

15th April 2024

South Lanarkshire Council  
Almada Street, Hamilton  
ML3 0AA

Dear Councillor,

Following our [open letter on 13th February](#) and an outcry of concern [across our professional community](#), we are writing to implore you and your fellow Councillors to reconsider the legal and societal implications of your deeply troubling decision to close seven public libraries across South Lanarkshire.

While we note with regret that the Council has failed to undertake its own Equality Impact Assessment, South Lanarkshire Leisure and Culture's EQIA echoes both [our extensive evidence banks](#) and [my personal experience as a local resident](#) by highlighting that closure of a community library will 'impact on the educational, cultural, economic and democratic life of [a] local area' as citizens lose access to essential resources such as 'physical books in all formats, including large print and talking books, supported access to PCs, internet and WiFi... literacy and learning activities... study and research space... [and] a programme of activities which can reduce social isolation', in addition to 'hearing aid batteries, period products, [and] vitamins for babies and breastfeeding mothers'. We are gravely concerned by the fact that these closures will leave South Lanarkshire with **the lowest number of library branches per population anywhere in Scotland**: fewer than one library branch per 20,000 people and less than half our national average. Our analysis suggests that over **19,700 of your constituents** will now no longer have access to a library branch within a one hour round trip on public transport.

We are sympathetic to the challenging financial landscape within which the Council is forced to operate, but public library closures can only be a false economy as **these unique and much-loved community spaces serve on the frontline of the cost of living crisis**: providing what renowned Money Saving Expert Martin Lewis describes in [our Warm Spaces guidelines](#) as 'crucial extra help to get a decent number of vulnerable people through the winter'. The irreplaceable value of public libraries is likewise [recognised by the Scottish Government](#) and South Lanarkshire's decision would make it **the only local authority in Scotland to impose public library closures** in its 2024/25 budget setting.

Within the context of a sluggish return to pre-pandemic opening hours in South Lanarkshire, reflected by more than 20% still not having been reinstated as late as September 2022, we strongly dispute the ostensible justification of a 'continual decline' in library usage, which is further contradicted by [recent University of Strathclyde research](#) confirming that **a majority of the public see digital services as 'no substitute' for physical library spaces**. Contrary to the SLLC EQIA, we also note, as the professional body for library staff in Scotland, that the suggestion of ebooks being more **environmentally and economically sustainable** than physical books is far from uncontroversial. Indeed, a [November 2022 report](#) cautioned the profession about the significant long-term carbon footprint of digital services, whilst as demonstrated by our support for the [#ebookSOS campaign](#), securing affordable access to e-resources for libraries can present severe operational challenges.

Furthermore, we are greatly troubled by indications that South Lanarkshire Council took no legal advice before deciding to close the seven libraries in question. Such legal counsel may have highlighted, as

recently articulated by Govan Law Centre Solicitor Advocate Mike Dailly in [Scotland's Library Advocacy Story](#), your **statutory duty to secure the provision of adequate library facilities for all persons resident in your area, in a way that is also **compliant with the Equality Act**, upholding social justice for those with protected characteristics and reducing the inequalities of outcome which result from socio-economic disadvantage. The law is clear that the responsibility to both provide library facilities for citizens and uphold the Equality Act via Public Sector Equality Duty resides with South Lanarkshire Council, not South Lanarkshire Leisure and Culture. From the evidence above, I fear that neither duty is being met.**

Yours sincerely,

*Kirsten MacQuarrie*

Kirsten MacQuarrie, CILIP Scotland