

BACKGROUND

Wollongong City Council relies on revenue generated through user fees and charges to fund services and facilities for the community. A schedule of fees and charges is developed and reviewed in consultation with the community, as part of Council's annual planning cycle. Wollongong City Libraries applies a schedule of fees and charges for a range of library services, as well as penalties for lost, damaged or overdue items, within this context.

From time to time, library staff receive requests from customers for a reduction or waiver of fees and charges due to circumstances such as financial hardship, serious illness or misadventure.

The range of requests received and the geographic spread of library services across the Wollongong Local Government Area require a policy response that provides clear guidelines for staff and complies with Council's delegations framework.

OBJECTIVE

This policy outlines the circumstances under which requests for the reduction or waiver of library fees and fines will be considered, provides criteria for the assessment of requests and outlines procedures for approval and documentation of a reduction or waiver. It provides the necessary guidance for library staff to make decisions based on individual customer circumstances and provides for referral of complex requests to a supervisor or manager.

The objectives of this policy are to:

1. Recognise and assist members of the community who have suffered a misadventure or who are facing financial hardship, so that they are not excluded from access to and participation in library services;
2. Establish guidelines for the assessment of requests for a reduction or waiver of fees and charges for library services, by applying principles of fairness, integrity, appropriate confidentiality and compliance with Council policy requirements; and
3. Ensure that the principle of fair and reasonable charges for library services, programs, events and for replacement of outstanding, lost or damaged items is applied.

POLICY STATEMENT

Council applies fees and fines to library services to contribute to cost recovery and to support library lending protocols, such as the return of loan items by their due date.

Council recognises that library customers may encounter contingencies and unexpected circumstances that create significant hardship and which may impact on their ability to pay scheduled fees and charges that will allow their continued access to library services.

In instances where library customers request a reduction or waiver of fees or fines, library staff may make an assessment of each customer's individual situation, within a framework of respect for privacy, confidentiality and the maintenance of positive customer relationships.

As a general principle, library fees and fines will only be reduced or waived in cases where extenuating or unforeseen circumstances impact on a customer's ability to pay and/or create the risk of exclusion from library services for that customer.

The delegation for approval of a waiver or reduction of a library fee or fine rests with the Manager Library and Community Services.

PRINCIPLES

1. Library staff will treat all people fairly, respectfully and consistently under this policy.
2. Library staff recognise the importance of establishing overdue charges as a management tool for ensuring that all items are returned on time and that all customers have full and equitable access to these items.
3. Library staff recognise the importance of establishing lost and damaged item charges as a management tool for ensuring that all items are treated with care and that all customers have full and equitable access to these items.
4. Library staff recognise the importance of establishing charges for selected programs and events as a tool for managing demand and supporting cost recovery.
5. The policy will be applied with transparency, integrity and observance of the provisions of Council's Code of Conduct.

STATEMENT OF PROCEDURES

Criteria for Assessment**1. Reduction or Waiver of Charges for Overdue Items**

Fines for overdue items may be reduced or waived on the following grounds:

- Serious illness or incapacity of customer or family member
- Accident involving customer or family member
- Death of customer or family member
- Disasters such as flood, fire
- Unforeseen contingencies such as becoming the victim of a criminal act
- Serious financial hardship
- Wollongong City Libraries' fines amnesty programs, such as 'Food for Fines' or in association with Council-wide initiatives

There may be additional grounds under which the reduction or waiver of overdue charges may apply. Staff and supervisors will determine the outcome of all requests for reduction or waiver of overdue charges based on consideration of individual circumstances.

A maximum charge, as per the maximum identified in Council's annual schedule of Fees and Charges, will apply to fines for overdue items. Amounts above the threshold will be waived.

2. Reduction or Waiver of Charges for Lost or Damaged Items

Charges for library items which are lost or damaged may be reduced or waived on the following grounds:

- Accident involving customer or family member
- Disasters such as flood, fire
- Victim of a criminal act – library card is stolen
- Financial hardship

The administration charge and any outstanding overdue fines on that item/s will also be waived in these circumstances.

3. Reduction or Waiver of Charges for Inter Library Loans

Fees for Inter Library Loans (ILL) will be waived if the request has been altered so that a charge no longer applies. This may occur where the request has been altered to a Suggestion for Purchase request, a Reservation, or a combined ILL request in the case of a two-part title.

4. Reduction or Waiver of Charges for Reservations

A waiver of Reservation Fees will be provided to members of the Friends of Wollongong City Libraries and to Wollongong City Libraries Volunteers, including Book Club members, who coordinate Book Club meetings on behalf of the libraries. This is in recognition of these groups' contribution to the delivery of library services.

A waiver of Reservation Fees will be provided to customers in receipt of Home Library Services, as they are unable to attend their local library to select library resources and/or to pay Reservation Fees.

5. Reduction or Waiver of Charges for Programs and Events

Fees and charges for participation in library programs and events may be reduced or waived on the grounds of serious financial hardship or to enable participation for groups in the community who are at risk of social exclusion, particularly in the case of programs and events for children and young people.

The Manager Library and Community Services will determine the outcome of all requests based on consideration of individual circumstances.

6. Reduction or Waiver of Fees for Reproduction of Local Studies Images

Fees for the reproduction of images from the Local Studies collection may be waived or reduced where it is deemed that the reproduction relates to a project or organisation that is community focused, not-for-profit and/or provides benefit to the community and/or Wollongong City Libraries.

Permission for a fee waiver or reduction will apply to the reproduction of up to 10 digital images scanned at 300dpi, on the condition that the Wollongong City Libraries is clearly acknowledged in the project or reproduction.

Processes

1. Requests for a reduction or waiver of library fees and charges can be made at any time by a customer, in person or in writing.
2. Library staff who receive a request for a reduction or waiver of library fees and charges will seek details to substantiate the request from the customer concerned.
3. Library staff will refer the request to their Coordinator at the point at which a request for reduction or waiver is received.
4. The relevant Coordinator will provide approval for the proposed reduction or waiver.
5. Library staff will inform the customer of the outcome of their request.
6. Library staff must record all necessary details concerning fees or fines that have been reduced or waived - the location, amount waived, reason for the waiver, and the staff member's name - in the library management system. A monthly report of all waivers and reductions of fees and fines will be provided to the Divisional Manager.
7. The Divisional Management Team will regularly review the application of this policy, including the incidence, cost and distribution of approvals for reduction or waiver of library fees and charges.

SUMMARY SHEET	
Responsible Division	Library and Community Services
Date adopted by Council	17 July 2017
Date of previous adoptions	Nil
Date of next review	July 2021
Responsible Manager	Manager Library and Community Services
Authorised by	Manager Library and Community Services