HAMPSHIRE COUNTY COUNCIL

Decision Report

Decision Maker:	Executive Member for Culture and Recreation
Date of Decision:	14 January 2010
Decision Title:	Proposed Changes to Library Charges
Decision Reference:	1193
Report From:	Director of Culture, Communities and Rural Affairs

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1. Executive Summary

1.1 This report describes a range of activities aimed at improving the library service provided to Hampshire residents and seeks approval for a variation in the fees charged.

2. Contextual information

2.1 On 13 September 2007 the then Executive Member for Recreation and Heritage received a report on changes to some library charges which were implemented in April 2008.[1] Eighteen months on, the Library and Information Service (LIS) has reviewed its charges again with the dual aim of slowing the decline of income as far as possible whilst also aiming to ensure that the number of books which are not returned is as low as possible.

3. Existing Income Streams

3.1 Audio Visual Membership Scheme

3.1.1 The main area of income is from audio visual loans, especially DVDs, the total income for 2008/9 being £532,150. To date income in this area is paid along the lines of 'pay as you borrow'. To enhance and encourage regular and repeat use it is recommended that annual membership cards be introduced as an alternative to 'pay as you borrow' with the introduction of an annual charge of £40.00. It is envisaged that such a subscription would enable the borrowing of any two AV items at any one time with no time limit

[1] http://www.hants.gov.uk/decisions/decisions-docs/070913-exerec-R0906101842.html

and no limit on the number of items borrowed over the course of a year. It is hoped that this will encourage regular users and be an effective promotional offer.

3.2 Fines

3.2.1 The second largest source of income is fines. These were last fully reviewed in January 2005. LIS is providing an increasing number of opportunities to enable customers to avoid overdue charges including: drop boxes, longer opening hours, Hantsdirect, on-line renewals, and e-mail notifications. Nationally there is a significant variation in the level of fines. Since LIS's charges to adults are towards the upper end of the spectrum already at 15p per day per book, it is not recommended to make any change here.

3.2.2 However, in order to help Hampshire residents who are unemployed and encourage them to use the service, it is suggested that a reduced rate of 10p per book per day is introduced for a time limited period to each unemployed person to a maximum of £4.00.

3.2.3 Another group that needs to be considered is that of children and young people, up to the age of 17, who are not charged any fines for overdue material. Currently, there are 33,513 children's items on loan to 16,693 borrowers that are long overdue. This is a higher proportion of the total numbers involved – so in comparison, there are 19,524 long overdue items on loan to 18,134 adult borrowers.

3.2.4 Some Library Services do charge fines on Children's books etc. and some do not – see Appendix 1 for more details. It is a potentially emotive topic and it is therefore recommended that the matter is debated by the Culture, Communities and Rural Affairs Select Committee in the first instance.

3.3 Concessionary Audio Visual Membership Scheme

3.3.1 In 2005 as part of LIS's approach to social inclusion and the removal of barriers to use, the concept of the Access card was introduced. This allowed adults and children with significant difficulties in reading printed material to borrow up to two AV items free of charge.

3.3.2 It is now proposed that a concessionary AV membership scheme should replace the current Access Card.

3.3.3 Whilst the Access Card scheme has been very much appreciated by eligible groups and individuals, there is some evidence that it has been taken up by those for whom it was not intended. LIS staff do not ask for written proof of eligibility (which is in line with the Culture Communities and Rural Affairs Department's policy guidance for concessionary charges for disabled people) but this has left the scheme open to abuse.

3.3.4 It is therefore proposed that the current scheme be replaced by concessionary membership of the AV annual subscription scheme. Provision will be made to ensure that free access to audio books is safeguarded for those who are unable to read print. A free request service for titles held in Hampshire libraries will also be retained. Otherwise, the proposed solution recognises that making a charge for the service is not unreasonable but that since use of AV by this group of customers is likely to be greater than average, a reduced charge would be appropriate. It should be noted that practice of library authorities across the country in this area varies widely and that many do not have any concessionary scheme at all.

3.3.5 Following an equalities impact assessment of the proposal, the need for wider consultation on the level of charge that would be appropriate has been identified. Approval is sought here for agreement in principle to the concept of a concessionary AV membership scheme.

3.4. Request Charges

3.4.1 In 2008/9 the income made from charging for requests was £42,398. It is recommended that LIS continues to keep charges for adults to 50p for requesting Hampshire stock. However, it is also recommended that LIS continues the concession of free requests for children for Hampshire stock, free audio book requests for visually impaired customers and free Large Print book requests for Hampshire stock. Free requests do not however mean free inter-library loans (i.e. loans from outside Hampshire) since that can involve LIS in significant expenditure, some of which needs to be passed on to the customer.

3.4.2 There is therefore a case for making a higher charge for items borrowed through the inter-library loan system (ILL). To bring LIS more in line with charges made by other local authorities, it is recommended that an increase of £1.00 per ILL request to £2.50 is made, with urgent ILLs also increasing by £1 to £3:50. In addition, international ILLs should increase by £2.00 to £10.00 to cover the staffing and postal costs involved. It should be noted that the charges to LIS from the British Library and other inter library loans agencies can be up to 4 or 5 times greater than the charges LIS currently passes on to customers, even before postal costs are taken into account. It is part of LIS's role to provide access to wider stock holdings, hence the service is subsidised by library authorities everywhere.

