



12 February 2016

Ned Sharratt
Assistant Clerk
Public Petitions Committee
Room T3.40
The Scottish Parliament
EDINBURGH
EH99 1SP

For the attention of Committee Members

— **Consideration of Petition PE1581 (on saving Scotland's school libraries)**

Thank you for your letter dated 27 January 2016 to Rory Mair, I am responding on behalf of COSLA to the issues raised in the petition.

Having viewed the petitioners submission and presentation to Committee the first thing to say is that we are sure that local authorities are aware of the issues, the value of library services and the contribution to raising attainment provided by libraries and librarians.

The petitioner spoke of the need for a national strategy on school libraries and we note some committee members seemed to think this was a good idea. There is already collaboration in relation to libraries through VOCAL and we not convinced of the need for a national strategy. A national strategy for school libraries will not change the available funding which is the main issue here.

Local authorities are legally required to set balanced budgets. The petitioners noted the budget savings that local authorities need to make and that protection of teacher numbers means other areas of provision bear the brunt of such savings. The pressures on budgets are not exclusive to education. For example there is increasing demand on social care services as a result of an ageing population and increased payroll costs. The reduction in funding for local government from central government of £350m will inevitably mean cuts in some areas of council provision.

Education budgets will be protected as far as possible and it is recognised that all education services are important and play a major part in raising attainment. Budget setting may mean that in some local authorities school libraries will be protected ahead of other parts of the budget whilst in others library provision may be reorganised. Such reorganisation can, for example, lead to co-location of community resources within school buildings as has happened in Aberdeenshire or the integration of public and school library resources which has long been the case on Shetland.

Budgets will be set in the near future and councils will need to take difficult decisions, but they will do their best to protect services for constituents and children in their locality.

Thank you for the opportunity to provide a response to the petition.

If you have further enquiries please don't hesitate to contact me.

Yours sincerely

John Urquhart
Policy Officer