

26th February 2024

North Ayrshire Council
Cunninghame House, Friars Croft
Irvine
KA12 8EE

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 nationally. Many of our members work in services including those in your public and school libraries.

I am writing to raise concerns over the proposal to reduce libraries opening hours by 20% and review all supplies and operational budgets as well as redesigning the library service.

Firstly, we fully recognise that the funding arrangements for local government are not sufficient to meet the needs of vital services and we have written to the Cabinet Secretary for Finance to make this clear, and we know this has been made more difficult with a freeze on Council Tax. Despite this, I hope you can understand the damage cuts to opening hours and budgets will do to communities and that you can agree not to take this forward.

As you know, you have a legal requirement to provide library services that meet the needs of communities and that reductions to services do not disadvantage anyone under the Equalities Act. We hope that if any cut is agreed that it has been fully assessed to avoid breaching your requirements based on both the Local Government Act and Equalities Law.

We urge you to look at [the evidence](#) for public libraries on our website and on the Scottish Book Trust [website](#). For example, public libraries are essential to improving literacy, tackling social isolation, and supporting mental health and wellbeing. They are also the most popular service local government provides and play a key role in digital inclusion 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 been vital in the cost of living crisis, as [backed](#) by Martin Lewis, and users need physical libraries that they can use and [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) and the cost of cutting libraries has a [high social cost](#).

Cutting opening hours could have the biggest impact on users who most rely on the service. For example, that may be young parents who can only attend at certain times, or working people on low incomes who require access outside business hours, or a vulnerable person who relies on the service being there at a set time every week. Additionally, libraries where money is spent on resources are proven to be well used.

Any proposal to reduce school library staffing following a review will also severely damage the service you offer and directly affect the quality of education you offer pupils as well as efforts nationally to improve literacy rates and attainment. An extensive, growing body of evidence highlights the contribution of school librarians to improved exam scores and achievement, and their role in creating a safe, supportive and inclusive learning environment where all pupils have equal and equitable access to curriculum related learning resources.

The National Strategy for School Libraries, Vibrant Libraries, Thriving Schools, which is currently being implemented in Scotland, states on numerous occasions the important role school librarians have in educational settings. School librarians are trained and skilled members of school staff, and reducing their impact will cause young people's education to suffer.

How much value a local authority attaches to its school and public libraries can often be a good indication over how much it values its people and whilst we once again acknowledge the huge challenge in balancing budgets, we hope you choose not to reduce library services.

Yours Sincerely



Sean McNamara, Head of CILIP Scotland