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ITEM:

SUBJECT: LIBRARIES STRATEGY 2019-2024 - KEY FINDINGS REPORT

AUTHOR: LIBRARY OPERATIONS MANAGER

DATE: 19 SEPTEMBER 2019

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This is a report concerning key findings of the Ipswich City Council ***Library Services Library Strategy 2019-2024*** Report, undertaken in late 2018 – early 2019 by an external consultant to inform forward planning of Library facilities. The report was supported by community engagement undertaken by the Ipswich City Council Community Research and Engagement team.

RECOMMENDATION/S

That the Interim Administrator of Ipswich City Council resolve:

That the contents of the report be received and noted.

RELATED PARTIES

ADVANCE IPSWICH THEME

Managing growth and delivering key infrastructure

IPSWICH LIBRARIES STRATEGY 2019-2024 – BACKGROUND

In March 2009, Ipswich City Council adopted the *Ipswich Library and Information Service Coping with Growth 2008-2026 Strategy* as the basis for forward planning of library facilities. In 2018 the Library Services Branch engaged an external consultant to review the Library strategy, producing the *Ipswich Libraries Strategy 2019-2024* document (Attachment 1). As part of the review, Ipswich City Council Community Research and Engagement team undertook community consultation. The *Libraries Strategy Review – Focus Group and Community Engagement Report* (Attachment 2) sought to identify community priorities regarding Library facilities and services.

Since the report was finalised, Council has progressed significant infrastructure projects and undergone a whole of organisation restructure which has resulted in substantive changes to the Library's operating model. Library Services have been combined with Council's Customer Services function to offer Ipswich residents and visitors an integrated approach for delivery of customer services from multiple locations including libraries.

This new operating model will impact significantly on forward planning for library facilities and for the delivery of the broader range of services at Libraries. The recommendations of the ***Ipswich Libraries Strategy 2019-2024*** will need to be viewed in the context of the new operational model. This report identifies the key findings of the strategy and community engagement which will inform facilities and services planning for libraries and customer services.

THE REVIEW

The external review was undertaken by AEC and took a broad-based view, including benchmarking of Ipswich Libraries against state and national standards and other Libraries.

The key project outcomes for the external review undertaken by AEC are:

- A financially sustainable and community focused Library Service delivery model for Ipswich City Council
- A facilities development framework and timeline that will support the preferred model into the future utilising a Signature Libraries methodology
- An Implementation / Transition Plan based on the recommended Operating Model.

The key outcome for the community consultation project was to identify community priorities pertaining to the planning of library facilities and services, based on an understanding of:

- Which libraries do participants use or not use?
- What do they use the Library for?
- Which library services do they most value, for themselves and the community at large?
- What barriers impact their use of the Library?

It is also clear from the results of the community consultation that many respondents are well aware of the trends and benefits offered at other library services, which shape expectations for existing and future facilities and services at Ipswich Libraries.

The strategy acknowledges that Ipswich Libraries has already begun to build a reputation nationally as innovators in the Library sector, who have responded to the current service challenges to prioritise customer-centred service initiatives. While the Library is growing as a trusted brand within the Ipswich community, there continues to be significant challenges and opportunities to position the library for the future exponential growth of the City.

The improvement and development opportunities identified in the broad-based **Ipswich Libraries Strategy 2019-2024** report and the findings of the community engagement revealed a number of congruencies of interest and expectations that fall into four key deliverables:

- Library Facilities
- Library Resources and Services
- Library Technology
- Library Staff

Underpinning the identification of key assets above, the community engagement revealed some deep expectations and desires for successful community living, which find their expression in part, in the library:

- Connectedness
- Inclusiveness
- Overcoming Barriers
- Lifelong Learning

Library Facilities

Key Finding – Library Floor space

Based on existing and projected populations for the key catchments in Ipswich, the strategy report has identified an existing and future under-provision of Library floor space based on benchmarks for public libraries as the key challenge to effective library service provision. This has emerged as the key challenge and determining factor for the delivery of appropriate and relevant services for the Ipswich community.

