

Midlothian Library Service – The Removal of Library Fines and Hire Charges

Report by Gary Fairley Chief Officer Corporate Solutions

Report for Decision

1 Recommendations

Council is recommended to approve the removal of library fines and the hire charge for CDs and DVDs as they are a barrier to access.

2 Purpose of Report/Executive Summary

The purpose of this report is to request Council to agree to remove library fines and hire charges for CDs and DVDs.

Date: 4th March 2021

Report Contact:

Annabel Cavaroli, Customer Services Manager (Acting)

annabel.cavaroli@midlothian.gov.uk

0131 271 3982

3 Background

- 3.1** During the COVID-19 pandemic, fines and charges have been abated as libraries have been closed and communities have been unable to access physical services. As we move through Midlothian's recovery route-map and as library services resume, a permanent removal of these charges along with a fines amnesty would help to welcome communities back. When the new facility at Danderhall opens, a service without barriers to access would be easy to promote and would encourage new members and existing users to return.
- 3.2** Fines are an outdated and old fashioned concept which do not fit with the modern library service that Midlothian Council provides and are at odds with the Council three priorities. They can be a deterrent to library use and are a form of social inequality which negatively impact on those in our communities who are in the greatest need of our support. Charges are currently levied for the hire of CDs and adult DVDs and again act as a barrier for those who cannot afford them. The role of libraries is to provide access to information, resources and learning not prevent it.
- 3.3** Although there is an income target for fines and hire charges of approximately £7,000, it is never met and the gap between the target and monies taken is growing year on year with more methods for users to renew items and an increase in borrowing of eBooks. Removing these charges will have a high beneficial impact for our communities for an extremely low financial benefit to the Council. Even when fines are minimal, they prevent people from using the library over fear or shame of accruing fines or being unable to afford to pay them. They are counterproductive as people may not return stock that they know is late in order to prevent paying fines. There are no hire charges or fines for our eBooks or eAudiobooks so having them for physical items causes further inequalities.
- 3.4** Benchmarking carried out across Scotland revealed that 12 authorities from the 20 who responded still charge fines and all of those wish to remove them especially as they've been ceased during the pandemic. Anecdotal evidence has shown that the removal of fines has had no detrimental effect in terms of items not being returned and has led to an increase in borrowing, membership and footfall. Many authorities no longer lend CDs or DVDs and while there is no budget allocated to buying new CDs, it is still a service we provide and want people to use. DVD issues have remained relatively steady over the past number of years although are reducing due to the impact of streaming services. Removing hire charges will also lead to an increase in the issues of both of these.

4 Report Implications (Resource, Digital and Risk)

4.1 Resource

There will be no resource implications

4.2 Digital

None

4.3 Risk

None

4.4 Ensuring Equalities (if required a separate IIA must be completed)

This report does not recommend any change to policy or practice and therefore does not require an Equalities Impact Assessment.

4.4 Additional Report Implications

See Appendix A

Appendices

Appendix A – Additional Report Implications

Appendix B – Background Papers/Resource Links (if applicable)

APPENDIX A – Report Implications

A.1 Key Priorities within the Single Midlothian Plan

Not applicable

A.2 Key Drivers for Change

Key drivers addressed in this report:

- ☐ Holistic Working
- ☐ Hub and Spoke
- ☒ Modern
- ☐ Sustainable
- ☐ Transformational
- ☒ Preventative
- ☐ Asset-based
- ☐ Continuous Improvement
- ☐ One size fits one
- ☐ None of the above

A.3 Key Delivery Streams

Key delivery streams addressed in this report:

- ☐ One Council Working with you, for you
- ☒ Preventative and Sustainable
- ☐ Efficient and Modern
- ☐ Innovative and Ambitious
- ☐ None of the above

A.4 Delivering Best Value

The report does not directly impact on Delivering Best Value

A.5 Involving Communities and Other Stakeholders

The report does not directly relate to involving communities but should benefit all.

A.6 Impact on Performance and Outcomes

The report does not directly impact on Midlothian Council's performance and outcomes

A.7 Adopting a Preventative Approach

Not applicable

A.8 Supporting Sustainable Development

Not applicable