

Title of meeting: Culture, Leisure and Sport Decision Meeting

Subject: Borrowbox, eBooks and eAudiobooks Update

Date of meeting: 11 December 2015

Report by: Director of Culture and City Development

Wards affected: All

1. Requested by: The Cabinet Member for Culture, Leisure and Sport

2. Purpose

- 2.1 To update the Cabinet Member for Culture, Leisure and Sport on the success of the Borrowbox eBooks and eAudiobooks service in Portsmouth Libraries.

3. Information Requested

3.1 Background

- 3.1.1 In 2014 Portsmouth City Council Library Service started a procurement process for an eBooks supplier. From June 2012 an eAudiobooks service (where books in spoken word format could be downloaded) was provided to borrowers through the OneClickDigital platform. Usage of this had been good (an average of 314 downloads per month) although with some feedback from the public that registration on the website could be difficult. However, library staff were receiving increasing requests from readers to provide an eBooks service.
- 3.1.2 Ebooks have been available in the UK for some years but as a Library Service we had refrained from buying in to a service because of the restrictions and uncertainty surrounding eBooks for libraries. Many publishers refused to allow libraries access to their titles in eBook format, whereas others withdrew titles at short notice or hedged availability around with restrictions such as limiting the number of issues an eBook could have. Although some major publishers still do not allow their titles to be made available to libraries in an eBook format, the publishing landscape has become more settled and there are enough big publishers on board to make the offer to our readers attractive.
- 3.1.3 The eBooks and eAudiobooks service was always intended to supplement and enhance our traditional book offer, which is still in great demand by residents. The advantage of an eBook offer is that it is available 24/7 outside of library opening hours and books can be borrowed and downloaded from the comfort of a reader's home.

This is one of a range of offers increasing virtual library visits and enabling digital use of services. There are also advantages for readers who require larger print or suffer from dyslexia (as they can enlarge text and change page colour) and there are no overdue fines or issues over lost or damaged books.

3.2 Contract award

- 3.2.1 After a procurement process, the Portsmouth contract was awarded to Bolinda Digital, who provide an eAudiobooks and eBooks platform called Borrowbox. Borrowbox can be accessed via a website and also via an app, which gives very easy access to stock. The contract was awarded at the end of March 2015.
- 3.2.2 In May 2015 we ended our contract with OneClickDigital as it was not financially viable to maintain two eAudiobook platforms.

3.3 Launch and promotion

- 3.3.1 Borrowbox Portsmouth was launched in August at an event at Southsea Library and has seen immediate high usage. Most of our OneClickDigital customers eagerly awaited the introduction of the new eAudiobook service when we ended the OneClickDigital service and we kept them up to date with developments via email. We therefore had an audience ready and waiting for the new service.
- 3.3.2 BorrowBox has also attracted people who had not previously used our online services. Through a range of promotions, including posters, postcards, branch displays with Bolinda balloons and boxes, this new service was publicised to library users. It was also important to attract non-users and lapsed users, and the library therefore produced articles for Flagship and the Portsmouth News to reach a wider audience. Since the launch an eBooks workshop was offered as part of the Over-60s Festival, and this was oversubscribed nearly three times over. Subsequent workshops have been offered to meet this demand.

3.4 eAudiobooks

- 3.4.1 eAudiobooks have seen the highest issuing figures in Borrowbox, with 1392 downloads by 31 October. The top 3 highest issuing adult titles were:

- Death of a Glutton (M.C Beaton),
- Comedian Dies (Simon Brett)
- Fatal Impact (Kathryn Fox)

The top young adult titles were:

- Finding Jennifer Jones (Anne Cassidy)
- Looking for JJ (also Anne Cassidy)

The top children's titles were:

- Fortunately the Milk (Neil Gaiman)
- Butterfly Club, (Jacqueline Wilson)

3.4.2 The high popularity of eAudiobooks could be due to a number of reasons:

- The library already had an established readership for eAudiobooks through our OneClickDigital service so were able to let those readers know via email that the new service was available.
- Rights to eAudiobooks mean that far more current, bestselling titles are available in this format with only a short wait from original publication as a book to availability in eAudiobook. A recent example is Harper Lee's *Go Set a Watchman*, which the library purchased as an eAudiobook less than two months after publication of the book itself.
- eAudiobooks tend to be more expensive to purchase than eBooks, so the offer of free eAudiobooks through the library is more attractive.

3.4.3 The eAudiobooks have undoubtedly been very popular, and the challenge for the library service is to meet this demand by regularly purchasing new titles. With an average price of £50 for an adult eAudiobook, and licensing restrictions which restrict each title to one borrower at a time, some of the more popular titles have already built up long waiting lists. To maintain a high quality service, some of the library's stock budget will need to be allocated to this area.

3.5 eBooks

3.5.1 eBooks have seen very encouraging issue figures with 1087 downloads by 31 October. The most popular adult titles were:

- Not Quite Nice (Celia Imrie)
- A Secret Kept (Tatiana de Rosnay)
- Missing (Karen Alvtegen)

The top young adult titles were:

- The Boy in the Striped Pyjamas (John Boyne)
- Paper Towns (John Green)
- City of Ashes (Cassandra Clare)

The top children's titles were:

- Monster (Michael Rosen)
- Gangsta Granny (David Walliams)
- Private Peaceful (Michael Morpurgo)

3.5.2 eBooks are cheaper for the library to purchase than eAudiobooks, which means that we can have a wider range of stock. However, publishers limit the availability of bestsellers, and there is a significant time delay between the release of a new title and its availability as a library eBook. As with eAudiobooks, eBooks are restricted to one book, one borrower, but there are also added restrictions from some publishers which mean that certain eBooks will expire after a set number of years. The library will then have to purchase another copy to retain the title in its collection.

This is unlikely to change in the near future. Although some publishers refuse to provide eBooks to libraries, their number is dwindling as more and more publishers make their stock available to libraries.

- 3.5.3 As with the eAudiobooks, some funds will be found from the existing stock budget to meet demand from our readers for more titles.

3.6 Feedback and evaluation

- 3.6.1 The number of BorrowBox users has steadily risen from 214 in July to 599 by the end of October. Feedback has been extremely positive, both verbally and by email. Initially the stock team answered a large number of enquiries regarding registration and set up, but users have also taken the time to write in with very positive feedback about the new service:

"Just thought I would send a quick note to say thank you and to reassure you that the wait was WELL worthwhile... a huge advance in public library services for those of us slight less able to get about ... "

"Thank you so much for providing this service and for keeping me so well updated via email. I'm VERY excited about using Borrowbox."

"As a very frequent user of audiobooks, I am delighted to know that the new system is now up and running."

3.7 Future

- 3.7.1 The stock team meet every two months to analyse the usage statistics for BorrowBox. The team are also able to pick up on titles with high waiting lists, and can buy top-up copies accordingly. Demand for this service is likely to increase as more people purchase tablets and smartphones, and wish to download eBooks and eAudiobooks via the BorrowBox app.
- 3.7.2 As the comment quoted above from one user makes clear, the service is accessible to those who are less able to physically reach libraries, whether because they are housebound or because their working patterns do not allow them to visit a library during its usual opening hours.
- 3.7.3 BorrowBox complements our usual book offer: where eBooks provide quick access, our standard books have a much wider range which eBooks are unlikely to match for many years. BorrowBox makes a very attractive addition to the library's digital services, which also include Freegal for music streaming and downloads, and Zinio for magazine downloads. As demand for BorrowBox increases, the stock team will monitor and allocate budgets to ensure that the service continues to grow.

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Signed by:
Stephen Baily
Director of Culture and City Development

Appendices: **None**

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