

<b>Culture, Heritage &amp; Libraries Committee</b>	<b>23/09/2015</b>
<b>Subject:</b> eBooks and eAudiobooks in Barbican and Community Libraries	<b>Public</b>
<b>Report of:</b> Director of Culture, Heritage & Libraries	<b>For Information</b>

### **Summary**

This report aims to provide Members with an update on our progress with the introduction of eBooks and eAudiobooks in our lending libraries, which is relevant to the ongoing wider debates about libraries and digital futures.

Since 2012, Barbican and Community Libraries has been offering customers the opportunity to “borrow” eBooks and eAudiobooks. Our customers can also learn any of 133 languages online with the “Transparent Languages” service. These services are available around the clock and they can all be accessed on a variety of devices including smartphones, tablets, laptops, PCs and selected electronic reading devices (Kindle Fire, Nook and Kobo).

Despite some customer resistance to electronic reading and eBook publishers placing a number of restrictions on the loan of eBooks, all of our digital library services are growing in use and popularity: in the first year of service, 2012 - 2013, 2865 eBooks were loaned to 580 customers and 675 library members borrowed 2210 eAudiobooks. In 2014 – 2015, 7610 eBooks were read by 961 customers and 3507 eAudiobooks were borrowed. Last year, the City of London Libraries’ “Transparent Languages” service was accessed 2615 times.

Until publishers make their full digitised catalogues available for public libraries to buy, the eBook service will remain limited in terms of content. Despite this, it is still a valuable and useful additional service for City Library members.

Barbican and Community Libraries’ eLibrary will be added to later this year when we will be introducing a free eMagazine/periodical service for library members.

### **Recommendation(s)**

Members are asked to:

- Note the report

## **Main Report**

### **Background**

1. On 19 November 2007, Amazon released the first Kindle electronic reading device in the United States. Prior to this, eBooks were available online and on computer disks but in very small numbers.

2. Overdrive, an American company, was the first to offer an eBook lending service to UK public libraries. Initially, this service was extremely limited, heavily geared towards the US market and difficult to use. Titles were expensive and an eBook could only be leased for a set period of time rather than bought for perpetuity.
3. Askews and Holts is the company which is contracted to supply all physical library books to members of the Central Buying Consortium (of which the City is a member). When they launched their eBook service, Barbican and Community Libraries took the decision to contract them. The biggest single advantage with using this supplier was that we could buy the books outright and own them for perpetuity rather than lease them for a set number of years/loans. If at some point in the future, we decide to contract a different supplier, we will take this stock with us. Another advantage is that if a title we bought is not downloaded, we are able to return it for a full refund. The eBook service went live in May 2012. At approximately the same time, we took up the eAudiobook service offered by W.F. Howes, a specialist provider of talking books on CD to public libraries.
4. Initially, both services were slow to take off and between 1 April 2012 and 30 March 2013, 2865 eBooks and 2210 eAudiobooks were borrowed. In the 2014 Barbican and Community Libraries Customer Survey, we asked nearly 2000 library users whether they used our eBook and eAudiobook service and if they had not, the reason(s) why. 42% of respondents said that they were not interested in borrowing eBooks (62% said they were not interested in borrowing eAudiobooks). However, 66% either did not know about the eBook service or thought they did not own a compatible device (44% answered similarly regarding eAudiobooks). Following full analysis of the survey, Barbican and Community Libraries staff drew up an action plan and embarked on a comprehensive and effective marketing programme for eBooks and eAudiobooks. This included a publicity drive and one to one and group surgeries to assist customers with accessing the services on their own devices. Staff also produced written help sheets for a range of different devices and You Tube videos showing users how to get started.

### **Current Position**

5. The eBook collection now numbers 5810 and the eAudiobook collection 1295 titles. The total physical bookstock for the three lending libraries is 214,963 and we own 3524 talking books on CD.
6. In the financial year 2014 -2015, 7610 eBooks and 3507 eAudio Books were borrowed; increases of 166% and 59% on 2012-2013.
7. Most of the eBooks borrowed are adult fiction (55%). 6% are children's books and the remaining 39% are non-fiction titles. This is contrary to the borrowing pattern for physical books in the City: in the same year, City of London library users borrowed 226,968 non-fiction books, 131876 fiction books and 65473 children's books. These figures equate to 54%, 31% and 15% of total loans.) Analysis of library users proves that those who borrow eBooks most are still borrowing physical books. Typically these customers read fiction electronically but prefer their non-fiction in hard copy.

