formal complaint by Birmingham Loves Libraries against Birmingham City Council (BCC) under s.10 of the Public Libraries and Museums Act 1964 (the 1964 Act)

(a) for failure to meet its statutory duty under s.7(1) of the 1964 Act, namely to provide a comprehensive and efficient library service for all persons desiring to make use thereof, and

(b) for failure to have due regard to the requirements of the s.149 of the Equality Act 2010 (the Public Sector Equality Duty) in respect of persons having, in particular, the protected characteristics of age and disability.

BCC's Plans and Background

BCC implemented significant closures of libraries and cuts to opening hours from 2010 (austerity cuts, localisation of services and disaggregation of a unified city-wide community library service, and loss of budgets), and then in 2017/2018. In 2024/25 it announced plans (Cabinet decision dated 11th February 2025¹) to reorganise its library service, some of which have been implemented in 2024, with other aspects to be implemented in 2025. These involve (inter alia) the closure of a number of its libraries and the cutting of the library budget by a third with, as a consequence, the city's 35 libraries forming its statutory service being reduced to the Library of Birmingham in the city centre, plus 27 further library locations across the city, such further locations to include 10 Community Hubs operating four days per week, and with the remaining locations offering part-time services for a minimum of three days per week. There will also be a mobile library service provided by two mobile libraries. In addition, according to paras 4.74-4.75 of the report to Cabinet of 11th February 2025, BCC hopes to establish seven "partner-led" libraries not forming part of the statutory service. It remains unclear as to how these will be managed and operated and services delivered.

Summary

BCC's plans for cuts in library numbers, opening hours, staff numbers, and the dilution of staff capacity to undertake community librarianship show that BCC is failing in its duty to provide a comprehensive and efficient service and to encourage library use by both adults and children. Given Birmingham's high levels of diversity of

¹ Decision detail and reports available from Birmingham City Council: https://birmingham.cmis.uk.com/birmingham/Decisions/tabid/67/ctl/ViewCMIS_DecisionDetails/mid/391/Id/13452/Default.aspx

communities and deprivation and overall low levels of educational attainment at primary and secondary level, it is particularly urgent that BCC strengthen and invest in its libraries, a much needed and beloved statutory public service. Instead, BCC have ostensibly disregarded relevant material such as the report of the inquiry into Wirral library services (2009)², which was ordered because of the perceived effect of closures on deprived areas and whose findings that the council's proposals did not satisfy the statutory duty were in large part based upon such adverse effect.

We assert that following the decision of the Cabinet on 11th February 2025, Birmingham City Council will fail in its duty under public libraries legislation to provide a comprehensive and efficient library service for all persons desiring to make use thereof for the following reasons:

1. The displacement and diminution of library services through the amalgamation of community libraries with the council's Neighbourhood Advice and Information Service (NAIS).
2. Further and critically reduced numbers of skilled library staff, the reallocation of NAIS duties to library staff (without a reciprocal reallocation of library duties to NAIS staff), and further uninformed and unsustainable reliance on volunteers for library activities without the professional capacity to initiate and support such activity.
3. The reduction of community library opening hours by over 30%.
4. The library closures on Saturdays were not referenced in either the public consultation or the Cabinet report (February 2025) and were not announced until 10th June 2025.
5. Compounding the Saturday closures, the decision not to open any community libraries in the evening – again omitted from consultation and the Cabinet report – is a major barrier to library use by children and adults and adds materially to the failure to promote and encourage library use.
6. The intention to create seven "partner-led" libraries with no transition plan or funding, and the arbitrary closure of those where no partner is identified or agreement is secured.
7. The closure of two libraries without substantive mitigation plans, despite promises of further consultation and appropriate mitigation.
8. Lack of information on the intention, without justification, to relocate two designated libraries.
9. Inadequate mitigation planning and dependence on short mobile library stops.

² Available here: <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/a-local-inquiry-into-the-public-library-service-provided-by-wirral-metropolitan-borough-council>

In addition to our concerns about the impact on the service, significant weaknesses (often demonstrating a failure to have proper regard to the guidance in the DCMS publication ‘Libraries as a statutory service’ (updated 21 February 2025)) have undermined the decision-making process:

10. There was no consultation on the amount to be cut from the libraries budget. There appeared to be little to no attention paid by those designing BCC’s budget to the already existing impact of cumulative cuts since 2010.
11. Poor and at times inaccessible consultation which presented flawed and shifting data.
12. Inadequate scrutiny, especially during design stage, consultation and decision-making.
13. Insufficient and inadequate Equality Impact Assessments (EIAs).
14. Failure to acknowledge or meet other legal obligations.
15. Inadequate Future Vision and Libraries Strategic Framework.

Our concerns about the BCC Cabinet decision in more detail

- 1. The displacement and diminution of library services through the amalgamation of community libraries with the council’s Neighbourhood Advice and Information Service (NAIS).**
 - a. While the statutory status of libraries requires public consultation to inform substantial change, this is not the case for NAIS. BCC claims that they are carrying out a “transformation” and, by implication, improvement of library services even though the range and quality of the remaining services is much reduced in scale, accessibility, delivery and potential output and impact. It does not reflect the vision for public libraries in England as presented in the strategic documentation published by DCMS, Libraries Connected or CILIP.³
 - b. There has been a lack of clarity about the merger of these services in Council communication in the consultation, which did not clearly explain that the staff structures and budgets were to be merged into a single service.

³ DCMS *Libraries as a Statutory Service* <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/guidance-on-libraries-as-a-statutory-service/libraries-as-a-statutory-service#what-the-law-says-about-public-libraries>

Libraries Connected *Public Libraries: What new councillors need to know* is a useful resource for all

<https://www.librariesconnected.org.uk/public-libraries-what-new-councillors-need-know>

Both have links to many resources and library planning tools

CILIP *Public Library Skills Strategy 2017-2030* <https://www.cilip.org.uk/page/PublicLibrarySkillsStrategy>

CILIP *Call for an ambitious national strategy to safeguard and strengthen public library services* (May 2025)

<https://www.cilip.org.uk/news/701217/Call-for-an-ambitious-national-strategy-to-safeguard-and-strengthen-public-library-services.htm>

- c. There is a lack of clarity regarding the budget allocations for library services versus NAIS services as well as about the risks of relying on the Housing Revenue Account (HRA) for service delivery.
- d. There has been no information about plans for the future scale or distribution of the Resources/Book Fund.
- e. We are concerned about the planned reallocation of NAIS duties to library staff and the imposition of peculiar new job titles and job descriptions (without a reciprocal reallocation of library duties to NAIS staff) at the same time as cuts to staff and without an increase in staff remuneration.
- f. We are concerned that the plans to amalgamate the two services under a reduced budget and reallocate NAIS duties to library staff demonstrate insufficient attention, in particular, to the needs of children. In Birmingham, 40% of the population is under 25 years of age; there are 75,000 under-5s, with more than half of these children living in the 10% most deprived areas in the country. In the Cabinet report and EIA, there are passing references to children and young people and how many use libraries or find them important. However, the reduction of hours, especially weekend and evening, the closure of library sites, and reductions in library staff runs counter to the huge need for library services to support parents, offer spaces with respite for parents and activities for children and young adults, provide learning and fun for children, foster a learning culture in young adults, generate creativity and cultural innovation, and increase skill, creative opportunity and safety in the digital world. The importance of libraries for children and families was underlined in the recent IPSOS report for DCMS, "Barriers to Library Use".⁴

2. Further and critically reduced numbers of skilled library staff, the reallocation of NAIS duties to library staff (without a reciprocal reallocation of library duties to NAIS staff), and further uninformed and unsustainable reliance on volunteers for library activities without the professional capacity to initiate and support such activity.

