

**RHONDDA CYNON TAF COUNTY BOROUGH COUNCIL**

**CABINET**

**20<sup>TH</sup> SEPTEMBER 2018**

**MOBILE LIBRARY SERVICE**

**REPORT OF THE DIRECTOR OF PUBLIC HEALTH, PROTECTION & COMMUNITY SERVICES IN DISCUSSIONS WITH THE RELEVANT PORTFOLIO HOLDER, COUNCILLOR R LEWIS**

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**1. PURPOSE OF THE REPORT**

- 1.1 The purpose of the report is to inform Cabinet Members of the feedback received from the consultation initiated by Cabinet in relation to the proposed changes to the Mobile Library Service.

**2. RECOMMENDATIONS**

It is recommended that the Cabinet:

- 2.1 Consider the feedback from the consultation as set out in Appendix 1 of this report.
- 2.2 Decide whether or not to implement the proposed changes that were consulted on as follows:
- Reduce the number of existing vehicles used for delivery of the Mobile Library Service from 3 to 2.
  - Invest in two new purpose built vehicles, which unlike the existing service vehicles, would have onboard access to Wi-Fi and be suitable from which to provide other Council information services.
  - Change the method of delivery from 393 short stops per fortnight to 48 longer stops every three weeks that would enable the service to expand the range of provision available on the vehicles.
  - Extend the scope of access to, and rebrand the Library Housebound Service to the @HomeLibraryService.

### **3. REASONS FOR RECOMMENDATIONS**

- 3.1 Mobile library provision has remained relatively unchanged since its inception, providing access to a range of books and reading materials in various formats for people who do not live near a static library. Those who receive this service are happy with the service provided as it meets their needs.
- 3.2 However, despite all the efforts made to promote the service the number of customers that access the service is low, and the longer term sustainability of the mobile service is under threat unless new customers can be attracted to the service. There is, therefore, a strong business case for changing the model of delivery and enhancing the service on offer in an effort to attract new customers and make maximum use of Council resources.
- 3.3 It is suggested that the option consulted on, of purchasing two new vehicles that will be used for longer stops and deliver additional opportunities to access advice and support, is the best option over the longer term in respect of ensuring the sustainability of the service and benefitting a wider range of residents.
- 3.4 The expansion of the eligibility criteria for the current Housebound Service and its rebranding as the @homelibraryservice under the proposals would ensure that any adverse effect on those most in need could be mitigated and they would continue to have access to the books they want.

### **4. BACKGROUND**

- 4.1 There are currently 3 mobile library vehicles that travel across the county, stopping in 393 locations every 2 weeks. The stops consist of:
- 353 street stops that last for 10-15 minutes
  - 28 stops at sheltered housing units, alcohol/mental health units, and residential homes for 20-40 minutes
  - 12 evening and Saturday stops for 3 hours at locations where static libraries have previously been closed.
- 4.2 The service currently has 3 vehicles but each of these has been deemed to be past its operational and economic life. The financial cost of maintaining the vehicles has risen significantly while the number of missed stops reported under the Welsh Public Library Standards has risen from 72 in 2015/16 to 201 in 2016/17 and 458 in 2017/18. 60 days of service have already been lost between 1st April 2018 and 30<sup>th</sup> July 2018 due to breakdowns and repairs. This highlights the impact on the continuity of service. In addition, the cost of repairs undertaken on the vehicles now outstrips the financial value of the vehicles.

- 4.3 On 22<sup>nd</sup> March 2018 the Cabinet agreed to undertake an eight-week consultation period on proposed changes to the Mobile Library Service.

The proposals were to:

- Reduce the number of existing vehicles used for delivery of the Mobile Library Service from 3 to 2.
- Invest in two new purpose built vehicles, which unlike the existing service vehicles, would have onboard access to Wi-Fi and be suitable from which to provide other Council information services.
- Change the method of delivery from 393 short stops per fortnight to 48 longer stops every three weeks that would enable the service to expand the range of provision available on the vehicles.
- Extend the scope of, and access to the Library Housebound Service and re-brand it as the @homelibraryservice to mitigate any potential adverse impact on disabled people, individuals suffering from long-term illness, full-time carers or people living more than 2 miles from a static library.

