



Te Rau Herenga O Aotearoa | Library and Information Association of New Zealand

CONSULTATION ON AUCKLAND COUNCIL DRAFT BUDGET 2023/2024

Te Rau Herenga o Aotearoa Library and Information Association of New Zealand Aotearoa (LIANZA) is the national organisation supporting institutions and professionals working in library and information services throughout Aotearoa New Zealand. Founded in 1910 the association serves and promotes the interests of the Aotearoa New Zealand library and information sector.

LIANZA is commenting on the [Annual Budget 2023/24 Consultation Document](#). We want to reinforce the value and essential service of public libraries in their local communities. LIANZA is concerned that the proposed Auckland Council budget will reduce local board activities including library services, at a time when many local communities are in need of additional support – not less.

We value the comment in the plan to “Ensuring our community centres and libraries meet the changing needs of our community...” (p.63). However we are concerned that proposed budget reductions will have a negative impact on libraries, their staff and most particularly, their ability to respond to the diverse needs local communities throughout the city.

We want Auckland Council to seriously consider the critical role that public libraries and qualified librarians play in community and economic wellbeing. Libraries are no longer defined by the number of physical books issued. They provide diverse support in response to the changing needs of their local communities. Libraries are vibrant centres of local activity and are an important hub for the community.

The role of libraries in Auckland communities

Libraries are not just a ‘nice to have’. Library services are essential to facilitate information literacy, promote reading for pleasure, provide community members with information, support literacy, reduce social isolation and play an important role in curating local heritage. Libraries are hubs within their communities where people come together from every walk of life, at every age, to learn, take part in activities, use technology, and connect with others.

People in Auckland are engaged in their libraries every day.

- Gaining digital access and building digital literacy
- Accessing trusted, independent sources of information
- Receiving support to access government, community and other services
- Learning about local issues, groups, and meeting community leaders
- Engaging in reading for pleasure

- Growing and improving literacy skills
- Gaining support to engage in the digital world
- Discovering local heritage
- Discovering new skills and ideas
- Using technology and learning new tools
- Accessing outreach services
- Participating in learning through reading, watching, and listening
- Connecting with others through programmes and activities.

Digital inclusion and equity are important elements of wellbeing. COVID lockdowns highlighted the impact of lack of access to digital devices and lack of digital skills on a person's health, learning and wellbeing. For many people in Auckland, their library provides essential digital access and support.

Libraries are often at the forefront of initiatives which reflect and respond to diverse groups in the community served, including support of Pacific Language Weeks, celebration of cultural festivals, storytimes offered in different languages, and world language collections in print and online. Libraries often employ staff from these diverse communities to help plan and deliver these programmes and services.

The impacts of recent climate events in Auckland have been severe and will continue to affect already vulnerable families and communities for months and years ahead. We know that the library service will play an essential role in alleviating individual stress and building community resilience for the future of the city.

The increasing demand for library services in Auckland

The demand for resources, programmes and events provided by Auckland Libraries continues to grow, showing the importance that libraries play in the lives of Aucklanders.

In 2017/18 13.34 million physical items including books were withdrawn from Auckland Libraries. This borrowing decreased over five years by 32% to 9.10 million in 2021/22 (Public Libraries New Zealand, 2022). It is important to note that this period of time included extensive lockdown periods during the COVID 19 pandemic, when people were not able to physically enter their library. However library staff developed innovative click and collect services to maintain access to books for users during this unprecedented time.

A broad range of digital services are consistently available from Auckland Libraries and recent years has shown an significant increase in demand for digital resources. In 2017/18 2.02 million e-issues were borrowed. This borrowing increased over five years by 97% to 3.98 million e-issues in 2021/22 (Auckland Libraries, 2023).

There was a huge increase in demand for eBooks and digital resources throughout New Zealand during lockdowns. In 2020, Auckland Libraries were one of only two library systems in the Southern Hemisphere to lend over 2 million eBooks. In 2021, this demand continued with over 3.5 million eBooks being borrowed by Aucklanders (Library Life, 2022).

Auckland Libraries provides eBook and audio book platforms, LinkedIn Learning, Press Reader, Ancestry.com, many databases and e-journals, Beamafilm, its own podcast service and YouTube

channel. These digital collections are provided for free and require specialist library skills to ensure they meet the needs and interests of diverse learners, communities and are accessible 24/7.

Digital services offered by libraries are heavily used and highly valued. Libraries are seen as places to get help with all aspects of the digital world, whether job seeking, setting up a device or responding to the census. Library staff often help people with their online life administration, meaning they can become privy to personal information and can be trusted to do so. This is a unique role. Libraries offer digital skills programmes, one-on-one or in groups, and thousands of people take advantage of these programmes because they feel confident to do so. They see libraries as safe digital spaces within an increasingly unsafe digital world.

Reduction in opening hours

Budget proposals by local boards in the [Annual Budget 2023/2024 Supporting Information for Consultation Document](#) include the reduction of opening hours in many libraries from seven to six days per week.

This proposal will mean Auckland may be the only city in New Zealand that will not have its central city library open seven days a week.

While a network approach will enable seven-day library services within local boards, we believe that this approach will have a negative impact on people who have less resources and ability to travel greater distances to visit their library service to access digital technology, engage in literacy and learning, and gain support from library staff. This reduces equity of access, increases the digital divide, limits access to the safe space of their library and will disproportionately impact Auckland's most vulnerable communities.

We stress that reducing access to the valued services and resources of local libraries, through reduced opening hours, will negatively impact the social and economic well-being of community members, particularly the most vulnerable.

The value of qualified library staff

In media reports it has been suggested that budget cuts may be achieved by replacing paid library professionals with volunteers. We note that replacing trained and qualified library staff with volunteers has not been proposed by any local boards.

Libraries provide a valuable service to so many people young and old across the city. We view using volunteers simply a recipe for shorter hours and a run-down in services. To deliver effective library services staffing levels must be sustainable and run by trained, experienced, and qualified professionals.

Librarians are professionals and are critical to providing high-quality information and resources their communities need. They are experts in information management, research, and technology, and are dedicated to helping people find the resources they need to succeed in education, work, and life. In public libraries, a wide range of skills are needed: from programme management and

communication to dealing with complex social situations and research and analysis skills. While volunteers are used in libraries, they cannot be a substitute for trained and qualified librarians and library assistants.

Auckland Libraries employs the equivalent of 850 FTE library staff. Approximately 10% of staff hold LIANZA professional registration, which is a requirement for senior and specialist roles. Professional registration assures their employer of the currency of their expert knowledge and professional competence. To gain professional registration, library professionals must hold a minimum of a bachelor's degree and many staff may hold post-graduate qualifications, with the requirement to revalidate their registration every three years.

Replacing trained and qualified librarians with volunteers would result in a decline in the level of service and support available in libraries as volunteers do not have the same level of expertise, training, and experience.

LIANZA is also concerned that budget reductions may particularly affect specialist library research services at a time when quality research is needed to counter misinformation and is essential to support key education curriculum priorities such as the New Zealand histories curriculum introduced this year.

Library staff across Auckland have played a key role in the Auckland Council emergency response, providing support to individuals impacted by recent floods. Their professional skills and community connections have played a key role in the Auckland Council response to communities in need.

References

Auckland Libraries data collection 2018-2023

Libraries and information services respond to COVID. (February, 2022). *Library Life* (489), 8

Public Libraries New Zealand (PLNZ) Data Collection 2018-2022