

15th Meeting of the Strategic Network Committee

Minutes of the meeting of 20 May 2022

Date	Friday 20 May 2022
Time	11:00 AM to 1:00 PM
Location	Online via Teams and in the Kaaroo Room, Level 1 State Library.
Chair	Cameron Morley (State Library)
Members in Attendance	Robert Knight (SW Zone) Erin Williams (SE Zone) Kathleen Allen (Sydney North Zone) Paula Pfoeffler (Sydney West Zone) Heather Davis (Sydney South Zone) Kathryn Breward (NE Zone)
State Library Staff in Attendance	Philippa Scarf, Ellen Forsyth, Andrea Curr, Genevieve Freeman
Apologies	Pam Kelly (CW Zone) Alexander Mills (CE Zone)
Minutes	Samantha Mantakoun

Minutes

Item 1: Preliminary Matters

1.1 Welcome and apologies

Item 2: Minutes, Business arising and action register

2.1 Minutes from the May 2021 meeting

The Committee reviewed the minutes of the October 2021 meeting. Cameron Morley informed the Committee that many of the research projects that were in progress at the last meeting have been completed. The reports are available to be viewed on the PLS website at <https://www.sl.nsw.gov.au/public-library-services/research-projects>

Item 3: Priority business

3.1 Children's Policy Guidelines review

Heather Davis addressed the Committee on the new legislation regarding child safety and protection. The City of Sydney has undertaken a whole of council review of children's policies and aims to finalise policies by the end of the year. As part of the review, Heather looked at both the State Library's Children's Policy Guidelines and those of the City of Sydney libraries. She noted that there needs to be a change in the approach from policies that seek to protect the organisation to one of "best interests of the child".

Heather commented that a statewide approach may be achievable through consultation with NSWPLA and other LGAs.

Cameron agreed that it is timely to review the SLNSW Children's Policy Guidelines as they were written in the early 2000s and are most prescriptive. The original approach of the guidelines was to address issues in libraries concerning unattended children.

Members of the Committee discussed the situation at individual councils. Kathleen Allen from Ryde noted that the council had changed the age for unattended children in the library to 12 years. Robert Knight agreed that the policy should be reviewed, noting councils are risk averse by nature. The challenge is balancing the concerns of councils and the consultation process. Paula Pfoeffler noted that this had been discussed at a recent Sydney West zone meeting and councils were at different stages of the process. Paula also noted another issue around the Working with Children Check and its interpretation and application across LGAs. Cameron stated libraries frequently ask about WWCC, however it is up to each council to decide on this policy.

Action

Cameron to consult and circulate draft SLNSW Children's Policy Guidelines before next meeting. Cameron to work with the Office of the Children's Guardian and NSWPLA.

3.2 Review of Public Library statistics

The 2020-21 Public Library Statistics are now available online at <https://www.sl.nsw.gov.au/public-library-services/advice-and-best-practice/public-library-statistics>. A hard copy has been sent to libraries.

Library usage figures for 2020/21 were significantly affected by the COVID-19 pandemic. Onsite services for most of the 2020/21 year were restricted due to COVID-19 Safety Plans, and many branches were closed to the public for extended periods. When library buildings were allowed to open, restrictions on visitor numbers, PC usage, reduced opening hours and a ban on programs and events resulted in lower than usual figures for many services.

Library visits for the period were approximately 50% of pre-COVID times. Physical visits are usually around 35M and in 2020/21 visits were 17.1M). However, loans were 35.1M, which was a reduction of only 7M which demonstrated that libraries "click and collect" services etc. were most successful. Library events were also quite high, with 43,700 programs. Cameron suggested the Living Learning Libraries standards and guidelines should remain at pre-COVID levels.

Further information about COVID-19 closures and the impact on libraries can be viewed here <https://www.sl.nsw.gov.au/public-library-services/covid-closures-impact-library-users>

The committee provided an update on their libraries. Robert noted that RRL is still experiencing post-COVID hesitancy with regards to in person visits. Most RRL libraries are delivering a combination of in person and online programs. Online programs remain and this has provided an opportunity for people who do not normally go to the library to access the programs online.

Cameron agreed and mentioned that visitor numbers were low (50%-60% of pre-COVID numbers). Some periods have increased for e.g. HSC students, but overall visitor numbers are often dictated by the number of people in the CBD. The State Library has formed a committee to look at revitalising the SLNSW programs and events.

Katherine Breward provided an update on the NE zone libraries. The floods had brought people back to the library. People were coming in because they wanted a place of refuge, or a place where they could share information and be supported. The library was the community hub. Clarence Regional Library had a membership drive during COVID-19 and new members had joined and stayed.

