

WIRRAL COUNCIL

SUSTAINABLE COMMUNITIES OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

7 JUNE 2011

SUBJECT:	LIBRARY SERVICE INTRODUCTION OF E - BOOKS
WARD/S AFFECTED:	ALL
REPORT OF:	DIRECTOR OF FINANCE
RESPONSIBLE PORTFOLIO HOLDER:	CABINET MEMBER CULTURE, TOURISM AND LEISURE
KEY DECISION	NO

1.0 EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

1.1 This report outlines the introduction of an e-books facility into the Library Service. This will allow access to books that can be read via a variety of IT media selected either at a Library or via the web. This report details the timescales involved and the likely savings and efficiencies that will be realised by these changes.

2.0 RECOMMENDATION

2.1 That Members note that as there is only one viable supplier the Library Service will deliver the e-books service via the OverDrive solution as negotiated via the North West Libraries Consortium.

3.0 REASONS FOR RECOMMENDATION

3.1 The use of web books will continue to improve the facilities on offer to all users. It will particularly help the Library Service to engage with non traditional users who can access the facility via the website.

4.0 BACKGROUND AND KEY ISSUES

4.1 Library users can currently select books in person or check availability from stock listings accessible on the web or via contact by telephone. Over the last few years commercial retailers have moved into offering books that are downloaded over the internet and read via a variety of IT media. The most successful is Amazon's Kindle which strictly limits downloads of books to those supplied by the company but the hand held Kindle can hold 2,000 books.

- 4.2. Local authorities have not been slow to recognise the situation and the benefits e-books provide both to the service and its users. In the "Modernisation Review of Public Libraries" (March 2010 Department of Culture Media and Sport) e-book provision is highlighted "*Government recommends that libraries assess the opportunity and demand for e-book lending in their community and develop strategies*". Currently there are only 14 library services in England that offer e-book services and the UK is some way behind the situation in the United States where a survey of 41 U.S. public libraries found that 97% were offering e-books in June 2009 and also found that having added e-books 87% of libraries reported an increase in circulation some by as much as 1200%.
- 4.3. The other stipulation in the Modernisation Review is that the loan of this material is free. "*Government will under section 8(2b) of the Public Libraries and Museums Act 1964, make an (affirmative) order preventing libraries from charging for e-books lending of any sort including remotely.*"
- 4.4. The Modernisation Review also states that "*E-books will enable library services to remain relevant in a market where people are using mobile devices to access information and entertainment and will provide a new opportunity to reach people who may not visit their local library building regularly, but who would like to borrow e-books from home.*"
- 4.5. Currently there are two methods of e-book access: Download and Online. Online is looking at a book online to wherever the book is held electronically. Download is where the book is saved on a medium of the readers to then be able to self-access. This is by far the most common method used in public libraries and is the recommended route.
- 4.6. With this method, users are issued with a unique PIN code based on the library card and can then download onto a computer or a variety of e-book readers (such as the Sony e-reader). Once the Library Service has purchased this e-content it is copyrighted and bought for a time-limited period (usually three weeks). The work is usually restricted to one loan per copy and multiple licenses have to be bought so that they can be borrowed concurrently. This is no different to the terms of loaning printed format books.
- 4.7. The Government has identified e-book provision as an important service for all public libraries to offer and the Authority has similarly done so with its decision at Council (21 February 2011 Minute 327) when the e-book development was part of the a specific budget allocation of £120,000 for Libraries.
- 4.8 The benefits of e-books are:
 - a. Access – This would provide a "24 Hour a Day" service including evenings and weekends when the library is closed or cannot be accessed (for example - refurbishment, bad weather). During the heavy snow of January 2010 there were massive increases in downloading of material. Locally for users of the Home Reader Service it would give more instant access than can be provided at present.

