

21st November 2023



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

email: admin@cilips.org.uk

Stirling Council

1-3 Port Street

Stirling

FK8 2EJ

Dear Councillor,

The Chartered Institute of Library and Information Professionals in Scotland ([CILIPS](https://www.cilips.org.uk)) is the leading professional body for librarians in Scotland and an affiliate of CILIP, the leading body in the UK. Many of our members work in services including those of your public libraries.

I am writing to raise concerns over your Council's proposal to either 'close up to half of the public libraries' or 'see all public libraries closed except the central library in the City of Stirling with services replaced by mobile libraries across the council area.'

We would urge you to strongly reconsider this before budgets are finalised. We absolutely recognise that local government funding has significant shortfalls and we have also written to the Scottish Government to make this point clear. However, changes such as this should only be taken if detailed public consultation provides evidence that the closures and resulting loss of vital services and social infrastructure are what your community needs and wants.

I understand that some of the decisions have been based on usage figures and changing habits. However, 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. If any of these decisions are being made based on footfall affected by the knock-on effects of the pandemic, then that would be deeply unfair as confidence of library users is gradually returning.

Whilst in some cases mobile libraries can provide services, this is not a replacement for a physical library, accessible at times that suit users. Public libraries are essential in providing access to books, 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.

There is a National Strategy for Public Libraries being implemented in Scotland that highlights their value to places, people, and partnerships, and all of these will suffer if libraries are removed from your communities. Stirling Libraries are often seen as one of the best services in Scotland with incredible, impactful staff and closing branches would be a significant blow to this.

It is your legal duty as a Council to provide library services that adequately meet the needs of your community, so any closures should only be undertaken with the support of residents. If changes

mean that someone cannot access services in the same way then this could also run counter to the requirements of the Equalities Act, so we would also ask that detailed Equalities and Economic Impact Assessments are undertaken. To undertake no meaningful consultation may mean that you have not met your requirements as a Council, and we would ask that you review this urgently. Recently in Aberdeen, a similar number of libraries were closed with no consultation, and this resulted in a legal challenge and a consultation being put in place and similar closure plans in North Lanarkshire were reversed after a political and public backlash.

How much value a local authority attaches to its public 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 grey rectangular background.

Sean McNamara

Head of CILIP Scotland