

26th August 2020



Robertson House, 152 Bath Street, Glasgow, G2 4TB

email: admin@cilips.org.uk

Council Leader Adam McVey

The City of Edinburgh Council
City Chambers
High Street
Edinburgh
EH1 1YJ

Dear Councillor,

The Chartered Institute of Library and Information Professionals in Scotlandⁱ (CILIPS) is the affiliate body of CILIP, the leading professional body for librarians in the UK. Many of our members work in services including those in Edinburgh and we write in response to your current plans for reopening public libraries.

Firstly, it is important to note that we welcome that services are returning across Scotland and we completely understand that this crisis has created unprecedented challenges, following several already difficult years in public sector finance. However, we believe it is essential that there are clear dates in place for reopening all library branches and, at time of writing, this is not been made available by Edinburgh City Council. We kindly request that you provide this as soon as possible to reassure local communities and staff.

As a UNESCO City of Literature as well as Scotland's capital and with a huge range of differing needs across the city, libraries are perfectly positioned to provide vital social infrastructure that has never been more needed than now. Libraries will be essential in tackling social isolationⁱⁱ and supporting mental health and wellbeingⁱⁱⁱ in the coming months, as evidenced by the Scottish Government. Libraries play a key role in supporting the current digital strategies in Scotland^{iv} by providing free access for people unable to get online at home, delivering substantial democratic, social and economic benefits to citizens and communities as well as helping people search and apply for jobs and welfare. Also, studies have shown that around a quarter of Scotland's adults have issues with literacy^v and libraries tackle this by providing adult learning and promoting access to reading at a community level.

We note that digital take up of the excellent online services libraries offer has been significant and we welcome this. However, with the digital divide still being very much in existence, some of the people who most need libraries, such as those living in poverty or older people without digital skills, cannot access the services they depend on. With libraries opening across Scotland in some form but not in Edinburgh there is a danger some people could be left behind if there is a significant delay in accessing essential services.

We understand that safety is of course paramount. However, as you will know, having a building that is easily accessed by communities is essential and having a library service that meets community needs is a statutory requirement. For these reasons, we would be keen to see a clear plan in place, including intended dates, to open your remaining libraries in the coming weeks and we would be happy to discuss further as required.

Yours Sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Sean McNamara", written in a cursive style.

Sean McNamara, Head of CILIP Scotland

ⁱ <https://www.cilips.org.uk/>

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

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

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

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