
MM17/18 PUBLIC LIBRARY FUNDING - Mayor, Councillor Jerome Laxale

File Number: MYR/07/10/20 - BP18/753

I am calling on Councillors to support the NSW Public Libraries Association and Local Government NSW in their advocacy to State Government for additional funds for Public Libraries, through their 'Renew our Libraries' initiative.

The City of Ryde recently considered its Library Service on two occasions, the first at its meeting on 24 April 2018 where it resolved, in part, to make representations to the NSW Premier, The Hon. Gladys Berejiklian, The Hon. Gabrielle Upton, Minister for Local Government and The Hon. Don Harwin, Minister for the Arts seeking the NSW Government to;

- i. Honour their pre-election promise to increase funding commitments to NSW public libraries
- ii. Match the NSW opposition Policy to double the per capita rate from \$1.85 to \$3.70 and link the subsidy to changes in the consumer price index.
- iii. Help City of Ryde expand their floor space and infrastructure through access to increased Capital Works and local priority grants.

The second occasion was at Council's meeting on 26 June 2018 where Council resolved for the General Manager to investigate the expansion of Eastwood Library with the objective to meet both current and future requirements for these services.

Both resolutions highlight the pressure Council is under in providing high quality Library services to its community.

City of Ryde has invested significantly in library services over the past decade, spending approximately \$14.3 million in capital expenditure and over \$6 million annually. Visitation to our libraries now exceeds a million people each year and they borrow approximately 940,000 items annually. The libraries provide electronic resources, a broad range of programs and have developed as spaces that are highly regarded by our community.

Whilst Council receives funds from the State Government, these funding levels are declining. In 2015/16, State funding for Public Libraries covered only 7.5% of the total costs of operating the 368 libraries across NSW. The level of State Government funding for NSW public libraries has reached crisis point. This is an historic issue that has been ignored by successive NSW governments. The key issues are that:

- NSW public libraries receive the lowest per-capita funding from their State Government compared to all other states in Australia;

Council, dated 24 July 2018, submitted on 24 July 2018.

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- NSW councils are currently paying 92.5% of the costs to operate public libraries, up from 77% in 1980;
- In 2015-16, NSW State Government funding for public libraries was only \$26.5m compared to a contribution of \$341.1m from Local Government. NSW councils are paying 12 times more than the State Government to provide library services to their communities;
- The total funding available through the NSW Public Library Funding Strategy is not indexed to population growth or consumer price index (CPI), thereby contributing to the ongoing attrition of State Government funding;
- The 2018-2019 State Budget delivered a 5% cut to current funding and cut access to all infrastructure funding for metropolitan areas;
- Physical and virtual visitation, library borrowing and participation in library programs continue to increase year on year;
- Libraries play a major part in supporting the achievement of government literacy targets; and
- Libraries provide collections, programs and spaces for marginalised groups including older people, refugee and multicultural communities, and people who are digitally disadvantaged.

In 2011, the NSW State Government made a pre-election commitment to comprehensively review the level and allocation of funding for NSW public libraries. The Library Council of NSW worked with the NSW Public Libraries Association and the State Library of NSW to develop an evidence-based submission.

The resulting submission *Reforming Public Library Funding*, recommending a fairer, simpler and more transparent method for the distribution of funds, was presented to the State Government in October 2012. Despite the undertaking of the State Government to comprehensively review funding for its public libraries, the recommendations of *Reforming Public Library Funding* were ignored and the funding model was neither reviewed nor improved.

In 2016, the then Minister for the Arts, the Hon. Troy Grant, undertook to review the matter of State Government funding for NSW libraries at the conclusion of the Fit For the Future program. It can be reasonably assumed that Fit For the Future has concluded, yet there has been no review of library funding nor any mention of libraries in the Government's pre-election undertakings. At the 2016 LGNSW Conference, the Premier Mike Baird committed to reviewing library funding.

