

READING BOROUGH COUNCIL

REPORT BY DIRECTOR OF ECONOMIC GROWTH AND NEIGHBOURHOOD SERVICES

TO:	HOUSING, NEIGHBOURHOODS AND LEISURE COMMITTEE		
DATE:	9 MARCH 2023	AGENDA ITEM:	
TITLE:	READING LIBRARIES IMPROVEMENT PROGRAMME: DISPOSAL OF LIBRARY STOCK		
LEAD COUNCILLOR:	COUNCILLOR BARNETT-WARD	PORTFOLIO:	CULTURE, LEISURE AND RECREATION
SERVICE:	CULTURE	WARDS:	BOROUGHWIDE
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1. PURPOSE OF REPORT AND EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

- 1.1 The report sets out a withdrawal policy for library stock. The approach to stock and asset withdrawal should be formally agreed as it involves disposal of Council assets.

2. RECOMMENDED ACTION

- 2.1 To agree the approach for the disposal of library stock and assets as set out in appendix 1.

3. POLICY CONTEXT AND CURRENT POSITION

- 3.1 Reading Libraries has a bookfund of £110,000 per year. The majority of spend is on printed books. The bookfund covers new books and replacements, where books are withdrawn.
- 3.2 Books are withdrawn based on use, need, quality and condition. This means that where an item is in poor condition, or is falling apart through overuse, or not being used, or is superseded/superfluous, we withdraw the item. The new books that arrive each year need space, and library stock is withdrawn in order to provide this.
- 3.3 If we did not withdraw books, we would run out of space for new ones. However, books are not withdrawn for the sake of withdrawing. Reports are run to check on use, and if a book has stopped being used, we can remove

from shelves and assess what happens next. In addition, most books will automatically be moved to another library after a certain period of time, so that customers see stock being refreshed and stock circulates round the network.

- 3.4 What happens after a book is withdrawn from the open shelf depends on the item.
 - 3.4.1 If an item is either falling apart due to overuse or general condition is poor but there is still a need for the item, we would replace where we can - an example would be a classic novel - we'll always need a copy and they can be heavily used.
 - 3.4.2 If an item has stopped issuing, we would assess whether it meets a particular need, whether it is the only one in the Borough, whether it is a subject we feel we ought to have and maybe look to replace with a similar title, or withdraw completely.
 - 3.4.3 If an item is still needed or not replaceable, but is in poor condition, or has stopped issuing but is of some significance, we would often place in reserve, so that we retain a copy but not on open shelves. It is still loanable and visible on the catalogue. This means, for example, that we still have many earlier works by well known novelists which may now be out of print.
 - 3.4.4 However, the majority of items are withdrawn as they are in poor condition, no longer required or not issuing. These items total around 8-10,000 per year. They are often of limited value, and are either offered to the public in periodic or permanent booksale, where people will purchase for a token amount of 50p-£1, or they are boxed up and collected by a book recycler. Where items have been offered for sale to the public and not sold, they will end up with the same boxed up books for recycling.
 - 3.4.5 There are two main companies operating in this field, and the return is very low to the service, on average less than 1p per book. The value is in:
 - not having to spend staff time and take up space in dealing with booksales
 - not having to send books direct to either recycling or landfill locally - the companies take away, pay a low price per book, and then books are reviewed and sold on, recycled or pulped. One company does then give a small amount back to the service from any sales- however the rate of return from withdrawn books is very low.
- 3.5 There is a large collection of older books, which are largely on the catalogue but mainly only for use within the library, and are also held on rolling stack shelves behind the scenes at central library. Some of these items have a value. Some are very old, and generally many are in poor condition. These items are with the library service as they have never been withdrawn - often simply due to age. However, they have no local connection, may have been with the service for over 100 years, are often in poor condition and currently do take up a lot of space, without being items that anyone wants to use. The current shelving run of these items totals around 120m of shelving. These items have in the past been visited and assessed by specialist antiquarian

book dealers who did purchase some items. We do receive occasional approaches to view these items with a view to sale.

- 3.6 The proposed withdrawal policy below seeks to balance the need to withdraw, the capacity of the service and reasonable return.
- 3.7 With the successful Levelling Up Fund bid to build a new Central Library at the Civic Centre, there is a need to formalise the withdrawal approach as the service prepares to relocate.
- 3.8 If we were to set up an 'ebay shop' type method of disposal, this would require staff time and would also need to align with Council finance processes - the advantage would be a potentially large audience and a higher return. However, there may be concern that the Council is 'selling off the family silver' - but there is genuinely no need for us to retain these items. A dedicated staffing post would not cover costs. We could offer small collections at a time and publish lists on the website, however dealers would then wish to see the items, which would require admin time.
- 3.9 Reading Museum do, if all avenues are exhausted, dispose at open auction and reinvest any money into collection development. However, this approach would need to be balanced against the lower value and poorer condition of library items.
- 3.10 The process set out in appendix 1 will
 - *enable the service to efficiently and effectively assess its withdrawn stock and appropriately dispose of it.
 - *give the library service the freedom to look at different ways of maximising return and efficiently and effectively dispose of withdrawn stock.

