

## ROTHERHAM BOROUGH COUNCIL – REPORT TO MEMBERS

1.	<b>Meeting:</b>	<b>Cabinet Member for Culture, Lifestyle , Sport and Tourism</b>
2.	<b>Date:</b>	<b>21<sup>st</sup> June 2011</b>
3.	<b>Title:</b>	<b>Library Service – Review of Charges for Requests</b>
4.	<b>Directorate:</b>	<b>Environment and Development Services</b>

### 5. Summary

**Rotherham Library and Information Services offers a request service to customers.**

**This enables them to request to reserve any published book to borrow. A recent change to the request procedure has been under review following a number of complaints from customers.**

### 6. Recommendations

- **That this report is received**
- **That Cabinet Member endorses the recommendation to re-instate the free request service.**

## **7. Proposals and Details**

As part of the annual setting of fees and charges, the library service proposed a change to the request procedure from April 2011. Prior to April 2011 the request service had been free of charge. From April a limit of 3 concurrent free requests was introduced, after which limit there would be a charge (50p) for each extra. This was in response to previous comments that the stock in a number of community libraries was becoming “unbalanced” due to the large number of requests within specific areas of interest.

The change was intended to be on a “trial” basis, pending a further review of the stock policy.

However, following customer complaints in April about the change, it was decided to undertake an immediate review.

Monitoring of the requests system has taken place during April and May, with comments from both staff and customers collated and analysed. In summary, responses indicated that:

- the change to the service is not facilitating good customer service
- it is perceived as being unfair to some customers
- it makes our services less accessible to some customers
- it has also engendered inconsistency in implementation
- it risks loss of custom
- it risks reduction in customer satisfaction

Rotherham Library and Information Service (LIS) aims to provide the people of Rotherham with a Library Service which is right for them – wherever, however and whenever they need. It is clear that this new procedure is not fulfilling that need. Two examples of this are:

- the access barriers for on line requests
- visually impaired borrowers who need access to talking books which may be spread across the borough’s libraries

The ‘wherever, however and whenever’ will be different for every customer and this needs to be recognised in our procedures. In addition we have recently launched a new library catalogue that is likely to increase a borrower’s interest in items that may not be at their local library. We therefore propose to reinstate free requests, other than those obtained via inter-library loans.

## **8. Finance**

The loss of income implication is likely to be minimal as evidence so far suggests strongly that customers are unhappy with the change and so few are prepared to pay the extra charge.

## **9. Risks and Uncertainties**

The risks are minimal but would be much greater as already outlined if we continued with present procedure and ignored customer comments.

## **10. Policy and Performance Agenda Implications**

The Library and Information service contributes to all the new corporate priorities and in particular to:

- Making sure no community is left behind
- Providing quality education; ensuring people have opportunities to improve skills, learn and get a job
- Helping to create safe and healthy communities

The free requests service is an important part of our service. Whilst we are always happy to experiment with different ways of doing things, we are also keen to listen to our customers and take on board their views. In terms of the corporate plan and the way we do things as a Council, we make our recommendation with reference to:

- Talking and listening to all our customers and treating everyone with respect
- Supporting and enabling our communities to help themselves whilst meeting the needs of the most vulnerable

## **11. Background Papers and Consultation**

We have recently completed public consultation about the Library and Information Service in Rotherham as part of the Library Strategy. We have also looked at what other library authorities do as regards requests. It appears most are free and of the ones who do impose any charge, it is still too early to say what effect any charge imposed has had. In Rotherham, there is a clear customer expectation that the requests service should be free. This trial period of the imposition of the charge is clearly not working well and puts some vulnerable groups at a disadvantage.

### **Contact Name**

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