

**OFFICERS REPORT****6.4 SUPPORTING OUR LIBRARIES**

Submitting Councillor: Dr Josh Fergeus

**MOTION**

*That Council:*

- 1. Acknowledges that Monash libraries offer an excellent standard of service to the community and congratulates Monash Public Library Service staff on their professionalism, creativity and dedication.*
- 2. Notes that Victorian public libraries produce \$4.30 in value to the community for every \$1 spent.*
- 3. Notes that even Victorians who do not use public libraries have indicated a willingness to fund libraries at more than one and a half times current expenditure.*
- 4. Notes that per capita expenditure on public libraries in 2019-20 was \$39.34 in Victoria, lower than any other state or territory and 21.5% lower than the national average of \$50.11.*
- 5. Notes that Monash has a higher proportion of active library borrowers than average across Victoria.*
- 6. Notes that our spend per head of population in 2019-20 was \$26.97, significantly less than the average across similar Councils (\$35.51) and less than the average across all Victorian Councils (\$32.10).*
- 7. Requests that Officers prepare a report on the benefits to service delivery that could be realised by increasing funding of the Monash Public Library Service to at least the average level of funding provided across Victorian councils, and that this report be presented to Council no later than November 2021.*

**BUDGET IMPLICATIONS**

The preparation of a report in response to this Notice of Motion can be undertaken within existing resources, noting that any subsequent increase in budget to the library service will be considered as part of the annual budget process.

It is noted that the Monash Public Library Service (MPLS) 2020-21 Capital budget for collections management was impacted by a one-off decrease of \$800,000, resulting in a budget of \$558,093 for collection acquisitions. The reduction assisted in providing Council's 10% rates waiver for community. This has been restored to \$1,336,061 in the 2021-22 adopted budget. The return to usual levels of capital investment will ensure our library collections remain contemporary and relevant for our Monash community.

The MPLS adopted 2021-22 Operational budget is \$6,201,232, representing \$30.26 per head on an estimated population of 204,936.

To match the State average in library funding (\$32.10 per head), as indicated in point 6 in the Notice to Motion, MPLS would require an additional \$377,082 in the Operational budget. It should be noted that the average per capita cost of library services across Victoria includes

regional and rural services which typically have a significantly higher cost base due to the smaller rural communities being served. More locally, Boroondara provides significantly greater funding towards its library service than our other neighbours.

Statistics released by Public Libraries Victoria late last year provide an insight into library funding across the State. It shows that the City of Monash provides 83% of the funding for its library service, with the State Government funding the majority of the other 17% (fees, grants etc contribute a small amount). Monash also provides an efficient service as shown by the following 2019/20 statistics.

	Ranking*
Total Operating Funding	4
Library visits	4
Visits per Staff EFT	3
Council funding per capita	12
Total library service funding per capita**	11

\*The ranking includes other metropolitan LGAs with stand-alone library services, and excludes the City of Melbourne and regional or rural library services

\*\*Includes State Govt funding

### **IMPACT ON INTERNAL RESOURCES**

If the Notice of Motion is supported, the preparation of the report can be undertaken within existing resources.

### **COUNCIL PLAN AND COUNCIL POLICIES**

The proposed report on the benefits to the library service aligns to Council's *A Healthy and Resilient Monash: Integrated Plan 2017-2021*, community feedback received during Monash 2040 consultations, and the four-year strategy. The strategy implies the need for ongoing support of libraries, and that libraries are safe community spaces that support social inclusion, lifelong learning, literacy health and build strong resilient communities.

### **RELEVANCE TO WORK ALREADY UNDERTAKEN BY OFFICERS OR COMMITTEES**

MPLS has commenced research to understand more on community needs within libraries following 2019-2020 changes to service delivery, a focus on online programming and impacts as a result of the pandemic. Community focus groups have been established, including consultation with Council's Disability, Gender Equity, Positive Aging and Multicultural Advisory Committees and Reference Groups. This research will be completed in September 2021. The results will inform MPLS Action Plans and be communicated to Councillors in late 2021.

Within the 2021/22 adopted budget, Council has supported a detailed work model design project titled 'Monash Future Libraries'. This project will investigate MPLS service delivery, staffing roles and systems, with the aim of providing recommendations to increase efficiencies and effectiveness of the library service. Trends and challenges for the library sector will be explored and recommendations made to Council in a report to be presented in early 2022.

***FURTHER CONSIDERATIONS***

MPLS has been advised that the State Government Public Libraries Funding Program for 2021-22 has been increased by 3.5% across all local government areas. This increase will result in a projected \$43,685 (a total of \$1,291,783) of State funding to be received by Council for MPLS delivery.

Results from the recently released 2021 Community Satisfaction Survey show that the local library and library services were the ninth most important of the 28 included services and facilities. Satisfaction declined very marginally this year, down 1.9% to 8.49, but remains “excellent” and ranked third overall for satisfaction. Of the suite of community services measured, libraries were considered the most important and also had the highest satisfaction rating.

COVID-19 has impacted library services across the State in various ways, including reductions to budgets, visitation numbers, and changes in community confidence and behaviours as State restrictions continue. Reduced access to the library collections, public programs and new offerings during this period are likely to have influenced this small drop in community satisfaction.