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Special Briefing: Reaction to the government's comprehensive spending review and implications for libraries and librarians

Many thanks for the opportunity to talk to you today and to give CILIP's initial response to the government's Comprehensive Spending Review (CSR). It is an initial response because we will be responding in a variety of ways for some time as the impact of the announcement ripples and grows across the library world.

And of course it would be wrong of me not to remind you that the public library sector is not the only one affected by government fiscal restraint. We have a 50% cut in the Department of Culture Media and Sport (DCMS) budget. We have the close down and transfer of Museums Libraries and Archives Council (MLA) functions. Becta going. Building Schools for the Future, £4.2 billion from universities, with its impact on research and development libraries. Outsourcing in the legal world. And many more examples of the impact of this unprecedented time of constraint.

CILIP members in every sector are facing similar threats and challenges though perhaps these are less visible to the public and less visibly on the 'front line' than cuts to public libraries.

At the same time, as we discuss these issues in England today it is important to remember that the home nations are just as much affected and coping with the huge impact of the changes on them. Devolved funding under the Barnett Formula will give a proportionate 'whammy' to public services across the piece and we know that the public sector accounts for proportionately more jobs in Wales and Scotland.

We only have the headlines at the moment so I want to give you a few key points about how CILIP views what's happening and what our response will be. I want to talk to you as leaders, as individuals and as elected representatives of the communities who will be impacted most by the decisions that have been made.

When I meet with Ed Vaizey next week I'm going to be telling him two things:

The first is that I am convinced that on his watch he does not want the legacy of this government to be the demolition of the public library service.

No government wants to allow the loss of something so fundamental and all it represents to a free, fair and democratic society. As Thomas Jefferson once said, 'No nation can remain both ignorant and free'.

CILIP trustees are about to agree a new vision for the organisation that encapsulates that philosophy and also recognises the vital role of experts in the profession in

delivering literacy, access to information and the creation of knowledge to underpin a fair and prosperous society.

The second is that we believe that if local authorities think that they can no longer afford public libraries they are wrong. They can't afford NOT to have them.

Particularly in times of hardship in society, the social contribution of libraries comes to the fore. People need community spaces to learn, to access support, to develop skills, to get information, to relax and escape and to do things for free. People need places to take their children, to spend time and feel welcome and to get help with daily problems.

And we know and have heard again today the reason why that is true, with so many opportunities for the contribution of libraries as part of the essential transformation of delivery of services to communities being highlighted by Nicky Parker in her speech.

Our message to government is not to forget that public libraries connect across the community and that wherever strategic responsibility is placed within the DCMS family, the conversations must take place across Whitehall about the contribution that you make at local level to health, literacy and learning, rural affairs, online access and place based services.

I'm sure that no one in this room disagrees with that view and we welcome the Local Government Association's recognition of this through their involvement in the Future Libraries Improvement Programme.

But the reality is that the success of getting that message across at a local authority level can vary enormously and no matter how much we believe in what we do, there will be decisions made that drastically reduce services that are provided to local communities unless the high level messages about the viable options for placing public libraries at the centre of local community delivery and are heard.

So what can CILIP do? Clearly we are here to support the profession and to make sure that the value of library, knowledge and information workers to a fair and prosperous society is in the mind of decision makers and influencers. But we have to do more than just say it.

So we will be campaigning. Our members have asked us to be more visible and vocal in support of their work and the institutions that they work in at this difficult time. We have to start to have conversations outside of what has been termed the 'echo chamber'. We all believe in the value of libraries but we can't just talk to each other and we need influential allies in the wider world.

We'll campaign for the value of libraries for what they represent for society, the workers and the expertise, customer focus and professionalism that they embody, and the future, which would look pretty bleak without the tools that people need for literacy, access to information and the growth of knowledge.

We'll work with partners including the Public Libraries Group and Society of Chief Librarians to make the case for the ongoing value of the library sector and to ensure that national government understands the impacts on local government and on local communities of the reduction of public library services. We'll work for our members and, as a charity, for the public benefit.

CILIP has a unique role as an independent voice for the library, information and knowledge sector and those who work in it, and we're going to make the most of it. At the same time we know that we have to be pragmatic in our support and recognise the realities of the situations that the sector is facing post CSR. That's why CILIP is part of the Future Libraries Programme Board.

