

BARNSELY METROPOLITAN BOROUGH COUNCIL

This matter is Key Decision within the Council's definition and has been included in the relevant Forward Plan

REPORT OF THE EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR OF COMMUNITIES TO CABINET ON WEDNESDAY 29TH MAY 2019

REMOVAL OF LIBRARY FINES AND RESERVATION CHARGES

1. PURPOSE OF REPORT

- 1.1 To consider proposed changes to library fees and charges in 2019-20 and abolish all fines and reservation charges for library customers from 1st July 2019 to remove barriers to accessing library services and encourage previous library customers to return and attract new customers. It is also proposed to waive all outstanding library fines and replacement charges for items not returned.

2. RECOMMENDATIONS

- 2.1 **To cease charging library fines for the late return of items with effect from 1st July 2019. Charges for lost or damaged items would be retained. Replacement charges for items borrowed after 1st July 2019 and not returned would also apply.**
- 2.2 **To approve the deletion of historic fines, replacement charges and reservation charges on customer records prior to 1st July 2019.**
- 2.3 **To cease charging to reserve items already in stock or on order for Barnsley's libraries. Request and inter-library loan charges for items not currently in stock would be retained.**
- 2.4 **A further report to be presented to Cabinet in 12 months to show the impact of the changes and review the decision.**

3. INTRODUCTION

- 3.1 Historically, public libraries have always fined for the late return of items which is seen as a deterrent to keeping an item beyond the loan period and provides a source of income. The council already makes an exception for children's material as it is recognised that fines are a barrier to parents encouraging their children to join the library or continue using it.
- 3.2 The recent Libraries Review noted that Barnsley's libraries have seen a 31% decline in book borrowing between 2012-13 and 2017-18. The Library Strategy

2019-2022 sets out the aspiration to create vibrant community and digital hubs that are relevant to people of all ages.

- 3.3 In Barnsley, fines are charged at a rate of 10p per book per day to a maximum of £5.20 per item. This figure has remained static for many years as an increase in the fine rate will undoubtedly have a further negative impact on the use of our libraries, which is counter to our aspirations laid out in the Libraries Strategy, particularly in relation to deprived areas and marginalised user groups who benefit most from access to library services.
- 3.4 Recently public libraries in the UK have been questioning the usefulness of library fines as they do not appear to act as a successful deterrent to keeping items beyond the loan period. Customers often keep the book as they can no longer afford the fine which means the Service and other customers lose access to that stock, with an additional cost to replace the item. There is also a perpetual cycle of losing existing customers as their membership is suspended when the amount owing exceeds £5.00.
- 3.5 This impacts their ability to use the public access computers and is a further barrier to the council's channel shift ambition. Customers without their own internet access are more likely to be from deprived communities. If they no longer use the library due to fines they are less likely to visit or change the way they access council services.
- 3.6 Similarly fines are a barrier to encouraging new customers to use the library, especially those on low incomes, older people and socially isolated who benefit not only from access to the books but also from using the library as a community hub, attending groups and activities and generally meeting people. Fines can therefore limit the potential of libraries to support communities, enrich lives and deliver the Library Strategy.

4. PROPOSAL AND JUSTIFICATION

- 4.1 It is proposed to remove all fines for the late return of items borrowed from Barnsley libraries. In the UK there is now a growing debate on the value of fines in modern libraries with several local authorities, e.g. Rutland, Trafford, Portsmouth, Halton, Kirklees and Blackpool taking the decision to remove them. Research from Australia and the USA has demonstrated no increase in the number of overdue items and in some cases more items are now returned on time. Evidence has also shown an increase in the number of families and groups subject to multiple deprivations using libraries.
- 4.2 In the last 3 years income from library fines has steadily declined, reducing from £14.2k in 2016/17 to an anticipated outturn of £11.5k for 2018/19. This is considered a small income stream to absorb compared to the potential benefit to existing and future customers using the Service. Further details are contained within Section 7 – Financial Implications.
- 4.3 The Library Management System has the capability to send email reminders to customers before items are due back at no cost to the Service. This would encourage customers to return their items on time and would be an improved service for customers. The current income target has discouraged the introduction

of this facility to date as it has the potential to reduce further the Service's ability to achieve the income target, but with the removal of fines it becomes a positive improvement.

