

SUBJECT: ENDING LIBRARY FINES

MEETING: Individual Cabinet Member Decision – Cllr Catherine Fookes

DATE: 12 October 2022

DIVISION/WARDS AFFECTED: All

1. PURPOSE:

- 1.1 To remove social and economic barriers to the use of public libraries through the removal of fines for overdue books.

2. RECOMMENDATIONS:

- 2.1 That the practice of charging of library fines for overdue books is ended with immediate effect to ensure that money does not present a barrier to people being able to access this important service.

3. KEY POINTS:

- 3.1 Libraries provide everyone with the opportunity to access information, resources, activities and cultural opportunities. They are places of learning and enjoyment, enabling people to come together and encouraging them to be active, healthy and engaged. Like many of our most treasured public services they are free at the point of use.
- 3.2 Historically, library fines were applied to encourage the timely return of books with the money raised used to cover the costs of sending printed overdue reminders to customers.. Email and text alerts have replaced printed notices and customers are given the option to renew online, by telephone or in person at one of the libraries which reduces transaction costs.
- 3.3 There is a growing movement in the UK and globally to remove the use of fines. Research has highlighted that these can result in the loss of members and non-return of books where fines have built to a level where they impact some of the most vulnerable and economically disadvantaged citizens. At a time when so many are struggling with finances we need to remove the risk that this could be seen as a barrier to people accessing this valuable public service.
- 3.4 Fines have not yet been re-introduced following suspension in March 2020 during the pandemic. In addition to this any unpaid fines were removed from customer accounts and several “book amnesty” events have been promoted in hubs, this has resulted in the return of many books that were previously out of circulation. In doing this we have sent a strong message to our customers that their presence by far offers more value than the principle of fines and fines therefore are counter-productive. In turn this results in increased stock circulation and customer retention.

- 3.5 Evidence suggests that fines are a barrier to members returning items and often people who are financially vulnerable will be discouraged from visiting libraries. In Monmouthshire, where the service is part of community hubs, the gateway to help and advice, we must do all we can to remove barriers to accessing services. .

EQUALITY AND FUTURE GENERATIONS EVALUATION (INCLUDES SOCIAL JUSTICE, SAFEGUARDING AND CORPORATE PARENTING):

- 4.1 Library fines directly impact equality, since fines are more likely to fall upon citizens who are less digitally connected and therefore unable to pick up overdue SMS and email alerts. Those with ease of access to own technology will be likely to obtain frequent reminders and updates and so will in turn find it easier to renew issues and avoid fines.
- 4.2 Fines are also a significant barrier to library use for our citizens who are financially vulnerable with loss of opportunities to learning, literacy, well-being and social engagement.

5 OPTIONS APPRAISAL

- 5.1 The two clear options are either to continue with fines or not. The only inclusive and fair option is to stop fines. This option has no negative financial impact for the council and benefits our whole communities.

6 EVALUATION CRITERIA:

- 6.1 Evaluation is not required.

7 REASONS:

To ensure that Monmouthshire Libraries are inclusive learning and well-being spaces for all.

8 RESOURCE IMPLICATIONS:

In the three years leading up to the Covid19 closure the income accrued from library fines in total amounted to £21,408,96. These were largely paid in cash and the administrative and security costs associated with banking and collection marginally exceeded the income.

It is therefore not financially viable to take fines as the cost to service outweighs the income accrued. In addition, the budget set by Council for 2022-23 reduced the pressure on community hubs to generate income meaning that the pressure to generate revenue from fines has been removed.

9 CONSULTEES:

Cabinet
Strategic Leadership Team

10 BACKGROUND PAPERS:

None

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