

13th February 2023

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

email: admin@cilips.org.uk

Clackmannanshire Council

Kilncraigs, Greenside St, Alloa

FK10 1EB

Dear Councillor

In addition to [our letter](#) dated 31st January, we would like to provide some further evidence and ask that you take this into account when making a decision on the proposals to close 3 libraries in your local authority. As ever, we recognise that the local government funding picture is one of severe financial challenges, but we hope that we can make clear just how damaging these cuts would be, potentially leaving your local authority with the lowest level of library provision in the whole of Scotland.

The below evidence, gathered from publicly available information, is particularly in reference to the point in the budget proposal that 'the long term trend of declining use of community access points and libraries has continued at a time when operating costs are rising unsustainably.'

- Whilst there is a pattern of 'declining use' this is based on the key metrics of people count and borrower numbers during a period of severe cuts.
- In 2017/18 - 3 branches were closed (Menstrie, Dollar, Clackmannan) and this saw an understandable decrease in the above metrics, and therefore it would be unfair to not recognise that this has an impact on usage as libraries are not there to be used.
- Despite this, a clear increase in borrower numbers was seen from 2019, countering the narrative of declining usage.
- Post covid, all metrics are once again increasing.
- Any decrease in the number of items borrowed also runs counter to significant decreases in book funds (140k in 2008, £59k in 2018) and does not consider eBook usage. Also, new book stock is only 25% what it was in 2005.
- Clackmannanshire Library stock (58,000) is in the lowest band of local authority provision of books in Scotland. Amongst neighbouring authorities, it is the lowest volume and further afield even Orkney, with half the population, has 145,000 items.
- All declining usage can be clearly seen as running parallel to service reductions and therefore becomes self-perpetuating if used as a reason for further cuts.
- Library usage across Scotland is high with libraries more popular than cinema and attending football matches so there is no clear sign of 'declining use' where libraries are funded, staffed and available.
- Clackmannanshire (1.95 per 20,000) falls below the national average for libraries per head of population (2.05)
- Reducing the total number of libraries in Clackmannanshire to 2 would then be the lowest provision per head in Scotland.
- There has been an unfilled library team leader post since April 2022 – this may have meant a lack of direct advocacy to the directorate and senior management team.

The service has endured a near decade of cuts from 2014-2023 and we would strongly ask you to reconsider the current proposals, especially where previous cuts have clearly influenced the position.

As I mentioned in my previous letter, we believe that closing these libraries would be deeply damaging to the local communities who rely on them. This would leave some areas without an accessible and adequate branch, and this could be a breach of your requirements based on both the Local Government Act and Equalities Law. To close 60% of your libraries in one go would be a severe and unprecedented reduction in Scotland.

Public libraries are essential to 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 and even to access warm spaces. We believe it would be deeply unfair to justify closures on the basis you have, especially when [the evidence of recent research](#) reaffirms the vital importance of library spaces to the public (a majority of whom stated that there can be 'no substitute' for them).

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