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Stephen McCabe - Council Leader

Municipal Buildings

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Dear Stephen,

I am writing to you from the Chartered Institute of Library and Information Professionals in Scotland (CILIPS), the country's professional membership body for library and information staff. Our charitable mission is to support the principle of equality of access to information, ideas and works of imagination as fundamental elements of Scotland's economy, democracy and culture. Therefore, we are writing to express our deep concerns at the proposals to reduce the availability of library services in Inverclyde.

Inverclyde's 6 Public libraries serve a population of around 79,500, around a quarter of whom are aged 60 or over. Scottish Government statistics show that almost a quarter of Inverclyde's population suffer health problems or disability. CILIPS understands the financial pressures that many local councils are under but regrets that Inverclyde's response is to propose closure and curtailment of library services which remain one of the most popular services local government can provide. ⁱ

Research shows that a majority of people view public libraries as important to communities.ⁱⁱ Professionally run public library services operate as the social hub in local communities, supporting residents to access information and informal learning opportunities, encouraging reading and literacy developments through Bookbug sessions and other initiatives and promoting social cohesiveness by facilitating a safe neutral meeting space for local groups. Inverclyde Libraries provide access to the internet and technology support with recent research showing that 23% of Scotland's households still do not have access to the internetⁱⁱⁱ and 64% of people who access Citizen Advice Bureau services saying they need support to apply for jobs or benefits online^{iv}.

This vital work is endangered by proposals under consideration in Inverclyde aimed at saving around £300,000 that if implemented will result in the loss of 11.79 library posts. The scale of these changes raises questions as to whether Inverclyde would continue to meet the requirements set out in legislation such as the Local Government Act and the Equalities Act^v.

1. The closure of South West Library

The closure of this recently refurbished community facility, located in an area identified by the Scottish Government as suffering multiple deprivation is extremely worrying. Ending local library provision risks an increase in social isolation, will deprive the community of access to books and reading, and leave vulnerable children without Bookbug provision, despite the proven benefits of access to this early

intervention programme. It will terminate local supported access to public PC's for job seekers and Universal Credit applicants and force residents, including those with disability or mobility problems, to travel some distance to access alternative facilities.

2. Reducing Central Library opening times and library headquarters (HQ) reduction

Around 60% of all library visits in Inverclyde are to Central Library and any reduction in evening and Saturday morning opening would disproportionately affect those who work. HQ staff provide support across the whole library network and services such as the provision of highly valued adult learning classes, run by those staff, would be reduced.

3. Transferring Inverkip and Kilmalcolm Library to community management

Research shows that while the public broadly supports the use of volunteers to augment existing staff they remain opposed to the replacement of paid staff by volunteers.^{vi} It's unclear whether the Council has identified groups and explored with them the transfer of a statutory responsibility together with obligations for buildings maintenance, service development and delivery. We believe that this would present a reputational risk to the Council.

CILIPS believes that volunteers should only be used to complement the work of paid staff. The transfer of the library service to community management raises a number of issues including a lack of onsite trained staff able to offer professional support, the management of risk in the areas of data protection and copyright legislation, and potential loss of access to the wider library network.

In conclusion, CILIPS maintains that professionally run library services contribute to key policy priorities and government goals including reducing inequalities and supporting literacy and learning. We therefore urge Inverclyde Council to reconsider these proposals.

Your Sincerely



Catherine Kearney

Director

CILIP in Scotland

ⁱ <https://www.carnegieuktrust.org.uk/carnegieuktrust/wp-content/uploads/sites/64/2017/04/Policy-Report-Shining-a-Light.pdf>

ⁱⁱ Ibid.

ⁱⁱⁱ https://www.ofcom.org.uk/_data/assets/pdf_file/0020/104933/cmr-2017-scotland.pdf

^{iv} <https://www.cas.org.uk/news/many-scottish-cab-clients-unable-use-internet>

^v <http://www.cilips.org.uk/advocacy-campaigns/legislation/>

^{vi} <https://www.carnegieuktrust.org.uk/carnegieuktrust/wp-content/uploads/sites/64/2017/04/Policy-Report-Shining-a-Light.pdf>