8. In order to borrow either an eBook or an eAudiobook, customers must be library members and in possession of their library membership number and their PIN. In both cases, they go to an external website and download the books to their chosen device. They can select any loan period from 1 day to 21 days and at the end of this period, the item is automatically deleted from the device and will no longer be accessible. It is neither possible to return eBooks early nor to renew them. If a loan expires before the item is read, the customer will have to reissue it to themselves. Licensing requirements mean that an eBook can only be “borrowed” by one customer at a time. We do not own any of our eAudiobooks but instead, we buy the licence for a set number of years/number of loans. Many of our audiobooks are “multicap” which means that they can be borrowed by more than one customer simultaneously. Most customers use the electronic library services in the evening when our library buildings are closed with 10pm – 11pm being the peak period to download eBooks.
9. All digital stock can be accessed from the City of London Libraries’ website. eAudiobooks can also be accessed on smartphones and tablets via an app which is more straightforward and very simple to use. Our eBook provider is launching an app in the very near future.
10. The services cannot be accessed outside of the UK. However, as both eBooks and eAudio Books are downloaded rather than streamed, customers can read them when they are travelling abroad provided they were downloaded in the UK.
11. Electronic reading software allows users to personalise fonts, text size and background colours. They are also more portable than physical books because electronic reading devices are much lighter in weight than an average book and one device can carry thousands of titles. This is a great advantage to travellers who can carry their electronic library with them and the accessibility options benefit people with dyslexia, sight and/or mobility problems. Pages are “turned” by a simple swipe of a finger which may also benefit older people and those with arthritic hands. They do need regular charging and most tablets and smartphones cannot be used in bright sunlight.
12. The Transparent Languages service offers City of London Library customers the opportunity to learn any of 133 languages. Of these 133 courses, 27 are English for speakers of other languages. Library customers can set up an account and then access the learning via a PC, or a mobile app. In 2014 – 2015, 194 different users accessed the service 2615 times. The top three languages accessed were French, German and Polish. The top three languages for non-native speakers were English for Italians, English for Spanish (Latin American) and Welsh for English speakers.
13. Some library customers are demonstrating channel shift from physical books to digital ones and this is more apparent with eAudiobooks: in 2014-15, the City’s lending libraries loaned 44,750 fewer books than in the previous year. Taking eBook loans into account, total book loans have fallen by 37,140. However, in 2014-15, the City’s lending libraries loaned 2860 fewer talking books on CD than in the previous year but taking eAudiobook loans into account, total loans of talking books has increased by 647.

14. There are a number of barriers over which we have no control, to setting up a truly comprehensive and accessible eBook library:

a) Access to eReading

Amazon will not allow library eBooks to be downloaded to their standard Kindle eReaders and the Kindle is by far the most popular reading device in general ownership. However, it is possible to download the library eBooks to a Kindle Fire, Nook or Kobo eBook reader and they can be read on smartphones, tablets, laptops and PCs.

b) Limited stock and Costs

- I. Customers do not have the same wide variety of choice with eBooks that they have with physical library books. The Publishers' Association has been very reluctant to support public library eReading. The Society of Chief Librarians of England and Wales has been working to reassure publishers that allowing their catalogues to be digitised and made accessible to public libraries will not damage their businesses. This animosity is gradually being broken down with more publishers releasing their catalogues to public library stock providers but some major publishing houses including Hatchards and Penguin remain resolutely opposed to the service. Of those that have allowed their books to be sold to libraries, few have released their full catalogue and it is becoming apparent that some do not release the whole of a series of books, we believe in order to force the reader to buy the missing book(s). Some publishers e.g. Vintage and Bantam, have released titles to us but later and without notice, withdrew the licences: we lost our entire Graham Greene collection in this way. Of the current W H Smith top 10 fiction bestsellers, only one title is available for public libraries to buy as an eBook and it costs five times the price of the Amazon paperback.
- II. Library eBooks are significantly more expensive than physical or Kindle books. For example, with the substantial stock discounts we get by buying within a consortium, Summer Secrets by Jane Green (a current fiction best seller) would cost us £6.93 in hardback but the cost of the library eBook is £29.56. It is not unusual for a popular new eBook to cost in excess of £50.
- III. Unlike physical books, eBooks are not VAT exempt and there is a 5p download charge for every loan. We also pay an annual fee of £2000 for the annual subscription to the service. There is no income stream with eBooks either; books disappear from the reader's device at the end of the loan period so there is no question of fines for late returns. NB eAudiobooks are not subject to the same restrictions and we can buy the newest titles at prices similar to those of physical talking books.

## **Options**

15. We will continue to seek out the best deals for our customers and divert budget from physical to electronic stock as appropriate. In October, we will be introducing a new magazine/periodical service for library users which will offer our customers remote access to a range of titles. We are also considering an electronic newspaper subscription which will give library visitors unlimited simultaneous access to over 4000 current publications from 101 countries and in 60 languages. This will be demonstrated to library staff in October 2015.

## **Corporate & Strategic Implications**

16. The move to electronic services is key to the Department's strategic aim 3, Continue to use technology to improve customer service and increase efficiency.

## **Implications**

17. Staff will continue to ensure that these services are delivered within the confines of library budgets and will seek sponsorship for expansion of services.

## **Conclusion**

18. It is clear that many library customers wish to be able to read electronically but the publishers' restrictions on the eBook service (as detailed in point 14 above) and customer resistance to channel shift means that at present, these services can only supplement rather than adequately replace a physical library service. We will continue to work with all our customers to persuade them to try other ways of reading. We also continue to support the Society of Chief Librarians in their work to persuade publishers to allow library customers to read in the format of their choice.

## **Appendices**

- None

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