With the population of Ipswich expected to increase significantly between 2016-2036 (see Table 1), the existing and planned total floor space across Ipswich does not meet required minimum standards.

Table 1. Population Estimates by Catchment

Catchment	2017	2021	2026	2031	2036
CBD	89,110	94,012	104,689	116,028	129,949
Redbank	50,224	53,787	60,313	65,875	72,369
Springfield	49,586	57,267	77,116	98,956	123,733
Ripley	5,449	18,608	44,946	77,533	108,628
Rosewood	12,196	15,009	23,809	37,405	57,520

Source: 2017 ABS ERP

Current total floor space (approx. 6,843 m²) does not meet the required minimum standards by 28.5% based on existing population numbers, resulting in significantly lower library patronage. This under-provision will continue into the future, as even with the increased planned floor space for Ripley (3,000m²) there is still a 36.3% shortfall by 2021 and 78.2% shortfall by 2036 if no further expansion or replacement facilities are provided. (see Table 2 NOTE: Recent changes to infrastructure planning/design are required to inform the revised state of gross area allocation.).

Table 2. Assessment of Required Floor space Over Time

Location	Existing M ² 2019	Industry Minimum Standard 2019	Planned M ² 2021	Industry Minimum Standard 2021	Planned M ² 2036	Industry Standard 2036
Ipswich CBD	2,600	3,520	3,700	3,770	3,700	5,000
Springfield	2,000	2,080	2,000	2,430	2,000	4,500
Ripley ^(b)	-	370	-	1,300	3,000	4,000
Redbank Plaza ^(c)	415	-	415	-	415	-
Redbank Plains ^(c)	850**	-	850**	-	850**	-
Redbank ^(c)	-	2,110	-	2,280	-	3,000
Rosewood	978	840	978	1,050	978	3,000
TOTAL	6,843	8,920	7,943	10,830	10,943	19,500

Source: AEC

**Since this report was finalised, the Redbank Plains Library floorspace was reduced by half to accommodate the necessary Logistics Hub, the total space at Rosewood Library has increased, capacity at both Springfield Central and Rosewood have been impacted by the addition of the customer service offering.

Participants in the community consultation also expressed a concern with perceived infrastructure inequality, that investment has been unfairly distributed across Ipswich. Respondents believed that services to Springfield have come at the expense of services elsewhere, particularly for the rural areas (Rosewood and Walloon in particular). It should be noted that the consultation occurred prior to the confirmation and subsequent commencement of building of the Rosewood branch library.

Innovative options for delivering collections to community hubs like the proposed Library Pod at Karalee should not come at the expense of adequately proportioned library buildings.

Library facilities that are too small impact on key service deliverables. Customer feedback also indicates frustration with a lack of amenity in the areas below:

- Space for collections which are readily accessible, with adequate browsing and display space
- Safe, accessible meeting and learning spaces
- After-hours access to meeting and study spaces
- Defined quiet zones for study separated from general or noisier areas
- Accessibility for those with mobility issues
- Welcoming areas specifically designed for indigenous and other key target groups
- Programming spaces
- Amenities for young families, including secure pram parking and parenting rooms

Community consultation revealed an expectation that libraries act as a community hub or anchor, providing safe, neutral spaces where the community can meet and connect. The safety aspect of libraries is a recurring theme in the community feedback, with respondents identifying an infrastructure gap that can be filled by provision of affordable room resources at the libraries. There is also some appetite for 24/7 access to Library spaces.

Participants identified a number of other factors that influence their choice to use Ipswich Libraries, or which may attract them to other library services. Most people choose to visit a library based on the proximity to their home or work, with the following elements impacting their ongoing motivation to support a particular branch:

- Parking, including time limits. As most people (80%) drive to a library, parking emerged as a key area of interest
- Access to public transport
- Building design – pleasant, air-conditioned, comfortable and contemporary fitout
- Diverse spread of opening hours
- Meeting rooms and study spaces
- Children’s services and spaces
- Technology – internet, wifi, 24/7 access
- Collection – physical and e-collections
- Program of activities and events

Library membership levels at Ipswich Libraries are also low (18% NOTE: Active membership has increased from 18 to 25% since this evaluation as a result of the opening of Springfield Central Library and other changes, this growth is anticipated to continue with the addition of new branches in the immediate future.) compared to similar councils in Queensland and nationally (40+%). This means that there is currently less strain on the Library spaces than could otherwise be the case and is a future risk to Council.