- 4.4 Equally the Library Management System will alert library staff if someone has items they have not returned on time and prevent those customers from borrowing further items without staff intervention.
- 4.5 Libraries currently make reservation and requests/inter-library loan charges for customers wishing to reserve an item on loan to another customer or to obtain a copy from another library outside the Authority. Reservations on items in stock or on order in Barnsley Libraries are charged at 55p per item (30p for Over 60's and Barnsley Leisure Card concessions).
- 4.6 Currently if a customer visits the Central Library and asks for a book from stock in non-public areas a member of staff will retrieve the book for them at no charge. A customer in a community library requiring the same book will need to place a reservation and incur the reservation charge. Items are then delivered to individual libraries by the regular service used to circulate new and requested items.
- 4.7 With the opening of the Library@TheLightbox staff will no longer be able to retrieve books as this stock will no longer be on site. Therefore rather than introduce a charge for Lightbox customers in line with the community libraries, it is proposed to remove the reservation charge for everyone. The potential benefit in addition to an equitable service is the potential for an increase in reservations, book issues and increased use of the stock and therefore value for money.
- 4.8 In the last 3 years income from reservations and inter-library loan requests has been marginal with £3.1k being expected for the year 2018/19.
- 4.9 Charges for the loss or damage of books and for requesting items not currently in stock will remain at the current level (80p for not in stock; PLUS £2.40 from another UK Library/ £3.95 from British Lending Library).
- 4.10 From 1st July 2019 customers will no longer incur library fines, but they will still be liable for the replacement cost of any items they fail to return.
- 4.11 Removal of fines will also significantly reduce administration in the service and allow our workforce to concentrate on engaging with users of the service. An indication of the time saved equates to approximately 6 hours per week across the library network from reduced cash handling, banking and distribution of overdue letters. There is also a financial saving on reduced printing and postage.

5. CONSIDERATION OF ALTERNATIVE APPROACHES

- 5.1 In relation to book reservation charges, there is an option to apply the reservation charge to all customers requiring a book from the stock. It is anticipated that this would result in a significantly higher level of complaints from customers who have previously used the Central Library compared to the loss of income and positive impact from removing the charge for everyone.

- 5.2 The removal of fines could be introduced for a trial period only and the impact monitored. This would entail additional work for staff to introduce new monitoring systems to evaluate when items are returned, produce reports and bring these back to Cabinet for a final decision or extension to the pilot. Research has already been undertaken in other Authorities and there is no reason to suppose that the patterns of behaviour and benefits identified would be any different in Barnsley.
- 5.3 However, it is recognised that the proposed changes should be monitored over the first 12 months and a further report presented to Cabinet to show the impact and provide an option to review the decision.
- 5.4 Library fines could remain at their existing level, but the opportunity to introduce a change with the potential to positively impact declining library usage would be lost.

6. IMPLICATIONS FOR LOCAL PEOPLE/SERVICE USERS

- 6.1 There are various benefits for customers:
- Removal of financial barriers to using libraries – future and historic
 - Improved access to library and council services in relation to literacy, digital, learning, health & wellbeing
 - No barriers to using public access computers to access services online
 - Reduced social isolation
 - Reduced fear from fines, stigma and embarrassment
 - Equity for all customers and types of books (there are no fines on e-books)
 - Conscientious customers who pay fines are no longer penalised
 - Improved choice of books as items are not kept overdue for long periods

7. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

- 7.1 Consultations have taken place with representatives of the Service Director Finance (S151 Officer).
- 7.2 The Appendix A (attached to this report shows the detail of the financial implications of removing library fines and reservations charges.
- 7.3 The table below provides a summary of the Fines and Revenue Income achieved over the last three years by the Libraries.
- 7.4 Whilst removal of these charges is likely to result in a loss of income of around £15k per annum, this will be managed via budget realignment this being possible due to the cost efficiencies created through the recent reconfiguration of the library service therefore their removal is considered totally manageable from a financial perspective.
- 7.5 It is also worth noting that removal of fines and reservations will provide a small cost reduction in printing and postage costs and also a staff time saving of 6 hours per week in terms of the administration of fines (Paragraph 4.11 refers) enabling staff to be deployed effectively elsewhere.

7.6

Revenue Effects	<u>Actual</u> 2016/17	<u>Actual</u> 2017/18	<u>Actual</u> 2018/19	<u>Budget</u> 2019/20
	£	£	£	
Fines Income t Reservations Income	14,220	13,504	11,420	11,500
	3,393	3,593	3,156	3,500
	17,613	17,097	14,576	15,000

8. EMPLOYEE IMPLICATIONS

8.1 There are no implications in relation to the number of staff employed in the Service. However, by reducing administration associated with cash handling and financial routines staff will be able to further assist customers in need of support, especially in terms of support to access digital services. Staff will no longer be forced to exclude users as a result of outstanding fines which will avoid resulting conflict and aid our aspiration to support vulnerable members of our communities.

9. LEGAL IMPLICATIONS

9.1 The recommendations in this report are consistent with the general statutory duty of the Council under section 7 of the Public Libraries and Museums Act 1964 to provide a comprehensive and efficient library service for all persons who wish to make use of it.

