

CULTURE, RECREATION & TOURISM CABINET MEMBER MEETING

Agenda Item 56

Brighton & Hove City Council

Subject: Libraries Fees and Charges
Date of Meeting: 9 December 2008
Report of: Director of Cultural Services
Contact Officer: Name: **Sally McMahon** Tel: **29-6963**
E-mail: sally.mcmahon@brighton-hove.gov.uk
Key Decision: No
Wards Affected: All

FOR GENERAL RELEASE

1. SUMMARY AND POLICY CONTEXT:

- 1.1 Purpose of the report is to review the impact of the Libraries fees and charges introduced last year, and to agree the fees and charges for 2009-10
- 1.2 When they approved the fees and charges for this year, Members of the Culture, Recreation and Tourism Committee asked for a review of the impact of those changes after six months of implementation. Under the Corporate Fees and Charges Policy, we are required to carry out an annual review in line with the policy.

2. RECOMMENDATIONS:

- 2.1 (1) To agree the Libraries Fees and Charges proposals for 2009-10.

3. RELEVANT BACKGROUND INFORMATION/CHRONOLOGY OF KEY EVENTS:

- 3.1 The current fees and charges were approved by the Culture, Recreation and Tourism Committee on 12 September 2007. Quite a number of changes were made, and the purpose behind the changes was to implement a balanced overall package delivered by:
 - Removing the charging of fines to children
 - Small reduction in fines to adults to utilise coin-op facility
 - Raising prices on audio visual material hire in the light of the current market
 - Introducing a new audio visual discount subscription card for older people (people 60 years and over)
 - Reintroducing a charge for reserving books
 - Maximising the use of our assets such as the Jubilee Library conference rooms
 - Simplifying and rationalising concessions on charges
 - Maximising income generation opportunities to support the delivery of library services

3.2 Review of the impact of the changes implemented April 2008

Members asked that we review the impact of a number of the changes made this year:

(1) Reservation charges:

The introduction of a 50p charge for reserving an item in Brighton & Hove Libraries stock (there is already a charge of £2.50 for obtaining an item from outside the authority) has not yet been introduced as we wish to ensure that the reservation system is working at its best capacity before introducing the charge. The charge will be implemented in time for the beginning of the new financial year. Free reservations will be maintained for children and on print and audio books for exempt card holders with concessionary members paying a reduced rate of half price.

All but four other authorities in the SE region make a charge for reserving their own stock, with charges ranging from 30p to £1.00. All authorities charge for external interlibrary loans, ranging from 40p to £3.00 with most around £2.00. The cost of dealing with reservations is an estimated to be 70p per internal reservation and £14 for items from another authority.

(2) Audio-visual charges:

Borrowers continue to hire DVDs and CDs though income levels have dropped slightly. This is a general trend across public libraries, and we are fairing better than many other authorities. We are planning an improved marketing campaign to boost audio-visual hire next year, as our prices compare favourably with other high street outlets, where prices are around £3.50 - £4.00 for a loan period of only a day or two, as opposed to the cheaper priced one week loan on offer by Libraries. Music CD hire is a unique service offered by public libraries, as there are no other places where people can hire music CDs.

(3) Room hire charges:

Significant increases in room hire rates at Jubilee Library were made in line with market trends to maximise income from this developed service. Whilst there has been a 31% decrease in the total number of hires from April-September 2008 to the equivalent period in 2007 income has held steady with a small increase of 2%. There has been a complete change of staff managing these facilities which has delayed the introduction of our plans for developing the service. Some investment has been made in service improvement and a marketing campaign is being planned to increase use and income.

(4) Baby Boogie charge:

The Pre-School Music and Rhyme project of which Baby Boogie is an integral part has been developed largely through external grant funding over the last five years. This has delivered regular structured pre-school music singing and rhyme sessions in 10 libraries and a range of pre-school settings; a free pre-school loan service of instruments available to individuals, families and groups and related CDs and books for loan as well as updated written support material on a range of skills from singing with a baby to how to run a music and rhyme session. These services are

widely promoted at community festivals and play-days in the park, and training also delivered to pre-school workers.

To help continue to deliver and develop this very valued service it was agreed to introduce a charge of £1 per buggy at Baby Boogie sessions regardless of the number of children if further external funding could not be secured. This being the case the charge was implemented from September 2008.

This charge engendered a large amount of public concern and complaint and due to the strength of feeling and range of concerns it was decided to suspend these charges from October 16. It is now proposed that Baby Boogie sessions remain free and a review of alternative opportunities are investigated to help resource this service.

(5) Concessions and Exemptions:

A standard half price charge for CDs and DVD hire to people on low income or with disabilities was introduced to simplify and rationalise the previously complex and confusing system. The original intention of free audio-visual hire was to give free access to books in other formats to people who cannot use standard print and this was maintained.

All 750 previously exempt borrowers who had used the library over the past 18 months were written to prior to the introduction of the change, explaining how this would affect them and asking for questions/response. There have been approximately 20 responses/comments about the changes and some discussion with individuals and organisations. From this feedback and discussion it became very clear that there were particular issues for people with learning difficulties in terms of combining disability, vulnerability and low income as well as often needing to utilise music and DVD hire as the principal need of their library use.

