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Council Leader Adam McVey

The City of Edinburgh Council
City Chambers
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Dear Adam,

The Chartered Institute of Library and Information Professionals in Scotlandⁱ (CILIPS) is the leading professional body for librarians in Scotland. We write this open letter in response to your current Council Change Strategyⁱⁱ, due to be discussed at your Finance and Resources Committee on February 14th. This includes proposals to reduce opening hours, introduce some charges and review delivery models.

Firstly, it is important to note that we completely understand that you are facing very severe financial challenges, as all local authorities are, and are required to make difficult choices. However, we would like to raise some of our concerns around your current proposals and ask that you please take these into account when making your decisions:

Strategic Review of Libraries – including Co-location and/or reduction in physical buildings

We are fully aware that it is important to assess options around delivery models. However, we believe co-location or reduction of physical buildings should only be attempted after detailed consultation with users thus ensuring that people's ability to access services is affected as little as possible. The importance of a physical library and the role this plays in improving wellbeing is significant and whilst it is of course reasonable to assess options around open plus and other delivery models, it is essential that these are still supported and managed by staff with professional expertise in libraries as much as possible.

The removal of a physical building can also have a detrimental effect on wellbeing. For example, studies have shown that around a quarter of Scotland's adults have issues with literacyⁱⁱⁱ and libraries tackle this by providing adult learning and promoting access to reading at a community level. They tackle social isolation^{iv} and support mental health and wellbeing^v as evidenced by the Scottish Government. Libraries also play a key role in supporting the current digital strategies in Scotland^{vi} and across the UK by providing free access for people unable to get online at home, delivering substantial social and economic benefits to citizens and communities. A physical and adequate building is essential to all the above.

Reducing Opening Hours

We welcome that you are using data on usage to inform your decisions and are pleased to see that you intend for libraries to remain open every day. Nevertheless, we believe that reducing opening hours has the potential to damage the ability to meet local requirements and may also disadvantage people, such as working parents of young children, who need to visit libraries on a Saturday. We urge you to ensure the impact on equalities has been fully evaluated as it is essential that any decisions taken do not affect the local community's ability to access an adequate public library service as required by legislation.

Reservation Charges

Whilst we understand that this is an opportunity to raise income, we would ask that you consider whether this may create additional barriers. Recently, several library services in Scotland^{vii} and further afield have started to remove charges such as fines and have found this increases the number of people using services^{viii}. This type of income generation often brings in low amounts and would be going against the current trend of removing barriers, increasing equitable access and promoting literacy and library usage.

Summary

An appropriately staffed public library service, open and available at the times people need it demonstrates the value a local authority places on its community whilst meeting the requirements of the Local Government Act. I would hope that you can take the above information into consideration and we would welcome further discussion on the matter should it be useful.

Yours Sincerely



Sean McNamara

Head of CILIP in Scotland

ⁱ www.cilips.org.uk

ⁱⁱ <https://democracy.edinburgh.gov.uk/documents/s13866/Item%207.1%20-%20Councils%20Change%20Strategy%20Planning%20for%20Change%20and%20Delivering%20Services%202023%20-%20Progress.pdf>

ⁱⁱⁱ <https://www2.gov.scot/Resource/Doc/339854/0112382.pdf>

^{iv} <https://www.gov.scot/publications/connected-scotland-tackling-social-isolation-loneliness-building-stronger-communities/>

^v <https://www.gov.scot/publications/making-easier-health-literacy-action-plan-scotland-2017-2025/pages/6/>

^{vi} <https://www.gov.scot/publications/realising-scotlands-full-potential-digital-world-digital-strategy-scotland/>

^{vii} <https://scottishlibraries.org/about-us/news/library-fines-abolished-at-live-borders/>

^{viii} <https://www.publiclibrariesnews.com/about-public-libraries-news/abolishing-fines>