

# SCOOP

Winter 2010



## Somerset County Branch of UNISON

# Save Our Services

## It's time for unions to resist

- **Somerset County Council (SCC) claims they have no alternative other than to slash services.** They do (see page 5)! The attempt to cut redundancy compensation at the same time as making redundancies is ideological. Trying to impose zero pay protection at the same time is also unjustified and ideological.
- **Somerset is not broke.** The reduction in funding from central government (bad as that is) is being used as an excuse to slash and burn vital public services. The £43 million cut announced at the full council meeting on 10<sup>th</sup> November was not necessary - particularly as they still do not know what the financial

settlement is. They are coming back for more cuts at the 22<sup>nd</sup> December and 16<sup>th</sup> February Full Council meetings. Ask your councillor how they will vote!?



- **The student protests about tuition fees and the education maintenance allowance (EMA) cuts** have shown that resistance is possible AND shows that pressure on elected politicians can work.

- **UNISON** in Scotland are discussing industrial action options with other unions to combat the cuts.
- **UNISON** are also exploring the possibility of legal action over the cuts as SCC did not undertake **Equality Impact Assessments (EIA)** prior to making budget decisions which they are required to do.
- **Somerset County UNISON** has already a position of running a **consultative ballot (work to rule as an option)**.

If we do nothing to defend services and jobs, then we will lose.

**If we do something collectively, we might win!!**

# From the Editor . . .

Hi and welcome to the latest edition of SCOOP.

We are facing unprecedented times because of the intended cuts and we bring you more information in this magazine. A BIG thank you to everyone who has attended the Lobbies and the March and Rally in November. There is no doubt, however, that more needs to be done and we have organised another March and Rally in Taunton on 18 December. We really need as many people as possible to attend to send a

huge message to the Council that Public Service workers are prepared to fight back. Public Service workers are being made scapegoats for mistakes made by the financial sector which is totally unfair. As I travel around Somerset meeting members it is obvious that everyone is working to their absolute utmost to provide first class services for vulnerable people. The Government's idea that these vital jobs can be undertaken by unqualified volunteers as part of the 'Big Society' will never work and it is the most vulnerable who will

suffer the most, and be put at risk. We must do everything we can to inform the Public about the vital services we provide. We have a team of dedicated activists working very hard on behalf of the Branch but we could always do with more. If you would be willing to give up a little time to get involved there will never be a more important time to help. Please get in touch with the UNISON office if you want to know how you can help, and please come to the March and Rally on the 18th and the Lobby of Full Council on the 22nd.

**Belinda Burton**  
Magazine Editor

## Libraries

Somerset County Council (SCC) is consulting on the future of the Library Service. It appears they want to close over 12 of the smaller libraries, make redundancies and run the service with volunteers even though the consultation has not been completed. So when a government minister for libraries states:

*"Local authorities have a statutory duty to provide a comprehensive and efficient library service. I shall be writing to all local authorities this week to remind them of that. We have put in place a plan*

*through the future libraries programme to help local authorities take forward their library service."*

***We need to make sure SCC don't use the cover of cuts to undermine the service.***

The Museums, Libraries and Archives Council strategic aims commit us to: "Put museums, libraries and archives

at the heart of national, regional and local life", and we recognise that this requires us to take into account the needs of rural communities. Will this happen in Somerset?

Recent statistics from the Chartered Institute of Public Finance and Accountancy showed a drop of nearly 1,000 in the number of paid library staff in the 12 months to March 2010, a 3.4% fall to a total of just under 25,000. Over the same period the total number of volunteers in UK public libraries rose 7.7% to 17,111.

Philip Pullman, author of the



“Dark Materials” trilogy, said he was “greatly concerned” by developments. *“The librarian is not simply a check-out clerk whose simple task could be done by anyone and need not be paid for,” he said. “Those who think that every expert can be replaced*

*by a cheerful volunteer who can step in and do a complex task for nothing but a cup of tea are those who fundamentally want to see every single public service sold off, closed down, abolished.”*

We need to encourage service

users and the rest of the community to protect and enhance the library service. Our members have provided an excellent service on a small budget for years.

