



Department  
for Culture  
Media & Sport

Rob Wilson MP  
Minister for Civil Society  
4th Floor  
100 Parliament Street  
London SW1A 2BQ  
020 7211 6000

[www.gov.uk/dcms](http://www.gov.uk/dcms)  
[enquiries@culture.gov.uk](mailto:enquiries@culture.gov.uk)

Councillor Sachin Shah  
Leader of Harrow Council  
Civic Centre  
Station Road  
Harrow HA1 2XF

CMS 295320/DC

20 December 2016

Dear Mr Shah,

**Local inquiry into library provision in Harrow**

The Secretary of State has considered whether to intervene by directing an inquiry under the Public Libraries and Museums Act 1964 ("the Act") into the changes in the library provision in Harrow. She has decided not to direct a local inquiry for the reasons set out below.

On 19 May 2016, the then Secretary of State decided that he was not minded to direct an inquiry under the Act ("the minded to letter"), but invited further representations before taking a final decision.

The background and general principles which are relevant to this decision are set out in the minded to letter, which should be read in conjunction with this letter.

As explained in the minded to letter, it is the duty of the Secretary of State to superintend, and promote the improvement of, the public library service provided by local authorities and secure the proper discharge of the duties conferred on local authorities under the Act. A wide range of approaches are open to the local authority when deciding how to provide a comprehensive and efficient library service. It is not the function of the Secretary of State to substitute her opinion for that of the democratically accountable local authority. The question which the Secretary of State must consider is whether the HC library service, as revised by the changes agreed by its Cabinet on 19 March 2015, is comprehensive and efficient.

The Secretary of State may intervene by directing a local inquiry following a complaint that a local authority has failed to carry out its duties under the Act, or of her own motion. Her approach in deciding whether she is minded to direct an inquiry has been to ask herself whether, having regard to the duties on her and the local authority, there is good reason in all the circumstances for her to direct an inquiry at the present time.



In taking that decision, the Secretary of State has given consideration to a number of factors. They include:

- Whether there is any serious doubt or uncertainty as to whether HC is (or may cease to be) complying with its legal obligation to provide a comprehensive and efficient library service.
- Whether HC appears to be acting in a careless or unreasonable way.
- Whether the decision is or may be outside the proper bounds of HC's discretion, such as a capricious decision to stop serving a particularly vulnerable group in the local community.
- Whether HC appears to have failed to consult affected individuals or to carry out significant research into the effects of its proposals.
- Whether HC has failed to explain, analyse or properly justify its proposals.
- Whether the local proposals are likely to lead to a breach of national library policy.
- The advantages of local decision making by expert and democratically accountable local representatives.
- Whether there is any further good reason why a local inquiry should be ordered.

### ***Library changes in Harrow***

The library changes in Harrow approved by HC's Cabinet on 19 March 2015 involve the reduction in the number of Council run static libraries from ten to six with the retention of the school library service and housebound library service. In summary, the Secretary of State understands that the statutory service comprises:

- 6 core static libraries - Gayton, Pinner, Wealdstone, Stanmore, Roxeth and Kenton. Gayton library is open 7 days a week for a total of 62 hours and all other libraries open 40.5 hours per week, but are closed on Wednesdays, Friday afternoons and Sundays. The libraries offer a range of services, such as free books, newspapers and magazines on loan for all ages and abilities; free Wi-Fi for library members; online services offered 24/7 including online ordering and renewal of books; employment support including support for local small businesses and community information, council and enquiry service including advice on authors and new books
- Housebound library service – to ensure the vulnerable, isolated and older library users who find it difficult to visit a library in person are still able to access library services.
- Schools' library service – subscription to the service available to schools both within Harrow and from other neighbouring Authorities.

The revised library service continues to be managed by Carillion. HC considers that this library service model delivers its agreed savings, meets local need and enables it to provide an efficient service which remains comprehensive.

### ***Further representations***

No further representations were received in response to the minded to letter, although the authority did provide additional information in response to requests for further clarification from DCMS regarding the implementation of the changes to its library services.

### **Decision**

The Secretary of State's duty is one of superintendence and not every alteration in library provision will justify a costly local inquiry and the uncertainty that it brings. In the present case, the Secretary of State's view is that an inquiry is not appropriate.


The specific question which the Secretary of State must consider is whether the statutory library service provision, after implementation of HC's proposals, of six core static libraries, a school library service and housebound library service is comprehensive and efficient.

As set out in the minded to letter, the criticisms made by Mr Blackman MP regarding the library service provided by HC have been carefully considered, having regard to all of the factors listed on page 2. The Secretary of State notes that no further representations have been received and agrees with the views of the previous Secretary of State as detailed in the minded to letter.

The Secretary of State recognises that there has been a reduction in the number of static libraries and considers that HC has explained and properly justified the changes. She notes that HC's library strategy aims to ensure that its library service is sustainable in the future, with reduced financial resources being targeted to best meet the needs of residents. In delivering a library service within available resources, the Secretary of State is satisfied that HC has taken into account its duty to provide a comprehensive and efficient library service. HC has considered the location of its libraries, the opening hours and range of services on offer, to ensure its library service remains accessible to residents on an efficient basis and deliver a comprehensive service. This is supplemented by the targeted home delivery library service for older residents and those with a disability who are unable to visit a library.

The Secretary of State is satisfied that HC's library provision offers a comprehensive and efficient service. The Secretary of State does not consider that there is any serious doubt or uncertainty that the library services provided, based on the overall model of six core static libraries, a school library service and housebound library service, offers a comprehensive and efficient service, reflecting the declining library usage and resources, to justify holding an inquiry.

The Secretary of State does not believe there to be any other good reason why an inquiry should be ordered. However, she recognises that the duties under the Act are ongoing, and will continue to monitor the Council's compliance with its duty to provide a comprehensive and efficient library service in the same way as with any other library authority.

Yours sincerely  


**ROB WILSON**