## 5. CONSULTATION

- 5.1 The consultation took place between 8<sup>th</sup> May and 3<sup>rd</sup> July 2018. 389 questionnaires were returned. The responses can be summarised as follows:

- 93.2% of respondents to the questionnaire were users of the mobile service, with 88.6% of the users using a short stop. 96.9% of respondents stated that they use the service fortnightly. 19.2% of respondents also said they also use a branch library.
- 72% of respondents disagreed with the **proposal to reduce the vehicles from 3 to 2** (42.9% strongly disagreeing).
- 78.8% of respondents disagreed with the **proposal to reduce the number of stops** (49.4% strongly disagreeing).
- 44.6% of respondents disagreed with the **proposal to introduce I-pads and free wi-fi on the mobile buses**, compared to 16.2% who agreed with the proposal and 39.1% who did not have a view.
- 37.7% of respondents agreed with the proposal that the Council should **use the mobile vehicles as outreach hubs**, with 34.5% disagreeing.

- 43.1% of respondents agreed that the **proposed vehicles should park in accessible central locations**, however 42.6% disagreed, many of whom disagreed on the basis that they don't know where the proposed central locations would be.

The full Consultation Report including the methodology used to undertake the consultation can be seen at Appendix 1.

- 5.2 It was anticipated in the previous report to Cabinet that there would be resistance to change on the part of customers who have been used to having books delivered if not to their door, then to their street. This is evident from the questionnaires that were returned.
- 5.3 Despite every effort made to engage with the wider community very few responses were received from people who do not currently benefit from the service which may indicate that the service as it is currently delivered is deemed to be irrelevant to their needs.
- 5.4 In terms of customer profile 86% of respondents to the questionnaire were over the age of 65 while 34% identified themselves as disabled. The age profile highlights the dilemma faced by the Library Service – balancing current customer needs with the need to ensure a sustainable service for the future.
- 5.5 Despite the negative response to the proposal for longer stops it is interesting to note that there was some support for using the vehicles for the provision of health and well-being advice and information while there was almost an equal split between those who favoured the vehicles being used as outreach hubs and those against this idea. Similarly, there was an almost equal split between those who wanted to see the vehicles parked in accessible central locations and those who responded negatively to this. (Some respondents who disagreed with this option noted that they did so as they were not provided with information on the proposed locations).
- 5.6 Some of the written comments suggest that there is a lack of understanding of how the Housebound Service operates (e.g. fears that the customer would be unable to identify the books they want) while a few responses would suggest that the mobile service is currently used by some customers who should have been referred onto the Housebound Service due to their ill-health/disability.

## **6. RECENT DEVELOPMENTS**

- 6.1 Due to significant further deterioration in the performance of the library vehicles since the last report to Cabinet, (as indicated in 4.2 above) two new vehicles have been ordered and are currently being prepared for deployment in September. Any decision to purchase a third

replacement vehicle is subject to Cabinet's decisions on the recommendations at paragraph 2.

- 6.2 Should Members support the recommendation to reduce the number of vehicles to two, then this will require a decision to be made on how the service is operated from September 2018, as two vehicles cannot deliver the same service as three vehicles.

## **7. PROPOSED WAY AHEAD**

- 7.1 The purpose of proposing changes to the Mobile Library Service was to ensure its future sustainability by offering a high-quality service that would be attractive to more customers and offer access to a wider range of advice and support. The only way to accomplish this is to change the model of delivery.

- 7.2 In order to mitigate any adverse effect on the most vulnerable customers the eligibility criteria for the Housebound Service should be amended to include:

- individuals who suffer from long-term illness
- individuals who have mobility problems
- full-time carers
- people who live over 2 miles from the nearest static library

Re-branding the service to the @homelibraryservice may enable it to be marketed more effectively and make it more appealing to relevant customers.

- 7.3 It is anticipated that the @homelibraryservice will be able to accommodate an additional 100-130 customers without requiring additional resources. However, it should be noted that it is uncertain how any additional applications for this service would be received if the longer stops option is approved.

- 7.4 A reduction in the number of vehicles will result in an unavoidable reduction in staffing. However, some staff have previously expressed an interest in redundancy/early retirement and there may be opportunities to find employment for staff in static libraries.

- 7.5 If the proposal to move to longer stops is approved by Cabinet, Library Service Management will consult with communities and all relevant stakeholders, including Elected Members and the Public Service Delivery, Communities and Prosperity Committee in order to identify the most suitable locations with a list of possible sites given to encourage discussion. As part of the proposal it is suggested that no stops are placed within a one mile radius of a static library.

