

Perth and Kinross Council
Pullar House, 35 Kinnoull St, Perth
PH1 5GD

20th September 2024

Dear Councillor,

I am writing to you from the professional body for librarians in Scotland (www.cilips.org.uk) in relation to your ongoing discussions over library provision in Perth and Kinross.

Although your libraries are provided via Culture Perth and Kinross, it is local authorities who have a [legal duty](#) to provide library services that their community needs, and on that basis we are pleased to see you are undergoing community consultation. 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 and we have [advocated](#) at a national level for sustainable, longer term funding for local authorities.

We understand that a variety of models are being considered including community-led provision and click and collect style services. We would be deeply concerned that community-led provision may well leave residents without the library service run by trained library professionals that they are legally entitled to. Whilst we are encouraged to note that communities care enough to try and save library services themselves, running a library is a complex challenge with many practical, financial and ethical considerations and needs trained library workers and management. This approach, or any alternative decision that results in full or part closure of a library, would be extremely damaging and may also infringe equalities law if it requires additional travel to access essential services.

We also do not believe click and collect can adequately replace library services. Whilst elements of this can be useful as an add-on that are dedicated to widening access, this proposal is isolation could lead to communities losing vital access to a safe space that is adequately safeguarded by skilled professionals.

The evidence in support of libraries is clear and if well-funded and staffed, they will support the future economy, save you money in the longer term and be the beating heart of your communities and this is why:

- **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. The library (including mobile and online) was the most [frequently visited](#) cultural event or place in 2022 - 16% of adults visited a library at least once a week, and over one third of adults visited at least once a month (35%).
- **Literacy** - 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. It is estimated that

['the average worker in the UK with very low literacy will earn approximately 7.1% less than if they had a basic level of literacy'](#).

- **Reading for pleasure** - Reading for pleasure was the most [popular cultural activity](#) in 2022 and 64% of adults participated in reading books, poetry or graphic novels or comics for pleasure. A UK- [survey](#) found that people who read for just 30 minutes a week were 18% more likely to report relatively high self-esteem and greater life satisfaction, and non-readers were 28% more likely to report feelings of depression.
- **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](#). UK library [research](#) has found that a branch library typically provides £1 million in value each year.
- **Supporting the NHS** - Library engagement saves the NHS £1.32 per person per year. Research found that being a regular library user is associated with a 1.4% increase in the likelihood of reporting good general health. Based on reductions in GP visits caused by this improvement in health, its' predicted the medical cost savings associated with library engagement at £1.32 per person per year. In England, this is an estimated [average cost saving](#) of £27.5 million per year and the equivalent saving in Scotland would work out at £3.2m per year.
- **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.
- **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.
- **Reducing Loneliness** - Libraries are [key to reducing](#) social isolation. UK [research](#) found that 95% of people who are blind or partially sighted read (through an audiobook, or another technology) at least once a week to alleviate feelings of loneliness and isolation. It also highlighted that there will be 7 million lonely people over-60 by 2030 and that loneliness among older people will cost almost £2 billion by 2030.

Times are extremely tough for many just now, but we must try and emerge from this period with strong and robust library services, as they are indisputable evidence of the more equal country we want to become. How we value our libraries represents how we value the potential of our communities. 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