



LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY
FOR THE AUSTRALIAN CAPITAL TERRITORY

STANDING COMMITTEE ON ENVIRONMENT AND TRANSPORT AND CITY SERVICES
Ms Suzanne Orr MLA (Chair), Miss Candice Burch MLA, Mr James Milligan MLA

Submission Cover Sheet

Inquiry into ACT Libraries

Submission Number: 051

Date Authorised for Publication: 26 September 2018

Submission On
Inquiry into ACT Libraries

September 2018

Kristine Johnson

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

I am making a submission to the Standing Committee on the Environment and Transport and City Services inquiry into the current and future need for library sites and the best, most cost effective model of library service points. As a frequent user of ACT libraries – in particular the Tuggeranong library – I have some comments to make regarding the current services delivered by ACT libraries, but in particular the Tuggeranong library. I have grouped them according to the Terms of Reference.

TOR 2: Strategic planning for libraries in the ACT - *Opportunities for community involvement*

There appears to be very little opportunity for community involvement in libraries at present and as someone who has an interest in art, one possibility that has occurred to me is of providing opportunities to display community work – for example art - on a rotating basis. Not only would it involve the community but it would provide more interesting décor in the libraries. I understand this is done in at least one ACT government library already but at this stage it is a local initiative.

Recommendation

- Consider providing space to display or hang community work - for example art work - on a rotating basis.

TOR 3: The nature and extent of current and future community demand for different library services including: *Non-digital offerings*

I have noticed that the quantity of non-digital resources has been reducing in the Tuggeranong library over recent years. I assume this is part of the move towards more electronic resources and I assume it is a move designed to cater to younger patrons – and possibly to cut costs. But many of us who are older still prefer to read books and we are still part of the libraries' client group as well. If a library is only going to provide online resources then there is little point to its existence as these can be accessed without using a library. If costs are a problem, it is comparatively simple and cheap in Canberra to obtain good quality, recent, books from sources such as the Lifeline Book Fair.

Overall, my attempts to use the electronic resources in the library have generally not been very satisfactory for the following reasons.

- They are distributed on different websites or platforms and each one functions differently.
- In addition, the listings of ebook titles are hard to search and it is much more difficult to find something you want to read simply by looking at titles on a website.
- Some of the other resources - for example on-line magazines and journals – have proved to be almost impossible to access due to problems of different ways of accessing each one, different passwords and lack of compatibility between systems.
- To overcome the problems I have found it is necessary to visit the library and find a librarian versed in these issues – and often there is not one of these available.

- The last time I tried to access an online copy of *Choice* magazine, not even the librarians could access a copy of the article I wanted and they referred me to the hardcopy.
- Some authors do not publish in ebook format and some types of books, for example art books, are not really successful in this format.

If you are going to move towards digital resources I believe it is necessary to employ more specialised resources to help organise them and ensure that they are readily accessible to all.

Recommendations

- Re-evaluate the current policy of shifting rapidly towards digital resources.
- Examine the difficulties of using digital resources and try to find ways to simplify the process.
- Engage more staff who specialise in organising and possibly simplifying the online resources so that they are more accessible
- Have means of obtaining help to use digital resources readily available – maybe in the form of better guidelines on the library website and in the library itself.

TOR 3: The nature and extent of current and future community demand for different library services including: *Education and training opportunities*

I understand that sometimes educational activities occur at libraries. I have occasionally picked up a brochure which advertises them but the activities seem to be unevenly distributed across libraries. I have found that all activities in which I might be interested seem to be occurring at distant libraries, for example at Gungahlin. There seem to be very few at Tuggeranong and those that are held there seem very limited compared to what is offered elsewhere. In the current month, for example (September 2018) of the 36 activities advertised, 4 are at Tuggeranong, including 2 for children 3-5 years and only 2 for adults. In the same month there are 12 activities at Gungahlin.

The other issue is the advertising of the opportunities which are offered. When I have noticed a brochure and picked it up, many of the opportunities are already in the past, so this is not very effective. And if some of the activities are those that are geared to older people, then advertising them on Facebook or a website somewhere is not going to be very effective. I think a better system of advertising these things might be implemented, for example by having a noticeboard in the library which is only used to advertise such activities. This would also act as a reminder that the activity is coming up, perhaps reducing 'no shows'.

