

5<sup>th</sup> September 2024

Dear Councillor,

I am writing to you from the professional body for librarians in Scotland ([www.cilips.org.uk](http://www.cilips.org.uk)) to highlight the importance of protecting library services in the upcoming budget round.

As you know, whether your libraries are delivered directly by the council, or by an arm's length body, the [legal duty](#) to provide library services that your community needs is yours. As we have seen recently in the media, the decimation of library services in many parts of the UK has been significant and Scotland is not [immune to this](#) with an estimated 30% cut to funding and more than 14% closed since 2010. It is essential that we take action now to ensure this trend does not continue.

We are fully aware and sympathetic to the huge financial challenges facing councils across the country, including rising demands of health and social care, the cost-of-living crisis and the level of financial settlements you receive. We have [advocated](#) at a national level for sustainable, longer term funding for local authorities. However, as Michael Rosen [pointed out](#) "It's society who suffers and it's people who suffer" when libraries close or are cut. Libraries are far more than a nice thing to have. The evidence backing up their impact is clear:

- **Well used** - Libraries in Scotland are more popular than the cinema and football combined, are [used by millions](#) and have seen usage and demand increase in the past decade.
- **Access to reading** - Libraries play an essential role in increasing literacy skills, with [over 1 in 4 adults in Scotland likely to face challenges related to reading, writing and numbers](#), and reading for pleasure has been [proven](#) to improve the mental health of young people.
- **Return on investment and economic growth** - [Independent research commissioned by Suffolk Libraries](#) shows that libraries generate £41 million worth of social value, translating to at least £6 for every £1 invested, as well as saving NHS services £542,000 annually, as well as [supporting economic growth](#).
- **Young people** - Children with regular [access to books benefit](#) from increased opportunities to enjoy stories from an early age, and Bookbug songs, rhymes and stories also help children to develop the skills they need to flourish later in life.
- **Digital inclusion** - Libraries provide vital facilities and training to [improve digital inclusion](#), with the current digital skills gap costing the UK [up to £63 billion a year](#).
- **Climate change** - Libraries are all about reuse and have been [producing impactful sustainability projects](#) to help educate their users.
- **Life changing** - Our recent campaign with CILIP UK gathered over [180 stories](#) of the many ways Libraries Change Lives.
- **Quality of life** - In the Scottish Library and Information Council's [2023 Public Library Survey](#), over 93% agreed that using the library improves their quality of life.
- **Physical over digital** - [Research confirms](#) that the public see digital services as 'no substitute' for physical library spaces, with [CIPFA's library survey](#) also revealing that in-person visits to libraries increased by 68% since the pandemic.
- **Loneliness** - Libraries are [key to reducing](#) social isolation.

In addition to this, our school libraries and librarians need urgent protection. The past decade has seen many schools share librarians or lose them entirely, and this is counter-productive for a society that is looking to end child poverty and raise attainment.

[School librarians](#) are key to higher achievement and multiple literacies and children and young people who use the school library have [better levels](#) of reading enjoyment, reading for pleasure, reading confidence, writing for pleasure, writing confidence, and attainment than those who do not.

School librarians work in partnership with teachers in delivering the curriculum and create a safe, supportive, inclusive and sustainable learning environment where all pupils have equitable access to resources. School librarians are also unparalleled experts in matters of information and media literacy, and intellectual freedom. With the [rise of book banning requests](#) affecting schools, it is more vital than ever that trained, supported school librarians remain in place.

Considering the tremendous positive benefits of your public and school libraries and those who work in them to the communities you serve, I would urge you to avoid reductions to library funding as well as cuts such as reducing/de-professionalising staffing or cutting book budgets and opening hours.

Times are extremely tough for many just now, but we must try and emerge from this period with libraries intact, as they are and will be indisputable evidence of the more equal country we want to become.

As the award-winning poet Kevin Gilday recently [said](#), libraries 'represent the best intentions of civilisation. That's not just to do with the importance of books and our access to them but something much deeper. It expresses our hope for the growth of strangers who we have never met. It is a testament to the optimism we feel for each other. Libraries are the great equaliser of inequality.'

We hope you agree and please get in touch if you would like to discuss any of the above, we are here to help.

Yours Sincerely



Sean McNamara

Director, CILIP Scotland