

Roddie Mackay
Council Leader
Council Offices
Sandwick Road
Stornoway
Isle of Lewis HS1 2BW

21 November 2018

Dear Councillor Mackay,

Service redesign 2018/19 – protect Comhairle nan Eilean Siar Library Services

My name is Peggy Hughes and I am the Chair of Literature Alliance Scotland (LAS), which is Scotland's largest literary membership network, representing the principal literature and languages organisations in Scotland.

I'm writing in response to the Comhairle's public consultation and the proposed changes to the provision of library services. We are particularly concerned about the potential reduction of the mobile library vehicles with the move toward a "community hub" concept. It is not clear what is meant by this concept, how it would operate and who it would be staffed by. We share the view of our member organisation, CILIP in Scotland, that public libraries should be staffed by professional librarians. We are also keen to understand which "specific areas" and "specific tasks" the proposed "smaller scale" mobile libraries would serve and how the redesign of the library service would ensure the Comhairle's continued contribution to national outcomes such as reducing inequality and improving literacy, life chances and health.

While I do of course fully appreciate that the Comhairle nan Eilean Siar is under financial pressure, the argument for long-term investment in public libraries is strong.

Libraries are crucial in providing access to literature, assisting digital literacy, and improving people's chances in life. Reading is Scotland's favourite cultural activity, which brings with it important health benefits. In fact, a 2013 study conducted by the Scottish Government shows clear and significant links between cultural participation and improved health and wellbeing. Public libraries provide safe, warm meeting places where people have access to culture, knowledge and the chance to learn. In fact, successful countries, such as the Nordic countries and The Netherlands, are actively strengthening and building upon their existing networks of public libraries. They see them as the principal way for their societies to provide local democratic access to knowledge and culture in the digital age.

Importantly, libraries are vital to improving literacy in Scotland, and they provide equal opportunities for everyone. The Comhairle's existing mobile libraries are crucial for reducing service inequalities between towns and rural communities, and lowering social isolation in all demographic groups, including vulnerable adults and the elderly.

Chair: Peggy Hughes | **Vice-Chair:** Dr Donald Smith | **Treasurer:** Rosemary Ward

Communications Officer: Jenny Kumar (admin@literaturealliancescotland.co.uk / 07989 557198)

Literature Alliance Scotland is a Scottish Charitable Incorporated Organisation. Registration Number: SC046387

In addition, the mobile library service demonstrates the value the Comhairle places on its communities while local residents clearly value the service delivered as evidenced by a consistent growth in membership that has almost doubled in the past four years.

Scotland has long been known for its strong support for public libraries, and for the excellent network of libraries that has already been created. On behalf of our members, and the communities of the Western Isles, we urge you to think of the big picture and to please protect their library service.

Yours faithfully,



Peggy Hughes, Chair

Literature Alliance Scotland Membership at November 2018

MEMBERS

- Association for Scottish Literary Studies (ASLS)
- Association of Scottish Literary Agents (ASLA)
- Bookdonors CIC
- CILIPS (Chartered Institute of Library and Information Professionals in Scotland)
- Edinburgh International Book Festival
- Edinburgh UNESCO City of Literature Trust
- The Gaelic Books Council
- Moniak Mhor
- National Library of Scotland
- Peter Pan Moat Brae Trust
- Playwrights' Studio Scotland
- Publishing Scotland
- The Saltire Society
- Scottish Book Trust
- Scottish Library and Information Council (SLIC)
- SLAM (Scottish Literary and Arts Magazines)

- Scottish Society of Playwrights
- Scottish PEN
- Scottish Poetry Library
- Scottish Storytelling Forum
- Scottish Writers Centre
- Society of Authors in Scotland
- Universities Committee for Scottish Literature
- Wigtown Festival Company
- Writers' Guild of Great Britain (Scottish Region)

NETWORK ASSOCIATES

- Ayton Publishing
- Cove Park
- Edinburgh Jewish Literary Society
- Florida State Universities Library
- Indie Authors World
- Royal Botanic Gardens Edinburgh
- Stirling Centre for International Publishing and Communication @ Stirling University
- The Poetry Association of Scotland

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