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The NSW Public Libraries Association has joined forces with Local Government NSW to establish a library funding advocacy initiative in the lead up to the 2019 NSW State election. The *Renew Our Libraries* strategy will be rolled out over the next 8 months to persuade the Government that its network of 368 public libraries has reached a funding flashpoint that, without significantly increased and sustainable funding, is at risk of imminent service reduction. The success of this approach relies heavily on the support of NSW councils, their libraries and their communities.

It should be noted that the following motion (submitted by the Blue Mountains City Council) was unanimously endorsed at the Local Government NSW 2017 Conference:

That Local Government NSW works with the NSW Public Libraries Association (NSWPLA) to develop a strategic partnership to:

- a) increase public awareness of the multiple roles that Local Government Public Libraries play in supporting the educational, social, cultural and economic outcomes in local communities.*
- b) advocate, in the lead up to the March 2019 State election, for improved State Government funding for Local Government Public Libraries in NSW to enable public libraries to meet the growing needs of our local communities.*

(Note: This motion covers the following motion set out in small font)

Wagga Wagga City Council - Funding for public libraries - That Local Government NSW and member councils lobby the NSW Government to increase annual percentage of funding for public libraries

As previously noted, this is not a party-political issue as every government since 1980 shares the blame for the current funding situation. Nevertheless, it is worth noting that the NSW Opposition released its Library Funding Policy on 26 March 2018 with an undertaking to increase overall funding to all suburban and regional NSW public libraries by \$50 million in the first term of government. This is a very significant pledge insofar as it is the first policy from any political party in recent history that undertakes to provide a significant and specified increase in state funding for public libraries.

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NSW public libraries are governed by the Library Act 1939, a legislative instrument that was initially introduced to ensure the provision and ongoing sustainability of libraries through State Government and Local Government collaboration, and providing up to 50% of the funding required to establish and operate libraries. Since then local government has increasingly carried the funding burden with the situation deteriorating significantly since the 1980s. As a result, there are examples of attrition in library staffing, opening hours, collections, services and programs in a number of councils across the state.

Disappointingly, the 2018-19 NSW state budget delivered a 5% cut to current library funding and cut access to all infrastructure funding for metropolitan areas. The State Government has completely ignored the recommendation of its own expert panel, the Library Council of NSW which, in consultation with the State Library of NSW and the NSW Public Libraries Consultative Committee, recommended an increase in public library funding to \$30M in 2018-19. The public library grant funding component, which has been a budget inclusion for many years, has been scrapped entirely. This component financed a competitive grant project which has part-funded countless library infrastructure and service projects over many years.

The NSW public library network is at serious risk. Neither this Council nor the broader NSW Local Government sector can continue with the high degree of uncertainty about the level of ongoing State Government funding for public libraries.

I am recommending that we support urgent action from the NSW local government sector and NSW Public Libraries Association / Local Government NSW, to reverse the ongoing deterioration of state funding for public libraries to ensure that local councils will not be forced to continue meeting the funding shortfall.

RECOMMENDATION:

- (a) That Council endorse the NSW Public Libraries Association and Local Government NSW library funding advocacy initiative, *Renew Our Libraries*.
- (b) That Council make representation to the local State Members Hon Victor Dominello MP and Hon Anthony Roberts MP in relation to the need for additional funding from the NSW State Government for the provision of public library services.
- (c) That Council write to the Hon. Don Harwin, Minister for the Arts and the Hon. Walt Secord, Shadow Minister for the Arts, calling for bi-partisan support for the provision of a significant increase in state funding for NSW public libraries, supported by a sustainable future funding model.

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- (d) That Council take a leading role in activating the campaign locally.
- (e) That Council endorse the distribution of the NSW Public Libraries Association and Local Government NSW library funding advocacy initiative information in Council libraries, as well as involvement in any actions arising from the initiative.
- (f) That Council formally advise the NSW Public Libraries Association and Local Government NSW that Council has endorsed the library funding advocacy initiative.

ATTACHMENTS

There are no attachments for this report.

Report Prepared By:



Councillor Jerome Laxale
Mayor