



13.1 COUNCIL ENDORSEMENT LIBRARY ACTION PLAN

EXECUTIVE MEMBER: TONY KEENAN, GENERAL MANAGER, COMMUNITY WELLBEING AND INCLUSION

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1. PURPOSE

1.1 This report is to present the Library Action Plan for endorsement by Council following a consultation and engagement process undertaken on the draft plan.

2. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

- 2.1 Council approved a period of engagement to seek community feedback on the draft Library Action Plan (LAP) at the Council meeting of 3 February 2021.
- 2.2 The development of a Library Action Plan is one of the key outcomes of the Art and Soul (Creative and Prosperous City) Strategy which was adopted by Council in mid-2018: “Develop a Library Action Plan that contributes to a creative ecosystem and responds to current and future community needs for programming, collections and emerging technology”.
- 2.3 Background work for development of the LAP occurred from May to October 2019 involving a wide-ranging consultation and engagement exercise receiving more than 500 responses, gathering views about future opportunities for development of the library service. The final phase from February to April 2021 collected 132 responses on the draft LAP. The engagement was extended to capture responses from young people and families with young children which were not initially captured.
- 2.4 Council delayed community engagement on the draft LAP in 2020 because of the significant service and community disruption being experienced due to the progressive impact of COVID-19. Council resolved to wait until such time as libraries were re-open and better access options were available for community participation.
- 2.5 Considering the range of community feedback on the draft LAP and the goals it outlines; the majority of accompanying actions were generally well-liked and supported. Consequently, the proposed revisions to the LAP following engagement on the draft plan do not significantly alter its intent. Changes in the final document are adjustments or updates. No substantial changes to the scope or detail of the Plan have been made. The changes encompass 4 key areas:
- *Implementation of a 24/7 Library service.* This was the most contentious issue mentioned by respondents, the majority of whom were from Middle Park and Albert Park. It is suggested that this reflects a lack of clarity about what a 24/7 library is and how it would work. The context is that it could be a cost-effective way of extending access hours for Middle Park residents with a one-off investment for necessary infrastructure, rather than increasing opening hours which incurs staff costs annually. A continued investigation into how technology may benefit the community and extend opening has remained in the plan.
 - *Updating of library infrastructure and amenity.* Comments about amenity updates were evident for all branches but a particular emphasis was on St Kilda library in terms of priority for a branch refurbishment. A brief overview of each Branch has



been included to establish baseline information and assist with a priority plan for making changes that will bring each branch amenity up to a level that better meets contemporary public library service standards.

- *Improve communication and engagement.* Progress towards the *Connect* goal has begun with a new more interactive website launched in February 2021. While further work is to be undertaken the plan reflects progress and signals a better communications strategy.
- *Be more explicit on timelines for delivery.* There were a number of comments about timelines for the actions, and there was a view that it would better support delivery outcomes for the plan if these were included. It is suggested to develop a timeline and report back to Council on this with some high-level indicators of timing for delivery following endorsement of the plan.

Suggested changes to the Plan also reflect minor adjustments related to commentary around the five LAP goals of *Belong, Connect, Grow, Sustain* and *Create*. Minor amendments to wording address these areas around staff, programs, partnerships and community engagement. In relation to these topics, a small number of actions have either been amalgamated to avoid duplication, or else simplified to provide greater clarity.

3. RECOMMENDATION

That Council:

- 3.1 Notes the consultation and engagement process undertaken to help formulate the draft Library Action Plan, thanks those community members who provided feedback on the draft.
- 3.2 Endorses the Library Action Plan 2021-2026 for adoption and authorises the CEO to make minor editorial changes to finalise the Plan that do not materially alter the strategic intent of the document.

4. KEY POINTS/ISSUES

- 4.1 The Library Action Plan is intended to act as a reference point for both the library service and Council, providing a strategic basis for more informed planning and decision making, and clearly articulating Council's vision and future aspirations for libraries
- 4.2 The LAP provides context and background for why libraries are a vital part of Council's cultural and community infrastructure, identifies possible gaps and areas for future service development, and outlines the steps and actions required to best position the library service to respond to both current and emerging community needs.
- 4.3 The final Plan has drawn together the feedback gathered from the community consultation, the subsequent work on service mapping and benchmarking, and considered Council's key challenges in formulating a direction for how we need to re-position Port Phillip libraries in response.