- b. Good Public Relations – This removes one of the most negative aspects of borrowing from any public library. Borrowers will never have to pay a fine for an overdue item again. The downloaded book remains accessible for a set time, when the license expires the user can no longer access the book unless it is re-borrowed.
 - c. Economies – There are lower administrative costs. Unlike printed books, e-books do not need to be “serviced” (repaired, laminated or re-jacketed), this means there is no need to purchase these materials. It also saves considerable staff time on non-frontline tasks.
 - d. Stock Management – Economies can also be made by not having to provide expensive items in printed format that have very limited circulation. Student textbooks are a good example. E-books could then be marketed through Wirral Metropolitan College or Birkenhead Sixth Form College for example, giving the public library service much greater relevance to a section of the community than at present.
 - e. Stock Loss or Damage - In this format stock cannot be lost or not returned, again helping budgets where average losses of around 6% are normal nationally. Similarly audio-books with multiple parts have to be purchased again in their entirety if just one part goes missing, which would not be the case with e-audio books.
 - f. Social Inclusion Benefits– The technology will have a profound benefit for people with visual impairment (ease of change of font size or the way text is illuminated) or physical disability (no need to turn pages). Wirral spent £33,000 on audio-books in 2009-10 could be reduced.
 - g. Customer Service – There are particular titles that users are reluctant to borrow in printed format, particularly on health; this so called “embarrassment factor” can be alleviated with the borrowing of e-books.
 - h. Local Content – It is possible to upload local content and then make it available for loan such as locally produced material, including local history, oral history and creative writing.
- 4.9. The Authority has investigated the market for such a solution and has identified that there is only one viable supplier who can meet the full specification, specifically the ability to offer an overall platform which links and hosts to the website, the breadth of content and provides both e- books and audio books.
- 4.10. The supplier is OverDrive, an American company, which is the market leader of e-book provision to UK public libraries, with all but one Authority purchasing their content on this platform. They have over 300,000 items from 1,000 different publishers, including major book publishers such as: Random House, Harper Collins, Little Brown, Simon & Schuster and Penguin. Included in an agreement the company would build a customised website, integrate with the Library Management System and catalogue, as well as provide technical support, staff training and material to promote the service.

4.11. The North West Libraries Purchasing Consortium is led by Stockport MBC has negotiated for all consortium members to access a discounted pricing from the company of 25% on the annual fee. It is likely that after an initial period with OverDrive the Authority will be able to review from a wider established market with other well developed suppliers being able to offer competition which should ensure ongoing price competitiveness.

5.0 RELEVANT RISKS

5.1 Given the libraries traditional role of being the public source of print there can be a perception that e-books may replace printed books and therefore those that depend on print will be disadvantaged. The view at Wirral is that e-books are an extension to the current service not a replacement and offer a great opportunity to broaden the service. The Library Service connects people with information to improve and better their lives and this is a new way to help achieve this.

5.2. People may not use the system which is then not cost effective. This will be addressed by ensuring that staff engage with users to maximise its use, the understanding of its simplicity, and the release of time it gives staff to engage with users.

6.0 OTHER OPTIONS CONSIDERED

6.1. No other options were considered.

7.0 CONSULTATION

7.1. This has focused on outcomes from other Library services where this has been welcomed positively and once installed there will be ongoing consultation with users to understand their issues and to obtain comments about the system.

8.0 IMPLICATIONS FOR VOLUNTARY, COMMUNITY AND FAITH GROUPS

8.1 There are no implications arising directly from this report.

9.0 RESOURCE IMPLICATIONS: FINANCIAL; IT; STAFFING AND ASSETS

9.1. **FINANCIAL** – The cost of the OverDrive solution is driven by the North West Libraries Consortium discounted pricing which would give a price of £16,500 per annum (including £7,000 annual collection credit). The cost will be met from the Cabinet approval for funding (21 February 2011 Minute 327). There will be ongoing cost savings that this system brings to the overall Library budget via a reduction in stock loss and damage which will increase as more books are accessed this way.

9.2. **STAFFING** – There is no direct staffing implication at this stage although a full roll out of the system will allow staff to move to more direct public engagement.

9.3. **IT** – The system is installed and maintained by the manufacturer and links with the TALIS IT system. Sufficient bandwidth and awareness of system support for Library outcomes will be required to maximise the systems efficiency.

9.4. **ASSETS** – There are no implications arising directly from this report.

10.0 LEGAL IMPLICATIONS

10.1 There are no implications arising directly from this report.

11.0 EQUALITIES IMPLICATIONS

11.1 There are no implications arising directly from this report.

12.0 CARBON REDUCTION IMPLICATIONS

12.1 There are no implications arising directly from this report.

13.0 PLANNING AND COMMUNITY SAFETY IMPLICATIONS

13.1 There are no implications arising directly from this report.

FNCE/85/10

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REFERENCE MATERIAL

“Modernisation Review of Public Libraries”
(March 2010) Department of Culture Media and Sport
[HTTP://WWW.OFFICIAL-DOCUMENTS.GOV.UK/DOCUMENT/CM78/7821/7821.PDF](http://www.official-documents.gov.uk/document/cm78/7821/7821.pdf)

SUBJECT HISTORY (last 3 years)

Council Meeting	Date
Cabinet	21 February 2011