

Brentford Library

Historical context

30 years ago Brentford Library was staffed by two chartered librarians and (I believe but cannot remember fully) library assistants. The stock was much fresher in those days. Many years ago Hounslow dispensed with professionally qualified staff in branch libraries. In many parts of the country, training for library assistants tends to be generic eg customer care, health and safety. In others a few core library skills are taught so that the assistants are equipped to help with research etc. NVQs in Information and Library Services are offered through Richmond College – these are aimed at employed staff. There is also a similar certification process through CILIP. Do Hounslow Library Assistants train for and take these qualifications?

The Issue

- I was asked by Denis to take up this issue as the BCC had become aware that its opening hours had become unreliable recently
- Supposedly full time opening is 9.30-8pm Mon and Thursday; 9.30-5pm Tuesday and Saturday; Closed Sunday, Wednesday and Friday
- Recent additional closures have been 2nd Feb at 4pm and Tues 3 Feb all day on account of snow and travel difficulties for staff. Less acceptably it has been closed at 5.30pm (not 8.30pm) on 19th February; closed all day Monday (one of our two long days) 23rd March and closed at 5.30pm (not 8.30pm) Thursday 26th March.
- What is even more alarming is that I have heard this reduction is owing to staff shortages at other more important libraries to which Brentford staff have been redirected!
- Why is there no contingency planning with sufficient slack in the Hounslow Library staffing to allow for sickness and holidays?
- Why is it OK for Brentford (and I believe other branch libraries to close) but not for the three hub libraries to have reduced staffing?
- Why is it OK for Brentford's standard hours to cover only part of 4 days a week with only two late evenings?
- What is this as a commitment to service to Council Tax Payers?
- Why is Hounslow quite unable to provide a digital comments form for library users?
- Why is there no obvious attempt to build up a pool of experienced locum staff and why are there no advertisements for staff in either the professional or local press?

and

- How far has Hounslow Local Studies progressed in terms of coming up to national standards? It has been very poorly resourced with regard to professional paid staff for a long time.

Why we need a better library service

- The key purpose of libraries has been defined as: "To anticipate, determine, stimulate and satisfy the needs of existing and potential users for access to information* in an ethical manner". (* information includes literature etc)
- For a branch library this means not only satisfying the recreational and information needs of local residents & employees in the locality but also their educational & career needs. For children this is likely to mean being the key resource for school project research. For others it may be a key information starting point for setting up a business or re-training for a different career. In a recession all these needs are more acute and so the library service needs to offer more not less.

Action so far

- As an individual I have taken this matter up in The Guardian and I understand my letter has been circulated in the library world press cuttings
- On behalf of the BCC I have raised the matter with several residents' associations
- Heather Jones, local resident, has taken up the issue on BrentfordTW8.com where there has been a short discussion
- There has been some interest from local councillors of each of the three political parties representing Brentford and Syon Wards.
- Through Heather Jones' daughter, Bethan, an offer was made to the BCC by Tim Grier, Managing Director of the Integrated Services branch of John Laing who are contracted to manage Hounslow Libraries, that either he or a senior manager would be willing to attend this meeting to talk informally with the BCC about this issue.

Action needed now by John Laing

- The problem is familiar. It happened under CIP. Local residents brought the problem to the attention of local councillors. John Laing are said to be re-structuring....Senior staff have worked for Hounslow Libraries for a very long time. They need to act rather than defer action.

Hazel Dakers 20th April 2009