

Midlothian Council  
Midlothian House, 40-46 Buccleuch St, Dalkeith  
EH22 1DN

**30th October 2024**

Dear Councillor,

I am writing to you from the professional body for librarians in Scotland ([www.cilips.org.uk](http://www.cilips.org.uk)) in relation to your budget setting in Midlothian, where many of our members live and work.

We are pleased to see that you are consulting over the plans as we believe that community users and staff engagement would be a key part of any next stage in progressing redesign. We are also fully aware of and sympathetic to the huge financial challenges facing councils across the country, including rising demands of health and social care, the cost-of-living crisis and the level of financial settlements you receive. In fact, we have [advocated](#) at a national level for sustainable, longer term funding for local authorities.

We would like to provide our recommendations in response to the proposals to change the way libraries operate in Midlothian by, for example, integrating public and school libraries and making libraries self-service or community operated, shifting the focus on libraries to online services and no longer replacing or refreshing the books or materials on offer to customers.

Whilst we realise that innovative solutions need to be found, we would be very concerned that community-led provision is likely to leave residents without a library service fully run and delivered by trained library professionals as they are legally entitled to, as well as potentially breaching equalities legislation. Effective library delivery is a complex challenge with many practical, financial and ethical considerations and [needs trained library workers](#) and management. We also do not believe self-service can adequately replace library services, and whilst elements of this can be useful as an add-on dedicated to widening access, if replacing staffed services it could lead to communities losing vital access to a safe space that is adequately safeguarded by skilled professionals.

E-books are a welcome addition to print collections, yet evidence has shown that a significant majority of people prefer physical books, plus around [15% of people do not have](#) foundation digital skills, so not to buy new print copies would further increase inequalities. Additionally, [research confirms](#) that the public see digital services as 'no substitute' for physical library spaces, with [CIPFA's library survey](#) also revealing that in-person visits to libraries increased by 68% since the pandemic.

Midlothian has the fastest growing population in Scotland and constituents will need access to the library services they are legally entitled to. In our opinion, this would not be the time to scale that back.

Any changes to school library services that reduce the number of school librarians or access to school libraries will also be damaging to the education of young people. [Research](#) shows that school libraries, staffed with a trained school librarian, play a vital role in supporting both academic

achievement and pupil wellbeing, and the strength of school libraries in terms of quantity and quality of books, space, librarian knowledge and pedagogy, and pupil use can play a vital role in academic outcomes and attainment.

School librarians create a safe, supportive and inclusive learning environment where all pupils have equitable access to curriculum related learning resources. With around a quarter of Midlothian children living in poverty it is critical that library services are protected, as a [wealth of evidence](#) links library services and reading to the reduction of poverty and increased life chances.

Our profession is defined by a set of [ethical principles](#) that ensure your libraries can be key in upholding, promoting and defending human rights, equalities and diversity, access to knowledge, intellectual freedom, freedom from censorship and the development of information skills and literacy. But this can only happen if public libraries are open and available to communities, and with the rise of [book banning requests](#) it is vital that school librarians are likewise in place in schools to provide their expertise.

Libraries in Scotland are [used by millions](#), have seen usage and [demand increase](#) in the past decade, and are consistently the most [frequently visited](#) cultural event or place. They play an essential role in increasing literacy skills, with [over 1 in 4 adults in Scotland likely to face challenges related to reading, writing and numbers](#), and reading for pleasure has been [proven](#) to improve the mental health of young people. It is estimated that ['the average worker in the UK with very low literacy will earn approximately 7.1% less than if they had a basic level of literacy'](#).

[Independent research](#) also shows that libraries generate £41 million worth of social value, translating to at least £6 for every £1 invested as well as [supporting economic growth](#), and library engagement saves the NHS £1.32 per person per year. Based on the [average cost saving](#) of £27.5 million per year in England, the equivalent saving in Scotland works out at £3.2m per year.

Libraries are evidence of a country that values its communities, committed to equitable access and reducing inequality. We hope you agree and please get in touch if you would like to discuss any of the above, we are here to help.

Yours Sincerely



Sean McNamara

Director, CILIP Scotland