Dear (name of your Councillor or MP),

I’m writing to protest against the Council’s proposed cuts to Birmingham’s community libraries.

I’m a resident of (where you live e.g. Harborne) and a user of (name of your library). Here you could say why you love your library and how you use it – e.g. you go every week to borrow books, attend a storytime, go there to read with your children, take your class there, use the computers etc.

I have read Birmingham City Council’s proposals for the future of our community library and I’m deeply disappointed as I do not believe that this is reflective of the wishes and needs of our community.

Here you can say a bit about your library depending on what the plan is (e.g. is it only going to be open 2 days a week/run by volunteers/moved to a shared use building/funding being withdrawn)

Here’s a few helpful pointers to choose from…

* Birmingham is one of the most vulnerable areas to literacy challenges in the entire country, with 50% of wards in the city ranking in the top 10% of need in England. To close libraries, by stealth, in a city with such huge need is a shameful thing. Some children living in areas of high deprivation will face a choice of walking more than two miles or finding money for public transport to reach their new ‘local’ libraries. This will have a severe impact on equality of opportunity and education.
* If a library is only open two days a week, then this drastically reduces people’s ability to attend and the capacity of the library to run activities and groups like children’s storytime, groups for elders, school sessions etc. The inevitable reduced footfall which comes with limited opening is frequently used by councils to justify further cuts to services and eventual closure, as we have seen happen at Aston Library.
* Run by volunteers? While we recognise that volunteers can be a powerful community force, they should not take the place of trained staff. The reliance on volunteers in place of professional library staff will further undermine the remaining services – leaving the residents of Birmingham not only under-served in terms of the number of libraries per capita, but also in terms of their quality, consistency, and social impact. A volunteer-run service also places an enormous pressure on the group of volunteers tasked with running it.
* Libraries not only provide access to books but also access to quiet study spaces, resources, and expertise particularly at a time when access to IT for support, job searching, and Universal Credit claims are of vital importance. Birmingham has the highest claimant unemployment rate (14.6%) amongst the UK’s core cities and is well above the UK average (5.3%).
* Libraries also provide essential support for public health, including mental health and help to combat loneliness.
* Under the new proposals many communities in the city will be without a local library for the first time in over 120 years.
* Thousands of Birmingham residents from across Birmingham struggled through the arduous online survey or attended meetings during the first phase of the consultation process. The Council has now put forward a preferred option that mirrors its original, leaked intentions from January of this year, suggesting that the consultation process thus far has been nothing but a box-ticking exercise.
* I do not believe that the Council’s preferred option (consisting of just 10 libraries remaining open full-time, 14 libraries open only 14 hours a week, 7 libraries having all council funding and staffing withdrawn and 5 libraries closed altogether) is a service fit for our city

I want to live in a Birmingham that values equality of opportunity and a hopeful future for all its residents. Our library is central to our community, and I am committed to campaigning for everyone in Birmingham to have the library service we deserve. It’s vital that the Council conducts a proper analysis of the value libraries and library staff add to our communities and conduct a cost-benefit analysis of the proposed cuts before they are implemented. I call upon you as my Councillor/MP to oppose these proposals.

I look forward to your response.

Yours sincerely,