Minute No. 621
Report - Standing Policy Committee on Protection and Community Services - June 12, 2006

Item No. 3 **Read Away Your Fines Program - Library Services**
File L-1

COUNCIL DECISION:

Council concurred in the recommendation of the Standing Policy Committee on Protection and Community Services and adopted the following:

1. That the Library Services Division of the Community Services Department be authorized to institute a "Read Away Your Fines" program.

2. That the Proper Officers of the City be authorized to do all things necessary to implement the intent of the foregoing.

Report - Standing Policy Committee on Protection and Community Services - June 12, 2006

DECISION MAKING HISTORY:

Moved by Councillor Steeves,

That the recommendation of the Standing Policy Committee on Protection and Community Services be adopted by consent.

Carried

EXECUTIVE POLICY COMMITTEE RECOMMENDATION:

On June 21, 2006, the Executive Policy Committee concurred in the recommendation of the Standing Policy Committee on Protection and Community Services and submitted the matter to Council.

STANDING COMMITTEE RECOMMENDATION:

On June 12, 2006, the Standing Policy Committee on Protection and Community Services concurred in the administrative recommendation and submitted the matter to the Executive Policy Committee and Council.

RE: READ AWAY YOUR FINES PROGRAM – LIBRARY SERVICES

FOR SUBMISSION TO: Standing Policy Committee on Protection and Community Services

ORIGINAL REPORT SIGNED BY: Clive Wightman
Acting Director
Community Services Department

REPORT DATE: May 8, 2006

RECOMMENDATION:

1. That Council authorize the Community Services Department, Library Services Division to institute a “Read Away Your Fines” program.

2. That the proper officers of the City of Winnipeg be authorized to do all things necessary to implement the intent of the foregoing.

Report Summary

Key Issues:

- In 2003, The Community Services Department, Library Services Division created a Task Force to examine methods to improve library service at St. John’s Library for the community.
- The Task Force recommended that staff be given the ability to reduce fines for children.
- The Community Services Department, Library Services Division, recommends instituting a “Read Away Your Fines Program” at St. John’s and West End Libraries.
- The Read Away Your Fines program would help eliminate barriers to library service and help improve literacy skills.
- The program would allow children and youth ages 5-17 to reduce or eliminate their fines by reading at the library during July and August, 2006.
- Library staff would review and evaluate the “Read Away Your Fines” program at the end of the summer and expand the program to other library branch locations the following year where appropriate.

Implications of the Recommendation(s):

General Implications

( ) None

(x) For the organization overall and/or for other departments

(x) For the community and/or organizations external to the City

( ) Involves a multi-year contract

Comment(s):

The users of the St. John's and West End Libraries would benefit from having barriers to library service removed and literacy skills increased.

Policy Implications

( ) No

(x) Yes

Comment(s):

Council approval is required to amend the current Library fines policy to allow for fines to be reduced or eliminated through the Read Away Your Fines Program.

Regulatory Implications

(x) None

( ) Eliminates or reduces regulatory impact

( ) Proposes regulatory impact

Comment(s):

Environmental Implications

(x) No

( ) Yes

Comment(s):

Human Resources Implications

(x) No

( ) Yes

Comment(s):

Financial Implications

(x) Within approved current and/or capital budget

( ) Current and/or capital budget adjustment required

Comment(s):

The establishment of this program would benefit select youth patrons who cannot pay their fines. They would be "paying" their fines by reading, thus developing a foundation of literacy skills and contributing to positive academic performance and enhanced life skills.

Since the library fines on blocked patrons' cards are only recorded as revenue when they are collected, the amount of potential revenue "lost" [$15,500] due to the "Read Away Your Fines Program" is nil. By replacing the dollar fine with "reading time" there is no budgetary financial impact to Library Services.

Report

REASON FOR THE REPORT:

Council approval is required to alter the current library fines policy to allow for fines to be reduced or eliminated through the Read Away Your Fines Program.

HISTORY:

In 2003, The Community Services Department, Library Services Division created a Task Force to examine methods to improve library service at St. John's Library for the community.

The Task Force recommended that branch staff be given discretionary authority to reduce fines for children.

The program would help eliminate barriers to library services and improve literacy skills.

DISCUSSION:

The Community Services Department, Library Services Division charges fines for overdue materials to encourage library users to return materials promptly so that others may benefit from the service. A patron's card is blocked when an accumulated balance of fines, fees and charges exceeds $10.00. Consequently, children and youth who have fines over $10.00 and are unable to pay, are no longer allowed to borrow library materials.

The ability to read is a critical skill for successful school and life achievement. The best way to strengthen and improve reading skills is to read often: reading silently or aloud, reading alone or with a partner. A program to assist children and youth with reading away fines provides an opportunity for the library to encourage and support increased time spent reading. As children practice their reading skills, they grow in strength and confidence as independent readers. Continuing to develop this foundation of literacy contributes to positive academic performance and enhanced life skills.

The Community Services Department, Library Services Division recommends instituting a Read Away your Fines program at St. John's and West End Libraries, to eliminate barriers to library service and improve literacy skills. Currently 15% of St. John's (5,610) juvenile cardholders and 11% of West End's (6,299) juvenile cardholders have fines exceeding $10.00 and are therefore prevented from borrowing library material. These

two branches have the highest percentage of blocked cardholders in the system and are in high needs areas. It is anticipated that there would be a minimal loss of revenue depending on the number of participants in the program.

Similar types of programs have been developed at other library locations including, Calgary Public Library, Halifax Public Libraries, Okanagan Regional Library, Columbus Metropolitan Library (Ohio, U.S.), and Southwest Public Library (Ohio, U.S.)

The Winnipeg program would encourage children and youth to age 17, to eliminate fines by reading at the library during July and August, 2006. For every 15 minutes spent reading, a child would reduce their fines by $2.00.

Throughout July and August, children and youth would be invited to read in the library and have that time recorded by library staff. Staff would calculate the amount of fines to be waived and reduce the outstanding balance accordingly.

The Read Away Your Fines Program could also be used in conjunction with the Library's annual Read Aloud Program, a shared reading program where trained teen volunteers are partnered with emerging readers ages 6-10 for a variety of literacy activities including, story reading, word games, puzzles, etc. Teen volunteers and participating children with large fines would be eligible to receive credit for reading time during each program attended.

Library staff would review and evaluate the "Read Away Your Fines" program at the end of the summer. The Community Services Department, Library Services Division would expand the program to other branch library locations the following year as appropriate.

Financial Impact Statement Date: May 8, 2006

Project Name:
Library Services Division Read Away Your Fines Program

COMMENTS:

The establishment of this program would benefit select youth patrons who cannot pay their fines. By "paying" their fines by reading, they would be developing a foundation of literacy skills and contributing to positive academic performance and enhanced life skills.

Since the library fines on blocked patrons' cards are only recorded as revenue when they are collected, the amount of potential revenue "lost" [$15,500] due to the "Read Away Your Fines Program" is nil. By replacing the dollar fine with "reading time" there is no budgetary financial impact to Library Services.

(original signed by)

Manager of Finance & Administration

IN PREPARING THIS REPORT THERE WAS:

Internal Consultation With and Concurrence By:

External Consultation With:

THIS REPORT SUBMITTED BY:

Department Community Services
Division Library Services
Prepared by: Rick Walker, Arthur Cohen
File No.