The CILIP Council wants CILIP policies to support library leaders and library workers in the real world and the real situations you work in. That's why we have been reviewing cases and keeping track of the difficult situations that some of you face. And that's why, for example, CILIP Council has made the difficult decision to change its policy on volunteering, to recognise the reality of the situation that you work in, and the fact that the majority of library services have been working with volunteers for many years. And having worked with charities for the past couple of years, I know that the passion and commitment of volunteers is enormously valuable. BUT:

CILIP knows that volunteers are not free and cost money to manage and coordinate and that services must be professionally managed and structured and supported by expert and qualified staff who know the business and how to build successful customer focused services.

So, firstly our practical response will be to talk to the experts and to work with the library authorities that are making the use of volunteers work well to support those who are developing volunteer supported services for the first time with guidance on managing a volunteer workforce. We can learn from third sector organisations and not start from scratch on this issue but CILIP will continue to reinforce the message that library services need expert management to ensure effective delivery and that means that we need a professional workforce able to plan and deliver for customers.

Secondly, as we are constantly being asked for a response to specific cases of proposals for library closures and downsizing by various press and media and sometimes by campaigning bodies, we need to be clear with you what guidelines we are using for our response.

We rarely comment on specific proposals to the press but we do, and we may ask to discuss more with you about any areas where we have concerns. A CILIP panel set up specifically to monitor the current picture across ALL libraries, not just public, has set five criteria against which we will assess any specific case we are asked to look at and these are strategic in nature:

- 1. Is there a strategic plan for the library/information service in place?*
- 2. Is there evidence of a proper needs assessment informing the strategic plan and proposals for change?*

3. *Can the proposals be seen as proportionate to the resource requirements of the library service and its parent institution?*
4. *Have the stakeholders in the library service, especially user communities and staff, been properly consulted?*
5. *Has professional advice been taken in determining the proposals for change?*
6. *In the case of public libraries, do the proposals allow a council to meet its statutory obligation? (that is, the Public Libraries and Museums Act 1964)*

I recommend these questions unreservedly to any elected members. I am happy to talk to anyone individually more about the value of these in terms of local activity and case building.

We want to preserve professional standards but in a realistic and progressive way and we will be reviewing all of our activities to ensure that what CILIP does is create enabling frameworks and recognise the new environments that people work in and not be so prescriptive as to be irrelevant.

In the reality of the situations that you face, there is no doubt that professional jobs will be under threat and that is of enormous concern to CILIP. I want to take the opportunity to talk to both elected members in the room and library leaders and their directors to say a couple of things about this.

Firstly, in a time when survival of library services is essential for the good of the local communities that you represent and serve, skilled leadership for the sector is absolutely vital and CILIP is here to support the leaders of the profession and to help them to support each other as much as we possibly can.

Secondly, CILIP is not a trade union. We are a charity that is about setting high standards of for the workforce to deliver public good. So we will express our concerns about the delivery of services but we won't represent individual cases, it's not our job. That's for Unison and other unions to do. What we will do is continue to campaign for a skilled workforce, from the front line to strategic management and for the professional management of services.

I would urge elected members and senior officers to understand that the survival of the library services in your community could be down to the quality of leadership that you offer and that you retain to support your library service. You need the best professionals and the best advice you can get at a time like this.

Finally, at CILIP we are not immune to the effects of the recession. We have an enormous change agenda to deliver as we have to reduce in size due to declining income and modernise our offer. Our members want us to be primarily and advocating body that works with partners to put across the key messages and to provide networking opportunities and a realistic framework for career development. I am working to develop the five top offers that CILIP brings to members that make us indispensable throughout any librarian or information worker's career.

It's my job to work with the staff, trustees and stakeholders to deliver what CILIP members need in a time when they are losing jobs and feeling financial pressures.

CILIP needs to continue to increase its relevance, flexibility and immediacy of response to all members and stakeholders. And for those of you at senior levels in the profession, we need you to be part of that and I will calling to have those conversations.

I wish you all the best of luck in the challenges you will be facing and I can promise the following:

- That CILIP will work with you to influence, lobby and advocate on your behalf.
- That we will provide strategic support.
- That we will listen to your needs.
- That we will do our best to understand and live in the real world with you, in the challenges that you face.
- And that we will hold to the vision that the public library service is part of the solution for the problems we face at a time of crisis and not a problem, and that its leaders and workers have a great deal to offer in their local authorities.

And finally a plug for a document that we have produced last year especially for elected members: [What constitutes a Good Library Service?](#)

Thanks

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