Fit-for-purpose library facilities are essential in providing the services necessary to deliver on the strategy. Despite the increase in the availability and use of electronic resources, the requirement for physical library space is very strong, particularly for group learning, early childhood literacy sessions, quiet study and the continued popularity of the physical book.

The strategy identified that each catchment represents its own significant geographic community within the Ipswich local government area, and it is considered that the most appropriate operating and cost-effective model would be a staged development of a distributed ‘Signature Libraries’ facilities model. Under this model, each of the five facilities would be of a similar significant size, no smaller than 3,000m², and deliver core functional services to their geographic community, yet able to have their own ‘look and feel’ reflecting locality and community. A substantial library in each catchment would represent a more equitable distribution of infrastructure investment across the city.

Each major community catchment would have access to service levels similar to a traditional 'central' library (opening hours, study space, rich collections, current technology, tailored program of events and amenities such as parents' room and access to meeting/event spaces) but updated for current lifestyles. Adequate parking is essential.

Due to Ipswich Libraries' unique current situation of not inheriting a large network of small, inadequate branches, Ipswich is in a strong position to develop well-located and appropriately-sized facilities for the expected population.

A detailed facilities plan will need to be developed, aligned to and embedded into the rest of Council's planning and financial frameworks to achieve the Signature Libraries model. The plan will forecast and cost the need of facilities augmentation and replacement, including whole-of-life maintenance costs.

Interim solutions for a shortfall in library space will also need to be investigated.

Library Resources and Services

Key Finding – Collections

While the library collections, both physical and digital, form a key platform for the Library service and are identified as the primary reason customers use the Library, customer engagement revealed considerable dissatisfaction with the collection's size, layout, split between physical and digital, and range. While admirable work has been undertaken to merchandise and curate the collections, a history of low levels of spending and inadequate physical space to house, present and access the material has impacted on the size and quality of the collection.

Historically, expenditure per capita on library materials has been well below the national minimum recommended spending and compared to peers. Low levels of expenditure and available resources have resulted in low levels of service reach, participation and below average satisfaction as recorded in the user/non-user survey. Minimum expenditure was reached for the first time in five years in 2017-18 with the opening of the Springfield Central Library.

Based on the strategy report's analysis, the grant provided by the State government is insufficient on its own to meet the recommended acquisitions rate of 0.2 items per capita per annum to maintain the collection at a suitable size, and is not adequate to improve the size and quality of the collection.

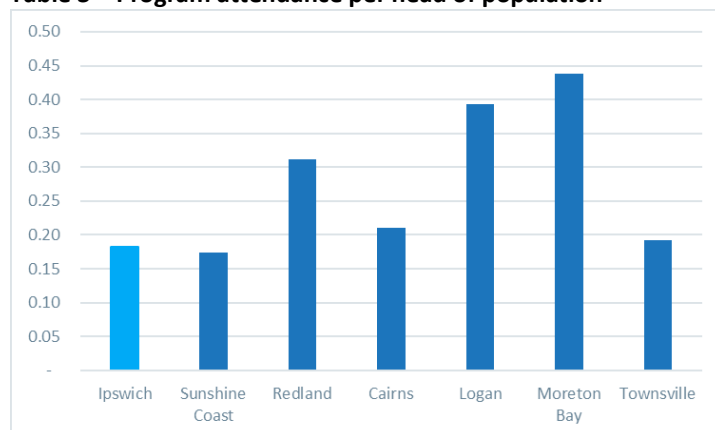
A Whole of Life Collection Plan is to be developed to forecast the cost of improving the collection over several years, in terms of stock numbers, age and quality in alignment to the built infrastructure.

