

North Ayrshire Council  
4-6 Metcalfe Place  
Irvine  
KA11 5DF

**10<sup>th</sup> October 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)) in relation to your budget setting in North Ayrshire, where many of our members live and work.

We are pleased to see that you plan to undertake community consultation before the budget is finalised. And we are fully aware of 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.

However, we are deeply concerned at the suggestion to close 6 branches and implore that this is not taken forward. As you know, you have a legal requirement to provide library services that meet the needs of communities and that reductions to services do not disadvantage anyone under the Equalities Act. We hope that any proposals will be fully assessed to avoid breaching your legal duties.

Our profession is signed up to a set of [ethical principles](#), that ensure our libraries can be key in upholding, promoting and defending human rights, equalities and diversity, access to knowledge, intellectual freedom, including freedom from censorship, and the development of information skills and literacy. But this can only happen if they are open and available to communities.

Additionally, the [wider 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:

- **Well used** - Libraries in Scotland are more popular than the cinema and football combined, are [used by millions](#), have seen usage and [demand increase](#) in the past decade and they were the most [frequently visited](#) cultural event or place in 2022.
- **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.

- **Return on investment and economic growth** - [Independent research](#) shows that libraries generate £41 million worth of social value, translating to at least £6 for every £1 invested as well as [supporting economic growth](#).
- **Supporting the NHS** - Library engagement saves the NHS £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 works 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 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.

We must try and emerge from this challenging period with robust library services still in place, as they are indisputable evidence of a country that values its communities and people and believes in reducing 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