10. CUSTOMER AND DIGITAL IMPLICATIONS

10.1 There are potentially positive benefits in relation to reducing library telephone calls to the Contact centre. Currently a significant proportion of calls are in relation to renewing library books. Whilst the facility to renew items online has been available for several years, many customers still prefer to telephone, especially if they cannot visit the library and have concerns about incurring fines.

10.2 The fear of incurring fines will be removed so there will not be the urgency to telephone to renew items. Library staff will have more time to show people how to renew their items online and if the Library Management System issues a reminder email before the items are due then the customer will have more notice to plan when and how to renew or return their items.

10.3 The Library Management System will need adjustments making to the system parameters to ensure fines and reservation charges are no longer charged, but this is within the control of system users within Customer Services.

10.4 An additional piece of work will be needed to remove historic fines from library accounts and also delete and anonymise accounts that have been inactive in order to comply with GDPR. Again, this is within the control of Customer Services staff and processes exist within the Library Management System to enable these to be completed on bulk.

11. COMMUNICATIONS IMPLICATIONS

- 11.1 The proposal is a positive communications message which will require the Marketing and Communications team to work with the Service to issue targeted messages to make library users and non-users aware of the changes, update their perception of the public library service and encourage new membership. It will link to Imaginelt as part of Town Spirit and a key message will be to encourage customers to return items on time and support their town by ensuring items are available for the wider community to borrow and benefit from.
- 11.2 As part of the communications message customers benefitting from having historic fines and charges waived from their accounts will have the opportunity to make a voluntary donation to the Library Service to be used towards the purchase of new books or resources.
- 11.3 The timing of the change links to the opening of Library@TheLightbox and is a further opportunity to promote the services offered at the Lightbox and across the community libraries, promote the breadth of library stock, the ability to reserve or request any book and future developments to deliver the Library Strategy.
- 11.4 It is likely that if approved the proposal will be highlighted in the professional library press, by Libraries Connected and CILIP and across social media, raising the profile of the Service and developments within the town.

12. CONSULTATIONS

12.1 HR, Performance & Communications:

Alison Brown, Service Director – HR & Business Support

Katie Rogers, Head of Communications & Marketing

Equality & Diversity:

Jules Horsler, Equality & Inclusion Manager

Faith Ridgwick, Equality & Inclusion Officer

Finance, Assets & Information:

Mark Bell, Strategic Finance Manager

Legal & Governance:

Garry Kirk, Service Director - Legal

Employment and Skills:

Tom Smith, Head of Employment & Skills

Trade Unions:

April Pepper, Unison

Ann Gallagher, GMB

Others:

Diana Terris, Chief Executive

Andrew Frosdick, Executive Director – Core Services

Matt Gladstone, Executive Director - Place

Rachel Dickinson, Executive Director - People

Wendy Lowder, Executive Director, Communities

Phil Hollingsworth, Service Director – Stronger, Safer, Healthier Communities

Dave Robinson, Service Director – Customer Information & Digital Services

Graham Terry, Programme Lead, Provider Services

13. PROMOTING EQUALITY, DIVERSITY AND SOCIAL INCLUSION

- 13.1 The proposal is likely to have a positive impact on low income families, the socially isolated, disabled and least mobile and those without access to digital services.
- 13.2 An initial Equalities Impact Assessment has been completed (Appendix B) and whilst the proposal has a positive effect the Service will monitor the impact on and library usage of demographic groups during the initial 12 month period.
- 13.3 As part of the targeted communications message the Service will raise awareness with a diverse range of people and utilize specific social media pages for the various Equalities groups.
- 13.4 Customers requiring items of stock in alternative formats or languages can currently access these either from library stock or via the requests process. The Service regularly reviews its stock policy, collections and new demands so increased demands from different community groups can be met as part of business as usual procedures.

14. RISK MANAGEMENT ISSUES

- 14.1 The potential risk is from an increase in items not being returned alongside the loss of current income. However, evidence from other authorities in the UK and abroad suggests that there is no significant increase in items not being returned and evidence to suggest the opposite as customers are no longer concerned about incurring fines.
- 14.2 Procedures and alerts from the Library Management System will prevent customers from continuing to borrow items if they already have items overdue.
- 14.3 Further mitigation can be introduced by sending early email reminders to customers regarding when items are due to be returned.
- 14.4 The impact of the proposed changes will be monitored over the initial 12 month period.

15. GLOSSARY

CILIP Chartered Institute of Library & Information Professionals

16. LIST OF APPENDICES

- Appendix A: Financial Implications
- Appendix B Initial Equalities Impact Assessment

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