



The Rt Hon Matt Hancock MP
Secretary of State for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport
DCMS
100 Parliament St
London
SW1A 2BQ

5 March 2018

Dear Mr Hancock

I am contacting you on behalf of the All Party Parliamentary Group for Libraries with concerns about the future of public libraries operated by Northamptonshire County Council. The role of the APPG for Libraries is to promote the role of libraries in society and the economy, and as Chair of the Group I have been dismayed to see the announcement of sudden and severe reductions to library services in Northamptonshire.

As a former librarian I have seen first-hand the social and economic good of public libraries. Northamptonshire's award-winning library services have provided invaluable services to their communities, including by providing innovative services encouraging business start-ups and entrepreneurship. Between 2015 and 2017 Northamptonshire libraries supported over 670 potential business owners and entrepreneurs, of which 64% are owned by women, 26% by young people aged 16-35 and 23% had previously been unemployed before starting their business - leading to the creation of 140 new businesses. As trusted public places libraries are unique in their ability to reach diverse groups of people and make real and lasting impact.

I understand that you have received formal complaints under the Public Libraries and Museums Act that Northamptonshire County Council risk failing to provide comprehensive and efficient library services. I urge you to use the full powers at your discretion to ensure the residents of Northamptonshire receive the quality of services they are, under statute, entitled to. I ask you to intervene and establish a formal inquiry as a matter of urgency.

Additionally given concerns raised by a number of local authorities about their financial sustainability Northamptonshire cannot be viewed as an exceptional case and we should, unfortunately, expect more such announcements in the coming months and years. A fundamental weakness of the Public Libraries and Museums Act is the absence

of a definition of 'comprehensive and efficient'. Given the lack of library standards in England the absence of a clear definition causes unnecessary confusion amongst local authorities as to the services they should provide and amongst local residents as to the services they should receive. I ask DCMS to lead on providing a clear and transparent definition to all local authorities in England and Wales.

I look forward to hearing from you on these matters and continue to pay close attention to developments in Northamptonshire.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'Gill Furniss', is displayed within a light blue rectangular box.

Gill Furniss MP
Chair of the All Party Parliamentary Group for Libraries

This is not an official letter from the House of Commons or the House of Lords. It has not been approved by either House or its committees. All Party Parliamentary Groups are informal groups of this letter are those of the group.