



Title of meeting: Culture, Leisure and Sport Decision Meeting

Date of meeting: 16 March 2018

Subject: Library Fines and Reservation Fees

Report by: Director of Culture and City Development

Wards affected: All

Key decision: No

Full Council decision: No

1. Purpose of report

1.1 To set out the issues related to the current practice of charging fines for the late return of adult books and other library materials, in the light of changing patterns of use and pilot schemes by other library services. To make recommendations to change the practice of charging fines across Portsmouth Library Service as part of a broader campaign to bring back previous library users and attract new ones.

2. Recommendations:

2.1 That for a pilot period of three years, Portsmouth Library Services ceases to charge fines for the late return of books and other library materials lent to the public from Portsmouth owned stock. Stock from other libraries will continue to be charged according to inter-library-lending requirements.

2.2 That for a pilot period of three years, Portsmouth Library Services cease to charge a reservation fee for books and other library materials, where the request can be satisfied within existing Portsmouth library lending stock. Stock obtained from other library sources and agreed with the requester will continue to be charged at cost.

2.3 That an evaluation of the two pilots is conducted throughout the three year period in terms of library membership, use of services and loan return rates, taking recommendations for further action to the Portfolio Holder in year three.

2.4 That the pilots be accompanied by a vigorous communication and outreach campaign to inform residents of the changes and encourage engagement with library services.

3. Background

3.1 Library Fines

- 3.1.1 All public libraries in the UK make a charge for the late return of adult books and other borrowed items. Some also charge for the late return of children's material, but Portsmouth City Council took the decision not to do so approximately 19 years ago. Historically library fines have been employed as a means of deterring borrowers from keeping items beyond the loan period. It has also been valued as a method of income generation to offset some library costs.
- 3.1.2 Portsmouth, in line with other libraries in the UK, has seen a decline in the borrowing of physical books. At the same time, more measures have been put in place to support borrowers in avoiding their loan items becoming overdue. These include telephone and online renewals and text reminders that the items are reaching the end of their loan period. In Portsmouth, fines are charged at a rate of 18p per book per day to a maximum of £9.00. In the last 7 years, income from library fine income has declined from £28,000 per annum to an anticipated £16,000 for the year 2017/18. It is therefore clear that this is a declining income stream, upon which the service can no longer rely in the long term. [See Appendix 1].
- 3.1.3 In 2006, the Portsmouth Library Development Plan identified the objective to increase access to services as both a significant challenge and an aspiration for the service. This was to ensure that libraries could best serve and benefit all users, as well as targeting the most vulnerable groups in our local communities, including people facing multiple deprivations. The Plan also recognised that library fines were and remain a barrier to library access, particularly amongst economically marginalised user groups who stand to benefit the most from library services. The term "fine" infers a sense of 'wrong doing', that can be prohibitive to many users, as the threat of a financial penalty causes many people to act in the opposite way than the fine intends, i.e. many retain the books because they are too scared of the fine to return them. As a result, fines accrue and eventually borrowing rights are suspended; users let their membership lapse and drift away from the service altogether. This is of broader concern as library membership is often linked to other services, such as using computers, accessing the internet, and taking part in courses and events. Moreover, the people who cannot afford to pay fines — including those on low incomes, the elderly and the socially disadvantaged — benefit the most from using libraries, not only to access books, but as community hubs, social meeting places, and to access other services.
- 3.1.4 There is no clear evidence base to demonstrate whether income generated from fines produces a surplus over the cost of labour and materials involved in collecting them. More broadly, over time, library professionals have become increasingly concerned about the impact of fines as a financial penalty. This resulted in a pioneering pilot scheme delivered by the City of Sydney Public Libraries, in Australia, which like Portsmouth operates 9 libraries across the city. The service abolished all library fines after an eight-month trial showed that fines do not work as an incentive for people to return books.

Instead of fines, users were simply unable to borrow more books until overdue items were returned. City of Sydney libraries found that three times as many overdue items were returned when fines were removed than in the previous 12 months and borrowers from economically disadvantaged groups were less likely to cease using services when loans became overdue.

- 3.1.5 The practise of removing fines for adult library loans has also taken place in a number of US States including districts in Northern Illinois, Ohio, California and Massachusetts. 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. In districts without fines, there has been a significant increase in families returning to the library. Other library services in the USA have reported similar results, in terms of improved returns and overall increase in use of services, especially by groups subject to multiple deprivations.
- 3.1.6 Several academic libraries in UK universities also employ the practice of no fines. On 10th February, Trafford Library Service in Greater Manchester – which operates 12 libraries in the city - announced that it would be the first library authority in the UK to abolish fines on overdue books altogether. The library and information association CILIP support this move, with Chief Executive Nick Poole saying that 'anything that removes barriers to joining and using the library is very welcome. Trafford council's announcement to abolish library fines for all ages is an exceptional development. As long as sums add up then we would like to see all libraries taking similar steps to encourage more members and more reading.' Despite Trafford's claim to be the first in the country to make the move, Rutland Library Service also does not charge fines on overdue books, neither do library services in West Lothian, Shetland and West Dunbartonshire in Scotland.
- 3.1.7 There is now a strong opportunity for Portsmouth City Council and Library Service to become a key stakeholder in the growing number of libraries internationally choosing to abolish overdue fines. This can be introduced to Portsmouth Library Service with immediate effect at the relatively low cost of £20,000 per annum [see Section 3.4]. Our library management system already has the software in place to manage this process, including the temporary blocking of overdue accounts. The publicity resulting from the removal of fines will raise the profile of the library service both nationally and locally as a flagship for innovation and outreach in the UK. National bodies including the Society of Chief Librarians and CILIP have requested information and feedback from libraries prepared to take a lead in this ground breaking approach There is also great potential for Portsmouth to provide evidence and best practice in measuring the impact of removing fines, both the financial impact and benefits for the service in terms of work practices, and the impact on library usage and library users.