- a. The Cabinet decision determined that staff will be reduced, stretched and underqualified. The numbers of staff will be reduced across the combined services of community libraries and NAIS from 148 to 110.
- b. We note that staffing has already suffered during years of austerity: from 2010 to 2016, 39 community librarian posts were reduced to 11;⁵

⁴ <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/barriers-to-library-use-qualitative-research-report>

⁵ See Corble, Alice Rose. 2019. The Death and Life of English Public Libraries: Infrastructural practices and value in a time of crisis. Doctoral thesis, Goldsmiths, University of London, p 207. We also want to note that in some public meetings the Head of Service is referred to as "Chief Librarian" with the assertion that the service is professionally led and so conforms to legal requirements. Such a title (which was in fact "City Librarian") was abolished by BCC in 1989, replaced by "Director" and subsequently by "Head of Libraries" or "Head of Service" in line with other converged and downgraded service leaders in the Council.

this has been further reduced, though final totals remain outside the public domain. Posts with professional librarian qualifications in particular have suffered as the service has been hollowed out, maintaining library sites but understaffing them.

- c. Staff library duties will be merged with those of NAIS staff and library staff will be retrained to undertake triage for NAIS. This has caused alarm among library staff who do not believe this is their skill or strength. In the new model, transactional work may be undertaken by any “library staff” while also carrying out NAIS duties; however, hearsay tells us that NAIS staff have refused to undertake transactional library duties. Details of training to help staff cope with the transition have not been released by BCC.
- d. The requirement for library qualifications in the new job structure is unclear. It is understood informally there will be five posts on a par with “community librarian” in the proposed staff structure, overseeing all the remaining community libraries.
- e. Because of the proposed changes, library staff trade union (UNISON) instigated the dispute process but this was rejected by BCC at stage one. Library users and campaigners have observed with concern that the staff consultation only took place once the public consultation was over, rather than in parallel, meaning staff felt that their feedback would not arrive in time to shape proposals.
- f. It appears that BCC envisages the creative, proactive, transformational work undertaken by library staff in the community, working with partner organisations to deliver creative, cultural and informational learning, as the work of volunteers. This militates against the duty to encourage both adults and children to make full use of the library service (1964 Act section 7(2)(b)). Library staff should have time to encourage reading for skill and enjoyment with both children and adults and carry out community development and lifelong learning work with diverse groups, notably vulnerable adults, children and people with protected characteristics.
- g. Indeed, BCC says it will encourage community groups to use the library buildings but there is no evidence or information on who or how; only aspirational rhetoric. Such a role in the community itself requires the proactive engagement of a professional community librarian or equivalent. In spite of multiple references to “working with the community”, BCC’s lack of action in this regard has been counterproductive.
- h. There are significant problems inherent in the use of volunteers in the running of libraries, even if such ‘community-managed’ libraries are not part of the statutory service.⁶ These problems are most acute for volunteer-run libraries in urban areas, especially in locations with high levels of deprivation, where volunteers may be difficult to recruit and/or

⁶ Links to various research and accounts in Public Libraries News
<https://www.publiclibrariesnews.com/campaigning/volunteer-run-libraries>

retain over significant periods. Inevitably, individual volunteers may only be contributing part time and will need to give priority to other personal or family demands. Moreover, they cannot be expected to provide the skills of trained librarians. BCC does not appear to be making significant progress in setting up “partner-led” libraries, perhaps reflecting such limitations. As BCC has stated it will close libraries designated to be “partner-led” if no partners come forward, it is urgent to consider whether BCC’s proposals in this area are likely to come to fruition.

3. The reduction of community library opening hours by over 30%.

- a. Before the conclusion of the consultation, all libraries were “temporarily” closed for one day a week from July 2024, placing increased pressure on the physical accessibility of community libraries. This was initially blamed on the transition to a new service model before being attributed to staffing shortages. These “temporary” closures have for many libraries continued to the present, with insufficient information about if or when recruitment will resume.
- b. Under the model approved by Cabinet in February 2025, BCC reported that opening hours for the statutory library service would be further reduced from a previous total of 1049 to 763 hours per week. This represents a reported reduction of 27.26% reduction in opening hours; however this total, disingenuously, includes hours at the Library of Birmingham (66 per week) and the mobile libraries (30 current and 30 planned); the loss to community libraries alone is greater: 33%, based on these figures.⁷
- c. Libraries will only be open three or four days per week, reducing accessibility and deterring access. Although BCC asserts that organisations and schools will be able to reschedule activities to the days when libraries are open, there are only so many weekly slots available when a library is open only 3 days a week.
- d. This round of cuts to the service comes after previous cuts already decreased hours across the city. In this round, half of the constituencies had statutory-service opening hours reduced by over 40%. Statutory-service opening hours in Sutton Coldfield have been reduced by 75%, a particularly drastic cut.

⁷ Paragraph 4.72, p. 17 of the Cabinet report dated 11 February 2025 reads: “Under the proposed delivery model for option 4, opening hours for BCC led statutory library provision would total 714 hours per week. This represents a 31.94% reduction from the current 1049 hours per week. The proposed hours include the mobile library services and the Library of Birmingham. The specific opening days and times of individual libraries will be confirmed after the staff consultation concludes and will be regularly reviewed.” The report then included a further recommendation (3.4) that “the opening days of all part- time libraries be increased to a minimum of three [rather than two] days per week...Under this recommendation opening hours would total 763 hours per week. This represents a 27.26% reduction from the current 1049 hours per week offered. The proposed hours include the mobile van Library services and the Library of Birmingham” (see paragraph 4.90, p.22). Cabinet approved the report and the further recommendation 3.4.

