



# 'SPOTLIGHT on LIBRARIES'

ISSUE: 2: August 2010

## WELCOME TO SPOTLIGHT!

Welcome to our second edition of 'Spotlight on Libraries'. We hope to keep you informed on what the reps do and what issues we are involved in.

We hope to encourage active member participation through articles; information and features which we hope will improve communication among our members and strengthen our Union as a whole.

We still hope to include articles which reflect the concerns of our members. Get in touch to tell us what you would like us to focus on

### In this months issue

- Welcome!
- Reps Appeal
- Union team
- Comment on "Future of Libraries"
- Concessions

### THE UNISON TEAM:

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Want to Join Unison?

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# MORE REPS NEEDED

If you want the stewards team to represent your views...if you want support in your promoting health at work interviews...if you have an issue you need help on,  
**NOW IS THE TIME TO GET ACTIVE.**

UNISON urgently needs volunteers to become active representatives in libraries. Training and support will be given for anyone who wants to step up to the challenge.

Contact Dawn Palmer–Ward for further information

## UNISON Members Meeting

Budget Cuts & abc

Tuesday Sept 14<sup>th</sup>

12.30-1.30

Starley Road Community

Room, Croft Road

(Opposite Argos)

Think it won't affect you?... Think again!  
These cuts will affect every area of the City Council,  
come and discuss the challenges we will all face.

## Libraries Need Investment to Thrive

**Millions of us read books. If we grasp the idea libraries have to be cared for and decently resourced we can halt their decline**

They would doubtless deny it, but today's release of a new set of figures from the Department for Culture, Media and Sport (DCMS) looks like a textbook case of softening up the public for yet another fall of the axe.

The subject is our public libraries – which, to read the accompanying coverage, are in danger of falling into dusty decline. Apparently, only 12.8% of us made a monthly habit of visiting our local library last year, and just 40% of us went there at least once. The DCMS reckons that the number of weekly visitors to libraries has fallen by 32% in five years.

Cue the inevitable noises about greater use of volunteers and the possibility of moving book-lending services into pubs and shops (predictably enough, supermarkets are usually mentioned), as well as sad predictions about what is now likely to transpire. Over to the libraries campaigner, Tim Coates: "I believe we will lose between 600 to 1,000 libraries in the next 12-18 months and that may be only the beginning: we are seeing the destruction of the public library service."

Tangled up in the figures, however, are some far more complicated realities. Over the report's five-year timeframe, despite the fact that children's books account for only 1.6% of councils' library spend, visits among children aged 11-15 stayed pretty much the same, at 71.6%. Records for kids aged 5-11 only began in 2008 – but again, any decline was insignificant (the figure fell from 75.3% to 74.9%). You also wonder about the differences between broadbrush national figures and what's actually happening in particular areas – a very relevant question, given that libraries policy can vary wildly from council to council.

This much we know: in lean times, libraries are among the first services to feel the pinch, and councils in Wirral, Swindon and Warwickshire have already been busy attacking their services. By contrast, recent figures show library use going up in the London borough of Hillingdon, and Cumbria – partly because of the recession, partly because the people in charge understand that decline often has as much to do with supply as demand.

I tip my hat to the Observer's Rachel Cooke and her brilliant 2009 piece about the state of our libraries. As she pointed out, "in 1996/7 there were 92.3m books available for lending in the UK; in 2007/8 that figure fell to 75.8m. The result of this is that fewer people borrow books – at some councils the number of book loans to adults has fallen below 2.5 a year – at which point it is very easy for a council to claim a library is poorly used and should be closed down." What she revealed about Hillingdon proved that the reverse applies and if you increase the number of books available, people will come: from 2007 onwards, 64,000 new books were introduced and borrowing figures went up fivefold.

Therein lies a fantastically important lesson: that for all the importance of internet access and "information hubs", and a deafening noise about allowing in Starbucks, or taking libraries into Tesco, a handful of facts join together to prove something beyond doubt. Millions of us still read books, and use libraries. Our children certainly do. And if we hold fast to the idea that libraries have to be lovingly cared for and decently resourced, the idea of inexorable decline can be contested.

It's simple enough, though the people at the top seem rather lost – as ever – in mysterious winkspeak. This, for example, is from the DCMS's announcement of the first 10 areas to be co-opted into a new "future libraries programme", which bigs up the idea of borrowing books as an essential part of the "big society", and says this: "The programme promises to build momentum on the ideas that have been generated and spread learning between library authorities to achieve cost savings, new partnerships and governance models, and to take advantage of digital opportunities."

I'm not sure what this means, though it perhaps brings to mind a recent, much written about report by the consultancy firm KPMG, which reflected one of the big society's biggest ideas by praising the plan of communities somehow running their own libraries, which would "save large amounts of money on over skilled paid staff, poor use of space and unnecessary stock". The words are chilling, but also borderline moronic. They also conjure up the likely future: dwindling numbers of books, clueless staff, and further decline. We seem to be falling into an archetypal vicious circle; the cost, needless to say, will be paid in ignorance. Clever, eh?

Marion Boston

*Assistant National Officer, Local Government, Police and Justice, UNISON*

Library Stewards team are raising the issue of the "Future of Libraries" debate at the next Culture Leisure Sports and Libraries Trade Union Forum.

We will ask Library Management team for their view of the 10 projects put in place nationally and also what they believe are the challenges facing our service in light of budget cuts. We will feedback to members in a "Library Issues" soon.

Get in touch with your views, tell us what you think!

## UNISON INCIDENT FORMS

KEEP SENDING INCIDENT FORMS TO US AT THE UNISON OFFICE. WE USE THEM TO DISCUSS YOUR HEALTH AND SAFETY ISSUES WITH LIBRARY MANAGEMENT... dealing with problems in the workplace if you don't tell us what is happening we can't ask management how they are.

IF YOU HAVEN'T SEEN OR DON'T KNOW WHERE THE FORMS ARE KEPT ASK YOUR MANAGER OR LOCAL REP.

# Staff Concessions

Libraries management are in the process of reviewing concessions offered to Library staff (free DVD's, free reservations). Dawn Palmer-Ward attended the first Library staff concessions working group meeting on 28<sup>th</sup> June.

Part of the review is to audit concessions currently available and see how this fits with the concessions offered to staff in other areas of the Council along with the financial impact on the service. The working group will then look at the options available and produce a report for LISMT to consider.

UNISON believes the concessions as they stand (and have done for many years) are an implied term in the terms and conditions of our members and we will strongly challenge any consideration of their removal without compensation. We do however recognise the value of discussing the basis for these concessions with management. We have gathered information from 59 other library authorities through the UNISON Library network regarding concessions. Of these 59 28 have full concessions similar to those in Coventry, 22 have partial concessions and only 10 report no formal concessions are available.

We will be discussing this information at the next working party meeting and will be consulting with you on management's proposals in due course.

As ever if you have any comments or thoughts on this or any other matter contact one of the Library Stewards team.