

**Client:** Daily Content  
**Source:** The Huddersfield Daily Examiner (Main)  
**Date:** 23 October 2015  
**Page:** 4  
**Reach:** 13432  
**Size:** 473cm2  
**Value:** 766.26



■ Poet Simon Armitage is supporting the campaign to keep libraries open. Below, Lepton Library which is to close next year

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POET Simon Armitage has thrown his weight behind a campaign to save libraries in Kirklees.

Kirklees Council is planning to shut some libraries and hand others over to unpaid volunteers.

The Bradford, Halifax and Huddersfield branch of union group **Unite** Community is resisting the closures, with a campaign that has included petitions, demonstrations and lobbying of councillors.

Unite Community says the council is sitting on cash reserves which could be spent on saving the libraries.

It plans a big protest today at 9am outside Huddersfield Town Hall, where the council's scrutiny committee will discuss the closure plans.

Now campaigners have won the backing of Mr Armitage, professor of poetry at Oxford and Sheffield universities, who lives in the Holme Valley.

He said: "I wholeheartedly support all efforts to save the libraries in Kirklees, especially those in outlying

communities.

"As well as providing a vital resource and an essential service, offering access to the world through reading and the internet, they are part of every community's identity and an important cultural and democratic presence in our society.

"They stand for learning, understanding and sharing, and in a region like West Yorkshire with its incredible legacy of artistic expression and intellectual curiosity, dismantling the library system would represent a permanent break with a long and distinguished tradition."

And June Holmes, of Bradford, Halifax and Huddersfield Unite Community, said: "More than one person has told us that the library is their lifeline.

"We want more libraries not less and we want libraries for the 21st century that are well resourced and properly staffed.

"Volunteers can enhance the work of the library but not in place of paid, experienced staff."

The decision to overhaul the

library service - with the loss of at least 88 jobs - was made last month.

It will see just eight 'town libraries' remain as full-time, fully staffed

operations. Two libraries - Thornhill Lees and Lepton - will close next April, and 16 smaller 'community libraries' will be run by volunteers with the support of one Kirklees Council employee.

But any changes to re-shuffle libraries are on hold until the outcome of the overview and scrutiny committee meeting.

The committee does not have the power to overturn the decision but can recommend that Cabinet considers making amendments.

Councillors have long debated how to slash money from the libraries budget, and the threat has been looming since government cuts began to impact council coffers in 2011.

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