4. **The library closures on Saturdays were not referenced in either the public consultation or the Cabinet report (February 2025) and were not announced until 10th June 2025.**
5. **Compounding the Saturday closures, the decision not to open any community libraries in the evening – again omitted from consultation and the Cabinet report – is a major barrier to library use by children and adults and adds materially to the failure to promote and encourage library use.**
 - a. In mid-June 2025, after the Cabinet decision and without further consultation, BCC announced a plan to have ten community library hubs open every Saturday and eight other libraries open on alternative Saturdays (Birchfield, Hall Green, Harborne, Kings Norton, South Yardley, Kingstanding, Sparkhill, Stirchley). Nine others (Perry Common, Yardley Wood, Weoley Castle, Shard End, Tower Hill, Sheldon, Aston, Balsall Heath, Selly Oak) would never open on a Saturday.⁸ There has been significant public outcry at the plan that reduces access for residents who work during the week, families with young children, and school-age children: Saturday is their only chance to visit their local library.
 - b. Before BCC implemented the “temporary” one-day-a-week closures of July 2024, there were 28 libraries open on Saturday. In addition, two other libraries under renovation or due for repairs had, prior to their closure, opened on Saturdays. BCC’s June 2025 plan cuts that original total of 30 (28 + 2) to 14 libraries open each Saturday, a reduction in Saturday openings of over 50%.
 - c. To open libraries only on alternate Saturdays will compound the “barrier to use” with inconsistent hours, which risk deterring regular and frequent use and complicates having a weekly offer of learning and cultural activities at the library.
 - d. Opening hours in community libraries have been reduced repeatedly over the last two decades; this has meant libraries are rarely open outside office hours. The current proposal, yet to be clarified/confirmed, will only include one so-called evening opening (until 6.00pm) per constituency per week.
 - e. Saturday and evening opening hours are important for school-age children, families, young adults, and people who work and study during the week. Central to our concern is the fact that the paucity of opening times deters access, doing exactly the opposite to the statutory requirement to encourage both children and adults and installing one of the barriers cited in the IPSOS report for DCMS, “Barriers to library use”. (DCMS Report ‘What works to engage library non-users’ (10 July 2025))

⁸ Announcement available at https://www.birmingham.gov.uk/news/article/1577/changes_to_saturday_opening_hours_of_library_buildings

- f. The recent announcement of Saturday closures, made without any consultation and post-Cabinet decision, is catastrophic, threatening to shut down many weekly, fortnightly and monthly community group-led activities which, of necessity, take place on Saturday. It has generated renewed campaigning by 'Friends of' and other library groups to "Save Our Saturdays".
- g. BCC have since announced a temporary extension to some Saturday openings but only due to planned closures during maintenance works in Spring of 2026.

6. The intention to create seven "partner-led" libraries with no transition plan or funding, and the arbitrary closure of those where no partner is identified or agreement secured.

- a. BCC designated seven libraries to be "partner-led": Bartley Green Library, Bloomsbury Library, Boldmere Library, Frankley Library, Glebe Farm Library, Sutton Coldfield Library, and Walmley Library. These libraries would receive no BCC funding, be operated or funded by groups or organisations outside BCC, and be designated as outside the statutory offer. BCC has stated however that these partner sites will be linked to the library management systems and reservations systems. Nonetheless, people will not be able to apply for library membership, reset library account pins, or pay overdue book charges at these libraries.
- b. Critically, there has been no publicly available information about any kind of transition funding or volunteer training programmes for these libraries, a mitigation that other library authorities have implemented to help secure the future of partner-led libraries. In a difficult funding environment, it is concerning that partner-led libraries would be competing against each other for external funding and with no support from BCC.
- c. After initial press coverage indicated that BCC was intending to have 11 hubs and hand over the remaining community libraries to the voluntary sector,⁹ the Council called for people to register as potential partners during the initial consultation period, before library users had been able to comment on the proposed models. Library users expressed concern that people or organisations volunteering to run their library could potentially have been putting their library at risk of being chosen as a partner-led option.
- d. There is little public information on the detail of the relationship – legal, financial, strategic or operational – partners will have with BCC. On one hand, this raises concerns about the practicalities of the relationship: as an example, the Council has not made public plans about how repairs to self-service kiosks at partner libraries will be financed or who

⁹ <https://www.birminghammail.co.uk/news/midlands-news/25-community-libraries-birmingham-risk-28488801>

would be responsible for building maintenance. On the other hand, there has been little public discussion or engagement on the question of which organisations should take over libraries.

- e. BCC has made limited progress in securing agreements with partners, claiming to have pursued largely confidential discussions with undisclosed potential partners. At the time of writing, over six months after the Cabinet decision, there is still little public information about the future of partner-led libraries. In one case, that of Frankley Library, the partner was announced on social media only a month before the library was due to lose its council funding, for example. The exception to this situation is two of the libraries in the Sutton Coldfield constituency, where the Royal Sutton Coldfield Town Council has agreed an arrangement with BCC, details of which are now in the public domain.¹⁰
- f. The future of these libraries remains at risk. One library which was designated as partner-led, Sutton Coldfield, has already been closed in June 2025, to be replaced by a mobile library stop of only 3 hours a week (see below for more detail). BCC's previous attempt at creating a partner-led library in Castle Vale has not been a success; the library has now closed without any stated intention or plan to reopen – despite BCC portraying it as a success during the consultation period in 2024. In the event of the Royal Sutton Coldfield Town Council withdrawing funding from the two libraries it is supporting, it is assumed they would close.
- g. The loss of any of these libraries would leave significant gaps in geographical distribution. Moreover, some of the libraries – Bartley Green, Bloomsbury, Frankley and Glebe Farm in particular – are in areas of high deprivation. Bartley Green and Bloomsbury Libraries are in the top 10% of deprived wards nationally and Frankley and Glebe Farm in the top 20%; Frankley and Bartley Green both have higher than UK average disabled population.¹¹ By BCC's own admission, for these communities, closing a library would have significant socio-economic impact, reducing residents' access to educational resources, information, study space, internet access, and community engagement opportunities.¹²
- h. Despite the potentially high socio-economic cost of these libraries closing, the building costs due to be saved by BCC are minimal: for all of these libraries except Sutton Coldfield, the savings are less than £50,000 per library. For Bartley Green Library, for instance, the saving

¹⁰ Report to Strategy & Resources Committee , 17 September 2025, <https://suttoncoldfieldtowncouncil.gov.uk/wp-content/uploads/2025/09/RSCTC-Libraries-and-Community-Centres.pdf>

¹¹ Report to Cabinet, 11 February 2025, p. 7; BCC, Appendix C Equality Impact Assessment Transformation of Libraries and NAIS Service, p 23, 61. https://birmingham.cmis.uk.com/birmingham/Decisions/tabid/67/ctl/ViewCMIS_DecisionDetails/mid/391/Id/13452/Default.aspx

¹² Appendix C Equality Impact Assessment Transformation of Libraries and NAIS Service, p. 62.

is listed as £14,155; for Frankley Library, the saving is listed as £22,054.

7. The closure of two libraries (Spring Hill, Sutton Coldfield) without substantive mitigation plans, despite promises of further consultation and appropriate mitigation.

