

Notice of KEY Executive Decision

Subject Heading:	Lifting the suspension of adult late item fines for libraries
Decision Maker:	Officer – Kathy Freeman
Cabinet Member:	Councillor Paul Middleton
ELT Lead:	Paul Fisher
Report Author and contact details:	Alexis Wainwright Frontline Services Manager alexis.wainwright@havering.gov.uk
Policy context:	Relates to Corporate Theme Resources - A well run Council, that delivers for People and Place.
Financial summary:	To secure fines income on overdue adult book stock. Supports attainment of Library Income targets.
Reason decision is Key	(c) Significant effect on two or more Wards
Date notice given of intended decision:	22/02/2024

Key Executive Decision

Relevant Overview & Scrutiny Committee:	Overview and scrutiny board
Is it an urgent decision?	<i>No</i>
Is this decision exempt from being called-in?	<i>No</i>

The subject matter of this report deals with the following Council Objectives

People - Things that matter for residents

Place - A great place to live, work and enjoy

Resources - A well run Council that delivers for People and Place. X

Part A – Report seeking decision

DETAIL OF THE DECISION REQUESTED AND RECOMMENDED ACTION

Reintroduction of Fines for Late Return of Library Items for adults.

Following a thorough review of library income needed and consideration of the current council financial circumstances, it has been decided to reintroduce fines for late return of library items, specifically adult books and spoken word items. This includes maintaining concessions for individuals with disabilities or senior citizens etc.

Background:

Historically, public libraries have enforced penalties for overdue items. Before the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic in 2020, Havering's late return fee structure mirrored corporate adjustments for fines and fees, which were based on inflation rates. Late return penalties for adult books were set at 39p per book per day, with a maximum charge of £10.00 per book. Additionally, borrowers were granted one automatic renewal to allow for a grace period in returning items. Throughout and following the COVID-19 period, when library services resumed, the suspension of fines remained in place to align with the practices of The London Libraries Consortium, of which Havering is a member and to support its residents with the cost of living crisis. Our consortium partners who are still charging fines have now reintroduced them. This decision allowed for grace period of over 3years for adult book fines.

Recommended Actions:

- 1: Adult book and spoken word item fines will be charged at 42p per book per day, maintaining a maximum charge of £10.00 per book. This increase charge is in line with the corporate fines and fees increases based on inflationary charges.
2. Automatic renewals will be reduced to one session to accommodate the reintroduction of fines.

Implementation Plan:

The reintroduction of fines for adult library items will be communicated through various channels, including, writing to members, signage within libraries, the library website, and social media platforms. Staff will be trained to implement the revised fines structure and to assist patrons with any inquiries or concerns.

AUTHORITY UNDER WHICH DECISION IS MADE

Havering Council constitution Part 3, section 3.3.3

- 1.1 To take any steps, and take any decisions, necessary for the proper management and administration of their allocated directorate, in accordance with applicable Council policies and procedures

STATEMENT OF THE REASONS FOR THE DECISION

Reintroducing fines for late returns is essential to ensure the efficient circulation of library materials and to encourage borrowers to return items promptly. The adjustment in fine rates is necessary to keep pace with inflationary changes and to sustain the viability of library services.

Key Executive Decision

The decision to reintroduce fines for late return of library items reflects our commitment to maintaining the integrity and sustainability of library services.

OTHER OPTIONS CONSIDERED AND REJECTED

Option 1:

Continue as is- suspension of fines.

Continuing the suspension of adult fines was not deemed feasible at this time. This decision was influenced by the substantial income targets set for libraries and the imperative cost-saving measures, amounting to over £300,000 assigned to Libraries.

Option 2.

Permanent Removal of All Library Adult Fines

After thorough consideration, it was determined that permanently removing all library adult fines was not feasible at this time. This decision was influenced by the significant income targets established for libraries and the necessary cost-saving measures, totalling over £300,000. Removing fines at this stage was deemed incompatible with the council's current financial position. However it is something we would like to consider in the future if the councils financial position improves.

PRE-DECISION CONSULTATION

NAME AND JOB TITLE OF STAFF MEMBER ADVISING THE DECISION-MAKER

Name: Gareth Nicholson

Designation: AD Customer

Signature: *GD Nicholson* Date:30/03/2024

Part B - Assessment of implications and risks

LEGAL IMPLICATIONS AND RISKS

None

FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS AND RISKS

Ending the suspension of fines will enable the library service to generate revenue, which contributes to meeting its designated income targets. This is estimated to be approximately £10,000 or more per annum.

HUMAN RESOURCES IMPLICATIONS AND RISKS (AND ACCOMMODATION IMPLICATIONS WHERE RELEVANT)

While the practice of collecting fines is not new initiative it means that library staff are adept at managing such tasks. However, challenges may arise, particularly when residents have outstanding overdue fines spanning over a period of time. The reintroduction of fines may result in:

- Increased workload as staff implement and enforce fine collection policies.
- Potential challenges from the public regarding fine collection, leading to conflicts or stress.
- Dissatisfaction among staff facing resistance or complaints from patrons.

To support these concerns:

- Training should be provided to ensure staff are proficient in fine collection procedures and conflict resolution.
- Clear and consistent policies and procedures are already established for fine collection, covering various scenarios and offering guidance to staff.
- Local seniors have discretion to waive fines and charges based on patrons' circumstances.
- A senior officer will be designated to manage escalated situations effectively.

EQUALITIES AND SOCIAL INCLUSION IMPLICATIONS AND RISKS

The proposed decision to reintroduce fines for late returns of library items, particularly adult books and spoken word items, has various implications, including equality and social considerations, as well as potential risks:

Equality Implications:

- Fines may disproportionately affect individuals or communities with lower socioeconomic status, as they may struggle to afford the penalties.
- Individuals with disabilities or mobility issues may face challenges returning items promptly, leading to increased fines.

Key Executive Decision

- Certain groups, such as students or those reliant on public transportation, may be more prone to late returns due to their schedules or limited access to library facilities.

Social Implications:

- Fines could deter individuals from using the library services, particularly those who perceive fines as punitive rather than constructive.
- Library fines may exacerbate existing inequalities by further marginalizing vulnerable people who are unable to pay fines.
- Communities that rely heavily on library services for access to resources and educational materials may be disproportionately impacted by the reintroduction of fines.

Risks:

- There is a risk of negative public perception if the reintroduction of fines is not communicated effectively or perceived as unfair.
- Reintroducing fines could lead to increased friction between library staff and patrons, particularly if there are disputes over fines or penalties.
- There is a risk of decreased library usage if fines act as a deterrent for borrowers, potentially affecting the overall circulation of library materials.

Mitigating Measures:

In light of these implications and risks, it is important that we adopt measures to minimize potential adverse effects on vulnerable residents. This includes maintaining concessions for individuals with disabilities or senior citizens, empowering local managers to exercise discretion in addressing individual fine challenges based on mitigating circumstances, and ensuring equitable access to library services for all members of the community. Effective communication of the rationale behind the decision to reintroduce fines is essential to ensure understanding within our community. Additionally, exploring alternative strategies to encourage timely returns, such as media campaigns could help alleviate some of the negative impacts associated with fines.

Key Executive Decision

HEALTH AND WELLBEING IMPLICATIONS AND RISKS

N/A

ENVIRONMENTAL AND CLIMATE CHANGE IMPLICATIONS AND RISKS

N/A

BACKGROUND PAPERS

ED to suspend – 19th March 2020

APPENDICES

Key Executive Decision

Part C – Record of decision

I have made this executive decision in accordance with authority delegated to me by the Leader of the Council and in compliance with the requirements of the Constitution.

Decision

Proposal agreed

Delete as applicable

Details of decision maker

Signed

Name: Kathy Freeman

Cabinet Portfolio held:

ELT Member title: Strategic Director of Resources and S151 Officer

Head of Service title

Other manager title:

Date:

Lodging this notice

The signed decision notice must be delivered to Committee Services, in the Town Hall.

For use by Committee Administration

This notice was lodged with me on _____

Signed _____