

DECISION NOTICE OF AN INDIVIDUAL MEMBER OF GWYNEDD COUNCIL CABINET

DATE OF DECISION 1 April 2021

DATE DECISION PUBLISHED 12 May 2021

DATE DECISION WILL COME INTO FORCE and implemented,
unless the decision is called in, in accordance with section 7.25 of
the Gwynedd Council Constitution 19 May 2021

Cabinet Member: Councillor Gareth Thomas
Cabinet Member for Economy and Community

SUBJECT
The Abolition of Library Fines

DECISION

To abolish library fines from 1st April 2021 and remove any existing fines from this date for adults using the public Libraries in Gwynedd.

REASON WHY THE DECISION IS NEEDED

Please see attached officer report

DECLARATIONS OF PERSONAL INTEREST AND ANY RELEVANT DISPENSATIONS APPROVED BY THE COUNCIL'S STANDARDS COMMITTEE


None

ANY CONSULTATIONS UNDERTAKEN PRIOR TO MAKING THE DECISION

Consultation with
Gwynedd Council Statutory Officers

The results of the consultations are reported upon in the attached report

DECISION NOTICE OF AN INDIVIDUAL MEMBER OF GWYNEDD COUNCIL CABINET – OFFICER REPORT

Name and title of Cabinet Member/s:	Cllr. Gareth Thomas Cabinet Member for Economy and Community
Name and title of Report Author :	Nia Gruffydd Library Services Manager
Date of Decision :	1/4/2021
Signature of Cabinet Member/s :	

Subject : The Abolition of Library Fines

Recommendation for the Decision :

Abolish library fines from 1st April 2021 and remove any existing fines from this date for adults using the public Libraries in Gwynedd.

Reason why Decision is needed :

1. Historically, library fines have been placed on books and other materials over their return date as a means of ensuring that such books continue to be available to as many readers as possible.
2. Over time, library fines have become an integral part of the public library service's budget, and fines for overdue items are now part of our income targets.
3. Library fines on books for children and young people under the age of eighteen were suspended in Gwynedd in the 2000s as fines were seen as a barrier to young people and families using the library.
4. There is an increasing tendency for Library Authorities to stop levying fines for late books. At least 15 British Library Authorities have suspended fines in recent years, and the Republic of Ireland has suspended fines completely since January 2019. Awen Trust Libraries (Bridgend County) was the first to do away with fines in Wales in 2019.
5. There are many good reasons to do away with library fines:

- 5.1. Anecdotal experience and knowledge suggest that people view fines as a barrier to library membership and usage. In addition, fines disproportionately affect those on lower incomes and fines can be linked negatively to library use.
- 5.2. Fines create a sense of being nasty or fearful and do not put consumer needs at the heart of what we do. The message of punishment given contradicts our messages of open and welcoming libraries.
- 5.3. Negative experience is a bad customer experience. A fine is a bad experience that can make a user never use a library again or never return late books.
- 5.4. Libraries are an invaluable resource for everyone in the community and we want to remove any barriers that may prevent people from making full use of them.
- 5.5. Income from library fines has decreased year on year. We are unable to meet our income target of £11,910, and fines are arguably a diminishing unreliable income stream that we cannot rely on in the long term.
- 5.6. Users who withdraw from Libraries for fear of getting or paying a fine (and this also extends to children and young people within families) are denied wider library services and activities, such as free access to computers, help with Government websites, children's activities.
- 5.7. Some research shows that eliminating fines increases book borrowing, attracts more families to the library, which is increasingly manifested in groups of users experiencing multiple deprivation.
- 5.8. In a staff consultation held in November 2020, (response rate 66%), 87% of respondents indicated that they agreed or strongly agreed that levying fines on late books was a barrier to people using the library. 80% of respondents believed fines should be removed altogether.
- 5.9. In a Consumer Consultation held in December-January 2021, the question was asked:
Are fines on overdue library books a barrier to using the library? Out of 134 responses, 25% responded that fines were a barrier (rising to 33% when considering the online response only). This is a sample of users with 86% of them having used the Library service during the pandemic

Reason and justification behind the Decision :

1. For 2020/21 our income target for late books was £11,910. Due to Covid-19, no income has been realised against this heading. However, in 2019/20 our actual income against this target was £9,545. There is an annual deficit against our income target, and this is unlikely to change.
2. Developments such as online accounts and users' ability to renew books themselves have contributed to consumers being able to take more responsibility for their accounts, and consequently our income levels are affected by fines.
3. The development of a Library app and the ability to borrow books via a smart device such as a smart phone, as well as being able to renew items remotely, will also have an impact on book fines income.
4. Any existing fines on library user accounts will also be removed from 1 April 2021.
5. The late return of other hired items e.g. DVDs and Language Learning resources (other than Welsh) will continue to attract a payment as this is in the form of a second loan period, rather than a late payment fine.

6. We will use this opportunity to promote and market the Library as a welcoming service that has removed existing barriers to use.
7. We will strengthen our systems for sending messages about books that need or need to be returned by users.
8. Implementation of this would be cost neutral to the Council, as it is recommended that the service fund the budget gap.

Declarations of personal interest by any Cabinet Member consulted with and any relevant dispensations approved by the Standards Committee

None

Any consultations undertaken prior to making the decision :

Head of Finance:

I support the Cabinet Member's decision to abolish library fines from 1st April 2021, and confirm that the Department's staffing restructuring creates sufficient permanent savings to fund the decision.

Monitoring Officer:

The basis for the recommendation is supported by appropriate evidence of the benefits that abolishing fines can bring. No comments to add regarding propriety.

Local Member/s:

None