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Minister’s Foreword

Victoria’s public library network is a first class community asset providing its members with invaluable access to knowledge, the latest information technology and a wide range of community services.

To ensure that public libraries continue to provide for the needs of Victoria’s many and diverse communities I have established a Ministerial Advisory Council on Public Libraries (MAC).

The MAC will bring together the key stakeholders in the delivery of public library services to the Victorian community. This important forum will promote the delivery of vibrant, effective library services by local government and help shape the future role of public libraries.

As is fitting for an investigation of such a valuable community asset I have established the MAC on bi-partisan lines. Including representatives from both sides of politics and appointing specialist representatives will ensure communities have access to relevant and effective library services.

The MAC will discuss issues relating to the provision of public library services with key stakeholders and the library using public. I want to be sure the public is fully consulted in this process.

Sincerely

Hon Jeanette Powell
Minister for Local Government
Introduction

“The public library is a profoundly important cultural, economic and social institution. Libraries collect and disseminate information; they provide comfortable and convenient places for people to read and learn; their physical spaces form meeting places for community groups; being free and open for all they help to create a fairer society. Public libraries are highly valued by the communities they serve, and are uniquely placed to draw a diverse range of people and groups together.”


The role of the public library continues to change and evolve, and so do the services they provide. In order to develop relevant and effective strategic directions for Victorian public library services, we need to first determine what tomorrow’s library looks like.

To achieve this, the Minister for Local Government has asked the re-established Ministerial Advisory Council on Public Libraries (MAC) to conduct a landmark review of the future role and functions of public libraries in Victoria, recognising their changing nature. Tomorrow’s Library is a consultation component of this review and is an opportunity for key stakeholders to inform and shape tomorrow’s library.

The review is being conducted in two stages. Tomorrow’s Library forms part of stage one where the current use of Victorian public libraries and future needs, including the use of emerging technologies, will be assessed. Stage two will commence in early 2013 and will review costs, prioritisation of library projects and programs, sustainability and levels of funding.

Background

With increasing public access to new technologies and social media, the role of the public library has changed significantly. The library is a place that fosters social inclusion, participation in the local community, lifelong learning and literacy, as well as providing the more traditional library services and programs. There are 51 public library services and 290 service points in Victoria operated by Councils and Regional Library Corporations. In addition, Vision Australia operates a lending service for vision impaired Victorians and there are 6 Mechanics’ Institutes that also act as lending libraries.

The library’s important role in the development of social capital is recognised internationally and has become a key factor in the planning of services and the buildings from which they are delivered.
During the last decade, Victoria’s public libraries have been focused on developing the potential of all Victorians through:

- Lifelong learning and literacy
- Free access to excellent resources and technology
- Trusted access to information helping to create better informed communities
- Building connections and encouraging participation.

The public library and local government sectors, and the Victorian Government have also been working towards a vision of a borderless library, fostering equitable community access to resources and information across the state through initiatives including:

- Collaborative purchasing of library materials
- Library Management System consortium (SWIFT)
- WiFi access to the Internet
- Sharing of resources through LibraryLink Victoria.

In determining the future strategic directions for public libraries, the continuing developments and changes affecting Victoria need to be carefully considered, including demographic, social, economic, cultural and local factors. These key factors should be considered in the context of the four key areas outlined in this discussion paper:

- Collections, resources and programs
- Library buildings
- Technology
- Service delivery.

Libraries are a vital resource for our communities and the Victorian Government is committed to improving services in partnership with local government.

This discussion paper is an opportunity for stakeholders and the community to input into the development of a future focused and forward thinking plan for Victorian public libraries.

Your voice is vital in shaping tomorrow’s library.
“For 87.2% of Victorians, the key reason to visit a public library is to borrow library materials.”

With the increasing use of the internet as an information source, the number of physical loans is declining slightly. However, anecdotally the amount of information sourced digitally by library members continues to increase significantly.

Based on community and sector feedback, library collections need to be current and relevant to library members, as well as presented in an aesthetically pleasing manner. The most recent public libraries Collections Audit identified that nearly half the collections across Victoria were more than 15 years old.

It is estimated that 16% of the items have not been borrowed for more than 25 months and are considered to be obsolescent. Additionally, around 30% of the English language non-fiction collections are not used.

Considerable work has been undertaken by the Australian Library and Information Association (ALIA) to develop national collection standards to guide authorities in the provision of library resources. The ALIA public library standards recommend a collection target of at least 2 items per capita with an ideal recommended target of 2.5 per capita.

According to the Annual Survey of Public Library Services 2009-10, there are 9 million items in the public library collection across Victoria, equivalent to 1.82 items per capita. There are significant variations between the different types of library services, as well as significant variations between rural and metropolitan library services in Victoria.

