

Abolishing library overdue fines - Appendix 1

1 Background

Library books and other items are lent to library members for a specific period of time – three weeks being the current agreed period across Wales. Historically, public libraries have levied a charge (referred to as a fine) on members for returning their books late, i.e. after the due date. Members have an option to renew their loan which then extends the borrowing period before the item is due back.

The fines increase incrementally the longer the item is overdue and are applied to each item borrow. The maximum fine per item is £8.00 (after 8 weeks overdue).

Overdue fine	Fine
Between 1 and 6 days late	10p per day (6 days = 60p)
7 days / 1 week late	£1
From start of 2 nd week	£2
From start of 3 rd week	£3
From start of 4 th week	£4
From start of 5 th week	£5
From start of 6 th week	£6
From start of 7 th week	£7
From start of 8 th week	£8.00 plus replacement cost.

2 Exemptions

Children aged 0-18 are not charged overdue fines in any public library in Wales, a policy which has been in place for many years, so that it is not a barrier to library use by children and young people.

Members receiving the Home Library Service are not charged overdue fines.

Exemptions can also be applied to adults with specific needs which might impact on their ability to return items on time (e.g. carers, dementia, learning disabilities) at the discretion of library managers.

3 Billing

Fines accrue in a member's customer account on the Library Management System. When the amount accrued reaches £30.00 members are blocked from any further borrowing until payment is made to reduce the amount owed.

If an item has still not been returned after 12 weeks, a charge for the replacement of the item is also added to the account. This price is based on the price of the book as listed in the catalogue, or a default price for the type of item.

Customers can opt to receive email or text messages to remind them to return their items.

4 Replacement charges

Replacement charges are different to fines – they are levied when an item is either not returned, lost or damaged by the borrower. It is the only intervention to prevent people just borrowing with no intention of returning an asset which belongs to the community.

Borrowers can renew items 5 times, they will get a couple of emails or SMS to remind them to return the items, and then if they are still not returned 12 weeks after the date it was due to be returned, the charge is levied.

The charge is accrued to the borrower's account in the Library Management System in lieu of raising an invoice for the amount due. Raising an invoice incurs a year end charge to the service from Finance of around £40 an invoice, so it would not be cost effective to invoice and it would involve a significant administrative burden. By placing the charge on the account, if the borrower does want to continue to use our service, they would have to pay off the amount owing to below the current threshold.

As far as can be ascertained, authorities who abolish fines retain this charge. The six authorities in north Wales are trying to harmonise procedures as far as possible because of the high level of inter-lending across the region, lending other authorities' property to our members and vice versa. We have agreed a way forward with some authorities not fining, but we would all retain the replacement charge for non-returned items to encourage the returning of borrowed items.

5 Unrecoverable historical accrued fines and charges on system

The accrued unpaid fines currently on the system are unrecoverable and will be deleted from members' records. Unreturned items are unrecoverable unless returned by the borrower.

Denbighshire Libraries do not actively recover accrued unpaid fines, accrued replacement charges or returned items. A pilot project over 10 years ago showed that it is not viable financially and costs more to operate than the value of recovered items.

When overdue fines are abolished, we are considering running a promotional campaign to encourage people to return any long overdue items as any accrued fines will have been deleted. We anticipate, however, that due to the length of time they have been on loan, most returned items will be in poor physical condition or contain out of date information

and they will be withdrawn from stock and disposed of in line with our stock management policy.

6 National and international context

The removal of overdue fines by library authorities is becoming increasingly common. At June 2022, 39 library authorities across UK are now fine-free. In Wales 4 authorities have already abolished fines and a further 5 are known to proposing to abolish in the coming year. All of Ireland's libraries are fine free and there are many countries and states across the world also abolishing fines.

Further information and the current list of UK fine-free public libraries can be found here:

<https://www.publiclibrariesnews.com/about-public-libraries-news/abolishing-fines>

A recent study of the current position on library fines across England, Wales and NI was conducted by Libraries Connected (the membership organisation for public library services):

<https://www.librariesconnected.org.uk/news/library-fine-survey-results-and-summary-report-revealed>

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