Spring Hill

- a. This purpose-built library is an historic Grade II* listed Ladywood landmark in inner city Birmingham. Its sustainability was supposedly confirmed by the construction in 2010 of a Tesco supermarket attached to it, increasing accessibility with a lift and automatic doors, works which included a substantial contribution by Tesco.¹³ BCC threatened to close the library and sell off the building in 2014, but changed its plan in response to community campaigning. However, BCC closed the library in 2022, stating publicly that they needed to repair the heating and would do so as a high priority.¹⁴ No such action ensued. BCC then announced its permanent closure in the Cabinet report of February 2025.
- b. There are high levels of deprivation in the area: the child poverty rate is 55% and 26% of households experience fuel poverty. The area is undergoing a major regeneration programme which excludes the library. Before the 2022 closure, there were 4,700 active members, with membership on an upward trend following the Covid lockdowns. The library hosted numerous activities, events and locally organised groups including a Reading for Wellbeing group, conversational English classes, a stitching group, a stay and play group for children, and a summer holiday club in collaboration with The Reading Agency.
- c. Mitigation is evidently minimal with a maximum of two mobile library stops per week to replace a static library. BCC appears to be relying on the fact that the community has already had to adjust to the closure of their community library; the Cabinet report of 11th February 2025 reads: "Spring Hill Library has been closed since December 2022, ensuring minimal impact on the community. There has been a weekly Mobile Library stop there since this closure." This stop is currently for a mere 45 minutes on a Wednesday. While BCC notes that the Library of Birmingham is a 20-minute walk away, residents stated that their community library and its staff were important for more vulnerable members of their community, the elderly and those with mobility challenges.¹⁵

¹³ Detail of this can be found in the following FOI:

https://www.whatdotheyknow.com/request/capital_spend_on_spring_hill_lib#incoming-481631

¹⁴ It closed 'temporarily' for heating repairs on 14 December 2022. All the books remain on the shelves, and a two-year-old Council poster still on the side door promises that 'the problem is being addressed as a top priority and the library will re-open as soon as heating has been restored.'

¹⁵ Birmingham Loves Libraries highlighted the importance of Spring Hill Library to the wider neighbourhood in a post: <https://www.birminghamloveslibraries.org/post/save-spring-hill-library>

Sutton Coldfield

- d. Sutton Coldfield was proposed as a partner-led library in BCC's Cabinet report of 11th February 2025, with its future described as "BCC retained – fully funded by Royal Sutton Town Council". However, on 21st May 2025, BCC announced that Sutton Coldfield Library would close permanently from 27th June 2025. Prior to the incremental cuts of the last two decades, this was a major library at the centre of the former borough with significant provision of materials in all media for loan, a local studies library with unique collections, a separate children's library, meeting and exhibition facilities and a permanent exhibition of historic artefacts relating to the history of the town. The historic material has since been moved out of the town and into the Library of Birmingham. The thriving and long-standing Sutton Coldfield Local History Research Group has had to reduce its activities and members have to travel into Birmingham to access materials.
- e. It has been difficult from BCC documents and meeting notes in the public domain to understand the negotiations between BCC and Royal Sutton Coldfield Town Council (RSCTC), with councillors and officers in meetings giving varied impressions of the progress of negotiations.
- f. Since the 2017/18 changes to library services in Birmingham, Sutton Coldfield has had four well used libraries: Boldmere (tier 2), Mere Green (tier 1), Sutton Coldfield town centre (tier 1), Walmley (tier 2). On 18th September 2024, RSCTC's Strategy & Resources Committee resolved to explore a partnership approach to help secure the future of the four libraries in Sutton Coldfield and the community centres in Mere Green and Walmley and to explore options including relocating Sutton Coldfield Library from the Red Rose Centre to a more prominent town centre location. As part of the Cabinet decision on 11th February 2025, BCC decided to retain the Mere Green library as the 'hub' in the Sutton Coldfield constituency and for the other three libraries to be partner-led. RSCTC was named as the partner, although it was reported at the Cabinet meeting that no formal agreement had been reached with RSCTC.
- g. Engagement subsequently took place with Royal Sutton Coldfield Town Council regarding the continuation of library provision in Sutton Coldfield through a formal agreement. There was to be an exploration of alternative site provision for Sutton Coldfield Library due to the current condition of the building, post cabinet report. It was proposed that BCC would continue to fund Mere Green as the Community Library Hub. The intention was that BCC would retain ownership of all assets and that RSCTC would meet service responsibilities related to staffing and building maintenance/repairs etc, through a proposed service level agreement. However, discussions with the RSCTC about the Sutton Coldfield Library clearly ended without a partnership and the

library was summarily closed at the end of June 2025. At this point and without a partnership agreement with RSCTC and with further lack of transparency, a different reason was given for the closure, namely the cost of repairs to the building. It is not public knowledge if funding this gap was a condition of it being designated a partner-led library.

- h. In this scenario the main library for the Sutton Coldfield constituency (as it is now) will now be Mere Green Library. This is located in possibly the most affluent area of Sutton Coldfield (indeed, Birmingham), while there are areas of greater disadvantage in other parts of the constituency such as Falcon Lodge estate. These are at some distance from Mere Green Library (Sutton Coldfield 1.9mi. Falcon Lodge 3.2mi).
- i. BCC stated that the nearest full-time library to Sutton Coldfield is 43 minutes' walk away. There appears to have been very limited mitigation, despite BCC's promises in the EIA of an "immediate mitigation" whereby "activities and events will be offered in local community and voluntary organisations' sites".¹⁶ There is only the introduction of a 3-hour weekly mobile library stop. In the case of the closure of a partner-led library BCC committed to "Engage with the community to understand their needs and concerns and involve them in finding solutions"; such community engagement has never happened.¹⁷

8. Lack of information on the intention, without justification, to relocate two designated libraries.

- a. There is no information in the public domain about where Harborne and Tower Hill Libraries are to be moved to.
- b. The timeline, if there is one, for moving these libraries is unknown, meaning residents are nervous about the future of their library services.

9. Inadequate mitigation planning and dependence on short mobile library stops.

- a. As mentioned in some of the points above, the mitigation proposed by the council in the EIA is engagement and services to be delivered via a mobile library. The addition of one more mobile library is proposed, bringing provision to a total of two mobile vans.
- b. Mobile libraries are not a comprehensive substitute for a static library, not least if it is also expected to offer NAIS provision.
- c. Furthermore, we have concerns about the proposal of mobile library stops as a catch-all mitigation for the cuts to library services. In the Cabinet report, it is alleged that the mobile will offer 50 stops per week and operate five days a week for a weekly total of 30 hours.¹⁸ This

¹⁶ Appendix C Equality Impact Assessment Transformation of Libraries and NAIS Service, p. 9.

¹⁷ Appendix C Equality Impact Assessment Transformation of Libraries and NAIS Service, p. 65.