3.5. Research Service

3.5.1 Currently, LIS offers a subject search service to provide information on a particular topic, which cannot easily be answered from Library stock - for example by branch staff searching the catalogue. A charge of £3 is made for the service with relevant request/photocopy/ printing charges added as appropriate. The service can include a bibliography/suggested relevant websites and/or contact details of relevant organisations. Increasingly the work involves sophisticated web searches and takes up more staff time.

Therefore, it is recommended that anything which requires further research should be now charged at the same rate as for Local History Research. If a customer requires research to be done on their behalf, then LIS will undertake a maximum of 30 minutes research free after which the customer is advised that:

- Additional research undertaken by library staff at a charge at the same level as that of the Record Office - currently £25.00 per hour (or £12:50 per half hour) NB Record Office charges will be under review in 2010 - significant changes not anticipated
- Or advised of other avenues customers could use such as Hampshire Record Office, private researcher etc.

3.5.2 This proposed change to the subject research service is along the same lines as currently used in the Hampshire Record Office for their research service.

3.6. Charges for Music CDs

3.6.1 Comparisons with other authorities show that Library Service is at the lower end of the charging spectrum for CDs. Music CD income has declined slightly in recent years and needs to cover new stock costs. The proposal is therefore to now increase the charge from 60p to £1.00. Whilst a significant increase, the level of charge is still a lot cheaper than buying a CD or audio album download. CDs can also be borrowed for 4 weeks so the service is still good value.

3.7. Reading Group sets and Play Set Loans

3.7.1 LIS has been instrumental in the growth and development of reading groups in Hampshire and currently has 1000 sets of titles for loan. It is suggested that a nominal reservation charge of £1.00 per loan is made as a contribution towards the cost of providing what has been a free service in the last few years. For this charge, groups can book a set of up to 10 titles up to a year in advance.

3.7.2 Hampshire also maintains a collection of play sets for loan to groups within Hampshire. It is recommended that the charge for requesting a play set is also £1.00 to be consistent with the new charge for requesting reading group sets.

3.8. Music Score Sets

3.8.1 Charges for vocal scores have been increased in step changes in the last ten years to their present level of £12.00. LIS provides an excellent and cheap service bearing in mind the cost for performing groups of buying or hiring scores elsewhere. It is recommended that a revised charge of £15.00 for a set of 40 scores be made.

3.9 Ancestry Online

3.9.1 Much used by family historians in libraries, the e-resource Ancestry is withdrawing its voucher scheme. Currently LIS pays for a subscription which allows free access in the larger libraries only but with voucher access at £5 or £10 (allowing downloading of information up to that value) in other libraries. Since the latter will no longer be possible and the alternative would be customers taking out personal subscriptions, access to and charges for the service during 2010 will need to be reviewed by LIS.

4. Recommendations

That the Executive Member for Culture and Recreation endorses the above changes to charging in Hampshire's Library and Information Service with effect from 1 April 2010.

CORPORATE OR LEGAL INFORMATION:

Links to the Corporate Strategy

Hampshire safer and more secure for all:	no
Corporate Business plan link number (if appropriate):	
Maximising well-being:	yes
Corporate Business plan link number (if appropriate):	
Enhancing our quality of place:	yes
Corporate Business plan link number (if appropriate):	

Other Significant Links

Links to previous Member decisions:		
Title	Reference	Date
Executive Member Cultural, Communities and Rural Affairs Decision Day	665	23 April 2009
Cabinet	746	29 June 2009
Direct links to specific legislation or Government Directives		
Title		Date

Section 100 D - Local Government Act 1972 - background documents

The following documents discuss facts or matters on which this report, or an important part of it, is based and have been relied upon to a material extent in the preparation of this report. (NB: the list excludes published works and any documents which disclose exempt or confidential information as defined in the Act.)

Document	Location
None	

Integral Appendix B

IMPACT ASSESSMENTS:

1. Equalities Impact Assessment:

1.1. A full Equality Impact Assessment was done as the Strategy evolved which shows that the current impact will be to bring significant improvements in usage and access, including disadvantaged groups. A separate Equality Impact Assessment has been carried out on the Concessionary Audio Visual Membership scheme proposals.

2. Impact on Crime and Disorder:

2.1. None directly.

3. Climate Change:

a) How does what is being proposed impact on our carbon footprint / energy consumption?

A comprehensive sustainability impact assessment was applied to the Vision and Strategy and various measures were set out in the Vision and Strategy to decrease LIS's carbon footprint.

b) How does what is being proposed consider the need to adapt to climate change, and be resilient to its longer term impacts?

The need to adapt to climate change is highlighted in the Strategy.

Appendix 1 – Children's Fines Comparisons

Southampton	No charge
Portsmouth	No charge
Isle of Wight	No charge
Surrey	2p a day
West Berkshire	8p a day
Kent	2p a day
West Sussex	No charge
Bath	5p a day
Bournemouth	No charge
Poole	No charge
Wiltshire	3p a day
Oxfordshire	5p a day
Dorset	No charge