Paula reported from the Sydney West zone meeting that Blue Mountains library had the highest downloads on Indyreads in the state. During the recent flooding event Camden Library was the hub for rescue and resilience efforts.

Campbelltown has completed a COVID-19 impact survey of the community. The results indicate that the hard lockdown continues to have a significant impact on the community.

Kathleen commented that Ryde libraries had not returned to full opening hours. This is due to reduced staffing from COVID-19 illness as well as staff vacancies. Library visits are at 60% pre-COVID levels but people are not staying. Physical distancing has resulted in a reduction in the number of PCs but there does not appear to be the demand, this could be a result of more people purchasing their own devices during the pandemic. Ryde does have iPads available for people to use while in the library if they need to have an online meeting or want to read the newspapers online in a more comfortable setting.

Heather noted that City of Sydney had received a complaint after PCs were returned to the pre-COVID numbers as people felt too close to each other. The council is tendering for public access PCs and are looking at a both PCs and laptops for the public to better meet community needs.

Cameron had also observed at Hornsby library that older people were not staying in the newly refurbished library. On the occasion he visited it was full of students rather than a mix of older and younger people.

Katherine commented Clarence Regional Library have created an infographic for each library location to provide a usage snapshot. It is an excellent tool to demonstrate to councillors that the libraries are one of the largest and most popular cultural services.

Andrea Curr noted that the State Library of California has a similar snapshot which highlights public library activity across the state. The PLS team will be working with the State Library's web team to create a similar visualisation for the website. This will allow the statistics to "come alive" and will be beneficial when working with external stakeholders.

3.3 LIAC and Drug Info Reports

Philippa reminded the Committee about the online professional development available to public library staff on the PL Portal. The next topic to be included is the Find Legal Answers online training. There has been positive uptake of the Drug Info online training and new topics will be added later this year.

<https://www.sl.nsw.gov.au/public-library-services/pl-portal>

<https://www.sl.nsw.gov.au/public-library-services/drug-info-online-training>

Find Legal Answers

LIAC partnered with Legal Aid NSW to facilitate the delivery of law talks in libraries for Law Week. Also worked Marrickville Legal Centre, Legal Aid NSW and the Tenants' Union to promote events on the [Law Week website](#). Libraries were provided with digital assets to promote events and the Find legal Answers service during Law Week.

Currently publishing a book on behalf of Macarthur Legal Centre called Dealing with Debt: a legal guide to personal debt in NSW. This will be a new addition to the tool kit and also available on the Find Legal Answers website.

Drug Info

The Drug Info team have been working on updating our Drug and Alcohol Info Hub in an effort to make the program more portable and interactive. One of the results of this is the Drug Fact Finder, a tablet-based

interactive display introducing interesting facts about different drugs. The Drug Fact Finder features colourful images, quiz questions and QR-code links to more detailed information on the Drug Info website.

One of the advantages of the Drug Fact Finder is that public libraries do not need to wait to host the Drug & Alcohol Info Hub to make it accessible to their communities. Simply set it up in an iPad stand along with Drug Info signage and/or promotional material and display in the library. It can also be taken outside the library and set up in your library's community fair or market stall, as well as other outreach activities.

The Drug Fact Finder is now live, and the Drug Info team are currently seeking feedback from public library staff. Access the Drug Fact Finder by entering the following URL into your tablet device:

<https://druginfo.sl.nsw.gov.au/drugfactfinder/>

Drug Info is working with NSW Health to produce a postcard for public libraries to distribute about vaping for young people. This is based on the current *Facts about vaping* campaign:

<https://www.health.nsw.gov.au/tobacco/Pages/vaping.aspx>

PLS eNews

PLS eNews is now published monthly and it is an excellent way to keep informed about activities in the PLS branch and the State Library. Please encourage your staff to subscribe.

To subscribe, and view past issues:

<https://www.sl.nsw.gov.au/public-library-services/services/keep-date-public-libraries/public-library-services-eneews>

3.4 Stock Quality Health Check

Ellen introduced the upcoming project to develop a Stock quality health check to examine the relevance, depth and range of adult fiction collection stock in public libraries in order to best serve their communities.

This builds on the Adult fiction stock quality health checks which were undertaken in 2011 and 2017 (<https://www.sl.nsw.gov.au/public-library-services/2017-adult-fiction-stock-quality-health-check>). A similar methodology of 500 titles in varied genres will be used.

