30 October 2026

Ms Megan Berghuis
Director
State Library of South Australia

Emailed: LibrariesStrategicPlan@sa.gov.au

Dear Megan

Libraries Board Strategic Plan

Thank you for the opportunity to contribute to the Libraries Board of South Australia's new Strategic Plan 2027-2032 (the Plan). I also appreciated our meeting on 20 October and the constructive discussion regarding the future of South Australia's public library network.

LGA welcomes the development of the Plan and recognises the important role of the Libraries Board in providing strategic leadership across the State Library, public libraries and School Community Libraries.

South Australia's public library network is a longstanding example of successful collaboration between State and Local Government. Through this collaboration, we provide an essential and highly valued community service that contributes to literacy, education, digital inclusion, social connection and equitable access to information and services across metropolitan, regional and remote communities.

The Discussion Paper which accompanies the consultation on the Plan provides an excellent summary of the value of libraries and the emerging trends, challenges and opportunities. LGA is committed to supporting these values through the new Plan.

Our comments focus principally on the partnership, governance and funding arrangements necessary to support the Plan's successful implementation, informed by feedback from our member councils.

A renewed State–local government partnership

The development of the Plan provides an opportunity to acknowledge the partnership underpinning South Australia's public library network and establish a stronger foundation for its future.

While the previous Collaboration Agreement between the Libraries Board and LGA has expired, as we discussed, LGA values our continuing engagement with the Libraries Board

and Public Library Services. We also acknowledge the State Government's continued financial contribution to the network in the absence of a new agreement.

A renewed, multi-year Collaboration Agreement would complement the Plan by establishing a clear framework for shared priorities, responsibilities, funding arrangements and governance.

Recommendation: LGA recommends the new Plan be developed as a co-design model based on engagement with LGA and library managers, including the Public Libraries Committee and Public Libraries SA (PLSA). The Plan's ambition should be supported by a new LGA-State Government Collaboration Agreement.

Governance

As you are aware, 85% of the funding for delivery of public libraries is from local government. The new Plan should embed this fundamental role in planning, governance and decision-making to ensure the needs of all partners are considered.

LGA recognises the statutory responsibilities of the Libraries Board and welcomes the consideration being given to strengthening governance and engagement across the network.

Effective governance should provide meaningful opportunities for local government and library managers to contribute to operational efficiencies, inform implementation and review network performance.

We also see value in greater transparency around the allocation and administration of state funding, including resources directed to PLS and shared services supporting the statewide network as distinct from the operations of the State Library.

Recommendation: LGA recommends the new Plan recognises the role of local government as an essential partner in the delivery of public libraries. Clear reporting on the allocation of funding, the costs of shared services and the resources available to support council-operated libraries is also recommended.

Library funding

LGA continues to advocate for a new funding agreement with the State Government that provides annual indexation and funding certainty.

Councils have advised LGA that increasing costs associated with staffing, collections, technology, facilities and service delivery are affecting their capacity to maintain existing services and respond to changing community needs.

Under the 2021 Collaboration Agreement, annual State Government funding was established at $20.701 million. This was subsequently reduced to approximately $20.1 million in 2024,

without consultation with local government, following the application of public sector efficiency dividends.

Restoring the original funding baseline would require approximately $600,000 annually.

Beyond this, the cost of introducing indexation over a new four-year agreement is approximately $4.58 million, based on annual Wages Price Index increases at 3.6%.

This represents a relatively modest investment when considered against the contribution public libraries already make to supporting the State Government's broader policy priorities.

For example, the government's $76 million *Kids Off Screens* initiative seeks to encourage children and families to engage in activities beyond digital devices. Public libraries already support this objective through access to books, storytelling, educational activities and welcoming community spaces.

Similarly, libraries directly support the Premier's Reading Challenge, the government's early childhood literacy agenda, including *Words Grow Minds*, and initiatives to improve digital inclusion and adult foundation skills. The statewide One Card network enables these benefits to reach communities across metropolitan, regional and remote South Australia.

It is an investment in established and trusted community infrastructure that contributes directly to the government's education, health, social inclusion and economic participation objectives.

Without a sustainable funding framework, there is a risk that the ambitions of the new Plan will place further pressure on resources and contribute to growing disparities in service provision.

We recognise that the negotiation of funding commitments sits beyond the direct scope of the Plan. However, the Plan should acknowledge the importance of sustainable funding to its successful implementation and avoid establishing additional expectations or service obligations without consideration of their financial implications.

Recommendation: Formalise a new multi-year Collaboration Agreement between LGA and the State Government to support the ambition of the Plan.

Distribution model review

The previous Collaboration Agreement included a commitment under clause 5.3 for the Libraries Board to review the methods of funding and resource allocation, including consultation with LGA and the local government sector.

I appreciated the update provided at our recent meeting and the Board's willingness to work closely with LGA as this review progresses. As discussed, we welcome the opportunity to

contribute to the review's scope, methodology and assessment of potential funding distribution scenarios.

Key considerations as part of this review should include the differing circumstances of metropolitan, regional and remote communities, including the costs of service delivery, population characteristics, geographic disadvantage, and the capacity of councils to contribute additional resources.

Recommendation: LGA recommends that the Plan's development take into consideration this review as part of implementation.

School Community Libraries

School Community Libraries (SCLs) also form a key part of the libraries network, ensuring equitable delivery of library services in the most remote parts of our State, as recognised in the Discussion Paper. As these libraries are staffed by Department for Education staff, but funded partly by local government, I will be interested to ensure these staff are closely involved in development of the Plan.

Recommendation: LGA recommends that development of the Plan includes specific engagement with library staff from SCLs and the Department for Education.

Collaboration with council library managers

The successful implementation of the Plan will depend on the knowledge, experience and commitment of those responsible for delivering public library services.

Council library managers, the Public Libraries Committee and PLSA have an important role in identifying emerging service needs, informing practical improvements and supporting innovation across the network.

Feedback received by LGA indicates that opportunities for library managers to contribute to strategic and operational decision-making could be strengthened.

I encourage the Libraries Board to adopt a collaborative approach to developing and implementing the Plan, with structured opportunities for sector input and ongoing engagement with library managers.

This should extend to reviewing existing administrative, reporting and acquittal requirements to ensure they are proportionate to the funding provided, avoid unnecessary duplication and allow library staff to focus resources on service delivery.

Recommendation: LGA recommends PLS works closely with library managers to seek a more streamlined engagement process to underpin delivery of the Plan.

Next steps

LGA is committed to working constructively with the Libraries Board and the State Government to support a strong and sustainable future for South Australia's public libraries.

I would welcome continued regular engagement as the Plan is developed, including the opportunity to review its proposed strategic priorities and implementation arrangements before finalisation.

LGA will continue to progress discussions on a new State–local government agreement to ensure the Plan can be delivered from a strong foundation.

Thank you again for the opportunity to contribute.

Yours sincerely



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