



## Department for Digital, Culture Media & Sport

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Dear Mr Imrie,

Thank you for your correspondence of 17 October to the Minister of Arts, Heritage and Tourism, John Glen MP, regarding the public library service. I am replying as a member of the Ministerial Support Team.

As you are aware, the Public Libraries and Museums Act 1964 ("1964 Act") requires all local authorities to provide a comprehensive and efficient library service. Public libraries are therefore funded and run by local authorities. In considering how best to deliver this statutory duty, each local authority is responsible for determining, through consultation, the local needs and to deliver a modern and efficient library service that meets the requirements of their communities within available resources.

As you correctly state, the Secretary of State has a statutory duty to superintend and promote the improvement of the public library service provided by local authorities in England under the Act. The Secretary of State may also intervene if she is of the opinion that a local authority is failing to carry out its duty, under the Act, to deliver a "comprehensive and efficient" library service for library users, by making a remedial order following a local inquiry. The local inquiry can be initiated either on receipt of a complaint or of the Secretary of State's own decision. This responsibility is something that Ministers take very seriously.

The Government fully recognises the importance and value of public libraries for all members of the public. Libraries not only provide access to books and other literature, but also help people to help themselves and improve their opportunities, bring them together, and provide practical support and guidance. They support a range of agendas from health to the economy. They also help to increase reading and literacy, improve digital access, and contribute to greater prosperity by supporting businesses and people seeking work. Libraries support lifelong learning, improved health and wellbeing, cultural and creative experiences, and research and innovation. That is why the Government is committed to ensuring that there remains a strong library service.

As you noted the origins of the public library service date back more than 150 years and volunteers have been a feature of most library services for decades. Their involvement in library services is not new; but their role and numbers have changed over time as library services have responded to change.



The staffing of public libraries is an issue for local library authorities, and volunteer support of paid staff in running public libraries can be valuable in supplementing services available and ensuring close collaboration and engagement between public libraries and the community. However, volunteers are not a substitute for expertise of professional librarians, who are key to the public library service.

I hope you find this information helpful.

Yours sincerely,

**Ministerial Support Team**