

30<sup>th</sup> January



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Midlothian Council  
40-46 Buccleuch St  
Dalkeith  
EH22 1DN

Dear Councillor,

The Chartered Institute of Library and Information Professionals in Scotland ([CILIPS](http://cilips.org.uk)) is the leading professional body for librarians nationally. Many of our members work in services including those in your public and school libraries.

I am writing to raise concerns over the following current budget proposals:

- **Remove staff from libraries - saving £150,000 in 2023/24 rising to £781,000 by 2025/26 - Each library would eventually either be self-service, run by community volunteers or closed.**
- **Adopt e-book service - saving a total of £144,000 from 2023/24 - Shift the focus on libraries to online services and do not replace or refresh the books or other materials on offer to customers.**
- **Service reduction in school library service – saving of £165,000 in 2023/24 rising to a total of £248,000 by 2025/26 - This proposal would remove school librarians from secondary school libraries.**

We are pleased to note that you are planning a consultation on any cuts, and we realise the local authority funding model means difficult decisions must be made. However, we urge you not to take these proposals any further. As you are aware, Midlothian already suffers from high levels of social exclusion and underachievement, as well as challenges around attainment, and library cuts will inevitably worsen this for your citizens.

The most important resource a library has is its skilled staff at all levels. A library run by volunteers or self-service alone would not be fit for purpose or worthy of being called a public library. Where this has been attempted elsewhere in the UK it has significantly damaged the service or ultimately seen it close; it is the legal duty of a local authority to provide an adequate library service and one that has no staff is completely inadequate.

Additionally, eBooks should only ever be a supplement to printed book stock, that is regularly added to and refreshed. Only using eBooks will exacerbate the digital divide as well as creating a two-tier service for people who cannot afford a device to read eBooks: this would increase the impact on vulnerable or disabled library users which may infringe the Equalities Act.

Public libraries are essential in improving literacy, tackling [social isolation](#) and supporting [mental health and wellbeing](#), as evidenced by the Scottish Government. Libraries play a key role in supporting the current [digital strategies](#) in Scotland 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 to search and apply for jobs and welfare.

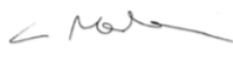
Additionally, the changes you propose making to school libraries will de-professionalise the service you offer and directly affect the quality of education available. Like public libraries, school libraries can only meet the needs of pupils if they are run by a trained and skilled school librarian.

Cutting school librarians runs counter to current national initiatives aiming to support and enhance literacy and will inevitably lead to a poorer overall educational experience. A [body of impact studies](#) highlights the contribution of school librarians to improved attainment and achievement. School libraries are a safe and supportive learning environment where all pupils have equitable access to curriculum related learning resources, both physical and digital, practical support, and information for educational purposes. We believe that school libraries should be the central resource of the school, open every day and staffed by a professionally trained librarian.

The [National Strategy for Public Libraries](#), currently being implemented in Scotland, makes clear that 'school librarians are a fundamental part of Scotland's education sector and have the potential to be transformative in the development of every child and young person'. This document emphasises on numerous occasions the important role that school librarians have in educational settings and it is important that local authorities recognise this. A recent proposal by North Lanarkshire saw almost 40,000 citizens sign a [petition](#) condemning the idea of reducing their skilled school library workforce.

How much value a local authority attaches to its public and school libraries can often be a good indication of how much it values its people. We ask that you take these savings proposals no further and we would be happy to discuss this matter in greater detail should you wish.

Yours Sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Sean McNamara', written over a light blue horizontal line.

Sean McNamara, Head of CILIP Scotland