

Bristol City Council's "Cuts Consultation"

To borrow a phrase made famous by Brenda a few months ago "What, another one?!" However, this "consultation" deals with the closure of almost two thirds of our libraries, half the public toilets and the loss of half the crossing patrol staff in Bristol, so it needs a response from all of us.

The consultation runs until September 5th and is intended to be completed online, although printed copies are available for perusal at your local library – which leads me to wonder where printed copies of the next consultation will be placed when we have no libraries... If you have a disability, you can request a copy in different formats by ringing 0117 922 2848

To find the consultation, go to www.bristol.gov.uk/yourneighbourhood and click on "Take Part in the Survey".

Section 1 (About You) requires your postcode and also asks for details of age group, ethnicity etc, although these details are optional.

Section 3 (Libraries) splits Bristol into three areas – South, East and Northwest – and proposes retention of the Central Library plus three libraries in each area, one Area Library which will be open 6 days a week and two Local Libraries which will be open 3 days a week. Three options are given, each identifying the 9 area libraries to be retained and the 17 to be closed. 6 of the area libraries will be kept in all three options while 13 will be closed in all three options, leaving 7 where some choice is actually possible. In our area, Avonmouth, Clifton, Redland, Shirehampton and Westbury will definitely close, Henbury and Southmead will remain and the third will be either Henleaze or Sea Mills. The options are based on four criteria, with "Current Usage" given "low" priority in the first two options and "medium" in the third...

The question asks only which of the three options you prefer, and doesn't allow for "none of the above!" - the only way to do that would be not to select an option at all. The only opportunity to object to the proposals is to use the feedback box at the bottom of the page to raise concerns about the process, such as the lack of choice of the number of libraries to be kept, the weighting and choice of the selection criteria, etc. The document refers to "Stopping all Council funding for libraries" rather than specifically "Closing libraries" so there may be mileage in proposing community takeover of the running/use of the buildings, particularly Westbury as it has been upgraded for "Extended Access", but there is no indication as to how this could be achieved and whether any future links with the Library Service would be possible. If nothing is done to prevent it, the likelihood is that the buildings will be sold off and, once gone, I fear there will be no possibility of their return in the future.

Section 7 (Next Steps) lets you identify up to three wards, based on council wards, which you feel will be particularly affected by the proposals. This is the place to point out that, for example Westbury's only two council-provided facilities are the library and the public toilets.

The Council has organised 8 meetings to discuss their proposals, between June 29th and July 24th. Places are limited and have to be booked online – details are at the bottom of the Consultation page. However, anyone without internet access can also book by calling 0117 922 2848.

Finally, people without Internet access can use the Library computers and staff there will assist with finding the relevant site, although they cannot advise you what to put into the relevant boxes! There will be a supported session running at Westbury on Friday August 4th from 1pm to 4pm and two at Henleaze on July 17th and 24th