

Our Ref: LD/gc

20 August, 2021

Jane Grace
Manager, Library and Social Development
Kingston City Council
PO Box 1000
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By your side

Via email: jane.grace@kingston.vic.gov.au

Dear Jane,

RE: LIBRARY REFURBISHMENT AND OTHER CONCERNS

I have been made aware of several outstanding concerns relating to the refurbishment of Parkdale and Cheltenham Libraries. It is my understanding that there have been previous attempts from delegates to address these concerns. Unfortunately, these attempts have not resulted in Kingston council addressing these matters. Following a round of member meetings and surveys, ASU members are still concerned with the safety and practicality of the refurbishment. As such I am writing to address these matters in a collaborative way.

I have outlined below the key areas of concern, not all related to the refurbishment, and provided possible options as a way forward to resolve these issues.

It is important to note that if adequate consultation had taken place prior to the refurbishment then most, if not all these concerns, may have been avoided. Members feel most aggrieved by the lack of consultation and input into the changes. This is further exacerbated by Council's disregard for the repeated concerns raised since working within the new space.

- 1. Carpet:** The new carpet is thinner, with little to no padding underlay. Staff are standing for long periods of time and as result have raised concerns with back/leg pain. This is further worsened by the removal of the circulation and information desk and replacement with small pods.

Solution: Replacement of the carpet tiles, or installing high density underlay, in the returns areas and around pods would be ideal scenarios. However, if this is not feasible, then a relatively affordable solution is the use of anti-fatigue standing mats.

- 2. Chute and Crates:** At Cheltenham branch the current location of the chute is quite a distance from the returns terminal and a concern in terms of manual handling. Further to this the crates are merely placed on the ground. There is concern regarding unnecessary double handling of books and the increased risk of injury with continual bending and lifting. The crates also pose a tripping hazard for both staff and patrons who, in the absence of barriers, have frequently entered the area.

Solution: I understand that new equipment to resolve this has been ordered, can you please confirm when this is due to arrive? In the interim period, especially given the lengthy delays in this being installed a suitable workaround could be to locate the returns terminal closer to the chute and place the crates on a low table. Cordoning off of this area could be done via retractable tensa barriers.

By your side

3. **Pods:** I understand that Council have advised that these pods meet the Australian standards, however the issue with them is that they are not fit for purpose. They
- provide limited space for books to be placed on.
 - do not allow for leg space if using a stool.
 - are awkward if the patron wants to sit and the staff member must be standing for screen and keyboard access.
 - create a safety concern with patrons able to come right next to us. The previous information desk allowed a buffer between the customer and staff member if required.
 - allow customers to view information on the screen when coming up behind us.
 - give a sense that we are a hurry or unable to chat, due to the standing design.
 - do not have adequate seating so not encouraging conducive interaction.

Solution: Replacement of these pods with a more suitable desk, which allows for enough desk space and chairs to sit comfortably underneath. Members have also sought to reintroduce an information desk space. Libraries are a community service where meaningful interaction with the community should be fostered and the current setup discourages this.

4. **Staff Vacancies:** Libraries are functioning with a large number of vacancies and filling of these taking a considerable period of time.

Solution: An audit to be undertaken of the EFT across the branches, which identifies the vacant positions and recruitment of those to occur, if they are currently not advertised for. Furthermore, a commitment from management that positions left vacant will be filled in a timely manner; for example, three months.

5. **First aid Representative information:** There is currently no information in staff rooms of staff that are trained in first aid; this historically was presented. Additionally, staff have not received first aid training within the last 5 years.

Solution: An updated list of first aid trained staff to be posted in all branches and all staff to be informed. General first aid training to be completed by all staff. Request that Emergency life support training to be offered to all librarians, and other interested staff.

6. **Diminishing staff morale:** It was concerning to hear multiple accounts from members advising that workplace morale is low and a strong sentiment of not feeling valued or heard. My assessment of the situation is that the refurbishment process undertaken has not only negatively impacted the capacity of staff to carry out their roles but has fractured the relationship with the workforce.

Solution: Council rectify the issues raised, and in future be more inclusive, consultative and transparent. Ensure staff input for any future refurbishments and that input is actively considered.

Members seek that not only the above concerns are rectified but also that these same mistakes are not made at other branches. Adequate consultation is key to ensuring that the knowledge and information held by those that work in the space day in, day out are considered. We understand that not all items may be achievable. However, informing and discussion with the workforce, regarding what's achievable and what isn't and why, is critical.



By your side

There is a considerable amount of information, and I am more than happy to organise a meeting to go through these points in further detail. As mentioned above I would like to find a collaborative way to address these matters.

Please feel free to contact me on 0400 986 745 or via email ldipietrantonio@asuvictas.com.au .

Yours sincerely,

LORRAINE DI PIETRANTONIO
ASU ORGANISER

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ASU Delegates