What will need to be explored is how the continued evolution of new technologies, including e-books and readers, will impact on the traditional considerations regarding the provision of library services. Similarly, the ageing population will lead to changing demands and expectations on public library services.

Challenges:

- **Investment in collections** – Library collections comprise a number of different formats. As technology changes, the composition of collections may require alterations. The collection needs to be managed to ensure it meets the needs of the community.

- **Standards** – Collection standards have been developed by organisations such as ALIA and address a variety of areas including the number of items per capita and the age of the collection. The Victorian Government has not endorsed any standards.

- **LOTE** – The range of LOTE material is generally limited. Library staff are often reliant on the retailer/wholesaler to provide recommendations for purchase. In excess of 150 different languages are spoken across Victoria.
• **Procurement** – The cost of purchasing collections is a major component of library expenditure. Collaborative purchasing arrangements and ‘shelf-ready items’ may help reduce these costs.

• **Programs** – Library services offer a range of programs to the community, usually free of charge. Anecdotal evidence suggests the provision of these programs and community expectation is increasing, placing extra demand on library services and facilities.

• **RFID** – Radio Frequency Identification enables libraries to keep track of the collection, provide self check out to customers and enable the collection to be easily shared with other library services. However, the implementation of RFID is a significant cost.

• **Outreach** – Library services are offered beyond the physical location of the library. Increasingly, technology is allowing an even greater range of services to be offered and is changing the way the community interacts with the library.

**Questions:**

1. Which of the challenges outlined for collections, resources and programs will most affect your library service over the next five to ten years? Are there other challenges that are not listed that affect your library service?

2. What is your library service implementing or planning to implement to meet these challenges? What assistance is required to meet the challenges?
“The majority of Victorian building stock is old, with just 12.7% constructed after the year 2000. The largest proportion was built in the period 1960–1979 (33.3%).

More than one-third of Victorian library branches have not been refurbished since being built; 58.6% of all branches have undergone major refurbishment. Approximately two-thirds (63.9%) of these refurbishments took place in the past seven years.”


Library buildings need to be flexible and adaptable, and meet the needs of the community. The Victorian Government’s Living Libraries Infrastructure Program has, during the last decade, funded 147 projects. However, not all local authorities have been able to maximise the opportunity presented due to competing capital demands on their budgets.

New and redeveloped public library buildings have changed community expectations about the functionality and capacity of buildings, placing additional pressure on local councils to redevelop older libraries. It is important to recognise that public library buildings will differ according to the needs of the local community and the operational requirements of the different municipal authorities.

Building codes continue to be revised and the Disability Discrimination Act and other requirements present compliance challenges for older library buildings still in use.

The public library plays a key role in the lives of the people served and plays a significant role in social connection and inclusion for the local community.

A key tool in planning and designing new and redeveloped spaces is the publication People Places, which has become the de facto standard for Australian public library buildings.

Challenges:

- **Fit-for-purpose buildings** – Library design and purpose has evolved over time, increasingly requiring purpose-built buildings or extensive refurbishment of existing buildings. The cost of building facilities has increased over time due to the increased complexity and size of the designs and the general increase in building costs.

- **Standards** – The Victorian Government has not endorsed any building standards, however encourages libraries to utilise guidelines in planning new building projects such as People Places.

- **Compliance** – Revised building codes and other requirements have significant cost implications. The increased community desire to move to ‘green buildings’ places increased strain on financial resources to meet these requirements.
• Co-location of public library services with other services – To maximise the return on investment and provide the community with joined-up services, libraries are often co-located with other community services such as Neighbourhood Houses and Maternal and Child Health facilities.

• Provision of other services – Libraries provide a variety of services including council customer service functions, meeting spaces and in some cases act as community refuges in the event of an emergency, affecting the operation of the library.

Questions:

3. Which of the challenges outlined for library buildings will most affect your library service over the next five to ten years? Are there other challenges that are not listed that affect your library service?

4. What is your library service implementing or planning to implement to meet these challenges? What assistance is required to meet the challenges?
“Approximately three-quarters (78.6%) of libraries provide a computer lab/internet area. Approximately one-half of these (47.1%, or 37% of all libraries) indicated that floorspace within the library is provided exclusively for this purpose, while 52.9% (41.4% of all libraries) provide computer or internet facilities within an area that is also used for other purposes.”


The continuing speed of technological change and other improvements presents opportunities to review service options and solutions. Just as the services and programs have changed for the 21st century, so too have community expectations for the service they receive. Communities now have access to increased choice, privacy levels and options for notification of new and relevant materials.

As more people adopt new technology and with increasing access in homes, workplaces and schools, demand for and expectations of access at libraries will continue to increase. Those without access will continue to expect the public library to be their point of access for new and emerging technologies.

New technologies have enabled library services to provide increased customer choices in their interaction with the library through self-service loans and returns, different notification formats, e-book loans online, as well as improved collection management such as LibraryLink Victoria.