Key observations from community feedback on the draft Plan

- 4.4 In broad terms, most of the community feedback provided was positive and constructive, with respondents commenting on what they felt was the important role



libraries play in the community, and appreciative of the work being done by Council inviting input on library service delivery and development

- 4.5 Responses to the vision statement for libraries were generally supportive, with many respondents liking that it was aspirational, and noting the importance of having an ambitious vision statement. There was also recognition of the significant commitment and investment that will be needed to achieve this aspirational vision through implementation of the Plan. Some respondents also commented that they thought the vision statement should have more emphasis on books, learning and literacy, believing that this is the core purpose of a library.
- 4.6 There was commentary around increased programming, longer hours, as well as technological support for digital and online library services, particularly for older residents.
- 4.7 The level of support across the goals for Belong, Connect, Grow and Sustain in the draft Plan was high, with every goal scoring more than 50% for 'Very supportive'. Create was slightly under 50% for very supported.
- 4.8 There were many competing or opposing views expressed in relation to the goal Belong. These included comments on:
- libraries where books and learning are the core purpose, versus libraries as a service and activity hub for the community,
 - the option for a 24/7 library to enable greater access, versus the idea of a 24/7 service as being unnecessary and unwanted.

The key themes emerging from the feedback for *Belong* were the 24/7 library, infrastructure, diversity/inclusion, resourcing and implementation.

- 4.8.1 The 24/7 library is a divisive topic, with many respondents supporting the idea, but more rejecting it. There was confusion about how this would work in practice.
- Those supporting the idea liked the greater access it would provide due to extended hours. Some of those rejecting the idea did not support any 24/7 library, while others did not support Middle Park as the choice for the library.
- 4.8.2 In terms of commentary around library infrastructure, some respondents agree with the need to redevelop St Kilda to support greater 'capacity and flexibility', while others stated that the refurbishment of all libraries is needed, including new community spaces.
- 4.8.3 For the libraries to be inclusive and welcoming to CoPP's diverse population, respondents suggested:
- Libraries be co-located with other services to support access by disadvantaged populations
 - Support CALD and LOTE communities through appropriate resourcing and services
 - Support for digital services for older community members
- 4.8.4 Responses were divided around the future libraries' direction. Some respondents liked that the Plan was "shift[ing] away from the traditional view of



a library of purely the lending of physical books and other reading materials” and agree with the “emerging role of libraries as social connectors”.

Other respondents stated they thought there should be more emphasis placed on maintaining and increasing books and hard copy resources at the libraries, particularly as ambitious other activities are proposed in the Plan.

4.8.5 While many respondents liked the ambitious ideas presented, they were unclear or doubtful about how they would be achieved without increased funding.

4.9 Commentary on the **Connect** goal supported the need to transition to more online and digital services for greater accessibility. Some respondents suggested that these technological upgrades were well overdue. There was also a good level of support for the suggested digital literacy programs, especially for older residents, as well as for CALD communities.

There was some concern that the focus on digital services, would impact on the physical collection.

4.10 **Grow** was the most strongly supported goal in the draft Plan (noting that some of the suggested actions were divisive). For instance, the suggestion of a volunteer program was contested. However more respondents ultimately supported the idea than rejected it, with the clear proviso that paid staff play a critical role, and so the context in which volunteers could or should be involved needs to be carefully considered.

4.10.1 There was also a generally strong level of support for the idea of partnerships (such as those that might support program delivery). There was support for the proposed early years and youth programs, including the idea of greater integration with local schools.

4.11 The goal **Create** was the least supported and this reflected a tension in relation to resourcing and scope of library services. While many respondents liked the ideas for expanding creative activities such as live music at the library, they viewed these activities as being an add on or to be potentially in conflict with what they believe to be the core purpose of the library: books, reading, and literacy.

4.12 The feedback on the **Sustain** goal focussed on a couple of key areas, particularly climate change, staff and community engagement.

4.12.1 While many people agreed with the urgent need to address climate change, most respondents thought library branches acting as a “climate emergency relief centre” was out of the scope of the library. They did however support the library providing public seminars around climate change for education, as a way of improving awareness and action around the issue in the community.

4.12.2 Commentary highlighted support for potential workforce expansion, including a stronger focus on diversity in recruitment to be more representative of and responsive to the community.

4.12.3 Some feedback supported greater community engagement and clearer avenues for involvement in library planning and decision making. To ensure that any engagement is inclusive and representative of CoPP’s diverse community, engagement should include multicultural groups, LGBTQI groups, First Nations, disadvantaged and vulnerable groups.



Revisions to the Library Action Plan

4.13 Considering the range of community feedback on the draft Plan and the goals it outlines, the majority of accompanying actions were generally well-liked and supported. The proposed revisions to the LAP do not significantly alter its intent, and for the most part are adjustments or updates rather than substantial changes to the scope or detail of the Plan.

4.13.1 The key suggested change is to provide greater clarity on the potential to expand service access through a 24/7 response and proceed with further exploration of the use of technology to achieve this

This 24/7 concept was the least supported of any of the proposed initiatives in the Plan, with feedback indicating that people felt the location was inappropriate, it was not in response to any identified need, and that the potential costs associated with either trialling or implementing a 24/7 model could be better spent on other avenues that could increase access for the community. However, a single upfront cost could be a cost-effective way of expanding library hours and should be further explored with the community.

