

Item No: R4 Recommendation to Council
Subject: **WATSONS BAY LIBRARY - ACCESS HOURS PROJECT**

Author: Jody Rodas, Manager Woollahra Libraries
Approver: Patricia Occelli, Director Community & Customer Experience
File No: 24/47070
Purpose of the Report: To seek support for installation of equipment that will allow community access to Watsons Bay Library during unstaffed times.
Alignment to Delivery Program: Strategy 1.1: Provide, promote and facilitate a range of community projects, programs and events that support an inclusive, thriving and sustainable community.

Recommendation:

THAT Council:

- A. Note the results of the community engagement carried out from 5 November 2024 - 11 December 2024 to implement community access hours at Watsons Bay Library in accordance with the Special Rates Variation funding granted.
- B. Agree for staff to proceed with the installation of equipment to enable extended community access to Watsons Bay Library during non-staffed times for a further 19 hours per week within the framework of the current development consent.
- C. Request a report be brought to Council following the operational trial between the period June 2023 – December 2023, to consider any further need for extension of community access hours beyond those proposed in this report.

Executive Summary:

Watsons Bay Library currently operates 29 hours per week across Monday to Friday. Following a Councillor briefing on 16 October 2023, Woollahra Libraries undertook a period of public consultation with Watsons Bay Library's neighbours, members, residents and other stakeholders between 5 November 2023 – 11 December 2023 to test the enthusiasm for additional community access hours outside current staffed times. Feedback indicated that while staff were greatly valued, many respondents would appreciate the opportunity to access the Library at different times, particularly on the weekend and weekday mornings.

After considering the feedback gathered through the consultation, it is proposed to offer an extended service to the community for an additional 19 hours per week, including time on a Saturday. This will complement the 29 hours of staffed time that is currently offered and bring the total opening hours for Watsons Bay Library to 48 hours per week. The maximum amount of time that the Library is able to operate under the 2009 development consent.

It is anticipated that after a six-month trial period at the end of 2024, a review will be undertaken to ascertain whether a change to the DA is required to enable further expansion of accessible hours.

Discussion:

Watsons Bay Library is a well-loved local community facility recording 58,762 visits and 21,576 physical loans in 22/23. It is currently open and staffed by two team members who provide face-to-face customer service for 29 hours per week with hours varying from day to day:

Monday and Friday 2.00pm – 5.00pm
Tuesday and Thursday 9.30am – 5.00pm
Wednesday 12.00 noon – 7pm
Closed Saturday and Sunday.

This Library moved to its current location from Dunbar House in 2009 with its current DA allowing for operation for 48 hours per week between:

Monday to Friday 9.00am and 7.00pm
Saturday 10.00am to 4.00pm.

The State Library's *Living Learning Libraries 7th ed. (2020)*, objective on Opening Hours is for a 'Library to be open at times which enable the community to make the most effective use of the library service and to ensure that the library's resources and services are as widely available as possible'. With the limited hours currently on offer at Watsons Bay, this guideline is not being met.

Consultation for the Library Strategic Plan during 2019 and subsequent annual Library satisfaction surveys indicated that the community is interested in attending Watson's Bay Library outside of current operating hours. Anecdotally Library staff are aware that the irregular hours cause confusion amongst library customers who have reported trying to visit during closed periods. While there is no capacity within Woollahra Libraries salaries budget to increase the number of staff hours on site at Watsons Bay each week, a project to provide access to this library's space and collection during times without staff presence was identified and subsequently funded as part of the Special Rates Variation. This project is also the Libraries nominated 23/24 Customer Experience (CX) Design deliverable.

Community consultation was held between 5 November 2023 - 11 December 2023 and included the following:

- Postal notification to neighbours
- 2 community pop-ups at Watsons Bay shops
- Survey on Council's Your Say platform. The survey was also made available in paper form at all Libraries.
- Ad-hoc conversations with library members at Watsons Bay Library.

Altogether, 50 responses were received from the Community indicating positive support for the extension of the opening hours. Analysis of the Community Consultation can be found at Appendix 1.

Extension of opening hours outside of current operations is possible through the installation of technology infrastructure so that approved library members will have access to the facility while unstaffed. As many library operations are self-service, this type of access is something the Library sector has successfully implemented at other services across NSW and interstate. Similar access models in libraries have been operating successfully at Lambton (Newcastle), Harrington (Mid Coast), and Forestville (Northern Beaches) for over twelve months. After completing positively received trial periods without incident, all three of these libraries have implemented unstaffed hours on a permanent basis. These libraries are all small branch libraries similar to Watsons Bay, with Lambton also being contained in a heritage building.

Two quotes have been sought from specialist library suppliers to install equipment to enable unstaffed access to occur and this is able to be delivered through the available budget.

Options:

Council may resolve in line with the recommendation/s as included in this report or, Council may choose to resolve in some other manner.

Community Engagement and / or Internal Consultation:

Internal Consultation

Several key staff have been consulted in the development phase of this project.

- Library staff, including staff based at Watsons Bay Library
- Manager, Information and Digital Transformation
- ICT Coordinator
- Team Leader, Heritage
- Manager, Development Assessment
- Building Services Co-ordinator
- Building Facilities and Projects Officer
- Community and Engagement Co-ordinator
- Health, Safety and Injury Management Co-ordinator

External Consultation

Community consultation was held between 5 November 2023 – 11 December 2023 and included the following:

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Altogether, 50 responses were received from the Community.

Policy Implications:

There are no policy implications as a result of this report.

Financial Implications:

This project was identified as part of the Special Rates Variation with \$30,000 allocated for the installation of infrastructure.

Woollahra Libraries has been in regular contact with two specialist Library suppliers, who offer these solutions and who have provided quotations to carry out the work. The preferred provider quote is within the amount allocated for the project.

Ongoing, additional security will be required to ensure the building is vacated and locked at closing. Approximately \$9,000p.a has been included in the Library's recurrent contracts budget for this purpose.

Resourcing Implications:

Resources for this project are allocated through existing staffing. The Responsible Officer for delivery of this project is Systems and Business Team Leader, supported by Library Resource Management Coordinator and Manager, Woollahra Libraries. The wider project team consists of Library IT Staff with additional advice and support provided by Council's ICT and Property and Project teams.

Conclusion:

A period of Community Engagement has confirmed community support and interest in accessing Watsons Bay Library outside of current operating hours. Engagement shows that there is support for an unstaffed access model that will give the community the opportunity to utilise the Library for an additional 19 hours across the week including Saturdays.

Funding for this project was considered as part of the Special Rates Variation and allows for installation of infrastructure later this year. Appropriate procedures and marketing will be in place for a launch so that a proposed trial of the system can proceed with feedback gathered after six months. Following this a further report will be prepared for Council which will evaluate its success and consider any requirement for further expansion beyond the current DA.

Attachments

1. Watsons Bay Library - Access hours project. Analysis of Community Consultation