¹⁸ Report to Cabinet, 11 February 2025, p. 20, 22.

would equate to an average of 25 stops per week over five days for each mobile library. Five stops per day implies stops averaging 1.2 hours each (despite longer stops of 3 hours promised in BCC mitigation plans). Indeed, the current schedule of the mobile library involves many stops that are only 35-45 minutes long.¹⁹

- d. Stops of less than 2 hours will provide little opportunity for more than brief browsing, returns and borrowing. There would be no opportunity for outreach opportunities, homework, study, online research, form filling, extended enquiries, etc. Considering that BCC envisions using mobile library stops to expand provision in areas of high need (in the top 10 through the Index of Multiple Deprivation score) and aims to use the mobile libraries to deliver a wider range of services, this scant attention to the logistics of the mobile libraries is of concern.
- e. With the announcement in June 2025 that on Saturdays many libraries will be closed, BCC announced that “There will be additional provision every Saturday by the mobile library service”.²⁰ There is no evidence of how this will be achieved; the existing mobile libraries are already committed according to the Cabinet report.

Our concerns about the decision-making process in more detail:

10. There was no consultation on the amount to be cut from the libraries budget. There appeared to be little to no attention paid by those designing BCC’s budget to the already existing impact of cumulative cuts since 2010.

- a) In 2010, the city had 39 libraries, most open full time. Repeated austerity cuts since 2010 meant that between 2011 and 2015, the budget for community libraries dropped from around £9 to £4 million; by 2024 it was £5.37 million. In addition to the loss of four libraries – Kents Moat (closed), West Heath (demolished), Wylde Green (closed), and Castle Vale (community asset transfer c. 2015, now closed) – opening hours have hugely decreased and some libraries have been put in smaller, shared premises or moved to smaller buildings with fewer staff (Aston, now in a community fire station; Birchfield, moved to smaller premises; Bloomsbury, in the Nechells Pod community centre; and Selly Oak, now in the Sense building, Touchbase Pears). As covered above, there have been large cuts to staff. There is already an increased reliance on volunteers and charities to provide additional hours; experience has shown at Stirchley Library that setting up a stable pool of volunteers to help extend library hours has taken 3-4 years.

¹⁹ https://www.birmingham.gov.uk/info/50163/library_services/1479/mobile_library_service/3

²⁰ https://www.birmingham.gov.uk/news/article/1577/changes_to_saturday_opening_hours_of_library_buildings

- b) The “Resources available” criterion²¹ is not accurate as Birmingham’s resources are not so much “available” as allocated and approved by BCC through a budget process that involved no consultation (except for a badly designed survey listing all services provided by the council and asking people to rank them; results were never released). Following the issue of a Section 114 Notice in September 2023, a £2.285m reduction in Community Libraries and NAIS annual spending for 2025/26 onwards was proposed through redesigning and amalgamating the services. These proposals were approved by City Council as part of the 2024/25 Council Budget and planned to be phased in over two years.

11. Poor and at times inaccessible consultation which presented flawed and shifting data.

- a) Public consultation began in April 2024 and ran through four stages for almost a year. The first stage of the consultation was online, with attendees able to input questions in the chat with responses to be published weeks later online in the form of a list of FAQs. The session required adequate digital access and skills to attend and text on the slides required a high level of literacy.
- b) There was no intention to address the needs of children or young adults. The Friends of Stirchley Library organised a public meeting at which people protested that the consultation was designed solely for able-bodied, digitally literate adults. Subsequently a questionnaire was published for children. This adult-oriented initiative had three questions, none of which referred to the fact that the consultation was about cuts to the library service.
- c) There was no indication of any intention to seek the views of people with protected characteristics in a comprehensive way, rather than outreach to specific groups. i.e. there was little effort to provide the information and questions or any form of consultation in community languages or any accessible format, or to have meetings in individual libraries.
- d) Following protests, public consultation meetings were eventually held in libraries or other venues at which enlarged copies of the same slides were displayed with forms provided for comment. Officers were present to engage with people attending, but in some libraries, attendance was restricted to small groups of 8-12 people each.
- e) Incorrect and shifting presentation of usage data:
 - i. BCC claimed that the decline in library use was an inevitable change due to people using online services in order to justify

²¹ “It [a council] must do so in a way which meets the needs of people living, studying or working in the area, taking into account the resources available.” *Guidance. Libraries as a Statutory Service* p. 4
<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/guidance-on-libraries-as-a-statutory-service/libraries-as-a-statutory-service#what-the-law-says-about-public-libraries>

reducing the number of libraries and reconfiguring them to house NAIS services.²² They compared visits and borrowing statistics from 2014 with those of 2023, noting a decline, but without specifying the data used to reach this conclusion and without mentioning numerous external and internal factors that impacted on library use in the intervening years. The final Cabinet report, coming after months of campaigning by library users shows an increased recognition of the value of libraries to communities and the impact of Covid lockdowns and repeated cuts on library usage data; this did not cause BCC to reduce the budget cuts.

- ii. In initial consultation documents as well as in answers to councillors, BCC claimed library membership had declined – initial consultation documents cited a figure of 45%. In answers to councillors, they pointed to a category of “membership reserve”, which was left undefined,²³ but later was defined by the consultation team in reply to a campaigner after numerous queries as “the number of issues + returns of items”, which is unrelated to membership. As recognised in the February 2025 Cabinet report (but not corrected in consultation documents), membership has remained relatively stable, with 37% of Community Library provision (13 out of 35) seeing increased active library memberships of more than 5% from the years 2014-2023; 34% of Community Library provision (12 out of 35) having notably stable active memberships between the years 2014-2023 (no more or no less than a 5% difference between the earliest year of data available and the latest). Only 28% of Community Library provision (10 out of 35) has seen decreased library memberships of more than 5% from the years 2014-2023.²⁴ It is unclear why this data was not presented to members and the public at the time of consultation.
- iii. “Membership” was then changed to usage in consultation documents, with a statement that “Since 2014 useage [sic] of libraries has declined by 45% and continues to decline”; it remained unclear what data they were relying on.²⁵ It also contradicted BCC’s own evidence that footfall was rising in the years following Covid, as people began to return to regular library use.
- iv. The Cabinet report of February 2025 states: “At the same time overall physical usage (as defined by a combination of both footfall and PC usage in libraries) has declined by 45% from 2019-2023. Some of this decline can be attributed to library

²² CC, *Libraries Public Consultation* pack, April 2024.

²³ BCC, Meeting of the City Council, 5 March 2023, Agenda pack, p. 42.

²⁴ Report to Cabinet, 11 February 2025, p. 13.

²⁵ BCC, *Libraries Public Consultation* pack, April 2024.

closures/reduction in hours. The pandemic and closures of amenities during 2020 was also a major contributor to this trend."²⁶ It is unclear why BCC did not include this statement in original consultation documents. However, while BCC at least recognised here the impact of previous cuts and the pandemic, the statement in the cabinet report remains problematic and does not justify further service reductions and closures: (1) it is unclear how usage has been measured; (2) it is problematic to combine PC usage and footfall without a well thought-out methodology, and (3) the pandemic and associated closures of amenities during 2020 should be regarded as a temporary phenomenon from which recovery is in progress and continues rather than a permanent change.

