

17th September 2020



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

email: admin@cilips.org.uk

Bill White

Live Borders
Melrose Road
Galashiels
TD1 2DU

Dear Bill,

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 your local authority.

We are writing to ask for an update on your current plans for reopening your libraries in the Borders. Whilst we recognise that your Connect and Collect and mobile service has been proving successful, we believe the return of physical libraries is essential for communities. 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 has not been made available by Live Borders or Borders Council, who have the statutory responsibility to provide libraries.

With a huge range of differing needs across the authority, 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 the Borders 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 dedicated library buildings that are easily accessed by the whole community is essential. Not providing these raises serious questions over whether the Council will meet its statutory requirements for library provision under the Local Government Act and could also be a breach of the Equalities Act^{vi}. For this reason, we would be keen to see a clear plan in place to open most of your remaining libraries and to offer some protection for your dedicated and hard-working staff.

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>

^{vi} <https://www.cilips.org.uk/advocacy-campaigns/guide-to-lobbying/legislation/>