



LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY
FOR THE AUSTRALIAN CAPITAL TERRITORY

SELECT COMMITTEE ON ESTIMATES 2024-2025

Ms Nicole Lawder MLA (Chair), Ms Suzanne Orr MLA (Deputy Chair),
Miss Laura Nuttall MLA

ANSWER TO QUESTION ON NOTICE

Asked By: Ms Nicole Lawder MLA

Addressed to: Minister for City Services

Reference: Libraries

Hearing Date: 24/07/2024

In relation to: TCCS and Libraries ACT

QON lodgement Date: 26/07/2024

Answer Due date: 05/08/2024

- 1) When will Woden Library reopen after the upgrade or has it re-opened? If so when?
- 2) What specific factors influenced the budgeted FTE for ACT public libraries from 2021-2022 to 2023-2024, and how does this reflect the government's priorities for community services?
- 3) Noting the rate of inflation, particularly the wage price index, has the total staff expenses been decreasing in real terms?
- 4) What are the primary challenges in filling the current FTE vacancies across the public libraries, and what strategies are being implemented to address these challenges?
- 5) How do current FTE vacancies impact the operation and service delivery at the affected library branches?
- 6) How does the government decide the distribution of funds and FTE allocations among different libraries, particularly between larger and smaller branches?
- 7) Are there any planned closures or relocations of library branches in the ACT, and what criteria does the government use to make these decisions?
- 8) What future plans does the government have to further support and resource public libraries in the ACT?
- 9) What measures and evaluations does the government use to assess the effectiveness and impact of library services on the community?

Minister Tara Cheyne MLA: The answer to the Member's question is as follows:

- 1) The date for reopening of Woden Library is yet to be determined by ACT Property Group. A reopening date will be communicated publicly by the middle of August. The pop-up library at 26 Corinna Street in Phillip will continue to operate until the Woden Library reopens.

- 2) The FTE for public libraries has increased from 46.85 in 2021-2022 to 55.36 in 2023-2024. This increase has been influenced by the introduction of the secure workforce conversion policy and other strategic workforce planning actions.
- 3) No.
- 4) Like many areas of ACT Government, Libraries ACT have recently faced challenges to fill vacant positions due to the tight labour market. Many Libraries ACT roles are at lower classifications, which also means that staff often leave for opportunities at higher levels elsewhere across the ACT Public Service.

Libraries ACT has changed its approach on how positions are advertised and what is asked of prospective applicants, including using third party applications such as SEEK and LinkedIn and asking applicant to undertake an activity-based assessment in place of a written 'questions and answers' assessment. Recently, this has resulted in a larger applicant pool and has provided the opportunity to create merit pools to fill future vacancies. This reduces both the time a position is vacant and the frequency with which full recruitment processes need to be run.

- 5) Vacancies have the biggest impact on operations and service delivery, specifically when it coincides with a high number of absences (both planned and unplanned) on any given day: it is unplanned absences that have been the leading cause of ad-hoc library closures in recent years.
- 6) Funding is allocated to Libraries ACT as a whole business unit, which includes budget FTE allocation. The position descriptions for all positions based at public libraries include a requirement to work across any branch in the network when needed. This means that although each library branch has an allocated FTE in the budget, this isn't an indication of the total number of staff who work at or on behalf of each branch.

Where staff members work across two sites, for example Dickson and Civic, their FTE is listed as sitting within the larger branch, in this case Dickson. That is why smaller branches reflect a smaller FTE in the budget.

- 7) There are no planned closures for any of the library branches. Libraries ACT is aware that the future development of the Canberra Theatre is likely to impact the Civic Library given its current location. Libraries ACT is continuing to work with the Canberra Theatre redevelopment team on this, including the identification of a potential future location within the new Civic Cultural precinct.
- 8) TCCS proposes to present an incoming government with a new ACT library strategy for it to consider in late 2024. Subject to Government approval, the strategy will provide a roadmap with priorities for Canberra's public libraries up to and beyond 2030.
- 9) Effectiveness and impact of library services is informed by community feedback. This is received in a variety of ways, including the annual TCCS satisfaction survey, as well as use and direct contact with the library by community members. Annual accountability indicators are also a method for assessing the effectiveness of library services, these are presented in the ACT Budget and the Annual Report for TCCS.

Approved for circulation to the Select Committee on Estimates 2024-2025

Signature: 

Date: 1/8/24

By the Minister for City Services, Tara Cheyne MLA