



RECORD OF DECISION TAKEN UNDER DELEGATED POWERS OUTLINED IN THE CONSTITUTION – Part 3 Section 16

DELEGATED OFFICER DECISION Director of Public Health and Wellbeing
TAKEN BY:
PORTFOLIO AREA: Leisure Culture and Young People

SUBJECT: Withdrawal of library fines for late book and audio visual returns

1. DECISION

To agree the removal of fines for the late return of library books and audio visual items and agree an amnesty for historic fines.

2. REASON FOR DECISION

Our libraries are important. Beyond the simple issuing of books they provide access to a comprehensive range of services which connect people with communities, information and digital communication. Their use should be encouraged.

Even small fines can deter the return of items-and the perceived stigma they bring can deter people from using library services. A fine is a negative experience and the threat of fines can also prevent further borrowing of stock and use of wider library services, turning users into non-users. Fines don't fit with the accessible and welcoming image of libraries. Particularly in the current climate, libraries and the services they provide, are vital to supporting reading and literacy, learning for all ages, digital access, health and wellbeing etc. and are valued community hubs. Therefore any potential barriers to access, either real or perceived, should be removed where possible in line with our corporate objectives around equality, inclusion, integration, improving outcomes etc.

There is evidence to suggest that those most affected by fines are the less affluent who are the most in need of services libraries provide.

Increasingly more authorities, most recently Blackpool, Halton, Leeds, Oldham and Salford, have chosen to abolish fines and have subsequently reported no rise in the number of late or non-returned stock. Instead, there is evidence to suggest a positive impact in relation to the return of long overdue items, an increase in library visits and loans, along with a welcome response to the removal of barriers associated with outstanding fines.

Fines are not levied on e-books and e-audio book loans. These digitally enabled resources are auto returned at the end of their loan period unless renewed. Removing fines for the late return of hard copy resources cancels out this two tier system, brings standardization across the service and equity for those people who do not have the electronic devices required to access e-books and e-audio books.

Income from fines continues to fall, comparisons from 2016/17 to 2018/19 shows a drop of 25%. The projected fines income for 2019-20, based on payments made in year to date, is £7,750. It's likely that this trend in a reduction in fines income will continue. It is anticipated that the loss of income resulting from the removal of fines will be managed from within the service thus achieving a balanced budget outcome for 2020-21. There will be no impact on service users other than the benefits and goodwill which come from improved accessibility to services.

There will be no change to the policy of recouping of costs for lost, non-returned or damaged items.

3. BACKGROUND

Library fines were originally implemented to encourage people to return books on time. However, overtime this method has been seen to create a negative effect and in some cases has deterred people from returning items and using our services. Other methods to encourage the return of items have been introduced with customers now being able to opt to receive an email return date reminder. Items can also be renewed online at any time and can be renewed more often.

0 to 15 years and some other borrower categories, e.g. blind or partially sighted, are already exempt from fines. Concessions are in place for those aged 65 and over. Our data indicates that more items are returned by the 0 to 15 category where fines are not applicable. Other authorities have seen an increase in the return of long overdue items since introducing a fine free policy.

Removal of fines across all age groups will bring equity regardless of ability to pay.

4. OPTIONS CONSIDERED AND REJECTED

1. No change to current arrangements – fine income continues to reduce and budget pressure managed accordingly
2. Increase in fines to deter late returns – evidence shows that this actually deters return of books and therefore stock costs increase
3. Remove fines – creates an equitable arrangement between hard copy and e-books. Budget pressures will be managed within allocated resources.

Option 3 is recommended

5. DECLARATION OF INTEREST

All Declarations of Interest of the officer with delegation and the any Member who has been consulted, and note of any dispensation granted should be recorded below:

VERSION: 1

CONTACT OFFICER:	Adele Karwat
DATE:	09/12/2019
BACKGROUND DOCUMENTS:	None

Dominic P. Harrison

Signed:

Director : Dominic Harrison, Public Health and Wellbeing

Date: 17.12.19