**Now is the time to defend this vital and valued service.**

## Children and Young People

All centrally employed Children and Young People Directorate (CYPD) staff have received letters outlining the budget situation and the difficulties the Authority has in balancing the coming budgets in light of the Comprehensive Spending Review (CSR).

As the school budget (DSG), the largest part of the Education budget goes directly to schools, the focus of the cutbacks are centrally employed local authority staff, this means that most budgets will

see cutbacks, and as salary costs are the largest part of most budget spends, this inevitably will mean a reduction in posts. Some staff may find themselves having to, in effect, apply for their own jobs in competition with their colleagues; for example if a team of 20 posts is reduced to 10, there may be 20 people applying for 10 jobs. Formal “at risk” notices are being issued to some teams of staff, and unfortunately there will be more over the coming months.

This is a very stressful time for staff, especially as we approach the New Year with such uncertainty. Please be assured that **UNISON** continues to oppose the cuts: cuts to redundancy payments and pay protection, and have been consulting with staff over whether they believe these reductions to our terms and conditions are acceptable; overwhelmingly the response from staff so far has been that they are not acceptable.

**We will be looking to ballot members in the New Year over these changes, with a view to taking some form of industrial action if staff are in agreement.**

## Environment

UNISON are asking questions in Environment regarding redundancies and changes to conditions of service:

- Will there be a new round for voluntary redundancies?
- What action, if any, is the Council taking to promote

more flexible working patterns?

- What is the process and timeline regarding consultation and what role will there be for UNISON?
- How many posts would be made redundant?
- There has been mention of deploying staff flexibility—what does this involve?

- How long will this reorganisation last and how much reassurance can be given to remaining staff in order to prevent instability and loss of morale?
- Has any consideration been given to the impact of the current changes on the health of Somerset’s economy and its future?

We await a response.

# Campaign Against Cuts in Public Sector Services and Jobs

## Myth Busters

### Myth 1: Debt repayment is a cost to the country

About 80% of public borrowing is from the domestic market, what economists call the “non bank public”. To those who buy them—British bonds are an asset on which holders receive a payment totalling £34bn per annum. The remaining 20% is either held by government departments or is owed to foreigners. Most public borrowing appears as a liability on the government side of the ledger, but as an asset on the ledger of domestic bondholders.

### Myth 2: The taxpayer pays

We are told repeatedly that the cost of servicing public debt is paid by current and future taxpayers. But anyone who believes that has grasped the wrong end of the stick. The reason the government has had to borrow ever larger amounts since 2008 is that, in a recession, tax receipts fall while transfer payments (such as jobseekers’ allowance) rise. So it is the lack of tax receipts that leads to the borrowing, not excessive borrowing that leads to more taxes. As the economy recovers, tax receipts rise and borrowing falls.

### Myth 3: The government is broke

Liam Byrne’s note in May to his successor as the UK’s Treasury Secretary famously claimed that “there was no money left”. Clearly, this was not meant seriously. Every schoolboy knows (or should know) that government cannot “go broke” like a private business. As long as Britain has its own currency, it has the power to print money. Anyone who doesn’t believe this should read up on quantitative easing, the main form of printing money at present. Governments can only go broke if they have incurred debts in another currency; ie if they cannot finance their external current account deficit (which includes interest paid abroad).

### Somerset County UNISON Branch website

Have you seen your new look branch website? For up-to-date information visit [somersetcountyunison.org](http://somersetcountyunison.org).

If you have anything you would like to contribute to the website please contact [JRMitton@somerset.gov.uk](mailto:JRMitton@somerset.gov.uk).

# Have you moved?



Please let us know if you change your address—telephone us at the Branch Office on 01823 356136

# Somerset County Branch Fights

## Statutory Minimum Redundancy Payment/Zero Pay Protection/ Savage Service Cuts and Compulsory Redundancies

---

### What's been happening in Somerset County Council?

**What cuts were imposed at Full Council on 10/11?** The Employer has *imposed* the **STATUTORY MINIMUM for compulsory redundancies** (max.£11,800 payout regardless of service and pay); **voluntary redundancies REDUCED to just 1x** (from 2x); **SCRAPPED pay protection** (to ZERO from 3 years); a pay cut for many through "spot pay" has been withdrawn, but with no guarantee that will not be re-proposed.