As a result, identified people with learning difficulties have been temporarily exempted from all hire charges. It is therefore proposed that a new Learning Disability category be implemented that gives free hire of music and DVDs as well as audio books and that there be further discussion with Learning Disability groups, individuals and advocates as to how this be clearly, appropriately and sensitively administered

(6) Discount card for older people:

A new discount card for people 60 or over was introduced giving them free music loans and half price DVD hire. Since April 2008, 750 people over 60 have taken advantage of the discount subscription card for audio-visual loans.

3.3 Proposals for 2009-2010

As most Library Service charges are only a few pence, it is not possible to increase them annually by inflation. Instead, most prices are left unchanged for a number of years until an increase in real prices can be adopted. A range of increases above the rate of inflation were introduced this year, which

makes it unnecessary to make further changes for next year. This approach will enable us to support those facing difficulties in the current economic climate, by not increasing any of our Libraries fees and charges.

There are only two changes to the Libraries fees and charges proposed for 2009-2010:

- (1) To introduce a new category of membership for people with learning difficulties, that will enable them to access most services free of charge, including free audio-visual hire and reservations, and they will not incur overdue charges. Charges would still be payable for any lost items and hire of language course.
- (2) To confirm that charges for Baby Boogie have been withdrawn, subject to a full review of the service to take place next year.

3.4 Income targets for next year will increase by inflation, bringing the total target for Libraries Services to £441,700. We are confident that we will achieve this target as:

- We are beginning a new marketing campaign which will highlight our unique music hire service, and value for money of our DVD hire
- We are also developing and more effectively marketing the room hire and retail offer.
- We will be introducing the reservation charge which was delayed from this year.
- We are seeking to recover more of the outstanding money owed by library users.
- We are currently set to achieve all but £27,000 of this year's income target, the shortfall is mainly due to the delayed reservation charge implementation.

4. CONSULTATION

4.1 Consultation over the creation of a new membership category for people with learning difficulties is taking place with individuals, learning disability groups, advocates and social services. We are seeking the most sensitive and effective way of identifying people with learning difficulties in order to make sure they receive the right level of service to meet their needs.

4.2 Market research comparing our charges with other library authorities or other similar service providers has taken place.

5. FINANCIAL & OTHER IMPLICATIONS:

Financial Implications:

5.1 To The 2008/09 budget target for libraries customer income is £420k, and the service is expected to fall short by £27k. This shortfall, though, will be met by underspends elsewhere in the service.

Whilst the fees and charges detailed in appendix 1 are proposed to remain at the same level, with some charges being decreased, it is to be noted that

conversely the income target for libraries is expected to increase in line with inflation for 2009/10 (to £430k) and 2010/11 (£441k).

Therefore the use of marketing, improved debt recovery and the delayed introduction of the reservation charges – as outlined in section 3.4 of the report – will be an important factor in the achievement of next year's income target.

It is noted that income charges are analysed annually by the library service, with the fees and charges report documenting the results of their review

Finance Officer Consulted: Peter Francis

Date: 18/11/08

Legal Implications:

- 5.2 There are no direct legal implications or adverse Human Rights Act implications arising from this report and the overall approach to fees and charges is reasonable and in accordance with the council priorities and policies

Layer Consulted:

Bob Bruce

Date: 11/11/08

Equalities Implications:

- 5.3 The removal of audio-visual charges for people with learning difficulties through the introduction of a special membership card will benefit a group of people who are particularly disadvantaged in our society.

Sustainability Implications:

- 5.4 *Sustainable Consumption and Production* : No implications.
Climate Change and Energy: No implications.
Natural Resource Protection and Environmental Enhancement: No implications.
Sustainable Communities: The holding of all Libraries fees and charges at the current level and the removal of audio-visual charges for people with learning difficulties will enable more people to make use of Libraries facilities and services, and so contribute to the development of more sustainable communities.

Crime & Disorder Implications:

- 5.5 There are no crime and disorder implications.

Risk and Opportunity Management Implications:

- 5.6 There is a risk that the income targets for next year will not be met. This is mitigated by the plans set in place to stimulate more income through existing sources. There is an opportunity to encourage more families on low income, and more people with learning difficulties to make use of Libraries services.

Corporate / Citywide Implications:

The proposals support the corporate priority to '**Reducing inequality by increasing opportunity**'. The holding of all Libraries fees and charges at the current level and the removal of audio-visual charges for people with learning difficulties will enable more people, especially those most disadvantaged, to make use of Libraries services, as we are one of the few leisure and learning services that can be used at low cost or for free. Overall, the fees and charges support children and young people through the provision of mainly free services to children (no overdue charges, free special services such as Baby Boogie, Homework clubs, etc). Provision of concessionary rates for disabled people and those on low incomes, special provision for people with learning difficulties, and discount cards for people aged 60 and over, all target support for the most vulnerable in our society.

6. EVALUATION OF ANY ALTERNATIVE OPTION(S):

6.1 None considered

7. REASONS FOR REPORT RECOMMENDATIONS

7.1 To set appropriate fees and charges for Libraries services by holding them at their current rates and recognising the special needs of people with learning difficulties by removing all audio-visual hire charges for these users.

SUPPORTING DOCUMENTATION

Appendices:

1. Libraries Fees and Charges

Documents In Members' Rooms

1. None

Background Documents

1. None