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To whom it may concern:

As a recently retired teacher working for Southampton City Council, I am dismayed at the prospect that five essential local libraries (all in areas of recognised significant deprivation) and the Mobile Library Service (currently serving over thirty Nurseries across the city) are facing a serious and imminent threat of CAT/closure.

I note that in the document 'Reading: the next steps' from Nick Gibb Minister of State for School Reform, it states that "Libraries (also) have an important role to play in children's reading habits. The Government would like all children to be active members of a public library and we are asking all schools to arrange library membership for all their Year 3 pupils".

Whereas this is an excellent aspiration, it is based on the assumption that their local library will be accessible, open during hours outside the school day, during school holidays and staffed by librarians who are qualified and experienced to assist them in accessing all the services a thriving, professionally run library offers. The life chances of children/students living in these deprived areas of the city will suffer disproportionately if this basic service is withdrawn.

In the 'Response to the Select Committee Inquiry into Public Library Closures in England', point 4 of the summary reads as follows: "library closures do have an impact, particularly on the most vulnerable members of our society." Closures impact negatively on children, older people, people with disabilities and those living in deprivation who have little access to books and information.

Nicky Morgan herself says it is a "national mission" to improve levels of literacy of young children. (The same 'national mission' should also apply to older children and adults!) Sadly, these commendable plans will be seriously undermined if continued Whitehall savage funding cuts force closure of our local libraries.

Currently, the Government expectations of progress in reading are at least a full level in Key Stage 1, at least two levels in Key Stage 2, and at least three levels in Key Stage 3 and 4. These demands placed on children/students to achieve ever higher academic attainment continually increase, and local libraries are crucial in supporting many children/students. In areas of deprivation, such as where my local library is situated, homes can be overcrowded, chaotic and noisy, and access to the internet non-existent.

Local libraries are one step; and very often the first step, on the ladder out of the poverty trap. They provide a safe, warm place to study, qualified skilled staff to safeguard, advise and encourage. There are no pressures to spend money, and all cultures and religions are welcomed.

It is recognised that Literacy standards across Southampton really do need to improve, and as a class teacher, it was clear to me which pupils/families used their local library to complete homework and research, consult reference books, and make use of Internet and printers etc., because of their comparatively higher reading standards and positive attitude to learning. Closing local libraries is short-sighted and a false economy.

Within easy walking distance of my valuable local library are nine schools, catering for all Key Stages. Many pupils need regular and sustained access to their library to maintain and continue to make progress with their education after school hours, and on weekends and holidays, especially with help

and advice from professional staff. Our library serves also as a community hub, hosting many local groups including language classes, art, Tai Chi, Parent and Toddlers, and book groups. It also provides a venue as well as books and information resources for Southampton's thriving Home Education group, ensuring quality opportunities and 'education for all'. It is truly a safe place where people can meet, participate in activities and contribute to their community.

Local libraries, open suitable hours and within easy reach, provide opportunities for young families to acquire the 'reading habit' early in life. I totally agree with Nick Gibb, in the document referred to above, that: "Pupils who can read are overwhelmingly more likely to succeed at school, achieve good qualifications, and subsequently enjoy a fulfilling and rewarding career." Over my lifetime teaching career, I have actually seen this happen!

In point 10 of 'Response to the Select Committee Inquiry into Public Library Closures in England', if libraries are closed, Professor Robert Usherwood expresses concerns of the "...loss of general education support, and loss of support for literacy."

The closure of our local libraries will have exactly this negative impact.

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(recently retired teacher, Southampton City Council)