**Has this happened in the Somerset Districts?** No. The SCC Leader and half of the Cabinet are Mendip DC Councillors. They have **RETAINED 3x** on actual salary for compulsory redundancies, **INCREASED** voluntary redundancy to 2.5x on actual salary (from 2x) and **RETAINED** pay protection of 1.5 years (from 3 years).

**Does SCC know what the full Government settlement is?** No. SCC will not know what the actual financial position is until December.

**Was the settlement as bad as feared so far?** No. The Government spread the cuts over 4 years NOT 3; Council Tax freeze is fully funded with an extra £20m; "frontloading" of cuts for 2011/12 is 8% (not the 10-12% SCC estimated); there are "capitalisation" allowances to spread the cost of redundancies (like Icelandic Bank Debt write-off).

**When known in December, what happens if the actual financial position is better?** UNISON now believes that the cuts are ideological and will go ahead regardless of the final Government settlement. Will this allow for an "election fighting fund" for the next County Elections in 2013?

**Will this be the end of cuts?** No. These cuts are the first round of £43m of cuts. Employer wants another £32m of cuts in December requiring further measures.

**Is this all on top of the 3-year pay freeze?** Yes.

**How many redundancies will be compulsory?** Given the rush to savage 2011/12 cuts, there will have to be many hundreds of redundancies.

**Did UNISON propose affordable alternatives?** Yes. UNISON made affordable suggestions for all the measures imposed and urged the Employer to get behind "voluntary hours reductions" (to maximise savings). None of Unison's suggestions went to Full Council.

**Has genuine and meaningful negotiation occurred?** With unilateral imposition without agreement, then UNISON would say NO!

**Are other Shire Councils treating their workforce like this?** Overall, Somerset is the worst in the South West and amongst the worst nationally.

**Will staff made redundant now get the current 2x rate?** UNISON is seeking clarification on this. The Employer stated: "The current agreed rate (2x) will apply to redundancy terminations that take place before the 1st April 2011".

**Can the Council afford redundancies at a fair rate?** Yes. UNISON is urging the Council to allow the redundancy costs to be accounted for over a longer period, as other Councils are doing.

**What will Somerset County Council look like in future?** SCC will be a tiny rump of commissioning and contract management

continued on page 6

staff with services procured through Southwest One – requiring less than 10% of SCC staff now employed.

**Will this impact on the economy in Somerset?** This will take £70m out of the Somerset economy EVERY year. Many thousands of private sector jobs will go, alongside thousands of public sector jobs.

**What about people who rely on our services?** They will have to rely on volunteers or family.

**What is UNISON doing now?** We are engaging with our members via visits and a survey. Lobby of Cabinet 15/12, Full Council 22/12.

UNISON will carry out an indicative ballot of members, to test support for industrial action.

**What can I do?** Complete the

survey and ballot. Become a rep or workplace contact. Get involved with lobbying organised by your branch.

Write to your local MP.

## UNISONplus Health & Dental Plans

**20% OFF** THE COST TO ADD ANY NEW FAMILY MEMBER TO YOUR PLAN

You can add as many family members onto the plan as you wish.  
Family members include your spouse/partner, children, parents grandparents, in-laws, aunts/uncles, niece/nephews.



Claim your discount by calling our Freephone Customer Helpline

**0800 037 0753**

or by applying online at [www.youbenefit.co.uk](http://www.youbenefit.co.uk)

Discount valid for first 12 months and applicable to all new family members added to the plan during November 2010. Discount is terminated in the event of the primary applicant and/or the family member ceasing to remain a policyholder and is not transferable to the main policyholder.

# Voices of Power



On Saturday 18 September, several women members of Somerset County Branch joined some 40 other UNISON women from across the region for the annual UNISON SW Women's Conference in Taunton.

Our theme this year was 'Voices of Power', a very relevant focus, given the current situation in which women are bearing the brunt of the cuts to the public sector (over 70% of 'savings' is to come from women's pockets!) and the

fight back we intend to mount. During the day we heard keynote speakers, attended workshops, browsed exhibitions and networked together. We learned more about campaigns in which women have made their views and voices count, including the Demand Change campaign, which our branch has supported from the outset, the Single Parents' Network and the work of the Democratic Organisation of Iranian Women, which is struggling against the repression and medieval treatment of women in Iran under the dictatorship of Ahmadinejad. Other speakers gave us 'know-how' on getting our voices heard more effectively,

such as through the workings of parliament and effective public speaking.

