

PE1581/T

Scottish Government letter of 28 October 2016

CONSIDERATION OF PETITION PE1581 – SCHOOL LIBRARIES

Thank you for your letter of 30 September seeking an update on the Government's view on the Scottish Parliament Petition PE1581 calling for the Scottish Government to set out a new national strategy for school libraries which recognises the vital role of high quality school libraries in supporting pupils' literacy and research skills.

As indicated in my letter of 18 December 2015 to the previous Petitions Committee in accordance with the Education (Scotland) Act 1980 the responsibility for the delivery of education rests with individual local authorities. The 1980 Act enables local authorities to make such arrangements as they consider necessary for the management of a library service provided by them including the accommodation and distribution of books and other materials. They may also enter into arrangements with the managers of public libraries. In discharging these functions it is for authorities to determine the requirements for their school libraries, including the recruitment and deployment of school library staff, taking into account local needs while maximising the benefits of local resources.

Scottish Ministers welcome the opportunity offered by this petition to confirm their recognition of the important role school libraries play in supporting reading attainment, encouraging positive attitudes to reading, enhancing information literacy skills and improving access to knowledge for all learners. Through the Scottish Library and Information Council (SLIC), the Government continually seek to promote the value of libraries across all sectors and to provide leadership to the library sector. SLIC's activity includes coordinating and promoting national service developments and providing quality standards for library services, including both public and school library services.

The Committee may be interested to know that the National Strategy for Public Libraries, published in June 2015, was developed by SLIC, in collaboration with a number of partners. The strategy was endorsed by both the Scottish Government and COSLA.

As with public libraries, it is important that school libraries continue to adapt to meet the needs of their users and the wider attainment aims of their schools. It is in this context that local authorities and schools must continue to consider the role of their school libraries within wider improvement plans and strategies at local and school level. The Scottish Government, through the Scottish Attainment Challenge and wider policies on attainment and literacy, will continue to encourage local authorities and schools to make full use of school libraries as they work to raise attainment and improve literacy rates.

As previously indicated Scottish Ministers do not believe that it would necessarily be most appropriate for them to lead on the development of a national strategy for school libraries, akin to SLIC's strategy for public libraries. The Scottish Government would nevertheless be happy to be involved in any such work which was to be progressed by others and would be interested to hear the views of COSLA, ADES and SLIC in this regard.

I hope this reply is helpful.

Yours sincerely

Mrs Shirley Anderson - Scottish Government Policy Officer