4. CONTRIBUTION TO STRATEGIC AIMS

- 4.1 The library service contributes to the to the shared agendas of the wider Council including the Council's Corporate Plan, the Health and Wellbeing Strategy and the Culture and Heritage Strategy.

5. ENVIRONMENTAL AND CLIMATE IMPLICATIONS

- 5.1 The Council declared a Climate Emergency at its meeting on 26 February 2019 (Minute 48 refers). The proposed withdrawal/disposal approach would not directly contribute to changes in this area.
- 5.2 However this approach should lead to slightly fewer items than is currently the case going down a recycling path and more going down a reuse path, by being sold for further use.

6. EQUALITY IMPACT ASSESSMENT

- 6.1 Under the Equality Act 2010, Section 149, a public authority must, in the exercise of its functions, have due regard to the need to—
- a) eliminate discrimination, harassment, victimisation and any other conduct that is prohibited by or under this Act;
 - b) advance equality of opportunity between persons who share a relevant protected characteristic and persons who do not share it;
 - c) foster good relations between persons who share a relevant protected characteristic and persons who do not share it.
- 6.2 Relevant protected characteristics are: age, disability, gender reassignment, pregnancy and maternity, race, religion or belief, sex and sexual orientation.
- 6.3 Having due regard to the need to advance equality of opportunity between persons who share a relevant protected characteristic and persons who do not share it involves having due regard, in particular, to the need to—
- a) remove or minimise disadvantages suffered by persons who share a relevant protected characteristic that are connected to that characteristic;
 - b) take steps to meet the needs of persons who share a relevant protected characteristic that are different from the needs of persons who do not share it;
 - c) encourage persons who share a relevant protected characteristic to participate in public life or in any other activity in which participation by such persons is disproportionately low.
- 6.4 An initial Equality Impact Assessment has been carried out in respect of this report and no impact has been determined.

7. LEGAL IMPLICATIONS

- 7.1 Local Authorities have a statutory duty under the 1964 [Public Libraries and Museums Act](#) 'to provide a comprehensive and efficient Library Service for all persons' in the area that want to make use of it (section 7), taking into account local needs and resources. Further, local councils must:
- have regard to encouraging both adults and children to make full use of the Library Service (section 7(2)(b))
 - lend books and other printed material free of charge for those who live, work or study in the area (section 8(3)(b))
 - keep adequate stocks for borrowing/reference 'sufficient in number, range and quality to meet the general requirements and any special requirements both of adults and children'
- 7.2 It is the statutory duty of the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport to superintend, and promote the improvement of, the public Library Service provided by local authorities in England and secure the proper discharge by local authorities of the functions in relation to libraries conferred on them as library authorities. The Secretary of State has a statutory power to intervene when a library authority fails (or is suspected of failing) to provide the required service (section 10). He/she will only intervene after careful consideration of local authorities' compliance with the terms of the 1964 Act.

8. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

- 8.1 The financial implications are limited, sales of books generates an income stream of under £500 per annum. There are some more valuable items in the library collection, however these are locally important items and therefore would not fall under the scope of the disposal policy, particularly if they are unique to the service
- 8.2 There are some higher value items in the 'reference reserve' books mentioned above which would merit assessment as if these were withdrawn as no longer needed, we would be looking at a return of 1p per book via current routes, rather than a possible average £20-30 per title, if a book was suitable for withdrawal under the policy. Appendix 1 covers the appropriate treatment of more valuable items to maximise the value to the Council and provide a small income stream.

APPENDIX 1

READING LIBRARIES PROPOSED WITHDRAWAL/DISPOSAL POLICY

By purchasing books every year, and with a large stock holding, libraries are obliged to withdraw and dispose of books every year.

Library books are withdrawn based on use, need, quality and condition.

Library books will be moved onto other libraries, either automatically or manually by staff, in order to circulate as widely as possible within the library network and ensure stock works as hard as possible.

If a stock item has been removed from the shelves and is not suitable for transfer to another library, or for the reserve stock, or for repair/binding, it should be withdrawn from stock and disposed of.

The Library Development Manager, Children's Lead, Local Lead or Reading Libraries and Museum Manager will make this decision, either by viewing in person or providing lists or parameters to staff.

Withdrawn stock and surplus library assets may, as appropriate, be

- a) disposed of through a library book recycling scheme, where items generate minimum return and are disposed of or resold by a third party.
- b) offered for sale to the general public through either sales points in Reading Libraries or book sales
- c) sold to specialist book dealers or book collectors at the discretion of the Service Manager and in line with guidelines here. The service is able to solicit or receive approaches and agree any disposal or price to be obtained.
- d) disposed of at auction,
- e) offered on online auction sites where this is compatible with RBC processes.

- f) offered to other libraries or settings including schools/nurseries if appropriate to do so based on content, currency and condition

Donated stock will also be either sold or otherwise disposed of where it is not put into library stock, and this is made clear to those donating in person.

Items with a strong local connection will always be retained (unless condition or duplication merits withdrawal) as would any item where there is a special reason for doing so, often where a local connection or subject matter exists

Income received from sales is coded as library income on a revenue code.