

The Rt Hon David Cameron MP
The Prime Minister
c/o The Prime Minister's Office
10 Downing Street
London
SW1A 2AA

11th November 2015

Dear Prime Minister,

I am writing in response to your letter to Councillor Ian Hudspeth (14th September 2015) expressing your concern and disappointment at Council proposals to 'make significant cuts to frontline services – from elderly day centres, to libraries to museums'.

As the independent professional association representing the UK's estimated 86,000 library and information workers, the Chartered Institute of Library and Information Professionals (CILIP) shares your concerns. The impact of reductions in centrally-distributed funds to Local Government has already been profound for the Nation's publicly-funded libraries and is likely to become critical after the Budget statement on the 25th November.

Our best estimates show that as many as 200 public libraries have closed since 2008 and many hundreds more are being forced to make short-term decisions to transition into community-led models the sustainability of which remains an open question without appropriate planning or support.

Equally, if not more damaging to the long-term public interest is the loss of skills and expertise resulting from the loss of qualified staff in publicly-funded libraries. 1000's of qualified librarians have either lost their jobs or find themselves at risk of redundancy – a permanent loss of professional skills that will do profound and lasting damage to Britain's future as a globally-competitive Knowledge Economy.

I need hardly point out that the likely outcome of further significant savings passed on to Local Government in the Chancellor's Autumn Budget will trigger an avalanche of short-term decisions and further redundancies and is likely to put the Public Library Network itself – long the beating heart of our communities, a foundation of Britain's education, equality and social mobility and a central pillar of our economic future – at risk.

The Government's duty of care for the Public Library Network is statutory under the 1964 Public Libraries and Museums Act, which states;

"From the commencement of this Act it shall be the duty of the Secretary of State to superintend, and promote the improvement of, the public library service provided by local authorities in England and Wales, and to secure the proper discharge by local authorities of the functions in relation to libraries conferred on them as library authorities by or under this Act."

While we recognise the Government's aim to reduce public expenditure, it is essential to recognise that library services are often one of the smallest expenditure items in Council budgets but that they unlock a tremendous range of benefits including improved literacy and attainment, improved health and wellbeing, digital literacy and employability.

If cuts to local libraries continue unchecked, it is all too possible that the legacy of your Government may be a network of hollowed-out services, delivering only the most basic of library functions and failing to meet the reasonable expectations of the public. The loss of libraries and librarians is a profound disservice to the ideas and aspirations of generations to come.

We have a network of library and information professionals that are ready and willing to assist Councils – including Councillors in Oxfordshire - in making informed choices about the development of their library services with due regard to their statutory duties.

We are able to offer creative ideas and options, drawing on examples of successful and productive library policy around the world, which will secure the future of our wonderful publicly-funded libraries while maximising back-office efficiency and opening up new opportunities for partnership and enterprise in our communities.

There are no magic solutions, but there is a better way of achieving your intended outcomes. These depend on bringing qualified library and information professionals, Councils and communities together to develop creative and positive services which meet local needs while retaining the benefits of a joined-up national network. We urge you to work with the Chancellor, the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport and the Local Government Association to recognise the importance of libraries, to protect them as far as possible in the forthcoming budget and to provide policy and financial support through this period of transition.

We would be very glad to arrange to meet with you or your advisers at your convenience to discuss the issues raised in this letter and to identify a way forward that is in the best interest of the public good and that enables HM Government to deliver the truly C21st Public Library Network that Britain deserves.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'Nick Poole', with a stylized flourish at the end.

Nick Poole
Chief Executive Officer
Chartered Institute of Library and Information Professionals