

Response to question on notice

Questions on Notice Paper No 14

5 December 2025

Question No. 742

Mr Peter CAIN MLA: To ask the Minister for City and Government Services -

1. Can the Minister advise why book transfers between ACT library branches are taking significantly longer than they have in previous years, and what actions are being taken to improve transfer times.
2. How many library items currently listed as “on order” have exceeded the expected delivery or processing timeframe.
3. What is the cause of delays in ordered books arriving and becoming available to borrowers.
4. Why are “on order” notifications for some items disappearing without explanation.
5. What criteria does Libraries ACT use to determine which new and popular books are purchased and why are some high-demand titles no longer being stocked.
6. What processes are in place to assess and repair damaged children’s books and are there current resource or staffing limitations affecting timely maintenance.
7. Has funding for Libraries ACT increased, decreased or remained unchanged over the past three financial years (adjusted for inflation).
8. Is the current funding allocation sufficient to maintain previous service levels, including collection updates, repairs, and timely book transfers.
9. What additional funding, if any, will the Government consider restoring service quality.
10. How does the Directorate monitor service quality across library branches, and when was the most recent assessment of service standards completed.

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TARA CHEYNE MLA - The answer to the Member's question is as follows:

1. Libraries ACT is not aware of any substantial increase in the time that it is taking for reserved books to be relocated to alternate branches for pickup. In addition to branch staff, Libraries ACT employs three fulltime courier drivers that support interbranch transfers of reservations as well as supporting the ACT Home Library Service.

Delays in transfers can occur where books are unable to be located immediately within a branch such as where they may have been mislaid - however this is rare. In these instances, staff will undertake shelf reading activities to locate the book in branch. Where members of the public are concerned about the timeliness of their reservation, they can speak to staff in branch or call Libraries ACT to follow up.

Over 348,000 reservations have been completed by Libraries ACT to date in 2025.

2. Libraries ACT is not experiencing delays with expected delivery or processing times. New publications currently take an average of 34 days from the date that they are ordered to when Libraries ACT receives the books in branches ready to be put on shelves.

Libraries ACT works with suppliers to be able to order titles up to three months prior to the publication date. Libraries ACT makes titles visible online in this time period (prior to publishing) to allow members to review and place reservations. This process assists the collections team to gauge interest and order additional copies where required. There are currently almost 900 such titles on the Libraries ACT website.

3. Libraries ACT maintains contracts with suppliers to ensure the supply of new publications to its branches. Libraries ACT has not experienced delays in the provision and supply of new books to our libraries. New publications currently take an average of 34 days from the date that they are ordered to when Libraries ACT receives the books in branches ready to be put on shelves.

In addition to normal purchasing, Libraries ACT accepts requests from members to purchase specific titles that they wish to read. These customer purchase requests are received, assessed and books are ordered by the Libraries Collections team. Due to the increasing popularity of this service, the budget allocated to this aspect of the collection for the 24/25 financial year was exhausted in April 2025. At this time, the team ceased processing these requests until the new financial year.

The Libraries ACT Collections team aims to utilise the budget allocation to best service the whole ACT community and its interests. Customer purchase requests typically service more specific and niche topics that do not generally attract the same kind of readership as other publications which is why the budget allocation was adhered to.

All outstanding customer purchase requests have now been actioned with these titles generally being received from suppliers, where available, within the same timeframes as the wider collection.

Libraries ACT continues to review its collection and budget allocation to best serve the interests of the whole of the ACT community.

4. Libraries ACT may remove titles from the website for a few reasons - such as when items are not available due to publishing delays or cancellations or where orders need to be re-ordered from a different supplier or under a separate contract.

If members are interested in particular titles, they can contact Libraries ACT for assistance or complete a customer purchase request.

5. The criteria used to determine which books to purchase is based on a combination of data, community feedback, industry information and staff knowledge. More specifically purchases can be based on:

- Past loans and reservations data to build our standing orders for popular authors, series, topics, subjects and themes.
- Specialist suppliers with industry-expertise and information. Publishers announce their pre-publication list 3 months in advance to our suppliers, with information on titles and authors, with additional insights.
- Media, social media and book reviews and matching this information with what we know have been popular/high demand previously, i.e. Canberra community reading trends to build our supplier profiles.
- Collaboration with our Outreach staff and community input via enquiries, we purchase books and other items to meet the needs and expectations of our target communities.

Popular titles are also purchased in dyslexia-friendly, large print and audiobook formats together with digital resources such as eBooks and eAudiobooks.

Libraries ACT works to ensure there are adequate copies of high demand titles to avoid extended wait times for reservations. Where it is identified that particular titles are continuing to be borrowed and reservation lists and wait times increase, Libraries may seek to purchase additional copies where they are available. Within the collection there is a balance to be struck between the popularity of a title at a point in time, the cost of procuring additional copies, the physical space in our libraries and the likelihood that the title will remain as popular over the life of the book.

Popular titles are also affected by spoilage and can be very well-used leading to increased deterioration to the point the book must be recycled. Libraries ACT continues to review its collection and budget allocation to best serve the interests of the whole of the ACT community.

6. Libraries ACT staff do minimal repairs to damaged books such as repairing folded corners of a book cover or slightly torn pages. Returned items are assessed for damage and/or deterioration. Items with light damage such as dog ears, bent pages, peeling covers or light wear and tear, may be considered for remediation.

Items that are soiled or have unacceptable damage such as ripped pages, water damage, bite marks or excessive wear and tear, will have their records status amended noting the condition of the item/s and be set aside awaiting approval to discard.

Libraries ACT controlled recurring payments CRP payments have grown by indexation however have been adjusted for whole of government savings and expenditure reforms. The capital budget which funds Library collections has remained the same with any unused funding able to be rolled over between years.

Libraries ACT transition into City and Environment Directorate (CED) and Access Canberra as a part of Machinery of Government changes will deliver further corporate support and efficiencies. In addition, the alignment of ACT Libraries with other customer facing services within Access Canberra will enable better collaboration and support for ACT Libraries.

7. Libraries ACT continues to review its collection and budget allocation to best serve the interests of the ACT community. Libraries ACT transition into City and Environment Directorate (CED) and Access Canberra as a part of Machinery of Government changes will deliver further corporate support and efficiencies. In addition, the alignment of ACT Libraries with other customer facing services within Access Canberra will enable better collaboration and support for ACT Libraries.

8. Libraries ACT continues to deliver high quality services for the ACT community. Significant time and investment have been made into Libraries ACT to complete the Independent Working Group Report into Libraries ACT which made several recommendations. These recommendations are being actively progressed to improve Libraries ACT for staff and the ACT community alike.
9. Libraries ACT has a range of Accountability Indicators that are published within the ACT Budget. These indicators are reflective of the APLA-ALIA Standards and Guidelines for Australian Public Libraries. Customer Satisfaction with library services is one of these indicators and is measured from responses to an annual survey. The most recent survey report came out in May 2025 with 91% of customers surveyed being satisfied with library services.

Approved for circulation to the Member and incorporation into Hansard.


Tara Cheyne MLA
Minister for City and Government Services

Date: 16/12/25

This response required 23hrs 45mins to complete, at an approximate cost of \$2,439.97.