ROTHERHAM BOROUGH COUNCIL – REPORT TO MEMBERS

1.	Meeting:	Cabinet Member for Regeneration & Development Services Meeting
2.	Date:	2nd February 2009
3.	Title:	**Catalogue and Library Membership Data Maintenance** Affects all wards
4.	Programme Area:	Environment and Development Services

5. Summary

The Library Management System contains a large amount of data, dating back to the 1980s that relates to items, loans and members that are obsolete. This old information creates uncertainty when trying to locate items in stock for members of the public, can lead to staff mistakes in dealing with borrower records and contravenes Data Protection principles.

The intention is to delete items from the catalogue which have been on loan and unreturned for over 3 years and to delete membership records relating to people who have not used the service for over 3 years (standard registration period).

This is essential work preparatory to introducing regular "house-keeping" routines for keeping data up-to-date and revising the process for dealing with overdue items.

6. Recommendations

That this report be accepted and the Library Management System data clear-up be carried out.

7. Proposals and Details

To deal with historical data relating to overdue loans, members whose registration has lapsed and missing items of stock. No systematic deletion of obsolete records has taken place since an Automated Library Management System was introduced and there is data in the system dating back to the 1980s.

To run reports identifying the following, preparatory to deletion of old data:

(i)   items of stock that are recorded as on loan and due back prior to 1st January 2006
<u>10,469 items</u>

(ii)   records of borrowers of items due for return prior to 1st January 2006
<u>3,513 borrower records</u>

(iii)   overdue charges attaching to these long overdue loans
<u>Total £39,676.20</u>

We propose to write off all these unreturned items, as there is no realistic prospect of them now being returned in a useable condition. It is not possible to attribute financial value to this stock as this information was not routinely included in the previous Library Management System and is very dependent on the individual item.

We also propose to delete the membership records of these people. A mail-out to these lapsed members has been considered but would not be cost-effective in terms of the likely response and the fact that after a period of over 3 years many will have moved on from their recorded address. If any of these people return to the library in future they will be welcome to re-join as new members.

While the sum outstanding on these long overdue loans looks very high to write off, there is little if any prospect of it being recovered.

Subsequent to the clear-up of data, an improved system of maintaining stock and membership records will be introduced. With a more customer-friendly process of levying overdue charges we are hopeful that, with attendant publicity, previous and new members will be attracted back to the library.

8. Finance

The finance that relates to the overdue charges and value of stock that is long overdue is effectively a nominal figure, in that there is no realistic likelihood of these items being returned or the items being of further value to the Library Service. The figure of £39,676.20 is attached to unreturned loans dating back in some instances to the 1980s.

If any of these long overdue items - where the fines have been capped and the item effectively treated as lost - was returned, it would most likely be discarded due to age and/or condition, incurring costs for the library service for staff time and disposal.

Professional discussion nationally, as well as feedback received locally, indicates that the imposition of fines for late return of loans is a major disincentive to people joining the library, both for those who are socially/financially disadvantaged and for those who enjoy buying books.

There is no firm evidence either way but there is a strong school of thought which advocates that fines actually discourage people from returning items once the loan is overdue. This would mean that in fact while the imposition of fines creates a small amount

of income, it actually contributes significantly to costs in terms of lost items and unpaid overdue charges from users who never return to the library.

9. Risks and Uncertainties

It appears that the Library proposes to write off a considerable sum of money. In fact given the period that has elapsed since the items were borrowed, there is little or no prospect of stock being returned or fines paid, so the financial benefit to the Council is illusory.

Conversely, the risk of not dealing with the obsolete data in the Library Management System and the procedure for dealing with overdue loans would be to exacerbate problems in producing accurate reports, dealing with customers efficiently and maintaining active membership.

In terms of deleting old membership records, apart from the requirements of the Data Protection Act, the data needs to be deleted because it has not been verified for over three years and is likely to be inaccurate. It is possible that once the old debts have been written off that a customer returns to the library. We believe it is of more benefit to have the customer as an active member of the library and bringing in fresh income than barring them effectively for life.

Significant steps have been already taken to allow borrowers to renew the loan of items online or by telephone (24 hour service). There is no clear evidence to indicate that the imposition of fines actually encourages borrowers to return items. Some library authorities however, have introduced reminders to borrowers prior to fines being charged. This carries the implication that fines income would be affected, though ongoing use of the library would generate future income for charged services.

10. Policy and Performance Agenda Implications

An accurate and efficient Library Management System is essential to the efficient delivery of the Library Service, addressing the corporate themes of Learning, Achieving, Alive.

A clear-up of obsolete data and an ongoing process to keep data accurate, together with a more customer friendly process for charging for overdue items, will contribute more effectively to the corporate agenda on equality, diversity and fairness.

Obsolete data on the Library Management System complicates and confuses production of accurate management information reports which can in turn cause difficulties in setting and monitoring performance targets.

Currently membership of the library stands at 13.8% of the total population. A clear-up of old loan and membership issues and a fresh approach to the way fines are imposed will help us to reach the current target of 15% of the population, contributing to improving our local Performance Indicators.

11.   Background Papers and Consultation

None

Contact Name : *Mark Heaton, Manager, Library Service Design & Development, telephone (82)3619. mark.heaton@rotherham.gov.uk*