

29th March 2021



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

email: admin@cilips.org.uk

Dear all,

The Chartered Institute of Library and Information Professionals in Scotland (www.cilips.org.uk) is the affiliate body of CILIP, the leading professional body for librarians in the UK. Many of our members work in services across the nation's 32 local authorities.

We are writing this open letter to all Councils and Trusts that provide library services across Scotland to highlight the importance of ensuring funding and resources are in place for libraries to reopen and once again become the beating hearts of their communities. Public libraries can now open for essential IT usage and can re-open more fully from April 26th as per the latest guidance and we encourage all services to have plans and provisional dates in place as soon as possible to ensure clarity for both your users and your skilled staff, whilst ensuring library workers have the protection they need.

As our current campaign highlights, public libraries welcomed 43 million visits a year pre-pandemic, making them more popular than Scotland's professional football matches, with 20 million books borrowed every year. The benefits they provide both economically and otherwise to Scottish society far outweigh what they cost to run and almost 80% of respondents to the Citizen's Assembly recommended increased investment in libraries.

Libraries provide vital digital skills and access for all, playing a key role in combating digital exclusion, and evidence shows that they also contribute to improving mental health and reducing social isolation: support that will be in huge demand as our nation recovers from the pandemic's protracted impact. Libraries will be an essential resource post-pandemic and we invite you to have a look at the rich bank of case studies, evidence we have online, as part of our campaign supported by writers such as Jackie Kay, Kerry Hudson and Ali Smith, as well as national organisations like Age Scotland, the Scottish Book Trust, the Big Issue and many more - www.cilips.org.uk/advocacy-campaigns/librariesareessential/

We welcome the significant digital take-up of the excellent online services that libraries have been offering throughout the pandemic. However, with the digital divide still very much in existence and sadly exacerbated by the pandemic's effects, some of the people who most need libraries, such as those living in poverty, young people with no access to reading at home and older people without digital skills, cannot access the services they depend on. In authorities where libraries open more slowly, there is a real danger that some of the most vulnerable people will be left behind and experience a detrimental delay in accessing essential services.

We understand completely that staff and user safety is paramount and welcome the steps you will have no doubt taken so far. As you will know, having dedicated library buildings that are easily accessed by the whole community was always and continues to be essential. We hope that you have plans in place to open your libraries as soon as restrictions allow and to get your talented library workforce back to doing what they do best.

Yours Faithfully,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Sean McNamara".

Sean McNamara

Head of CILIP Scotland