Ellen will do an EOI for six public library staff to be part of the Stock quality health check project team with representation from the following libraries:

- small country library
- small metropolitan library
- medium country library
- medium metropolitan library
- large country library
- large metropolitan library

The project team will develop a spreadsheet of five hundred adult fiction titles which are representative across designated areas of reading interest (genres) which indicates the breadth and depth of an adult fiction collection in New South Wales. The spreadsheet tool will be distributed to public libraries to audit their own collections.

If you would like to nominate to be part of the working group complete the EOI by 10 June:

<https://www.surveymonkey.com/r/LJR22BN>

4.1 Zone highlights from the Zone Secretaries

Kathryn Breward (NE Zone)

- First face to face zone meeting last week. Interesting, with mixed responses regarding how people were travelling with COVID. Many reported their libraries were back to normal in terms of opening hours and services. Others were a little slower in taking up and increasing activities. MidCoast libraries have had a positive response with visitations higher than 2018-19.
- Libraries as an essential service was discussed and there was a strong feeling from the NE zone managers that libraries have been an essential service for the community during the bushfires, floods and COVID-19 pandemic and this needs to be acknowledged.
- Grafton library hosted Live n Loud at your library, which focuses on bands and solo performances for the ages of 12- to 20-year-old and has been running since 2016. This was held at an underground carpark with 300 people attending the event this year. It was a drug and alcohol-free event, Rotary provided free sausage sizzles and a variety of stalls.
- MidCoast libraries have implemented a community access model at Harrington library. This new model is working well and there have been no issues with vandalism, violence, or any security issues and the community is loving being able to access the space.
- Several builds and refurbishments in the NE zone are progressing:
 - Coffs Harbour now has a third floor
 - Forster library is progressing with a new library hub being prepared
 - Yamba library will be doubling in size and taking over the community centre, which should open in 12 months
 - Refurbishment at Iluka library
- RTRL - the library is still struggling and would prefer money instead of books to replace the collection in Lismore.
- Gary Elem was not able to leave Evans Head as he was managing the flood recovery for the council. This was a different experience for him as a library manager, but it is evidence of the trust and respect that his council has for his work. This is another example of why libraries should be considered an essential service as staff have the skills.

Erin Williams (SE Zone)

- Across the zone, finding that children's programs and early childhood programs are extremely popular. Have had to add an additional face to face session in Goulburn. Reported that many mothers who had children over the last 3 or 4 years have really struggled during COVID-19. The isolation and few services available for young children have resulted in a high demand for early childhood programs.
- Adult programs are increasing slowly, bookings are quite high but only about 50% actual attend. This makes it difficult when booking guest speakers.
- Ongoing issues with maintaining staffing levels, keeping doors open and managing rosters. Particularly with smaller libraries with fewer staff it is difficult to operate when staff contract COVID-19.
- Goulburn hosted its first major community event in three years in April. The Reader Writer Festival was fully booked for the author talks and panels.

Kathleen Allen (Sydney North Zone)

- Face to face Zone meeting will be held at Hornsby next week. This is the first face to face meeting in two years and everyone is keen to see the newly refurbished library.
- Northern Beaches farewellled Melanie Gurney late last year. The new manager, Maeva Masterson, will be attending the Zone meeting.
- Manly library has opened a new creative space. Repurposed and reconfigured the library spaces and ended up with an area of local studies stack in storage, made a community space which has been turned into a creative zone and so far, the community is loving the art space.
- Forestville library will be installing a book locker.

- North Sydney library has a change of manager, Rebecca Aukim is now the director in Customer Community and Kate Stewart is the library manager. The library is undergoing renovations on the ground floor, with new desks, lighting, and addressing damp issues following the extensive rain. There have been challenges with the timber shelving in the children's area attracting mould.
- Lane Cove is busy working towards the new St. Leonards library space. The opening has been delayed to November due to COVID-19 impacts.
- Ryde hosted Ellen and Andrea recently for an A&C visit.
- Gladesville library have opened a fire door to the car park and made it an entry into the library. This has created better connectivity to where people park for entry into the library, and this will be launching in the first week of June.
- Ryde library has received excellent attendance at face-to-face events such as the musical morning tea last week where 70 people attended. There has been an interesting mix of ages at these events particularly as they are targeted towards retiree groups but lots of mum and bubs have been attending.

