

# Implications of the removal of overdue fines for Hamilton City Libraries

## Elected Member Briefing

23 April 2021



# Purpose of Briefing

To inform Elected Members on the benefits and implications associated with the removal of Libraries overdue fines.

To get a steer from Elected Members on whether they would like Libraries Staff to pursue this further, and if so to what level?



# Why now?

Hamilton City Libraries charge overdue fines when customers are late returning items.

Overdue fines were introduced by libraries to encourage members to return their books and other items.

Recent evidence suggests this is not effective and has had the undesirable effect of creating a barrier to use.



# Hamilton City Libraries context:

Overdue fines 1 July 2019 – 30 June 2020

Customers	Item collections	Overdue fines charged to customers
Junior/Young Adult customers	Junior/Young Adult collections	\$7,310.40
Adult customers	Adult collections	\$53,163.00
Junior/Young Adult customers	Adult collections	\$4,488.60
Adult customers	Junior/Young Adult collections	\$11,330.10
<b>TOTAL All users</b>	<b>All collections</b>	<b>\$76,292.10</b>



# How this impacts usage at Hamilton City Libraries



Overdue fines were intended to motivate customers to return books so other customers have access. In fact, they serve as a barrier to access and trust.

Each year 5,200 new members join Hamilton City libraries.



Overdue fines are driving customers away who need libraries most.

Each year about 1,550 Hamilton City Library members, who owe us more than \$10, stop using our services.



Overdue fines are increasingly being removed around the world to increase equity of access to information and resources.

16% of Hamilton City Libraries overdue fines are never collected.

# Location of inactive members blocked due to fines in Hamilton





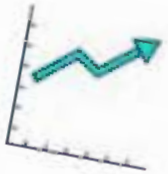
A photograph of two children, a girl and a boy, sitting at a wooden table. The girl, on the left, is wearing a light purple hoodie and is carefully placing a wooden block on top of a tall, narrow stack of other wooden blocks. The boy, on the right, is wearing a black hoodie with an orange and white graphic and is looking towards the girl's stack. On the table in front of them are several clear plastic storage bins containing various colored blocks (yellow, orange, blue) and a small container of 'BUG' brand magnetic fridge putty. The background is a simple, light-colored wall with a dark shelf above the children.

**Any questions about  
the current Hamilton  
City Council context?**

# Benefits of removing overdue fines



Remove a financial barrier.



Enable free and equitable access to information.



Increase customer membership and retention.



Removes barrier to membership that disproportionately impacts fixed income and vulnerable communities.

Increases borrowing and return of items.



# Benefits of removing overdue fines



Builds better literacy outcomes (more books read = higher literacy levels).



Increases customer satisfaction and reduces negative interactions between staff and customers.



There would be no material impact on the council's debt to revenue ratio if overdue fines were removed completely.



Saves staff time on payment transactions and debt recovery.



Increased trust in and enhanced reputation for Council.

# Cons of removing overdue fines



Loss of revenue.



Potential impact on other customers (slow return of books).



Impact on collections budget (need to invest more in high-demand material).



Negative views of other customers.




Partial removal of fines causing disgruntlement and confusion.



Need to manage historic debt.





Do you have any  
questions about the  
Benefits and Cons of  
removing overdue fines?

# What's happening around the world

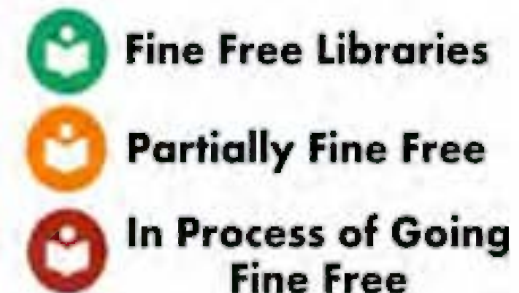


As of 19 April 2021:

- 578 library networks\* around the world have gone fines free
- 296 are partially fines free
- 33 New Zealand libraries offer full or partially fine free services
- New Zealand has the highest fines in the world

Reference: <https://endlibraryfines.info/fine-free-library-map/>

\* Library networks can be states, cities or consortiums.





# Response to the removal of fines in New Zealand

33 out of 67 New Zealand libraries have removed fines for part of or all their customers.

- **Auckland Libraries** have been fine free for children since amalgamation in 2010 and have made the decision to go fine free for all: “To contribute to Council’s recovery response, and the benefits would primarily assist those communities who need us most – we would achieve great outcomes for a small cost.”
- **Lower Hutt Libraries** increased youth borrowing and membership.
- **Upper Hutt Libraries** borrowing increased by 8%.
- **Christchurch City Libraries** have been fine free for 0 - 18-year-olds for over 25 years.
- **Tauranga City Libraries** have been partially fine free since 2016 and have noticed no difference in usage or membership.
- **Dunedin Public Libraries** Qualitative surveys found that the dropping of youth overdue fines was a game changer for their lower socio-economic families.

A photograph of two young children, a boy and a girl, standing in a library. The boy, wearing glasses and a white t-shirt with a black pattern, is interacting with a blue digital kiosk. The girl, with red hair in a ponytail, is looking at the screen. In the background, there are bookshelves filled with books. A person's hand holding a book is visible in the upper left corner.

# Recommendation

**That we should remove overdue fines on all junior and young adult items for all customers.**



# Potential implementation plan if the recommendation is supported

- Comms plan to be developed, including:
  - Stakeholder engagement.
  - Media releases.
  - Campaign to reconnect with lapsed users including those shown on the heat map.
  - Education for existing customers.
  - Scripts developed for staff use.
  - Campaign to attract new customers.
  - Website update.
- System changes by Kōtui (Library Management System).
- Develop a plan for potential debt amnesty.
- Report to the Finance Committee to address historic debt for fines for children and young adults.



**Does this proposal  
align with your  
aspirations for the  
Libraries' service?**





**Is there anything further  
that you would like to  
understand before  
making a decision?**

**Are there any other  
options you would like  
to see explored?**

