

"DEEPLY DISTURBING PACKAGE OF REDUCTIONS MAY BE ILLEGAL"

The public service union UNISON has written a response to the County Council's proposals for the Library Service.

The report echoes the concerns of Friends of Gloucestershire Libraries, and those of the many authors, illustrators, educators, professional librarians, MPs and Councillors who are supporting the local and national campaigns to save local libraries.

The report makes the point that the proposals are based on the views of a random sample of less than 1% of the County's population. Considerably more than double the number of people who took part in the consultation (5000) have signed the Friends of Gloucestershire Libraries petition opposing the cuts. At the time of going to press, the petition carried almost 13,000 signatures.

Further, UNISON argue that the survey questions were structured so as to lead people to respond in a particular way. It appears that the public are unclear about the proposals and are generally horrified when they discover the extent of what is proposed.

In particular, the proposals have overlooked where people live. Access is compromised by the failure to check public transport facilities, decisions being based on the assumption that everyone can travel by car. This also might explain the decision to scrap every mobile library scheme, including Share-a-Book - which serves some of Gloucestershire's most deprived children and the Homelink service which visits socially isolated older people.

In addition, it is claimed that the county council's strategy does not intend to retain some of the most used libraries. Cinderford, Matson,

Mitcheldean and Tuffley are all earmarked to no longer receive a council run service.

However these libraries are currently better used than many of the ones proposed as a Library Express. Bishop's Cleeve Library is the 3rd most used library in the county, and yet will remain only for only 3 and half days a week.

UNISON find that the proposals will reduce opening hours by 38.2%, and the number of public access PCs by a probable 28%. In total, if the collection point nature of Library Link services is considered, the 43% cut to the Library Service budget could result in Gloucestershire losing 54% of its libraries.

"This is a deeply disturbing package of reductions, and UNISON is not alone in questioning whether these proposals will fulfil the requirements of the 1964 Public Libraries and Museums Act, which requires the council to provide a 'comprehensive and efficient' library service."

The full document is available from the 'Friends of Gloucestershire Libraries' website: <http://foclibrary.wordpress.com/2011/01/18/deeply-disturbing-package-of-reductions-may-be-illegal-unison/>.



MISSION IMPETITIONABLE

Friends of Gloucestershire Libraries delivered a 10,600 strong petition to a full Council Meeting of Gloucestershire County Council yesterday (Wednesday, 19th January), as campaigners against the council's plans for an Incinerator also handed in a petition of over 5000 signatures. Conservative councillors responded rudely to these enormous petitions - the first of their kind, refusing to vote on them. Thus they were able to protect their party line from fracture, and some of their local councillors were spared having to choose between their electorate and their party masters. On top of this, conservative councillors dragged out pointless procedural matters regarding the vote that never came for over 3 hours, with the result that many interested members of the public were forced to leave. Worse, councillors behaved like disobedient school children when Demelza Jones gave an excellent speech outlining the decimation of the library service that may follow the council's proposals, choosing to chat amongst themselves and wander around the council chamber, rather than listen. Farcical is too kind a word for our County Council.

IN BRIEF

Stroud District Council faces the largest cut in central government funding of any council in the country - 28.6% over two years. Why are we being picked on? Answers on a brick through a Millbank window... (ahem, postcard) please.

Total Banker Bob Diamond - CEO of Barclays - says the time for remorse is over for bankers. Mr Diamond is due to receive an £8m bonus this year, but

UPCOMING EVENTS:

Saturday January 22nd 11.30am
National Shop Stewards Network Anti-Cuts Conference at South Camden Community School. www.shopstewards.net

Saturday January 22nd London
National Campaign Against Fees and Cuts Conference (at UCL) <http://anticuts.com/>

Monday January 24th
Consultation on GCCs proposals for the Library service, Stroud Library 4-7pm. Protest called by Stroud Against The Cuts from 3.30pm.

Monday January 24th London
National protest against benefit cuts www.benefitclaimantsfightback.wordpress.com

Wednesday 26 January
National Walkout called by National Campaign Against Fees & Cuts, details as above.

Saturday January 29th, 10.00am / 11.30am
Stroud Against The Cuts March & Rally
March meets at 10am Stratford Park Car Park, Rally outside Subrooms at 11.30 am. stroudagainstthecuts@yahoo.co.uk

Saturday, February 5th - Save Libraries National Day of Action to http://www.voicesforthelibrary.org.uk/wordpress/?page_id=802

Tuesday, February 15th, London
Defend Council Housing Mass lobby of parliament www.defendcouncilhousing.org.uk

Thursday, February 17th, Stroud, 7.30pm
Money as Debt: Film and discussion about reforming our money system.
At The Exchange, Brick Row.

Saturday March 26th - National Anti-Cuts Demonstration called by the TUC - "March for the Alternative: Jobs, Growth, Justice". Coaches will go from Stroud. <http://www.facebook.com/event.php?id=176812472328977>