Key Finding – Learning and Cultural Programs

Library programs focus mainly on literacies (reading, digital and other life skills) and access to and creation of information, stories and culture and support for building community connections and skills for life and work. The importance of the Ipswich Library's role in delivering on literacy outcomes was identified in both the strategy and through the community consultation.

The Library service has invested significant and appropriate resources, particularly staff (approximately 23% of total staff) into Public Programming and delivers over 1,200 events each year which is comparable to peer Library services. However, attendance figures have room for improvement as seen in the comparison with peers (Table 3). Again, the lack of library space across Ipswich is a key limiter in event participation and the learning and social outcomes in the future (Note: the introduction of new event spaces into Springfield Central Library, Rosewood Library and anticipated spaces at the new CBD Administration Building are anticipated to address this limitation).

Table 3 – Program attendance per head of population



Source: AEC

Respondents also highlighted an ongoing need for a more diverse and inclusive programming that provides targeted events and programs for all, including multicultural and differently abled. The strategy identified opportunities for the Library to develop stronger and more extensive alliances and partnerships to broaden the scope of programming and deliver on local priorities.

Library Technology

Key Finding: Technology

Traditionally, libraries have been at the forefront of providing access to emerging technologies and learning opportunities. Despite internet access becoming more affordable through mobile phones, there is still a need and demand for desktop PCs, laptops and peripherals such as scanners and printers in libraries to provide users with basic services.

Use of technology such as computers, Wi-Fi and printing/scanning is often one of the main reasons for library visits for seeking employment, completing inductions and accessing government services. Ipswich Libraries provides internet-enabled public access computers at 1.7 per 10,000 population (2017/18), which is below the Queensland recommended

standard of 4. Even with the opening of Springfield, the Library Service reports an increase to only 2.7 computers per 10,000 population.

Satisfaction with the quality of basic internet/computing facilities is notably low, with many respondents citing poor WiFi speeds as a disincentive to using the library.

In addition to the basic life skill enablers such as internet and computer access, Ipswich Libraries acts as the showcase for emerging technologies, such initiatives typically range from 'digital sandpits' and maker spaces where new technology is made available for people to use creatively and where interactive pop-up events raise awareness of and shape perception about new technologies that can be experienced and explored. The self-directed nature of the Ipswich Makerspaces combined with the provision of a specialist member of staff has resulted in a service and experience that is a leader not only in Queensland but in Australia.

The Library's online presence has also been the subject of some dissatisfaction with 70% of respondents saying that the website is difficult to navigate. Considerable effort and skilled development has been undertaken in the period since the review and consultation to rectify this. Ipswich Libraries introduced a new virtual library branch since this review occurred that is highly peer regarded, continuing to meet high community expectations requires an ongoing commitment to development and improvement to optimise engagement with library resources and services.

Internet and computing facilities are basic life-skill enablers and essential in lower socio-economic communities. Commitment to sustained investment into the quantity and quality of available computers, connectivity and the Library's online presence is an essential component of library service delivery.

To maintain the momentum of the Makerspaces, whole-of-life asset planning is required to ensure optimal maintenance, augmentation and replacement.

Library Staff

Key Finding – Staffing

In the community feedback from the 2018 survey 75.2% of respondents reported that the most important aspect of library service is 'helpful and informative staff'. The strategy review identified that Ipswich Libraries meets the National standards for staffing, with above-standard levels of qualified staff who are appropriately apportioned across programming, digital services and front-of-house duties. Community consultation demonstrated high levels of satisfaction with library staff who were seen as a vital resource who provide an important social interaction and connection for many people and forming the fabric of a welcoming environment. Responders indicated a desire for more staff presence in the libraries, and expressed high appreciation for the team members and their skills, including research assistance.

Respondents identified the library's role in providing trained and available staff to deliver trusted assistance in improving literacies – including print literacy and e-literacy, with ongoing assistance for the digitally disadvantaged identified, as a key desirable outcome.