4.13.2 Another issue is the feedback that was received around library infrastructure and amenity, particularly where St Kilda library could or should sit in terms of priority for any branch refurbishment.

While there was acknowledgement that continued work across all of the branches to maintain a good level of service amenity was important, it is also critical to recognise that St Kilda is the branch that has had the least work on basic building infrastructure in recent years.

So, in lieu of a potentially larger scale redevelopment exercise, the immediate priority should be for Council to determine an appropriate scope of work to bring the branch amenity up to a level that better meets contemporary public library service standards. It is suggested to develop a timeline and report back to Council on this.

In the same context, there is a suggested (minor) update to the Plan to include a snapshot profile that more clearly outlines the current state of library branches across the service.

4.13.3 Specifically, in relation to one of the actions for the *Connect* goal – Develop a new more interactive website – this has progressed, and the plan has been changes to reflect this. Further changes will occur in the future.

4.13.4 In response to community feedback around implementation of some of the key actions. It is suggested to develop a timeline and report back to Council with some high-level indicators of timing for delivery following endorsement of the plan

4.14 Minor adjustments to the Plan relate to staff, programs, partnerships and community engagement. In relation to these topics, a small number of actions have either been amalgamated to avoid duplication, or else simplified to provide greater clarity.

5. CONSULTATION AND STAKEHOLDERS

5.1 Consultation on the draft Library Action Plan took place from 5 February 2021 to 7 March 2021. The primary feedback tool was a survey, hosted online and available in



hard copy. One-hundred and six responses were received, with most respondents being Port Phillip residents (84 per cent).

- 5.2 An engagement activity was also run at our Neighbourhood Conversations sessions which received 104 'post-it notes' pieces of feedback in response to the draft plan's goals. Three submissions were also received via email and discussion occurred with both the Older Persons' Consultative Committee as well as the Multicultural Advisory Committee.
- 5.3 The consultation was promoted via Council and Library's communications channels, including Divercity, social media and e-newsletters. Posters and core flutes were displayed at Council's libraries and Summer Rangers also visited local activity centres to promote the consultation and encourage people to participate in the consultation online.
- 5.4 To ensure engagement reflected feedback from younger members of our community, supplementary consultation activities with young people/parents with children were undertaken in early April 2021. An additional 26 survey responses and feedback was gathered directly from the Youth Advisory Committee through this targeted approach.

The additional feedback gathered through the stage was positive and reinforced what had already been heard through the survey and neighbourhood engagement activities.

6. LEGAL AND RISK IMPLICATIONS

- 6.1 There are no significant legal or risk implications for Council in relation to this topic. In the longer term there is some potential risk around increased community expectations in relation to improvements to library services.
- 6.2 It is suggested this risk can be mitigated by clear messaging that proposed changes are in direct response to internal and/or broader community input, and that the library will continue to remain open to ongoing feedback.

7. FINANCIAL IMPACT

- 7.1 Any significant financial implications from proposed Library Action Plan recommendations will be referred to the annual budget and service planning process as appropriate for Council consideration

8. ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACT

- 8.1 There are no significant environmental impacts related to this topic, although continued work on implementation of the Plan may unearth opportunities for libraries to play a more active role in supporting community initiatives around environmental sustainability

9. COMMUNITY IMPACT

- 9.1 The plan received a high level of positive feedback, however, there were also some areas where there were divided opinions. There is always the potential for some pockets of community dissatisfaction around any proposed changes to service scope or delivery.
- 9.2 Given the significant role libraries play in community life, there is scope for a range of benefits related to community strengthening, social inclusion and cultural development to be achieved through implementation and delivery of the LAP.



10. ALIGNMENT TO COUNCIL PLAN AND COUNCIL POLICY

- 10.1 The proposed adoption of the LAP aligns with Strategic Direction 5 – We thrive by harnessing creativity, as well as directly addressing one of the listed actions of the Art and Soul Strategy which has already been endorsed by Council in an earlier term.
- 10.2 There are links between the Library Action Plan and other key pieces of cultural planning across Council, such as the Live Music Action Plan, the Game Action Plan and the Access and Inclusion Plan.

11. IMPLEMENTATION STRATEGY

11.1 TIMELINE

Delivery of the Library Action Plan will commence immediately on adoption of the Plan by Council, including work on timelines, aligning actions with the Council Plan and the annual budget process as appropriate

11.2 COMMUNICATION

Following adoption of the Plan, Council's decision will be communicated to direct stakeholders and interested parties, as well as updates for the wider community via both Council and library websites and social media channels.

12. OFFICER DIRECT OR INDIRECT INTEREST

- 12.1 No officers involved in the preparation of this report have any direct or indirect interest in the matter.

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ATTACHMENTS 1. Library Action Plan 2021 - 2026