

Last year Gloucestershire County Council (GCC) announced library services were to be decimated with 43% cuts, yet staff risked disciplinary action if they spoke to the public. Around the county 11 libraries were facing the axe, including Minchinhampton, but sustained campaigning has meant Cinderford Library will no longer be transferred to volunteers. Many like Nailsworth, Stonehouse and Wotton under Edge are condemned to be minimal self service facilities, while severely reduced opening hours and levels of stock threaten others like Tetbury. The jobs of the 176 county staff are at risk, as council leader Mark Hawthorne has said he could envisage library services run almost entirely by volunteers. Highly skilled staff and a coordinated service cannot be replaced by voluntary groups; this is effectively a move towards privatisation. Painswick library has remained closed partly because insufficient volunteers can be found. Friends of Gloucestershire Libraries have sustained a county wide campaign to defend library services, organising a county wide petition with more than 10,000 names, lobbies of GCC and protest events at libraries around the county.

### **Glos County Council forced to make concessions**

The Friends of Gloucestershire Libraries (FoGL) campaign and other campaigning groups have forced Gloucestershire County Council to suddenly 'find' £500,000 for library services.

- The cuts to the service will be reduced by £500,000 – This money has been 'found' as the Council have re-calculated the number of Council Tax payers in the county.
- Cinderford library, which was destined for transfer to volunteers, will now remain open as a 'Library Express' (three and a half days a week).
- Opening hours will be extended at some 'Library Express' and 'Library Link' services
- Volunteer-run libraries will have access to the central library catalogue and network.
- 'One-off' funding for 'community libraries' Library Links (ie Wotton, Nailsworth, Stonehouse,

Churchdown, Prestbury, Bourton and Moreton libraries) are to have 12, rather than 3, opening hours now. Staffed by the library service. This seems to be a well kept secret but all library staff have been informed. It isn't enough and the fight must go on.

Here is FoGL response (sent to the media):

While we welcome the revisions announced today, they go nowhere near far enough. They do not alter our position, and we repeat our call for an urgent independent and transparent review of these plans. Gloucestershire County Council says it has listened to the tens of thousands of people who have complained, attended meetings and signed petitions against the cuts in the library service. The result is that one additional library (Cinderford) is to be kept open with many others still to close or be funded by the local community. Furthermore, these revised plans have been announced with four consultation sessions still to be held and an online consultation survey which runs until the 11th February. Are the people attending these sessions and completing the survey between now and then to assume that their views will not be taken into account then? Or can we expect still more revisions as a result of what these people have to say? Whilst we are pleased that the Council have finally understood the arguments for Cinderford, this does nothing to help those who will be affected by the complete loss of the mobile library service (including some of our county's most vulnerable residents), or the communities of Hesters Way, Matson, Tuffley, Stonehouse, Churchdown, Nailsworth, Brockworth and others whose library services will be closed or severely reduced under these plans. Community groups are still being asked to take on libraries without appropriate support. The extra funding announced today is "one offs" – so what then? Nor does a one-off addition of £100,000 to the book fund achieve much when the budget has been cut by £1 million in the last 2 years and will be cut by £600,000 a year from now on. These revised proposals still fail to take proper account of social impacts, and are being rushed through without the opportunity for proper scrutiny. Our concerns around the Council's plans remain unchanged. The most deprived areas and most vulnerable people in our county continue to be hit hard, and the Council still fails to grasp the level of support needed if community run libraries are to be sustainable in the medium to long-term. Of course, the County Council are painting this in their favour, and Mark Hawthorne has been all over the news this morning claiming that this 'shows we are listening'. What do you think of these revisions? - Do let Councillors Hawthorne, Noble and your local County Councillors and MP know! We believe that the timing is very deliberate, and aims to give opponents of these plans as little chance as possible to scrutinise and raise objections ahead of the Cabinet meeting this Wednesday where plans are due to be finalised (more on this to follow).

Best Wishes (Demelza).

For more info go to the FoGL website. <http://foclibrary.wordpress.com>