

## Bath & North East Somerset Council

MEETING/ DECISION MAKER:	<b>Cllr Paul Crossley, Cabinet Member for Community Services</b>	
MEETING/ DECISION DATE:	<b>On or after 14<sup>th</sup> September 2019</b>	EXECUTIVE FORWARD PLAN REFERENCE:
		<b>E 3165</b>
TITLE:	<b>Removal of Library Fines</b>	
WARD:	All	
<b>AN OPEN PUBLIC ITEM</b>		
<b>List of attachments to this report:</b> None		

### 1 THE ISSUE

- 1.1 Charging fines for late return of books has been identified as a potential barrier to the public use of libraries. The barriers being caused by a number of factors, which include (but not limited to) embarrassment, lack of ability to pay, social anxiety and accessibility.
- 1.2 In recognition of this barrier there is a movement both nationally and internationally to remove library fines supporting the key messages of libraries as a safe and equitable place for all residents, and its aims to improve literacy, social and health well-being and to support the reduction of social isolation

### 2 RECOMMENDATION

**The Cabinet Member is asked to agree that;**

- 2.1 Following our successful trial, that fines for overdue books are now formally removed and fines for overdue DVDs and talking books (and whilst still available, CDs) are replaced with repeat charges. The removal of fines will remove barriers for the more vulnerable in our community, encourage usage of the service, enhance our reputation as a progressive and inclusive library service and allow for new ways of working.

### 3 THE REPORT

- 3.1 Currently Bath and North East Somerset Library and Information Services apply overdue fines for the late return of borrowed items. In addition there are a series of charges for certain non-standard services e.g. to borrow DVDs and Talking Books, and to replace lost items and library cards.
- 3.2 We have carried out a trial period where we have not been charging fines for overdue books. Fines have not been applied to adult or children's book stock borrowed from B&NES core libraries since 2nd April 2019. Fines have not been applied to books borrowed from Community Run Libraries with effect from their launch date. This has already had a positive impact on customer relationships and staff resources. In addition, early indications show that Bath Central Library issues for June 2019 increased by 2.2% on the previous June and the number of all payment transactions for June 2019 has already dropped by 37% in comparison to the same period in 2017-18.
- 3.3 Our Community run libraries and our Mobile Library Service do not charge fines, this would align our whole service to be more consistent, and make it easier for our residents to understand that we are one service together, all supporting our statutory duty.
- 3.4 The administration and collection of overdue fines and charges is very resource intensive. The need to take large volumes of small fines (fines on books start at 5p per item per day for children and 15p for adults) necessitated large amounts of cash handling and the provision of coin and note modules on all library self-serve equipment. Although self-serve equipment is provided, a significant number of customers needed assistance in navigating the charges interface, tying members of staff to supporting payment transactions.
- 3.5 The need to take coin and notes, and card payments places an instant overhead on the specification for library self-serve equipment. With a reduced number of financial transactions, the Service will be able to reduce the dependence on bespoke equipment, the overall number and types of kiosks which will reduce annual support and license costs. If a resident is late in returning a book, the process would be to send two notices via email or text (where we have this information) only sending via post where absolutely necessary. If the book is not returned then an invoice is sent to the customer for the cost of replacing the book. If using the library kiosk the customer will be asked to contact a member of staff where the situation will be mediated and resolved.
- 3.6 Internationally there is a movement away from the imposition of library fines. Large numbers of American and Australian library services have removed fines as "negative, punitive transactions" which create barriers to access. Their experience has proven that removal of fines does not have a negative impact on the return of items (and in some cases has resulted in the return of large amounts of overdue items). The move has also been received very positively by communities, decreased the numbers of suspended users and increased library use. For example, in northern Colorado, a district operating 13 libraries in the area, abolished fines and have found the overall financial impact has been neutral, while book borrowing rose overall, including a 16% rise in children's loans. Moreover, overdue library loans have decreased; 95% of borrowed materials are now returned within a week of their due date. Following a study on the abolishing fines, Colorado State Libraries recommended in 2017 that all libraries across the state stop charging all fines and fees as their research found there was not enough benefit from late fine revenues to outweigh increased circulation.

3.7 In the UK Trafford, Rutland and most recently, Portsmouth have removed fines. Portsmouth underpinned their move with an advertising campaign; "Stock works much harder" as they have seen issues and reservations increase. Angus abolished overdue fines in Anguslive libraries in December 2015 with no reported negative impact on return of stock (source: Fiona Dakers, Senior Manager). Since starting our own trial in April this year, Barnsley, Blackpool, Bridgend and Salford have also now become fines free.

## **4 STATUTORY CONSIDERATIONS**

4.1 This proposal is fully in line with the Council's overall strategic objectives relating to its statutory duty for delivering the universal outcomes and increased public usage of the library service as well as supporting ongoing service improvements and business efficiency for new ways of working.

4.1 Under the public libraries and museums act 1964, local councils in England have a statutory duty to provide a 'comprehensive and efficient' library service for all people working, living or studying full-time in the area who want to make use of it. The Council has committed to delivering three Core Libraries (Bath, Keynsham and Midsomer Norton) and by working more closely with local communities it can continue to deliver a comprehensive library offer which is tailored to the local community's needs.

4.2 Public health and inequalities: the Council has a statutory duty to promote the health and wellbeing of the inhabitants of its area and reduce inequalities amongst its population.

## **5 RESOURCE IMPLICATIONS (FINANCE, PROPERTY, PEOPLE)**

5.1 A review of revenue, costs and opportunities associated with the administration of library fines for overdue items indicates that the cost of applying and collecting library fines outweighs the revenue and restricts the possibility of introducing new ways of working and simpler and less expensive self-serve solutions.

## **6 RISK MANAGEMENT**

6.1 A risk assessment related to the issue and recommendations has been undertaken, in compliance with the Council's decision making risk management guidance.

6.2 Removal of library fines could result in the non-return of library items, reducing available stock and affecting supply times for reserved items. This would be mitigated by changes to increase the robustness of the current electronic overdue notification process. However evidence from our own trial and other regions indicates that there is no increase in the time taken to return items.

6.2 Once approved a positive campaign to make public aware of the removal of book fines through press, social media and direct liaison with target groups within the community would further support the increase in membership and use of libraries and remove barriers for those who would benefit most from access to books, including an amnesty period to return overdue items.

## 7 CLIMATE CHANGE

Removing cash payment and encouraging card payments is supportive of the reduction in carbon footprint, as is the reduction in equipment requirements.

## 8 OTHER OPTIONS CONSIDERED

- 8.1 None, as this has been recommended as it enables the Council to improve the offer to library customers, encourage usage, remove barriers and support equality of access to services.

## 9 CONSULTATION

- 9.1 Fines have not been applied to adult or children's book stock borrowed from B&NES core libraries since 2nd April 2019 as a trial. Fines have not been applied to books borrowed from Community Run Libraries with effect from their launch date. This has already had a positive impact on customer relationships and staff resources. In addition, early indications show that Bath Central Library issues for June 2019 increased by 2.2% on the previous June and the number of all payment transactions for June 2019 has already dropped by 37% in comparison to the same period in 2017-18.

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<b>Background papers</b>	N/A
<b>Please contact the report author if you need to access this report in an alternative format</b>	