



Department for
Digital, Culture,
Media & Sport

Michael Ellis MP
Minister for Arts, Heritage and Tourism
4th Floor
100 Parliament Street
London SW1A 2BQ

www.gov.uk/dcms
enquiries@culture.gov.uk

Councillor Stephen Harker
Leader of the Council
Darlington Borough Council
Town Hall
Feethams
Darlington
County Durham DL1 5QT

TO2018//DC
7 November 2018

Dear Councillor Harker

My predecessor, John Glen MP, wrote to your predecessor, Bill Dixon, on 18 October 2017 to notify him that this Department was treating representations raised with the Secretary of State as a formal complaint under section 10 (1) (a) of the Public Libraries and Museums Act 1964 (the Act) that Darlington Borough Council (DBC) 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 DBC on 23 March 2017 to its library service provision would mean that it is no longer comprehensive and efficient. The principal criticism raised related to the relocation of the central library (from Crown Street to the Dolphin Centre) including the reduction in available library floor space at the new location. Other criticisms related to a reduction in the number of library staff across the library network, as well as the removal of the mobile library service.

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 Judicial Review brought against DBC on grounds related to their two library consultations, which I understand was dismissed on 16 July 2018.

I understand that on 11 September 2018, DBC reviewed its decision of 23 March 2017 to relocate the central library service from Crown Street to the Dolphin Centre, and agreed to undertake a fresh consultation on this issue and on

extended the Home Library Service to cater for those residents, who for health reasons, are unable to visit the town centre library. I further understand it remains the intention of DBC to Home Library Service as part of its statutory service.



Department for Digital, Culture, Media & Sport

In view of this fresh consideration by DBC 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 Friday 7 December 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 the Council'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 representations in response to the Cabinet decision on the forthcoming library service consultation, they will be carefully considered 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 'Michael Ellis', is centered on the page. The signature is fluid and cursive, with a large initial 'M' and 'E'.

Michael Ellis MP
Minister for Arts, Heritage and Tourism