Heather Davis (Sydney South Zone)

- Lots of libraries are talking about how they just starting to see things starting to return to normal levels.
- Also challenges around staffing, especially due to COVID-19. Libraries reported that they have had to close a branch just because there were not enough staff.
- Playing around with hybrid programming and recording this is a good way of reaching a broader audience. Library budgets are quite tight this year and next financial year, there's low creativity in what the content of our programs are because we do not have as much as usual to spend.
- Couple of libraries have launched library apps in the last six months.
- About to start a collection connect working group. This is a good opportunity to share knowledge, ideas and best practice around collections (physical and digital) and discuss procurement/consortia options.
- A couple of libraries are using the Indigenous Space's in Library Places tool kit. Georges River has launched a new collection using the guide.
- Library anniversaries
 - Paddington library had an event last weekend celebrating 130 years of library service. This library has been a joint operation with Woollahra and City of Sydney since 1994.
 - Randwick libraries celebrating 70 years library service over the next financial year, so the library is doing something in the next calendar year.
- Waverley Library were nominated for a local government award for code club programs.
- There has movement in staffing and many managers report difficulties filling senior roles. To counter the challenge of recruitment the Zone plan to share knowledge and look at different ways of staffing including swapping staff and spreading skills throughout the zone.

Paula Pfoeffler (Sydney West Zone)

- Replacing Vicki Edmunds who is currently at the ALIA Conference.
- Quite a few libraries in the zone have been successful with Public Library Infrastructure Grants this year.
- In western Sydney, there are opportunities with the WestInvest funding program. Councils are applying for funds for different library infrastructure builds. This program is a \$1.2 billion fund for community infrastructure, community transformation or infrastructure projects in western Sydney. There are 15 LGAs eligible, most were in the hard lockdown, currently in the process of developing business cases and writing grant applications. It will be amazing if any of the library projects are funded from this as it is a significant, once in a lifetime funding arrangement from the State Government. Libraries are also competing against open space and school infrastructure projects. It is great to see funding available for libraries outside of the State Library grants program.
- Fairfield and Cumberland libraries have joined the Dolly Parton Imagination Library.
- Blue Mountain's Springwood library was also successful for an infrastructure grant. They are undergoing their refurbishment. Blue Mountains were successful in getting a bushfire recovery fund grant to put RFID and book lockers throughout the Blue Mountains area.
- HJ Daley library in Campbelltown will need to relocate as the council has leased the land.
- Parramatta library is scheduled to open soon.

- The recent floods have had a massive impact on the libraries in the zone, not only on library buildings, but many staff live flood prone areas. It was a tough time in February.
- Penrith and Campbelltown library were shortlisted for local government professional awards. Great to see a lot of libraries nominated across the state for programs, a few of the COVID-19 efforts were also recognised.
- Guildford library in Cumberland was used as a location for the Netflix series starring Toni Collette called Pieces of Her, so if you watch it so you might see Guildford library.

Robert Knight (SW Zone)

- Southwest zone digital library will enter its third five-year agreement on the 3rd of July. The collection has 15,000 eBooks and eAudiobooks, and 3500 magazine titles. It commenced in 2011 when ebooks were quite new.
- Carina Clement or Michelle Field will be the new secretary for the zone.
- Have updated the South West zone strategic plan, changes focussed primarily on engagement and about supporting libraries across the zone. Trying to engage people from all levels of zone, to take messages back to the councils.
- I will be leaving the Riverina Regional libraries after almost 42 years on the 30th of June, taking 7 months long service leave and then retiring on 31st of January next year. I want to take this opportunity to thank the State Library for its wonderful leadership, and collaboration that brings the public library network together. As well as the library managers whose input makes New South Wales PLA a strong and cohesive association for all libraries no matter how big or small.

Apologies – Central East and Central West Zones

4.2 State Library Report

Cameron acknowledged Robert’s retirement from RRL and thanked him for his support and longstanding commitment to public libraries. Robert has been closely involved with the State Library and the public library network for decades and has served on both the Library Council of NSW and the Public Libraries Consultative Committee. The State Library wishes him all the very best for the future.

- The PLIG grants have been paid to successful councils. This is total of \$6M.
- Next financial year, the public library funding will increase to \$2.85 per capita. Total funding will increase from \$38.6M to \$40.4M
- The new member of the PLCC (Public Library Council Committee) is Nick Katris, Mayor of Georges River. He is an experienced councillor and will be replacing Lesley Furneaux-Cook as the LGNSW representative on PLCC.
- Many libraries have been contacted by Trove about fee increases. There are significant fee increases across the board and the State Library and the NSWPLA will be following up with the NLA shortly and aim to report to PLCC on 29th June.

Next Meeting – 2022 dates to be set

Date	TBC October 2022
Time	11:00AM - 1:00PM
Location	SLNSW and online via Teams