

Cabinet meeting on 1st February 2017

Vishaka Robinson

Good afternoon – I'm here to talk to you about bath central library.

I'd like to start with a direct quote from Councillor Martin Veal, who as you are probably aware is the B&NES Cabinet member who holds the brief for Community Services, which includes Bath's Central Library.

"Your perception of a library is about a book; well my perception is not like that. My perception of a library is more about access to information. Less than 10% of people who come to the current library are either returning books or taking books out. 52% are actually getting access to the internet through computers so as long as we provide a good wifi service and a good broadband service access to computers etc we will cater to the 50% that still come in".

I want to talk to you about these figures. I've read this 9% stat in numerous media from the Bath Chronicle to the BBC and it states on the B&NES website that only 9% of Bath Central Library users want to renew or borrow books while 52% want to book a computer.

When I first heard it I thought no wonder they want to get rid of most of the books in our library and make it more like an internet café. It's a shame I guess but - no one is really borrowing books.

But dig a little deeper and you see that this data is purposefully misleading. The research behind these figures relates only to main desk inquiries. It excludes the kiosk near the entrance, the self-service machines and the children's desk. If you have been to the library you will know that you are actively encouraged to use the self-service machines.

So it seems this new digital strategy for the library has been decided solely on the basis of this incomplete and misleading research.

So please allow me to give you the correct data According to the BANES Voicebox Survey in 2015, 70% of users use the library for borrowing books, 35% borrow for their children only 16% of users said they used the computers. This data is consistent with the UK-wide findings of the 2016 UK Government's longitudinal Taking Part survey.

Can you explain why this flawed methodology has been used? And given that it is misleading how you can now justify these changes.

I'd also like to bring to your attention to how crucial libraries are to young people and even more so to those who are disadvantaged. For children in Bath who do not attend a private school our marvellous library is a brilliant leveller.

And when I say library I mean one which is crammed with books (not computers). A library does not belong sandwiched in between a police station, jobcentre, building control and social services to name a few. It's a key part of society, a valuable community space and a crucial element of our children's education.

And don't forget that in our library we have a study space for 100 an invaluable resource for the city's students, plus a family room that hosts classes and offers a place for nursing mothers to feed. In short we have a library that is meeting the needs of Bath's young people and it would be a disservice to them to change it without careful consideration.

The Institute of Education's 2015 survey found that "reading for pleasure was found to be more important for a child's cognitive development between ages 10 and 16 than their parents' level of education.

They also found that combined effect reading books often, going to the library regularly and reading newspapers at 16 was four times greater than the advantage a child gained from having a parent with a degree."

So to summarise: Our current library is brilliant, the people of Bath use it in huge numbers and I think its remarkably good value for money. The rush to change it and to rustle-up false data to justify an unnecessary move is an injustice people of Bath. I urge you to rethink this move. Having spent the last two weeks poring over countless documents relating to it I cannot fathom why you would shut this library – the logic and even the sums they just don't add up.

Thank you