

## 6.2.16 Public Library Funding

REPORT BY THE MANAGER, INFORMATION SERVICES TO 2 APRIL 2014 COUNCIL MEETING

Public Library Funding  
GOV400038, F0620012

### RECOMMENDATION

#### That:

1. **the report by the Manager, Information Services on Public Library Funding be received;**
2. **Council support the campaign mounted by the NSW Public Library Associations for increased State funding to local government for public libraries;**
3. **Council write to the Hon. George Souris, Minister for the Arts, calling upon the Government to implement the Reforming Local Government Funding submission of the Library Council of NSW in 2012 for the reform of the funding system for NSW public libraries;**
4. **approval be given for the distribution of NSW Public Library Associations campaign information in Council libraries.**

### Executive summary

The funding of public libraries in New South Wales continues to be a concern with contributions from the State Government at record lows. As a result, it has fallen to local government to pick up a greater percentage of the cost of delivering public library services. The NSW Public Libraries Associations have developed a campaign to communicate these concerns to the government as well as the public throughout 2014 and in the lead up to the State Government election in 2015. This report seeks Council's support for this campaign.

### Detailed report

The NSW public library funding situation is an historic issue that has been ignored by successive NSW governments. The funding level has now reached a crisis point. The key issues are:

- NSW receives the lowest per-capita funding for public libraries from the State Government of all states in Australia;
- State Government expenditure on public libraries has decreased as a proportion of total public library expenditure from 23% in 1980 to 7% in 2013.
- NSW Local Government councils are currently paying 93% of the costs to operate public libraries in NSW (which are governed by state legislation).

During the 2011 election campaign, the current NSW State Government made a pre-election commitment to undertake a comprehensive review of the quantum and allocation of funding for NSW public libraries. To date there has been no significant action by the government to meet this commitment.

In the absence of any government action the Library Council of NSW used the government's pre-election commitment as a trigger to convene a committee of representatives from the Public Libraries NSW Association (representing regional and rural councils and libraries), the NSW

Metropolitan Public Libraries Association (representing metropolitan councils and libraries), and the State Library of NSW, to develop an evidence-based submission about public library funding.

The Library Council of NSW then provided a submission to the State Government called *Reforming Public Library Funding* in October 2012. The evidence-based submission recommended a fairer, simplified and more transparent method for the distribution of funds.

The following principles for a new approach were recommended:

- Establish a base level of funding for councils with populations below 20,000 people (a safety net for small councils);
- Grant a modest increase in per capita allocations for all councils to recognise cost movements since 1994;
- Address disadvantage transparently through the application of appropriate disability factors;
- Phase out anomalies in current allocations due to former council amalgamations;
- Ensure sustainability by providing that no council receives less recurrent funding than 2012/13; and
- Build and maintain infrastructure via a substantial capital fund, entitled the *Building Library Infrastructure Program*.

The Library Council recommended that recurrent public library funding to councils be adjusted from the current \$26.5M to \$30M per annum from 2013/14 and indexed from the following year. This would be allocated as follows: 68% (\$20.4M in 2013/14) to councils by population with a base level of funding for councils with fewer than 20,000 residents, 17% (\$5.1M) to councils by NSW Local Government Grants Commission (LGGC) disability factors to explicitly address disadvantage and 15% (\$4.5M) applied to Statewide Programs.

In addition, a *Building Library Infrastructure Program* of \$30M per annum for building and maintaining infrastructure was recommended to replace the now defunct provision of grants from operating funds. This program would enable councils to renew library buildings, systems, collections and equipment in regional, urban and growth areas. It was proposed that this be phased in, rising to \$30M over the 4 years from 2013/14 and indexed thereafter.

Despite a high level of expectation that the State Government would fulfil its pre-election undertaking to review and increase its funding allocation to NSW public libraries, this did not eventuate in the 2013 state budget.

The NSW Public Library Associations (NSWPLA), representing country and metropolitan libraries, are now coordinating a targeted campaign to bring the situation to the attention of politicians and funding decision makers to address the problem.

Local Government NSW (LGNSW) and the Australian Library and Information Association (ALIA) are assisting NSWPLA in this campaign and information will be provided to councils and public libraries on an ongoing basis from these bodies throughout the campaign. In addition, local supporters of public libraries including Friends of the Library groups and library users will be engaged in the campaign to lobby State Members.

Given that 44% of the state's population are library users, it is anticipated that there will be strong support for the campaign in the community. Research also highlights the high value placed on public libraries by users and non-users alike. There will be high level media engagement and local and national champions of public libraries will be advocating for funding reform.

There is currently a high degree of uncertainty as to the level of ongoing funding for public libraries in NSW from the State Government. The intent of the NSW Library Act in 1939 was for equal

funding from state and local governments to provide library services. Since that time local government has increasingly carried the funding burden and the situation has deteriorated significantly over the past few decades. Without urgent action from local government and NSW Public Library Associations, this situation will continue and local councils will once again be forced to pick up the funding shortfall.

### Financial and Operational Plan implications

Not applicable.

### Community Plan implications

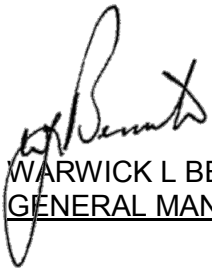
Not applicable.

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20 March 2014

*Attachments:* Nil

APPROVED FOR SUBMISSION:



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