

2nd October 2023



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

email: admin@cilips.org.uk

Deputy First Minister and Cabinet Secretary for Finance
Scottish Government
St Andrew's House
Regent Road
Edinburgh
EH1 3DG

Dear Deputy First Minister,

The Chartered Institute of Library and Information Professionals in Scotland ([CILIPS](#)) is the leading professional body for librarians in Scotland and an affiliate of CILIP, the leading body in the UK. Our members work in all sectors including many in both public and school libraries.

Firstly, congratulations on your appointment as Deputy First Minister and Cabinet Secretary for Finance earlier this year and we look forward to working with you.

We are writing to highlight our concerns at our school library and public library sectors being gradually reduced since 2010 and whilst we very much welcome the central funding that funds activities via the School Library and Public Library Improvement Funds, we believe that these services need additional urgent support. We challenge local authorities such as Aberdeen and North Lanarkshire when they agree to close statutory services like libraries or delete all school library posts with no consultation, but we also recognise that the financial pressures they are under are reaching an unsustainable point.

Public libraries are essential in providing equitable access to books and resources, 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. Libraries have also been essential warm spaces during the current cost of living crisis and librarians are playing a key role in combatting censorship, fighting misinformation and working with communities on climate change related projects. This all happens despite our spend per head for libraries being lower than many comparable countries.

Libraries are massively popular with over 40 million visits per year. Evidence shows that when libraries are funded and supported, they are well used, with libraries having more visits than Scottish football and cinemas combined before the pandemic, and recent research has shown that numbers are returning significantly in 2022 and 2023. As you know, there is a National Strategy for Public Libraries being implemented in Scotland that highlights their value to places, people, and partnerships, and all of this will suffer if libraries are removed from our communities.

As you will know the local government funding model across Scotland, and wider in the UK, has huge funding shortfalls. For too long, services such as libraries are falling between the cracks as national and local government attach blame for budget cuts to each other and the people that are suffering the most are communities who desperately need them. Before it is too late, we ask that some solutions are sought so that our essential public services are not further damaged.

How much value a country attaches to its libraries can often be a good indication of how much it values its people and the need for social mobility and equity. 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