The strategy acknowledged the Library's efforts to maximise the productivity and capacity of staff to be available to move into the higher-value customer-facing work through implementation of the following business improvement strategies:

- Continued optimisation of self-service technologies
- Increase program delivery through partners
- Reduce materials handling through automation
- Improved cooperative purchasing

The strategy identified the necessity of significant and sustained investment in the ongoing training and support of library staff, with strategies put in place to continue to build an energised high-performing team with a set of shared behaviours and service standards.

A workforce plan is to be developed, based on recommended FTE for estimated population growth, and aligned with and embedded into the rest of Council's planning and financial frameworks.

Ongoing and significant investment will continue to be made to support the training and development of library staff.

Other Considerations

Underpinning the practical strategies outlined above for the provision of library services to the Ipswich community is an identification of the citizen's desires in the City and the City's desires for its citizens. The community consultation allowed respondents to reflect on what is most valuable about library services. These are summarised below:

Connectedness and Inclusiveness

From a facilities perspective, Ipswich libraries are a key meeting place for the community, strengthening social networks and providing safe places to meet, access services, and be welcome no matter what the user's background. Libraries offer a neutral place where people can share, debate, learn or create, or be 'alone together'.

Ipswich Libraries also play a vital part in connecting people to the heritage and stories of the Ipswich community through collections and programming.

Libraries offer a unique opportunity for Council to connect with the community. Ipswich Libraries will undertake a targeted and sustained campaign to focus on doubling the Library's membership in the next five years. Council can benefit significantly from the increasing growth in membership which provides more opportunity for Council to engage with the public.

Responses from the community consultation highlighted the expectation that libraries are the hub in their communities and there is an element of 'ownership' of branches. This was clearly reflected in considerable push-back from the community about perceived lack of consultation and information about changes that have occurred, such as the change of service offering at Redbank Plains Library and the forthcoming CBD Library. A strong desire for more community inclusion in library planning was expressed by respondents and also identified in the strategy review as a key to delivering on community priorities.

Both the strategy and community consultation identified the Library as a key to promoting and supporting the diversity and individuality of all people, offering services and opportunities for multicultural users, for volunteers, for the aged and differently abled, as well as children, families, youth and the business community.

Overcoming Barriers

While the Library is growing as a trusted brand within the community, there is still considerable work to be undertaken to address some of the identified barriers to seamless and easy access to the Library and its services. Customers have identified barriers as various as:

- Parking
- Opening hours
- 24/7 Access
- Easy access to after-hours returns
- Distance – Rural disadvantage
- Literacy, including e-illiteracy

Innovations such as the Library Pod at Karalee are evidence of the Library's response to an identification that barriers to library access can be overcome by intersecting with customers where they are.

The Library has also been challenged by traditional library rules-based transactions that have created barriers to inclusive and easy use of the services. With the removal of library fines and the introduction of more user-friendly membership requirements, the Library is transitioning to a more customer-focussed experience of the Library. Thoughtful planning and design, committed staff and a focus on community outcomes are all essential elements to barrier-free library interactions.

Lifelong Learning

Providing learning and literacy-building opportunities for the community continues to be the main focus of Ipswich Libraries (including financial, technological, health literacies as well as traditional reading) and continues to be considered by customers as one of the library's most important functions. Ipswich Libraries maintains a strong focus on literacy as a foundational skill to allow people to thrive socially, economically and gain access to work.

Simply by improving literacy, the likelihood of individuals being reliant on state benefits reduces from 19% to 6% and increases the chances of being able to use a computer at work from 48% to 65%.

Making it Happen

Ipswich Libraries is at a critical moment. The strategy acknowledges that Ipswich Libraries is already employing innovation and good management practice to address the challenges of delivering a modern and appropriate Library service. In order to achieve the necessary outcomes for future service provision, the strategy has recommended that Ipswich Libraries seeks to further embed the libraries in other departments across Council to reduce the risk of missed opportunities and maximise the potential impact for the community. By advocating across Council, working with key managers and aligning library initiatives with Council priorities, the Library will grow its influence in and support for the Council.

