



Department for
Digital, Culture,
Media & Sport

Rt Hon Jeremy Wright QC MP
Secretary of State for Digital, Culture,
Media and Sport
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Councillor Matthew Golby
Leader
Northamptonshire County Council
Cabinet Office
One Angel Square
Northampton NNI 1ED

TO2018/16409/DC
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Dear Councillor Golby

My predecessor, Rt Hon Matt Hancock MP, wrote to you on 19 March 2018 to notify you that this Department was treating representations raised with him as a formal complaint under section 10 (1) (a) of the Public Libraries and Museums Act 1964 (the Act) that Northamptonshire County Council (NCC) was failing to carry out its duties relating to the public library service imposed on it by or under the Act.

The complainant suggested that the changes agreed by NCC Full Council on 28 February 2018, which were endorsed by the NCC Cabinet on 13 March 2018, to its library service provision would mean that it would not meet its statutory duty under the Act to provide a comprehensive and efficient library service. The principal criticism raised by CILIP related to the closure of a significant number of static libraries and the mobile library service, and the establishment of independent libraries outside of the statutory service. CILIP also claimed that in making the decision NCC failed to consider the option of a community managed library service within the statutory service. CILIP also raised concerns about the Equality Impact Assessment and suggested that there was a risk that NCC was in breach of its statutory duty under the Equalities Act 2010.

The Department has been carefully considering the issues raised to decide if a local inquiry is needed to resolve any serious doubt or uncertainty as to whether the Council is complying with its statutory duties under the Act.

The Department's consideration has also been mindful of the two Judicial Review applications brought against NCC's decision to close the majority of its libraries. Orders were handed down on 29 August 2018, which quashed the NCC Cabinet decision of 13 March 2018.

I understand that prior to the Judicial Review judgement NCC had paused the proposed changes to the local library service for further consideration and committed to work closely with community groups, partners and interested parties. I also understand that these discussions have been used to help shape and develop new proposals for library service provision in Northamptonshire and that NCC launched a fresh public consultation on the library service in general on 12 December and ending on 8 February 2019.



In view of this fresh consideration by NCC there appears to be no good reason to continue consideration of the existing complaint. Accordingly, unless we receive any representations to the contrary from the complainant by 5.00pm on Friday 18 January 2018, I can confirm the Department will discontinue its current investigation of the complaint.

However the duties under the Act are on-going and the Department will continue to monitor NCC's compliance with its duty to provide a comprehensive and efficient library service in the same way as with any other local authority. Furthermore, should the Department receive future representations either prior to or in response to the NCC Cabinet decision on the fresh consultation, expected on 12 March, they will be carefully considered by officials to determine whether they should be treated as a formal complaint.

A copy of this letter is being provided to the complainant.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Jeremy Wright". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Rt Hon Jeremy Wright QC MP
Secretary of State for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport