

Members' Library Service Request Form

Date of Document	02/10/25
Originator	Caroline Messer
Originator's Ref (if any)	
Document Title	Review of Library Fines and Charges

Please indicate if access to the document is to be “unrestricted” or “restricted”, with regard to the terms of the Local Government (Access to Information) Act 1985.

Unrestricted	☒	Restricted	☐
--------------	-------------------------------------	------------	--------------------------

If the document is “restricted”, please state on what grounds (click on grey area for drop-down menu):

For Publication

Additional information:

Authorised By	Eamon John
Designation	Head of Communities & Partnerships
Date	06/10/25

For Office Use Only:	
Library Reference	109/25
Date Received	06/10/25
Bulletin	Oct 25

COMMITTEE: Members' Library Service

MEETING DATE:

BY: Team Manager – Libraries & Customer Services

REPORT TITLE: Review of Library Fines and Charges

REPORT STATUS: Public

1 PURPOSE OF REPORT

- 1.1 To seek approval from Members' Library for the permanent removal of public library overdue fines and reservation charges.

2 RECOMMENDATIONS

Members are recommended to:

- 2.1 It is recommended that fines on overdue library items for individual borrowers are removed from financial year 2025/26.
- 2.2 It is recommended that charges on reserved library items are removed from financial year 2025/26.
- 2.3 It is recommended that charges for lost and damaged items are retained.

3 BACKGROUND

- 3.1 Prior to the Covid 19 pandemic charges were levied on all library members aged over 18. Overdue fines were levied at a rate of £0.15 per item per day overdue to a maximum of £5 per item. Request charges of £0.60 per item were levied when requesting an item not available in stock for collection at their local library.
- 3.2 Following the reopening of libraries after the Covid 19 pandemic overdue and request charges were paused. This has resulted in a pressure in the Customer Services budget which has been offset by underspends elsewhere in the budget, typically staffing due to turnover

- 3.3 Overdue and request charges have been increasingly viewed as being out of step with a modern, accessible and welcoming service and in recent years a growing number of local authorities have taken the decision to permanently end overdue charges for customers. In Scotland, 23 services have abolished them with a further 3, including East Lothian, suspending them until further notice.
- 3.4 Forward – Scotland's Public Library Strategy 2021-2025 has 15 strategic aims. Aim 1 is to reflect the rich and diverse communities in both library resources and programming to make them accessible to all. This includes in local actions the removal of financial penalties for all borrowers.
- 3.5 National and international reports cite several benefits associated with the removal of overdue fines including:
- 3.6 **Increased use of library services** – Overseas evidence has shown that removal of overdue fines results in increased library membership and borrowing. A no-fines approach is seen to encourage the return of lapsed users to the service.
- 3.7 **More equal access to service** – Evidence suggests fines act as a barrier to access for those who are least able to pay the charges with those who are from lower income households more likely to avoid use of the service which in turn has a wider impact on social disadvantage e.g. digital and social inequality. The removal of fines could help to tackle poverty and promote access to service for those who are in most need but who are most likely to be deterred by the potential of a financial penalty. Request charges have a greater impact on those in smaller communities as their libraries have a reduced stock level.
- 3.8 **Increased returns of long overdue stock** – reports suggest that people are more likely to return their long overdue books to the library without the threat of an overdue fine and that the practice of levying overdue fines has the opposite to the intended effect with customers holding on to books because they cannot afford to pay the costs.
- 3.9 **Improved customer service** – Administration of the fines system is resource intensive requiring cash handling and collection. The abolishment of library fines would remove the need for library and customer service colleagues to collect the income and discuss disputed amounts with customers, moving the focus away from transactional duties to more positive and qualitative customer interactions.
- 3.10 **Cost** The sums involved are prohibitively expensive in comparison with the cost required to raise an invoice following a prolonged period of non-payment. In the financial years 2016/17 to the end of March 2019 a total of £22,232.32 was invoiced with only 15% of that amount paid to August 2019.
- 3.11 **Lost and Damaged Items** The Library service as with all other library services manage a loss of book stock through missing, non-returned,

stolen or damaged items. The Library Management System does not record the number of items which are lost and not returned by customers as a separate and distinct figure from the overall total of items withdrawn from stock following a lost/missing status. Overdue items remain on a borrower's record until they are returned, or a replacement cost is paid. A replacement charge for items returned damaged is added to the borrower's record at the time of the return.

3.12 Management of Overdue Items Proposal Following the move to a new Library Management System in December 2022 all overdue fines and items prior to Covid were removed from customer records. Email notices are issued to each customer 3 days prior to the due date to remind the customer to renew or return items. Email notices related to overdue items are issued on the 1st day overdue. 2 further notices are issued confirming that if items are not returned then a replacement cost will be levied. Customers are also informed that their library membership will be suspended until items are returned or payment is received. 2009 long overdue notices were issued in 2024/25 and in October 2025 there are 1902 memberships suspended.

3.13 Communication It is proposed that the service capitalises on the permanent removal of overdue fines and request charges by running a high-profile communications campaign to encourage lapsed users to return long overdue items to the library, rejoin, and new customers to join.

4 POLICY IMPLICATIONS

4.1 The Library Borrower Policy 2018 will be rewritten as Library Conditions of Membership and Management Rules in line with other authorities and in consultation with staff and members of the public.

5 RESOURCE AND OTHER IMPLICATIONS

5.1 Finance: The Customer Services budget contains an income target of £25,700 for statutory fees. The table below shows that prior to the Covid 19 pandemic this target had not been met since 2016/17 and has remained an ongoing pressure. The library service will explore other avenues to recoup this loss of income by maximising room bookings and looking to offer new services such as wireless printing. This report has been approved by the Executive Director for Council Resources.

Year	Overdues	Reservations
2015/16	£13859	£7297
2016/17	£19173	£9175
2017/18	£15179	£7361
2018/19	£6919	£7605
2019/20	£7142	£7648

- 5.2 Human Resources: Administration of the fines system is resource intensive requiring cash handling and collection. The abolishment of library fines will remove the need for library and customer service colleagues to collect the income and discuss disputed amounts with customers, moving the focus away from transactional duties to more positive and qualitative customer interactions and in particular to focus support for those in most need.
- 5.3 Other (e.g. Legal/IT): None
- 5.4 Risk: None

6 INTEGRATED IMPACT ASSESSMENT

6.1

Select the statement that is appropriate to your report by placing an 'X' in the relevant box.

An Integrated Impact Assessment screening process has been undertaken and the subject of this report does not affect the wellbeing of the community or have a significant impact on: equality and human rights; tackling socio-economic disadvantages and poverty; climate change, the environment and sustainability; the Council's role as a corporate parent; or the storage/collection of personal data.

☒

or

The subject of this report has been through the Integrated Impact Assessment process and impacts have been identified as follows:

☐

Subject	Impacts identified (Yes, No or N/A)
Equality and human rights	
Socio-economic disadvantage/poverty	
Climate change, the environment and sustainability	
Corporate parenting and care-experienced young people	
Storage/collection of personal data	
Other	

7 APPENDICES

7.1 None

8 BACKGROUND PAPERS

8.1 None

9 AUTHOR AND APPROVAL DETAILS

Report Author(s)

Name	Caroline Messer
Designation	Team Manager – Library & Customer Services
Tel/Email	01620 820610 cmesser@eastlothian.gov.uk
Date	25 September 2025

Head of Service Approval

Name	Eamon John
Designation	Head of Communities & Partnerships
Confirmation that IIA and other relevant checks (e.g. finance/legal) have been completed	
Approval Date	05/10/2025