Challenges:

- **LibraryLink Victoria/SWIFT Library Consortium** – These two systems have been developed to help library services better manage and share resources. The courier costs associated with moving items have significantly increased, especially for the SWIFT libraries sharing a common database.

- **Future technologies** – Maximising the benefits of future technologies and initiatives such as the National Broadband Network and meeting the community expectation will be a considerable challenge for library services in the future.

- **Community use of technology** – as technology develops the community will interact with library services in different ways. The increasing use of tablets and smart phones is one example of new technologies where library patrons will start to look for, and expect, ‘apps’ to interact with their local library.
Questions:
5. Which of the challenges outlined for technology will most affect your library service over the next five to ten years? Are there other challenges that are not listed that affect your library service?

6. What is your library service implementing or planning to implement to meet these challenges? What assistance is required to meet the challenges?
“On average, every day every Victorian public library will lend about 500 items; each will receive nearly 270 visits from a total of 2.5 million registered users (over half the Victorian population) and respond to nearly 30 reference enquiries. Libraries will provide these services from a resource base that amounts to about 9 million books, magazines, audio books and videos through a network of 238 branches and 30 mobile libraries [in 2005] open a total of 10,500 hours every week.”


Through the use of new technology and media, the service delivery options continue to multiply increasing the demand on library service staff to be flexible and change their approach and attitude to library service provision.

A key service delivery change is the focus on front-of-house service rather than back-of-house service. This requires a different skill set for public library staff. As new technologies are adopted by library services, more specialist knowledge is required as patrons expect library staff will be expert users and able to assist and teach them.

It is becoming increasingly difficult for public library services to attract appropriately qualified and experienced staff to deliver the services required to meet community needs and expectations as fewer students are entering the library and information sciences discipline.

Different models for the provision of services have been developed by library services depending on their own unique circumstances. Some models include a mix of delivery points such as mobile libraries and depots, while others utilise home lending services.

**Challenges:**

- **Workforce** – The ageing public library workforce means a large number of retirements are imminent. Attracting and retaining staff and finding the right people to develop and deliver services is challenging for library services.

- **Equity in access** – Local councils across Victoria have varying levels of resources available for the provision of library services leading to varying levels of service.

- **Model of service** – Library services operate a variety of models including mobile libraries and static branches. The cost of delivering services to communities varies depending on the model and level of service provided.

- **Operation of service** – Several Regional Library Corporations have been disbanded in the last 5 years. Other models of service delivery have been developed and may lead to changes in the way councils deliver library services.
• **Demographic changes** – The ageing population, declining rural populations and rapidly increasing population centres on the metropolitan fringe will affect the way library services are used, creating unique, local challenges.

• **Hard to reach users** – Attracting the hard-to-reach and non-users who are not aware of the services or who do not believe the services and programs can assist them.

Questions:

7. Which of the challenges outlined for service delivery will most affect your library service over the next five to ten years? Are there other challenges that are not listed that affect your library service?

8. What is your library service implementing or planning to implement to meet these challenges? What assistance is required to meet the challenges?
“Libraries are the most used community facility in Victoria, along with parks and gardens, and are used by 51% of the population.”

Libraries are a vital resource for local communities and the Victorian Government is committed to improving services in partnership with local government. It is evident that the environment in which libraries operate is rapidly evolving. Emerging technologies, the ageing population and declining rural populations all have significant impacts on public libraries.

*People Places* identifies the key objectives for future public libraries are, to create places that provide a cultural hub and focal point for the community, are functional and multipurpose, enable access to the latest in technology, attract a wide range of users and are effective and efficient in the delivery of services.

Libraries play a key role in the development, education and engagement of local communities. They promote social inclusion and provide a non-judgemental ‘community hub’. It is important that libraries remain relevant, effective and responsive to local community needs.

Libraries are a vital part of your community today. Your voice will help define what they might look like tomorrow. This is your opportunity to input into the development of a future focused and forward thinking plan for Victorian public libraries.

Your voice is vital in shaping tomorrow’s library.

**Questions:**
9. Is there anything else that you wish to add about the challenges facing your library service that has not been covered?
Interested individuals and organisations are encouraged to make a submission on any or all parts of this discussion paper.

The Ministerial Advisory Council on Public Libraries will consider all submissions when conducting its review of public libraries in Victoria.

**To make a submission, go to**

Submissions should be received by 5pm Thursday 31 May 2012.

For further information regarding the Tomorrow's Library discussion paper or the Ministerial Advisory Council's review of public libraries contact:

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Or

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**Publication of submissions**

Submissions will be published online and available to the public.

Submissions will inform a comprehensive report on public libraries due to be published at the end of 2012. Extracts and direct quotes from individual submissions may be used in the report.
your voice. shaping the future.