12. Inadequate scrutiny, especially during design stage, consultation and decision-making.

- a) BCC sets out the role and responsibilities of the Overview and Scrutiny Committees (OSCs): "Overview and scrutiny committees ensure that decision makers within the council are held accountable. They help in strategic policy development, drive improvement in public services, and ensure that the voice of the public is heard. [...] They ensure cabinet members are accountable for the decisions they make, and for the services being delivered across the city."²⁷ We are concerned that there was minimal and inadequate scrutiny of the proposals to cut and reshape BCC library services. We highlight in particular: the lack of time given to scrutiny, particularly during the consultation period; the failure of scrutiny to meet its constitutional role, i.e. to provide a voice for the public; the poor quality of questioning and discussion with many members making little or no contribution; senior officers and cabinet member not attending even when timetabled in.
- b) From June 2024, library services have been under the responsibility of the Neighbourhoods OSC.²⁸ Previously they had been under the purview of the Coordinating OSC. In June 2024, the Coordinating OSC adopted the recommendation from the (informal and therefore held in private) April Savings Delivery Task and Finish Group meetings: "Saving 193 (Early Intervention and Prevention - Library and NAIS re-design): That the consultation process should be well managed and executed properly to enable residents and other key stakeholders to contribute meaningfully."²⁹ Subsequently, at the special meeting of the

²⁶ Report to Cabinet, 11 February 2025, p. 17 of 1056, Para. 4.44.

²⁷ https://www.birmingham.gov.uk/info/20142/overview_and_scrutiny/212/about_overview_and_scrutiny

²⁸ BCC, Neighbourhoods Overview and Scrutiny Committee, Agenda Document Pack, 19 June 2024, pp. 9-10, 18.

²⁹ BCC, Corporate & Finance Overview and Scrutiny Committee, 28 June 2024, Agenda Document Pack, p. 45.

Neighbourhoods OSC in February 2025, it was generally acknowledged that had not been done.

- c) Libraries remained on the Neighbourhoods OSC agenda throughout 2024 but no substantive scrutiny took place:
 - i. Minutes from the June 2024 OSC note that the consultation would end in July and libraries would be discussed at September's meeting. This meeting did not take place. There was a private meeting in July of the scrutiny committee, with no record published.
 - ii. At the next meeting in October 2024, despite libraries being on the agenda, the cabinet member responsible and officers all sent apologies and absented themselves.
 - iii. Only on 27th November 2024 did the Neighbourhoods OSC discuss the proposed changes to libraries with the Cabinet member and senior officers, who stated that the report would go to Cabinet on the 21st January 2025. The discussion consisted of a brief overview of the ongoing (extended due to an error) consultation, and a brief overview of the model, i.e. there would be provision for 28 libraries (including the Library of Birmingham) and each constituency would have a community hub. Members discussed the delay in making the saving target of £1.260m in 2024/25 and agreed it was critical to 'get this right' due to the importance of libraries, arguing that it was an opportunity to transform the service to ensure it was fit for purpose. The Cabinet Member acknowledged libraries were important and that 'one size does not fit all.' Therefore, the service would be tailored, and officers would be working with communities. The OSC agreed to change the date of the committee meeting to 15th January to accommodate the proposal going to Cabinet on 21st January 2025.
- d) On 15th January 2025, the Chair read a statement from the Interim Executive Director, Corporate Services that stated: "The Transformation of Community Libraries ... report is no longer on the agenda for Cabinet next week. As a result, this will not be considered by Neighbourhoods Overview and Scrutiny Committee tomorrow. Library services play a valuable role at the heart of our communities [...] Following public consultation, a report [...] is now expected to be delivered to Cabinet in February."
- e) Neighbourhoods OSC then met on 5th February 2025 "to provide the opportunity to provide comments and key points for Cabinet to consider at its meeting on 11th February 2025."³⁰ The committee acknowledged the current discussions with the trade unions regarding the proposed new model and requested that the Executive provide further details,

³⁰ BCC, Meeting Details, Neighbourhoods OSC, 5 February 2025, <https://birmingham.cmis.uk.com/birmingham/Meetings/tabid/70/ctl/ViewMeetingPublic/mid/397/Meeting/14546/Committee/419/SelectedTab/Documents/Default.aspx>

when available, on the proposed model to provide assurance on the service provided and enable further scrutiny. The Cabinet Member agreed to report back to the Committee, subject to approval at Cabinet on Tuesday, and after the staff consultation had concluded. It is evident from the video recordings, minutes and the final recommendations that, in spite of some questions from opposition councillors, there was no scrutiny of the consultation process, the restructuring or the nature of the library services being proposed. Councillors repeatedly asked to be better informed in the future and that they be engaged in the consultation process with “the community”. There was no indication that the Scrutiny Committee had articulated any views on the detail of the consultation to ensure the public voice had been heard nor on the future nature of community library services.

- f) At this meeting, the OSC made 10 recommendations for inclusion in the Cabinet’s consideration on 11th February 2025. Cabinet was invited to provide a formal written response after the meeting. In the event, a response to the recommendations was incorporated into the progress report presented to the Neighbourhoods OSC May meeting.
- g) Requests for the Cabinet decision to be ‘called in’ were reviewed and declined at the Neighbourhoods OSC on 5th March 2025.
- h) The Neighbourhoods OSC reviewed a progress report on 14th May 2025.³¹ The section on ‘Engagement’ indicated it was in the very early stages, referring as it does to an intention to identify key stakeholders and how the service would work with them. This was particularly disappointing as it was two months after the decision was made not to ‘call in’ the Cabinet decision. Additionally, the report did not fully address a number of the OSC’s 10 recommendations.
- i) The Neighbourhoods OSC reviewed a progress report on 22nd October 2025.³² This reported that an implementation plan was in place and that “The critical milestones for the plan are themed within [seven] workstreams.” The report was not then structured by workstream, making it difficult to be clear about progress in each area. There was still no reference to specific plans for Harborne and Tower Hill libraries. The engagement plan is still disappointing. The engagement reported is predominantly with councillors. There are some references to communicating with the public but there is no reference to engaging the numerous community groups supporting library services within the city.
- j) The reports to the OSC are the only source of public information about the operation of the library services. Their continuation is therefore an essential part of democratic accountability.