3.2 Reservations

- 3.2.1 Portsmouth Libraries currently makes a £1 charge for an adult reservation of a book held in a different branch in the city. This process is mechanised within the Library Management System, minimising the demands on staff time. The stock is moved around the city on the pre-existing library van delivery.
- 3.2.2 Demand for the reservation service is declining and the revenue from the service has also considerably reduced: from £6,424 in 2011/12 to £3,951 in 2016/17 [See Appendix 1]. There is increasing feedback from customers that a £1 charge to obtain a book from within Portsmouth Library Service (as opposed to inter-library loans from library services outside the city) is disproportionately high, given the cost of paperbacks purchases and the cost of books in second hand and charity shops. The speedy availability and low cost of books from Amazon also impact on our reservation service, particularly usage from higher income groups.
- 3.2.3 Those that are easily mobile can arrange to collect their items from other libraries. Clearly the existing system favours those who have easy access to larger library collections and have the means to collect items using their own transport. The least mobile, the disabled and those with multiple deprivations living in communities served by smaller libraries are most disadvantaged by this practice and also have the poorest access to library services. As a consequence, a large number of library authorities in the UK have abolished reservation fees, including Bristol, Kent and Southampton.

3.3 Proposal

- 3.3.1. The report recommends that for a pilot period of three years, Portsmouth Libraries cease charging fines for overdue items and library reservations. These measures will be accompanied by a publicity and outreach campaign to make users and non-users aware of the change, update their perception of the service, and encourage new membership. The campaign will include information about the breadth of library stock from which they could widely request, as well as promotion of the many and diverse services and spaces offered by the library service. The campaign should aim to be low/no cost and target coverage in the local media, online (e.g. council website/social media) and in libraries and other council-owned buildings, e.g. community centres.
- 3.3.3 In the last year of the pilot, the scheme will be evaluated, including data on: impact in membership and borrowing, impact on overdue returns, costs to the library service and feedback from staff and users on the change. A further report will be brought to the Portfolio Holder reporting on the outcome of the pilot and suggesting any further recommendations resulting from its findings. The evaluation report should be made available online and shared broadly with other library authorities and national bodies with an interest in this issue, i.e. the Libraries taskforce, the Society of Chief Librarians and CILIP.

3.4 Funding

3.4.1 The total cost of the proposals to library budgets (based on anticipated figures for the year ahead) will be as follows:

Library Fines:	£16,000
Reservations:	£4,000
Total:	£20,000

3.4.2 This would be funded within existing budgets as follows:

£2,000 from the cancellation of supplier selection and the related fee.
This is proposed to enable staff to tailor book purchase more directly to the needs of service users.

£5,000 from the School Library Services.
The School Library Services support this scheme as it will draw more families into regular library use, which could be promoted through the school network with collaborative activities and events.

£5,000 from the Libraries Bookfund.
Based on findings from the City of Sydney following the abolition of overdue fees, more books will be returned, reducing the need for so much replacement stock. The free reservation scheme would also maximise use of existing stock and reduce the need for every prominent title to be provided at each service point. This sum reflects the minimum anticipated saving and may be increased in years two and three.

£8,000 from the income gained from the sale of PCC parking permits in Libraries.

4. Reasons for recommendations

4.1 To improve access to library services for all Portsmouth citizens, both geographically and financially. This is essential if the library service is to meaningfully deliver to broader council objectives, including in terms of literacy, learning, digital access and support for health outcomes.

4.2 To provide a simplified and more economical way of working. A cash-reduced or cash-free environment would require less complex financial processes and routines, freeing staff time to be spent with customers in need of support. It would enable more roles to be undertaken by volunteers and produce a simple and flexible range of work processes.

4.3 To maximise use of library stock and services. More stock would be available for use and could be accessed without financial penalty from all service points, including the Mobile Library.

- 4.4 To increase library membership
- 4.5 To raise the profile of Portsmouth City Council and the Library Service as part of growing number of library authorities exploring this practice and building a meaningful evidence base relating to its impact.
- 5. Equality impact assessment (EIA)**
 - 5.1 A preliminary EIA has been completed and is attached at appendix 2
- 6. Legal comments**
 - 6.1 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.
- 7. Director of Finance comments**
 - 7.1 The total cost of the recommendation contained within this report will be £20,000 per annum.
 - 7.2 The loss of income will be funded form other Library Service budgets as detailed in paragraph 3.4. This will not have a significant impact on the future delivery of the service.

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Signed by:
Stephen Baily
Director of Culture and City Development

- Appendices:**
Appendix 1 - Library income from library fines and reservations
Appendix 2 - Preliminary EIA

Background list of documents: Section 100D of the Local Government Act 1972

The following documents disclose facts or matters, which have been relied upon to a material extent by the author in preparing this report:

Title of document	Location

The recommendation(s) set out above were approved/ approved as amended/ deferred/
rejected by on

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Signed by:
Cabinet Member for Culture, Leisure and Sport

Appendix 1

