

Aberdeenshire Council
Woodhill House, Westburn Rd,
Aberdeen
AB16 5GB

20th November 2024

Dear Councillor,

On behalf of the Chartered Institute of Library and Information Professionals in Scotland (CILIPS), the professional body for library workers, I am writing to express our significant concerns regarding the recent decision to close 13 library branches.

This would be nearly half of the total branches and leaves many of the communities who elect you without a vital service that they rely on for equitable access to books, resources, IT and much more.

I am writing to you as it is the Council's legal responsibility to provide libraries that local communities need. This is outsourced in some authorities, but this does not change where the accountability lies. You have a statutory duty to secure the provision of adequate public library facilities for all persons resident in your area, in a way that is also compliant with the Equality Act, upholding social justice for those with protected characteristics and reducing the inequalities of outcome that result from socio-economic disadvantage.

We are fully sympathetic to the huge financial challenges facing councils across the country. In fact, we have [advocated](#) at a national level for sustainable, longer term funding for local authorities.

However, closures like this must only be done following detailed consultation with communities as well as staff. This is partly to ensure you know service levels required to meet local needs, but also to ensure the likely to be significant impact of closures is fully measured. I note that some consultation has allegedly been undertaken but not with all communities and much of this appears to be post-announcement, this is not the correct approach if reversing these decisions is not an option.

An Equalities Impact Assessment is also essential. For example, what impact would a closure have on someone with a disability if they are unable to travel to the next nearest branch, which can be many miles away? Where will a young person who relies on the library for educational support go? How will older people or young parents, unable to travel easily, get the vital access they need?

Very recently Aberdeen City Council and Dundee City Council had to revisit decisions because campaigners engaged with legal advice over lack of assessment, and we would ask that you avoid the same issue. We hope and expect that communities will look into legal advice if not.

Our [extensive evidence bank](#) reveals that libraries in Scotland are more popular than the cinema and football combined, having seen both usage and demand increase in the past decade for what is often the only remaining non-clinical, non-commercial space left where a community can come together to learn new skills and access vital resources.

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.

Research proves that the public sees digital services as no substitute for physical library spaces, and the library staff who run them are consistently ranked as one of the UK's most trusted professions. Libraries generate £41 million worth of social value, translating to at least £6 for every £1 invested as well as supporting economic growth, and library engagement could save the NHS an estimated £3.2m a year.

Librarians are guided by a set of [ethical principles](#) that ensure libraries can be key in upholding, promoting and defending human rights, equalities and diversity, access to knowledge, intellectual freedom, freedom from censorship and the development of information skills and literacy. These principles have rarely mattered more than today.

Libraries are evidence of how a country values its communities. They offer them a safe and trusted space that is committed to equitable access and reducing inequality. Before closing a library, we would ask that you visit it and see and hear the difference it makes to people's lives. Please get in touch if you would like to discuss any of the above, and I look forward to hearing from you.

Yours Sincerely



Sean McNamara

Director, CILIP Scotland