Recommendations

- Offer a broader range of educational activities and make sure they are offered across all libraries.

- Advertise such activities more effectively, including by having a dedicated notice board in the library.

TOR 3: The nature and extent of current and future community demand for different library services including: *Spaces for learning, creativity and for achieving social inclusion - Noise Levels in Tuggeranong Library*

I spend a lot of time at Tuggeranong library, reading and doing research, and it is a lovely space to work in. However there is a problem with the noise level. Being a mixed use facility it can be very noisy, particularly during school terms. The high school students use the space as a recreation area and there seems to be no restriction on how much noise they make, consequently they treat it as any other space where noise is unrestricted. The design of the mezzanine area used mainly by students makes it particularly difficult to stop the transmission of noise throughout the library.

Should the library be used as a recreation space in the sense of being a place to sit and talk loudly, thereby affecting other patrons? Surely there are more appropriate venues for that. If it is difficult to use the library for reading or for research purposes because of the noise level then it could be argued one of its major functions has been negated and that it is a waste of ratepayer resources to be funding a library whose major use is as a social gathering place.

At one point the library staff did put a notice on one of the tables to the effect that this was a 'Quiet Area' but this was totally ineffective as it was in the middle of an open area with the young children's story area on one side and the older students recreation areas on the other.

I am aware that in these times the needs of older citizens who prefer more quiet have been overtaken by the tendency of the young to make a lot of noise, but surely it should be possible to accommodate both. After all, while the young are citizens deserving of consideration, so are those who are older. And it is likely that some younger people would like a quieter area to study at times as well.

Recommendations

- Set guidelines on how the library is to be used by students, including a direction that noise levels be contained.
- At a minimum I believe it should be possible for the library to arrange for a quiet area. Possibly some form of partitioning might be used to section off an area in which noise is discouraged.

TOR 4: The extent to which ACT Libraries are positioned to respond flexibly to meet current and future community opportunities and demands

Handling of feedback is definitely a problem with the ACT library system and if it is not responsive to feedback then how can it respond flexibly to community opportunities and demands?

As an example of this, I have raised the issue of the noise levels in Tuggeranong library - and the possibility of a quiet area -several times in different ways and have found it impossible to even get a considered response. I have made the request of individual librarians several times over the course of this year but this has not resulted in any decision that I am aware of, nor in any change to practices.

I have also lodged such a request through the library feedback website.

- 26 March 2018 I sent my initial request.
- 27 March I received a response that it had been forwarded to the Operations Manager
- 9 July I sent another email requesting a response to my initial request
- 12 July I received a response that my initial request had been forwarded to the Operations Manager and that it would be followed up
- 13 July I received an email that the Operations Manager planned to discuss the request with the branch co-ordinator the following week.

I have received no further advice on whether my suggestion was rejected, approved, or is still under consideration. What is the point in even providing feedback if it is not responded to in any meaningful way?

Recommendation

- To introduce some accountability a system should be implemented to ensure some meaningful response is made to community requests, even if that request is rejected – and reasons should be given for any decisions made.

.

TOR 5: The extent to which ACT Libraries are accessible to the community, including: *Opening Hours*

Some libraries, including Woden and Gungahlin, have late opening hours one day a week but this is not available at Tuggeranong Library, although it used to be at one time. Was this dropped due to lack of patronage or was it simply done to reduce costs? And could it be reconsidered?

Recommendation

- Consider re-introducing late opening one evening a week at Tuggeranong library.

TOR 9: Other relevant matters

One final small, but annoying matter is the issue of cleaning – and weeding – of the windows at the Tuggeranong library. The library is a beautiful building with fantastic views of the lake. However the views are somewhat spoiled by having to peer through windows that often need cleaning and which have cobwebs and peeling film in places. In addition, weeds grow along the windowsills – which are quite high and presumably difficult to reach. Some of these weeds have been growing for years and are over a metre high.

Recommendation

That periodic attention is paid to maintenance of the windows – and that the weeds be removed at Tuggeranong library.