LEGAL/POLICY BASIS

This report and its recommendations are consistent with the following legislative provisions:
Local Government Act 2009

RISK MANAGEMENT IMPLICATIONS

Learning and literacy continue to be at the core of library services. This focus is reflected nationally and internationally, aiming to reduce the risks from low literacy levels that often result in social isolation, drug-use, unemployment and crime that have flow-on impacts to the community (and to Council) in terms of cost and anti-social behaviour. Conversely, community members with good literacy skills are more likely to vote, smoke less, drink less, have better mental health, be better skilled and create a more flexible workforce.

Additionally, in this rapidly advancing technological age, literacy is an 'essential precursor to digital literacy' and also for digital engagement. As services such as banking, health, retail, education and communication become available only in digital format, there is a risk that many in the Ipswich community could be left behind, isolated and at risk of losing their role in and contribution to society.

It is Ipswich City Council's aim to continue developing its role in providing access to basic technology (internet access, eResources, PCs, laptops, scanners and tuition) to local communities. Those in employment with competent literacy levels may easily overlook those who do not have access to these basics. Just as important is providing these resources in a safe, non-threatening space with skilled staff to grow community confidence and capacity and prevent digital exclusion.

FINANCIAL/RESOURCE IMPLICATIONS

The following table provides a summary of the facilities and resources required to service the Ipswich community into the future as forecast by AEC Group. Estimates of annual staffing and operational expenditure have been calculated based on the forecast population multiplied by the National Standard and therefore represents the *minimum* levels of resourcing required. If future population levels differ and as technology formats/ needs change significantly, then resourcing levels would require adjustment.

Summary of Resourcing Requirements

2021	2026	2036
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Minimum number of total staff 78.9FTE • Minimum number of qualified staff 23.9FTE • Minimum operational budget (excluding collection) \$9.7million • Minimum collections budget \$1.3million 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Minimum number of total staff 102.6FTE • Minimum number of qualified staff 31.0FTE • Minimum operational budget (excluding collection) \$12.3million • Minimum collections budget \$1.8million 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Minimum number of total staff 162.7FTE • Minimum number of qualified staff 49.3FTE • Minimum operational budget (excluding collection) \$18.4million • Minimum collections budget \$2.2million

The strategy document provides a more detailed branch-by-branch Implementation and Transition Plan that identifies facilities and resources to service the Ipswich community into the future.

The strategy focus is outward to the community, firmly based on the needs of the region and builds on the developments and innovation already evident in the Library.

COMMUNITY AND OTHER CONSULTATION

As part of the review of the *Ipswich Library and Ipswich Service Coping with Growth 2008-2026 Strategy*, the Library engaged an external consultant to conduct a review of the strategy, which included community consultation undertaken by Ipswich City Council Community Research and Engagement team. The consultation included a city-wide survey and a series of 10 focus group sessions.

CONCLUSION

The *Ipswich Libraries Strategy 2019-2024* presents an ambitious but achievable plan for ensuring that library services meet the needs of the rapidly growing Ipswich community into the future. Early action will be undertaken in four key strategy areas, underpinned by strong planning and adequate funding to deliver on the expectations of the community for library services in Ipswich:

- Library Facilities
- Library Resources and Services
- Library Technology
- Library Staff

ATTACHMENTS AND CONFIDENTIAL BACKGROUND PAPERS

1.	Ipswich Libraries Strategy 2019-2024
2.	Libraries Strategy Review - Focus Groups Community Engagement Report

Cheryl Pye

LIBRARY OPERATIONS MANAGER

I concur with the recommendations contained in this report.

Sylvia Swalling

LIBRARIES AND CUSTOMER SERVICES MANAGER

I concur with the recommendations contained in this report.

Ben Pole

GENERAL MANAGER - COMMUNITY, CULTURAL AND ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

“Together, we proudly enhance the quality of life for our community”