Response to Clackmannanshire Council Consultation on proposed changes to library services

The Chartered Institute for Library and Information Professionals in Scotland is the membership body for librarians, information specialists and knowledge managers. Many of our members are employed in Scotland's public libraries.

We note the Council proposal to close 6 out of 8 current Community Access Points in Sauchie, Clackmannan, Dollar, Tullibody, Alva and Menstrie which will remove public library facilities from these areas. With only two remaining service points in the Speirs Centre, Alloa and the Ben Cleuch Centre, Tillicoultry, to serve its 51,000 residents, Clackmannanshire will become the Scottish local authority with the lowest library provision per head of population.

The proposed closures will negatively impact a variety of important services provided by the public library service including the highly successful Bookbug sessions in Menstrie, Clackmannan and Alva and the possible end of housebound services in Alva, Tullibody and Dollar. They will result in job seekers having to travel much further to obtain digital access and could increase the levels of isolation experienced by the most vulnerable members of the community. The scale of the closures raises questions as to whether Clackmannanshire would continue to meet the requirements set out in legislation such as the Local Government Act and the Equalities Act[i].

At a time when the Scottish Government is driving the implementation of approaches to community development and poverty reduction which build on local 'assets', including the public library network, it is difficult to see how the proposed closures fit with this ambition.

The recently launched Scottish Government Programme, *'A Nation with Ambition'* [ii]features several key policy proposals which have libraries at their core. These include:

- Refreshing the National Strategy for Public Libraries;
- Piloting a single library card for use in any Council library across Scotland;
- Providing support for coding clubs in libraries; and
- Introducing a targeted programme around the 'Every Child a Library Member' initiative

Public libraries offer the capacity to contribute to many policy and social goals and to contribute to digital participation and engagement, to education, an informed citizenry, health literacy and culture. There are many researched examples of how public libraries deliver on key policy priorities, improve opportunities for citizens and make a meaningful contribution to social and individual wellbeing.[iii]

We believe that libraries are central to safer stronger communities by serving as a safe social hub and contributing to government goals of:

- reducing inequalities
- building resilience
- supporting vulnerable young people [iv]

Research by Carnegie UK found that most people view public libraries as important to communities. Rather than closing libraries, that same research found that people wanted to see more activities such

as events taking place in libraries. Indeed public libraries remain the most popular service local government can provide. [v]

CILIPS understands that proposals being considered include volunteer operated services and would offer the following observations:

Volunteers in libraries can add value where they are complementary/additional to existing staff and able to extend and enrich the services on offer. CILIPS does not support the substitution of paid staff by volunteers and we do not support volunteers being used for delivery of core services. Indeed, research indicates that while the public broadly support the use of volunteers to augment existing staff they remain opposed to volunteers replacing staff.[vi]

In conclusion, we are deeply concerned about the proposed changes to Clackmannanshire library services, the scale of closures and the impact on the local community if the cuts go ahead.

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[i] http://www.cilips.org.uk/advocacy-campaigns/legislation/

[ii] http://www.gov.scot/Publications/2017/09/8468

[iii] https://www.carnegieuktrust.org.uk/publications/speaking-volumes-leaflet-to-view/

[iv] https://www.carnegieuktrust.org.uk/publications/library-as-learning-hub/

[v] https://www.carnegieuktrust.org.uk/shining-a-light/

[vi] Ibid.