



SOS Day

19 October 2017

A guide to campaigning against cuts to library services



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About UNISON

UNISON is the UK's largest trade union, serving more than 1.3 million members. We represent full-time and part-time employees who provide public services, although they may be employed in the public, private or voluntary sector.

UNISON represents and acts for members working in all areas of local government, including social care services, which are mostly contracted out. We represent members, negotiate and bargain on their behalf, campaign for better working conditions and pay and for public services.

About the SOS Campaign

The Save Our Local Services (SOS) campaign was set up in 2014 to bring together UNISON's work against local government cuts. The campaign aims to:

- Raise awareness of the impact of local government cuts with the public and politicians
- Speak up for local government workers and service users affected by cuts
- Support UNISON activists and members to defend services and employees against cuts where they live and work

Find out more about the campaign at:

www.unison.org.uk/saveourlocalservices

SOS Day 2017 - Thursday 19 October

On SOS Day, UNISON activists and communities across the UK will join together to raise awareness of the impact of underfunding and privatisation on library services.

We will call on local and national decision-makers to take action on shameful spending cuts and ask councils to commit to providing comprehensive library services.

Below are some of our campaign's key messages on the importance of libraries, the scale and impact of cuts and what UNISON is calling for. You can use these in any local materials you create for SOS Day or when talking to people about library cuts:

Libraries and cuts

- **Library services have huge local value and need to be protected.** Using the library is associated with higher life satisfaction, happiness and sense of purpose. Many members of the public value and support public libraries, but this service is under severe threat from cuts – ***478 libraries have already closed across Great Britain since 2010***
- **Library workers are overworked and their skills and expertise are undervalued.** Thousands of library workers have lost their jobs in the past few years due to cuts, leading to high stress levels and an increase in lone working. Many council leaders wrongly think that the responsibilities of library workers can be picked up by volunteers, but the majority of workers surveyed by UNISON believe that volunteers should not replace paid staff
- **Libraries work best when they are run by the public sector.** Councils actually have a legal duty to provide a 'comprehensive and efficient' library service for everyone working, living or studying full time in the area who want to use it

- **Cuts to libraries affect other public services.** It is estimated that library users in England save the NHS £27.5 million each year. Libraries often support people's education about their own health or social care needs, helping to prevent existing issues from escalating
- **Library cuts have an unfair impact on marginalised groups in their community.** Women, Black and disabled people are much more likely to use their local library, so they are disproportionately affected by library cuts, another blow when they may already be struggling to access other public services
- **We need to show our support for public libraries by using them!** The proportion of adults who use a public library has fallen each year since 2005. Some councils wrongly see falling visitor numbers as reason to make further cuts. In reality, closures, cuts to opening hours and services available at the library make it more difficult for communities to access this vital service
- **UNISON is fighting for library workers' rights** by campaigning for all local government workers to be paid at least the real Living Wage (£8.45 in the UK and £9.75 in London) as the bottom rate of pay and a 5% pay rise for all other staff.



The SOS campaign is calling for:

The Government to:

- Review how it allocates funding to local services so that it meets the diverse needs of local communities and ensures that properly resourced library services can be delivered
- Enforce the commitment in law for local authorities to provide a 'comprehensive and efficient' library service
- Give a real living wage and equal pay to all local government workers, with proper training and development opportunities

Local councils to:

- Ring-fence funding for library services in the long-term and to stop outsourcing the management of libraries to volunteer groups or private companies
- Maintain an adequate level of resources and paid library professionals instead of relying on volunteers to run library services
- Support UNISON's pay campaign for a 5% pay rise for all staff, and a guarantee of at least the real Living Wage (£8.45 in the UK and £9.75 in London) for everyone
- Work with local community groups and unions to design library services that truly meet the needs of the local community

How to get involved

Taking part in SOS Day on 19 October is the perfect chance to get out there and talk to the public, library workers and your local or national politicians about the impact of library cuts and what UNISON is doing to fight for better services. ***Busy on 19 October? No problem! Any activities between now and the end of October will help create interest in the campaign. Just make sure that you let us know what you are doing at SOS@unison.co.uk***

See below for some ideas of what you can do to support the campaign:

- Encourage UNISON members to join their local library and visit their local library on SOS DAY or during the week leading up to the day if they can't do it on the day. And use the campaign to try to identify new UNISON activists – those members who get involved are likely to be keen activists
- Hold a public stall at or near your library to show your support and raise awareness of local cuts. Ask members of the public to leave messages of support, sign a local petition against further cuts or have their photo taken with a Save our Libraries placard that you can put on your local website or social media to show their support. Make sure you tell them about UNISON's work to campaign against cuts and support public sector workers.
- Organise a local 'librarithon', where you visit all the libraries in your area. You can spread your librarithon over a weekend or a few weeks – make sure you take lots of pictures and send them to us on Facebook or Twitter, or email them to us at SOS@unison.co.uk
- Meet your local councillor. If you work in or use libraries, talk to them about your experiences or the issues we have discussed above in the 'libraries and cuts' section of this briefing. Ask your councillor to raise the issue of library cuts in their next council meeting. Read more on using lobbying to campaign on page 17 of the SOS campaigning guide:
https://www.unison.org.uk/content/uploads/2016/08/23797_Save_our_local_services_toolkit-3.pdf

- You can find more ideas and tips for campaigning in the SOS cuts campaigning guide:

https://www.unison.org.uk/content/uploads/2016/08/23797_Save_our_local_services_toolkit-3.pdf



Already planning to do something in October for SOS Day? Don't forget to:

- Tell us what you will be doing:
 1. Email us at SOS@unison.co.uk
 2. Tweet us at [@UNISONdamage](https://twitter.com/UNISONdamage)
 3. Talk to us on the [UNISON LG Campaigns Facebook page](#)
- Tell local media what you'll be doing – have a look at page 19 of the SOS campaigning guide (https://www.unison.org.uk/content/uploads/2016/08/23797_Save_our_local_services_toolkit-3.pdf) for extra tips on using the media for your campaign
- Send us any photos of your events and let us know how it went after the event – email us at SOS@unison.co.uk and we will put your photos up on our website and social media

Can't take part in any organised activities? Here are some other ways that you can support the campaign on SOS Day:

- **Encourage co-workers to join UNISON** and find out more about the impact of library cuts and ways to support the campaign by visiting our website www.unison.org.co/saveourlocalservices
- **Support the SOS campaign on social media:**
 - Follow the SOS campaign on Twitter (@UNISONdamage) and like our Facebook page (UNISON LG Campaigns). Retweet and share our posts using the hashtag **#SOSlibraries**

- Tweet about your own experiences of library cuts using the hashtag **#SOSlibraries**
- Add our Twibbon to your Facebook or Twitter profile - take a look at our website www.unison.org.uk/saveourlocalservices for more details on how to do this (*coming soon!*)
- **Send a message of support for library workers on SOS Day:**
 1. Print out our SOS message (find it on the resources tab of the SOS campaign webpage: www.unison.org.uk/saveourlocalservices and write your message of support for library workers and services
 2. Take a picture of yourself holding your sign
 3. Post it on social media, using the hashtag **#SOSlibraries** or email it to us at SOS@unison.co.uk and we'll post it on the SOS campaign's Twitter and Facebook profile