For me, one of the highlights of the day was the series of very powerful personal testimonies, 'Voices from the Region', in which UNISON women told us about some of the things that UNISON had done for them and they had done for UNISON.

You can find a full write-up on the Conference, more women's news and updates and how you can add your voice to UNISON's campaigns in the new issue of Women in UNISON.

**Liz Payne-Ahmadi**  
Women's Officer

**Defend Public Services**  
**!!!Stop the Cuts!!!**  
**March and Rally**  
**18 December 2010**

Assemble at French Weir, Taunton at 10.30 am  
March through Taunton 11 am

**All Welcome!**

## School Support Staff not beaten

Members of UNISON's national school's committee met in Nottingham, 5-6 November, and discussed the future programme of work for school support staff. Temperatures were running high over the government's cavalier treatment of our members and its announcement that the School Support Staff Negotiating Body will be abolished.

The Body was at the stage of testing job profiles in schools and was advanced in discussions about working time, when the ConDem government came to power. That this is a major setback cannot be denied but the committee was keen to let our school members know that UNISON will fight on for a better deal for them. There was need to regroup, protest about the government action, refresh the agenda and revitalise the

campaign on Justice for School Staff. It was agreed that communication is of the essence and that members should understand that UNISON's demands still stand and that the fight goes on.



It was also felt that members should have the opportunity to direct the future campaign and that a consultative ballot of members should take place in the New Year. This would present options for the way

forward in terms of industrial action, negotiating possibilities and campaign priorities. In the meantime, work will continue to keep the profile of school support staff high and to resist a return to the invisibility days. Regional school committees and forums would be discussing local responses and feeding back to the national committee and office. The education unions met on 8 November and pledged support. In particular it was agreed that the TUC General Secretary, Brendan Barber, would write to Michael Gove requesting a meeting to discuss the abolition of the SSSNB and future prospects for school support staff as a matter of urgency. If no progress is made, education unions have agreed to boycott a meeting of the Government's Education Partnership.

# Will you be affected?

The cuts that Somerset County Council are proposing will affect everyone who lives, works or has a business in the area.

**Children** – Up to 75% cuts in funding for some of Children and Young People's Directorate services for schools.

**Teenagers** - 75% cut in Youth Budget, closure of Youth Centres. County Ticket for 16-18 year olds to be increased by £80, despite bus services being cut drastically. Cut funding to Somerset Rural Youth Project which includes Moped Loans Scheme which will end.

**Those who want to help the environment and use public transport** - Cut subsidy to bus routes further (all but 19 of the 205 services are subsidised.) Bus services will probably be halved. More detail to come.

**Forcing you to drive but -** Only large, deep pot holes will be filled. Less resurfacing and top dressing. We do not know the exact detail yet as the Capital Programme will be discussed in January 2011.

**We are encouraged to recycle** - Household Waste 4 Recycling Centre to close now, with another 4 next year. Charges will be made for gas bottles.

**The List goes On....**

**Walkers** - Verge cuttings to be reduced to one per year

spent in the area. This will impact on local businesses.



on A and B roads. No weed killing at all.

**Theatre etc.** - 100% cut in Arts Grant Funding.

**Disabled and Elderly** – They want to move the criteria for Home Helps from Moderate need to Substantial.

**PCSO's** – 97% of the funding to be cut.

**Animals are included** - Animal Welfare to be cut.

**Businesses** – Somerset County Council is one of the largest employers in the county. With such a drastic reduction in the number of staff there will be less money

These are just some of the proposed cuts!!

Show that YOU care about Somerset

**To Do Nothing Is NOT An Option**

Lobby Cabinet on 15 December

March and Rally on 18 December

Lobby Full Council on 22 December

\*\*\*MARCH AND RALLY—18 DECEMBER\*\*\*

**JOIN THE UNION!!! [www.somersetcountyunison.org.uk](http://www.somersetcountyunison.org.uk)**