³¹ Available here:

<https://birmingham.cmis.uk.com/birmingham/Meetings/tabid/70/ctl/ViewMeetingPublic/mid/397/Meeting/14251/Committee/419/Default.aspx>

³² Available here:

<https://birmingham.cmis.uk.com/birmingham/Meetings/tabid/70/ctl/ViewMeetingPublic/mid/397/Meeting/14821/Committee/419/Default.aspx>

13. Insufficient and inadequate Equality Impact Assessments (EIAs).

- a) We are concerned that there has only been one EIA for the whole city rather than EIAs for individual libraries. In particular, there does not appear to have been an EIA examining the impact of the closure of either Spring Hill or Sutton Coldfield Libraries, or for the individual libraries set to be partner-led, or failing an agreement with a suitable partner, close.
- b) The initial EIA, Reference EIA000346, completed 05/02/2024, proposed “a minimum of 11 Libraries – ‘Community Living Room’ concepts” to replace the 35 existing community libraries, also implying that remaining libraries will be closed or handed over to community groups. This document suggested minimal mitigations to such a drastic change to the service.
- c) The second EIA, Reference EIA000916, which accompanied the Cabinet Report of 11/2/2025, again covered the whole city rather than individual libraries, risking overlooking the individual characteristics of each library’s users and their needs. As noted above, not only are proposed mitigations limited, but except for an increase in mobile library provision, even those proposed in the EIA appear not to be taking place.
- d) Accessibility of public libraries is of a matter of general importance. It is of especial concern to older people and to people with disabilities. This has been inadequately addressed by BCC.

14. Failure to acknowledge or meet other legal obligations.

- a) Human Rights Act 1998 (HRA98).³³
 - i. The statutory duty imposed on BCC by s.7(1) of the 1964 Act must, by virtue of s.3 of HRA98, be interpreted in the light of relevant rights secured by the European Convention on Human Rights, including the right to education, to which library services are integral (the IFLA-UNESCO Public Library Manifesto³⁴).
 - ii. The closures of libraries, reduction in opening hours and cuts to staff, especially professionally qualified staff, diminishes the access of Birmingham residents to much-needed educational resources, digital resources, events and opportunities available in libraries.
 - iii. This is of special concern in a city with a high proportion of young people and above-average child poverty levels:

³³ The requirement to interpret legislation in the light of the rights set out in the European Convention on Human Rights is contained in s.3 of the Human Rights Act 1998. The right to education is contained in Article 2 of the First Protocol to the Convention.

³⁴ <https://www.ifla.org/public-library-manifesto/>

- 40% of the 1.1 million population is under 25 years of age;
 - 37% of the 250,000 children aged 0-15 are in absolute low-income families.
- iv. It is also of special concern given that Birmingham has relatively high literacy need, particularly among children and young people. A significant number of wards (50%) rank in the top 10% for literacy need in England.³⁵
- Over a quarter of five-year-olds in Birmingham are not meeting the expected standard for literacy (according to the Early Years Foundation Stage standards). Lower literacy skills at a young age have knock-on effects on subsequent school engagement, academic success, and employment outcomes.³⁶ Libraries are a critical asset for supporting early years learning.
- v. Finally, it is also of concern due to given how deprivation impacts residents' access to and use of the digital world and digital literacy. There are stark inequalities between income groups. 51% of households with earnings between £6,000 and £10,000 have access to the internet at home, compared with 99% of households with an income of over £40,001. Similarly, 57% of people with a household income below £11,499 have essential digital skills, compared to 89% of those with a household income over £25,000. BCC's digital inclusion report from 2021 repeatedly mentions libraries as a critical asset in their efforts to tackle digital exclusion.³⁷
- b) Equality Act 2010, including the Public Sector Equality Duty. See our comments on the Equality Impact Assessment above.
- c) Nolan principles as outlined in Birmingham City Council Constitution (Part C)
- i. As highlighted in the Commissioners' report to the Secretary of State dated 31 January 2025, the Nolan principles should provide a guide for council officers, members, and overall BCC organisational behaviour. Of the seven Nolan principles, we are most concerned about BCC adherence to Objectivity, Accountability and Honesty.
- Objectivity: We are concerned that it took until the Cabinet report for BCC to produce a fair representation of library usage, with officers having previously presented incorrect data and inaccurate interpretations of their data

³⁵ National Literacy Trust and Experian (2017), <https://literacytrust.org.uk/policy-and-campaigns/all-party-parliamentary-group-literacy/literacy-score-mapping-literacy-need-across-england/>

³⁶ Cabrera, Gomez and Franklin (2024), "Early literacy matters: Economic impact and regional disparities in England", Pro Bono Economics/National Literacy Trust/KPMG UK, <https://literacytrust.org.uk/policy-and-campaigns/early-words-matter/>.

³⁷ Education and Skills Directorate, BCC (2021), "Connecting our communities - Enabling a Digital Birmingham", p. 13, https://www.birmingham.gov.uk/download/downloads/id/21162/digital_inclusion_strategy.docx.

in their answers to full council and reports to the public (see our concern about data in point 11 above).

- Accountability: We are concerned that officers involved did not submit their plans to the scrutiny necessary to ensure adequate accountability to the public. Members of scrutiny committees had little opportunity to ask questions and receive answers.
- Honesty: We are concerned that prior to and during the consultation, BCC did not present an honest picture of library usage, making claims of large reductions in membership that were not accurate.

15. Inadequate Future Vision and Libraries Strategic Framework.

- a) The Cabinet Member for libraries said in the November 2024 OSC meeting that “one size does not fit all [...] the service would be tailored, and officers would be working with communities”. There is little evidence of “working with communities” in the outcome of the “transformation”; community groups remain frustrated with the restrictive communications, staff have been instructed not to discuss proposals with users or disclose information about their new staff structures, job descriptions or roles; the announcement of further reductions in hours including evening and Saturday and alternate Saturday closures were decided after the Cabinet decision, without warning or consultation, while temporary reductions in opening hours have remained and staff recruitment appears to have stagnated.
- b) Instead, citizens are left with the future vision in Appendix A1 of the Cabinet report.³⁸ This is loaded with ideas familiar to library services elsewhere but lacking actions or funding with an unachievable timescale. There does not seem to have been much progress towards the targets for 2024-2029.
- c) Many examples of excellent library intervention like *Bookstart* and the *Summer Reading Challenge* were originally conceived and devised by or in partnership with Birmingham Libraries. “*Early engagement with libraries, books and reading gives children a head start*”. This is integral to the story of Birmingham Libraries which played an active role in almost every public library innovation over several decades.
- d) The 21 page “Strategic Framework” has a lot to commend it, reflecting as it does the “library thinking” of the last 30 years. With references to the 2023 Sanderson Review it reflects the admiration for what public libraries achieve, combined with the low awareness among decision-makers of what libraries can achieve.

³⁸ Cabinet Report 11 February 2025. Appendix A1. Draft Strategic Vision 2024-2029 and A2. Birmingham Strategic Framework for Library Services 2024 – 2029. Connecting People & Communities with Information, Culture and Each Other.

