



Department
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17 January 2024

INT2024/00356/DC

Dear Liz

Many thanks for sending me your independent report on public libraries – and for all the work that you, and those who gave up their time to talk to you, have put into it.

When I appointed you to lead this review in September 2022, I asked you to engage widely – both within the libraries sector and beyond – to get to the heart of the issues currently facing the sector and to make some practical recommendations to inform the development of a new Government libraries strategy.

I am very grateful for the time, effort, and passion you have brought to this endeavour. I know that you have reached deeply into the sector, devoted lots of your time to visit libraries across the country, and engaged earnestly with a broad and diverse range of people who – like us – are passionate and enthusiastic about our public libraries.

Your report conveys both that passion and a clear-headed analysis of the issues facing the sector. It will form a vital contribution to our work in developing a new public libraries strategy this autumn. That strategy will develop many of the points you have raised in your report, but I am writing to let you know my commitment to take forward the following recommendations in your report in particular:

- **The establishment of a national data hub to collate better evidence of the role libraries play in our society.** I agree that there remains a significant challenge for both the Government and for the sector in getting robust, accurate, and timely data which can be used to support both advocacy and improvement. My officials are clear about the need to address this problem and are working closely with sector bodies (including Arts Council England, Libraries Connected and the Local Government Association) to chart a way forward in this area, and we are optimistic that this collaborative effort will show results.
- **A national branding campaign to raise awareness of our libraries.** I agree with you that we should raise the visibility of our public libraries as an essential part of our national civic infrastructure. I am sure that there is a way to do this while respecting the fact that library services are delivered locally – just as the distinctive green cross for pharmacies respects the way they are delivered by thousands of



independent businesses across this country and internationally. I have asked my officials to explore further work with the Arts Council, as the development agency for libraries, to explore options and costs to implement this.

- **The closer involvement of the British Library.** I am grateful for your reflections on the important roles already being played by both the British Library and Arts Council England, particularly following the transfer of responsibilities from the Museums, Libraries and Archives Council and your observations about the lack of obvious ‘front door’ for those wishing to engage with public libraries at a national or generic level. I agree with you that the upcoming review of Arts Council England may offer an opportunity to look at this in more detail, so I will ask the reviewer to do that as part of his/her work, and to engage with your report and reflections in doing so.
- **An expanded library membership.** I am keen to see what DCMS can do in this regard – and, in particular, to pick up your reflections *on how DCMS can work with the Department for Education* to identify how to encourage data-sharing between schools, local authorities and their local public library services, which has the potential to unlock wider opportunities to expand children’s engagement with public libraries and reading for pleasure. Our two Departments have a number of shared interests in this area, and I will ensure that the joint work we are currently carrying out to inform the development of a new Cultural Education Plan engages with your recommendations. I agree that DCMS should look at ways of aligning the different models and identifying the best ages and access points to provide every child with a library card, and revisit the work undertaken in 2009 by the Society of Chief Librarians towards making ‘every library a local library’. As we consider our work for the next Parliament, I am also keen to explore how we can pursue work towards a universal library card.
- **The creation of a Libraries Minister and a more joined-up approach within Government.** I am already proud to have ministerial responsibility for libraries and to introduce myself informally as ‘Libraries Minister’. As you know, formal ministerial titles are agreed by the Secretary of State and the Prime Minister, and further changes will be agreed in the same way. I will also ask officials to develop options to support further cross-Government approaches to raise the profile of libraries, and continue to press for more engagement from other Government Departments – for example, by committing to the programme of three cross-Government roundtable meetings per year you recommend. I will hold the first of these during the first quarter of 2024, and hope you will be able to join it to share the insights you have gleaned from undertaking this review. I am grateful for the time you have made while doing it to join my meetings with Ministerial colleagues from other Departments to update them on the work you have been doing, and to discuss ways in which they can help to support the work of our public libraries.

I also want to assure you that we are already active in a number of other areas highlighted in your report; in particular, I would like to draw out our commitment to analytical work to understand more from the data that we do have. My officials are already working with analysts about ways in which we can gather more evidence and intelligence about why people may not use their library at present, and what would make them reassess this position. In addition, I am interested in updating work to identify those library services which have bucked previous trends of declining use and to examine whether they share any characteristics which would be useful to learn from and share with the sector more widely.

I agree with many of the other recommendations which you make which are principally for the sector, rather than for Government, to consider – for instance, a change to the timing of Libraries Week so that political representatives at a national and local level can be better involved and engaged – and will join you in discussing these with the sector.



Many thanks again for your excellent work on this important area of public policy: I look forward to working with you to follow it up.

With best wishes,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'J. P.', followed by a long horizontal flourish line.

Lord Parkinson of Whitley Bay
Minister for Arts & Heritage

