

Reforming Public Library Funding

The NSW State Government currently provides \$26.5M annually to local government in support of public libraries.

The Library Act 1939 sets out that the Library Council of NSW advises the Minister for the Arts on matters of public library policy and administration, and the provision of assistance to local libraries.

In 2012 the Library Council commissioned the State Library of NSW to work with local government stakeholders on a comprehensive review of the efficacy, administration and level of State funding in support of public libraries. As a result of this review, key stakeholders NSW Metropolitan Public Libraries Association, Public Libraries NSW and the Local Government and Shires Association have unanimously agreed on a new approach to the State Government Public Library Grants and Subsidies recommended by the Library Council of NSW. This new approach is necessary to ensure that NSW councils are able to continue to maintain and develop quality library services and ancillary services for the people of NSW.

Enabling communities

In 2012 there are 374 public libraries across NSW, operated by 151 local authorities. They operate as 99 services, some standalone and some through regional library agreements.

Over the past 10 years in NSW visits to libraries have grown by 24% to almost 36 million per annum. 3.3 million people in NSW (or 46% of the NSW population) in 2010/11 are library members. Loans of books and other materials have increased to almost 50 million per annum, and Internet usage in libraries continues to grow with more than 2.7 million hours of Internet access provided by NSW public libraries in 2010/11.¹ Public libraries are thus a key resource for community well being and the delivery of government services.

The sustained growth in demand from the people of NSW demonstrates the need for library services, and has placed pressures on local governments which are endeavouring to meet the demand.

¹ State Library of NSW (2012) *Public Library Statistics 2010-11*

Transparent reform

The Library Council recommends a fairer, simplified and more transparent method for the distribution of funds. The following principles for a new approach are 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
- **Build and maintain infrastructure** via a substantial capital fund, entitled the *Building Library Infrastructure Program*.

A modest proposal

The Library Council recommends that recurrent public library funding to councils be modestly 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.

Capital Needs

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

The State Library is currently seeking State Government support for this funding increase and model change.