- e) DCMS policy is flexible: “Every council in England is required to provide a ‘comprehensive and efficient’ library service under the Act. It must do so in a way which meets the needs of people living, studying or working in the area, taking into account the resources available.” In the Strategic Framework, BCC sets out the City Council’s interpretation of “comprehensive and efficient”
 - i. Comprehensive: “Geographically comprehensive”, a “comprehensive range of services”, “library services for everyone”
 - ii. Efficient: “value for money”, “joined up services”, “measuring success” with “independent analytical data to help understand what people want and need from their library services”.
- f) Given the aspirational and speculative nature of the Vision/Framework, its dependence on being managed by corporate officers with no library background or training, sustainable deals with partner organisations (so far inconclusive) and its need to engage community groups (some organisations may have been approached but many grassroots groups continue to feel excluded by BCC’s approach), there remains little indication of how the library changes can be funded and realised.
- g) While talking up the importance and value of the library in the community, the Vision/Framework justifies the proposed reductions. At the same time, it boasts of “doubling” the investment in mobile library services by adding one mobile library to the existing one without reference to the other four mobiles, decommissioned in recent years.
- h) The Vision/Framework is unique among the documents in acknowledging that one of the two drivers behind the “transformation” is a budget saving of £2.3 million. The other driver is the delivery of more, better, early intervention services. This justifies campaigners’ suspicions and their belief that the consultation process was, at best, disingenuous, borne out of a legal requirement to consult about a statutory – libraries – service.
- i) Examples of “positive improvement” are misleading. Shared services at Shard End Library were introduced some years ago. Co-located libraries (Aston, Selly Oak) are diminished reflections of their previous equivalents. The failure of the partner-led library (via a community asset transfer) at Castle Vale – now closed – is not mentioned. Even so, these examples are presented to the public, councillors, staff and potential future partners as successful alternative building-based solutions in a strategy that repeatedly downplays the value of the physical, professionally-staffed library in the community.

Birmingham Loves Libraries

Birmingham Loves Libraries is an umbrella campaign uniting Birmingham Friends of Library groups, save our libraries campaigns, and other library users and city residents campaigning to protect and champion our libraries and library services (www.birminghamloveslibraries.org).

For a list of library campaigns in Birmingham Loves Libraries, please visit:
<https://www.birminghamloveslibraries.org/list-of-library-campaigns>.

Birmingham Loves Libraries prior contact with Birmingham City Council:

Birmingham Loves Libraries (BLL) and its constituent campaigns have made numerous approaches to Birmingham City Council to alert councillors, corporate officers, and library management to the inadequacy of their proposals for the future of the library service. The campaign has also expressed alarm about the process and impact of carrying out such steep cuts to service budgets and the consequential failure to meet its legal obligations. Approaches by BLL to the City Council have been measured and constructive. In most instances BLL has been received civilly but with little further engagement. This is in spite of repeated claims in public statements and throughout the documentation that BCC wishes to work with communities. In effect BCC has managed to resist approaches, ideas and information put forward by campaigners. It has maintained its position on the merger of community libraries with NAIS, the further depletion of library services in locations, management, staffing, opening hours and community outreach / development capacity.

There have been numerous interventions initiated by the campaign including:

1. Representatives of library friends groups affiliated with Birmingham Loves Libraries met with Council Leader John Cotton and Cabinet Member for Digital, Culture, Heritage and Tourism Saima Suleman on 18th June 2024 to advocate for the preservation of all of our libraries. BLL representatives gave Councillors Cotton and Suleman a briefing, "Birmingham Needs Public Libraries", along with a petition signed by thousands of Birmingham residents against the closure of Birmingham libraries. In the meeting, BLL said:
 - a. The cuts to our library service will be costly in the long run... Libraries are an established lifelong education pathway. The £2.3 million saving risks causing greater costs elsewhere in future.
 - b. Properly staffed libraries are essential in a city where 46% of children grow up in poverty. Children in Birmingham must have free access to books, computers, and a space to read and do homework. This is all the more urgent for children and young people living in temporary and/or overcrowded accommodation and children out of school.
 - c. The consultation process is not fit for purpose. We wrote: "It is problematic to invite expressions of interest to take over running libraries before the consultation on the overall model has been completed"; "The consultation documents contain misleading

- information”; and “The consultation survey was overly long, confusing, and leading.”
2. Meetings of a strategic library leader and former Head of Libraries with the Cabinet member, corporate officers and library managers.
 3. Participation in consultation events online and in person (though there were barriers to attendance and participation as noted above).
 4. Briefing papers circulated to all councillors:³⁹
 - a. Birmingham Needs Public Libraries, June 2024
 - i. Why libraries are a statutory service: local councils are required to provide a comprehensive and efficient library service by law.
 - ii. Why Birmingham needs libraries: libraries support lifelong learning, adult and child literacy, digital inclusion, and more.
 - iii. Continuing use of Birmingham libraries despite ongoing cuts.
 - iv. Urgent questions for Birmingham City Council as they continue to carry out cuts to our library service in the face of public outcry.
 - b. Our Children Need Libraries, September 2024
 - i. This briefing discusses the critical role libraries play in fostering children's cognitive and language development, literacy, love of reading, and educational attainment.
 - c. Access to Birmingham Libraries, December 2024
 - i. This slide deck provides analysis of access to library services in the city and when and how the people of Birmingham need and use libraries. It emphasises the importance of Saturday and evening opening hours for school-age children and young people and people who work during the week. The plans to cut the hours of our community libraries service by over a third will not only reduce access throughout the week, but mean more libraries lose critical Saturday opening hours.
 - d. Commentary on Birmingham City Council proposals for Library Services, January 2025
 - i. This briefing summarises BLL's concerns and questions about Birmingham City Council's proposals for libraries as presented in the final phase of consultation. This document was prepared for the "Neighbourhoods Overview and Scrutiny Committee", which is supposed to discuss the council's proposals for libraries and hold cabinet members and officers to account.
 5. Several awareness raising activities with Councillors.
 6. Two Birmingham writers, Liz Berry and Catherine O'Flynn, assembled a team of 35 Birmingham writers to make a protest zine, championing Brum's community libraries against the proposed cuts. The library zine team paired a writer with each of Brum's community libraries. Throughout June 2025, the writers went to their libraries to explore, read, chat, dream, write and then create a short piece inspired by their visit. The Zine was published, with free copies available in every library; it is also available online.⁴⁰

³⁹ All briefings are available here: <https://www.birminghamloveslibraries.org/resources>.

⁴⁰ The Brum Library Zine is available here: <https://heyzine.com/flip-book/83a3fc029e.html>.

7. Questions put to full Council and to the Neighbourhood Overview and Scrutiny Committee.
8. Community campaigns around individual libraries that make up the citywide campaign that is BLL have also approached local councillors. At times, they have been ignored. When councillors have shown an interest, they have frequently been unable to effect changes in the proposals.

For further information, or to discuss the contents of this formal complaint, please contact Emma Lochery, Chair, Birmingham Loves Libraries, birminghamloveslibraries@gmail.com.