

PE1581/X

Deputy First Minister submission of 13 April 2017

Thank you for your letter of 15 March 2017 inviting me to give evidence to the Public Petitions Committee on PE1581 (Save Scotland's School Libraries) on 20 April.

The Scottish Government places great importance on school and public libraries. We believe everyone should have access to library services. Libraries do not just provide access to reading material; they play a crucial role in providing access to IT, improving attainment, supporting children and empowering communities. They also have a key role in supporting Scottish Government initiatives such as Bookbug, PlayTalkRead, Read, Write, Count and the First Minister's Reading Challenge.

From its discussions on 2 March, I understand that the Committee was particularly interested in understanding what information and advice local authorities have on the importance of libraries when making decisions in the context of constraints on their budgets.

Since 2015, the Scottish Government has supported the development and delivery of the National Strategy for Public Libraries – and invested more than £2 million to help re-invigorate the role of public libraries providing funds to roll-out Wi-Fi and support other local and national activity. We want to ensure that every child in Scotland receives a library membership.

I would expect all local authorities to give careful and positive consideration of the future role of libraries given their statutory responsibilities for the delivery of education and ensuring that there is an adequate provision of library services for their residents. The Scottish Government has treated local government very fairly despite the cuts to the Scottish Budget from the UK Government. The local government finance settlement including the extra £160 million announced on 2 February, plus the other sources of support is an overall potential increase of over £400 million (3.9%) in cash terms or £249.7 million (2.4%) in real terms.

The Scottish Government has protected funding in 2017/18 for the Scottish Library and Information Council (SLIC), which provides advice to local authorities and supports improvements in public libraries across our local authorities. The Committee will have seen that the research SLIC commissioned from Robert Gordon University on the *Impact of School Libraries on Learning* in 2013 is heavily referenced in the petition itself and the written submissions it has received. Further, Education Scotland's *3-18 Literacy and English Review* (2015) offers insights into the use and impact of school libraries and local library services in schools, from early learning and childcare through to secondary school. These reports are publicly available and bring home the important contribution school libraries make to the education of our children and young people.

SLIC has already highlighted to the Committee that it has been working on a mapping document to embed library outcomes in *How Good Is Our School 4* (HGIOS4), Education Scotland's whole school self-evaluation framework. I can now confirm that Education Scotland will be integrating the new librarian-focused guidance into the main HGIOS4 framework. This will give it greater prominence and help demonstrate the fundamental and wide-ranging links between the school library and the school's broader aims on Curriculum for Excellence.

I look forward to meeting the Committee on 20 April.