**National School Library Strategy**

**Policy Development**
The Deputy First Minister (DFM) has announced the Scottish Government’s intention to develop a National School Library Strategy. COSLA will participate in the National School Library Strategy advisory group. This paper asks Board members to provide views to support the development of a COSLA position for officers participating in the Group.

**Summary and Recommendations**

This paper invites Board Members to:

i. Support the proposal to gather good practice examples of school library provision from local authorities;

ii. Inform officers input to the National Library Strategy Advisory group; and,

iii. Agree a proposed COSLA position.

**References**

Previous reports on School Libraries

- January 2017 – Letter to Scottish Parliament Petition’s Committee in response to petition from Save Scotland’s School Libraries
- February 2016 – Letter to Scottish Parliament Petition’s Committee in response to petition from Save Scotland’s School Libraries

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National School Library Strategy

Policy Development
1. The Scottish Parliament’s Petitions Committee have been considering a petition from Save Scotland’s School Libraries calling for a “new national strategy for school libraries which recognises the vital role of high quality school libraries in supporting pupils’ literacy and research skills”. In response to the petition the Deputy First Minister (DFM) announced his intention to develop a National School Library Strategy. COSLA will participate in the National School Library Strategy advisory group. The Chair has been appointed and the first meeting of the group is due to take place at the end of February. It is anticipated that a draft strategy will be presented to the Children and Young People Board in June 2018.

Current COSLA Position
2. The provision and financing of school libraries is a matter for local authorities. There is currently no statutory requirement for a local authority to have school libraries. They must however ensure the provision of adequate and efficient education¹ and also adequate provision for library services².

3. On 10th January 2017, COSLA officers outlined our position to the Petitions Committee highlighting challenging budget settlements which mean that local authorities are faced with difficult decisions in the setting and balancing of budgets. Whilst noting increasing pressures on other areas of local authority provision (such as social care due to an ageing demographic), we noted that education budgets would be protected as far as possible and that some local authorities might choose to protect school library services, and make efficiency savings in other areas, whilst some might choose to reorganise their school library services.

4. It was also noted that a national approach to school library services would risk stifling innovation and the ability of authorities to be flexible enough to provide services that address local needs and circumstances in the context of reducing resources.

What is changing
5. The Scottish Government have established a National School Library Strategy group which will oversee the development of a National School Library Strategy. COSLA are members of the group which will have an independent Chair and independent facilitation by the Scottish Library Information Council (SLIC).

6. The aim is that the strategy will improve the role of school libraries and librarians in literacy skills and educational attainment, and will include national guidance for service provision to deliver consistency across the country.

7. In evidence to the Petitions Committee the Deputy First Minister acknowledged that there was a need for local discretion and that he wanted to be careful not to

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¹ Education (Scotland) Act 1980
² Local Government (Scotland) Act 1973, s163
overprescribe to local authorities what he requires them to do. At the same time, the DFM was clear that, should local authorities not follow good practice, the Scottish Government would look at taking additional steps to require Councils to take a particular approach to school library provision.

Proposed COSLA Position
8. It is proposed that officers engage positively with the National Strategy Advisory Group. To inform this work it will be important gather evidence of good practice from local authorities in relation to school library provision.

9. It is also proposed that officers’ contribution to the group is guided by the fact that we recognise the vital role that school libraries have in contributing to improving literacy and developing research skills. In addition we know that local authorities are committed to closing the educational attainment gap and recognise how access to a library at school can support this commitment. We are also clear that a one size fits all approach to school library provision will impinge on the ability of local authorities to be innovative and flexible in the context of reducing budgets.

Next Steps
10. COSLA officers will work with colleagues in local authorities to gather evidence of good practice to inform work on the advisory group and the development of the strategy.

11. Once the strategy is in draft form, it will be presented to the Children and Young People Board in June 2018.

Summary and Recommendations
12. The Scottish Government have established a National School Library Steering group with a view to producing a National School Library Strategy. COSLA are represented on the group and the final strategy will be presented to the Children and Young People Board for approval.

13. Board members are invited to:
   i. Support the proposal to gather good practice examples of school library provision from local authorities;
   ii. Inform officers input to the National Library Strategy Advisory group; and,
   iii. Agree a proposed COSLA position.

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