## **8. EQUALITY AND DIVERSITY IMPLICATIONS**

8.1 The Equality Act 2010 introduced a general equality duty and a specific public sector equality duty that is applicable to Councils. Section 149 of the Equality Act 2010 (Public Sector Single Equality Duty) requires public authorities to demonstrate that they have paid 'due regard' in their decision-making process to the need to:

- Eliminate unlawful discrimination, harassment and victimisation
- Advance equality of opportunity between people who share a protected characteristic and people who do not share it
- Foster good relations between people who share a protected characteristic and those who do not

The relevant protected characteristics are age, disability, gender reassignment, marriage and civil partnership, pregnancy and maternity, race, religion and belief, sex and sexual orientation.

8.2 The Council must have due regard to the impact of any proposals on those with a protected characteristic. The Council has a specific duty to publish information to demonstrate how it has paid due regard to the aims above as part of its decision-making. Undertaking an Equality Impact Assessment screening exercise (and if necessary a full Equality Impact Assessment) would be evidence that the Council has considered its legal obligations in making the decision on the recommendations in this report.

8.3 A full Equality Impact Assessment has been undertaken informed by the consultation feedback and included at Appendix 2.

## **9. CONSULTATION**

9.1 An eight week consultation was undertaken and the full results can be seen at Appendix 1.

## **10. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS**

10.1 It has been calculated that the proposed changes to the Library Service would result in revenue savings of £54,499 per annum.

10.2 Two new mobile library vehicles have been purchased at a cost of £215,000, funded as part of the Council's Fleet replacement strategy.

## **11. LEGISLATION CONSIDERED**

11.1 There is no statutory requirement for the Council to provide a Mobile Library Service and eight local authorities in Wales have no mobile library provision at all. The Public Libraries and Museums Act 1964 simply

requires local authorities to ensure the provision of a 'comprehensive and efficient service' without providing any criteria for what can be considered as 'comprehensive and efficient.' In Wales the Welsh Public Library Standards has clear quality indicators that library services have to abide by. These do not specify the need for a Mobile Library Service. However, if a Mobile library Service is provided there is an expectation that it will provide an efficient service and, ideally, access to Wi-Fi on its vehicles.

## **12. LINKS TO THE CORPORATE AND NATIONAL PRIORITIES AND THE WELL-BEING OF FUTURE GENERATIONS ACT**

- 12.1 This proposal links to the corporate priority of promoting independence and positive lives for everyone by ensuring that the Council continues to deliver a mobile library service for people who live in an area where there is no static library provision so that they can continue to access books and materials that will enrich their lives. The enhanced facilities that would be offered through the purchase of two new vehicles will further benefit customers, by facilitating access to a wider range of information, advice and training including access to free Wi-Fi.
- 12.2 This proposal is designed to ensure that the mobile library service can be sustained over the **longer-term** and remain relevant in the face of changing patterns of customer usage and raised expectations of modern library services. In order to provide the maximum benefit possible to customers, it is intended to **collaborate** with other Council services and partner organisations to facilitate outreach advice and training sessions on the mobile vehicles. This collaboration will add significant value to the service provided and maximise the use of resources thereby contributing to the creation of a more **integrative** model of provision.
- 12.3 The re-branding of the Housebound Service as the @homelibraryservice, and the expansion of the criteria for eligibility of the home library service, is designed to **prevent** the most vulnerable customers from being adversely affected by the proposed change in mobile library provision. Customers will be **involved** in a review of the service and feedback from customers will be gathered for analysis prior to any changes being introduced.
- 12.4 This proposal contributes to the following well-being goals:
- **A prosperous Wales** – Ensuring a sustainable mobile library service will ensure access to a world of lifelong learning through relevant book stock and materials. Using the vehicles for longer stops that will enable access to Wi-Fi and training opportunities will support the development of a more skilled and employable population.
  - **A healthier Wales** – By providing information through books, online resources and access to advice and support sessions through partner

organisations and services, customers will be able to make more informed choices for the benefit of their health. They can also be helped through the Book Prescription Scheme that directly supports people with health concerns.

- **A more equal Wales** – a transformed mobile library service will be better placed to support customers to achieve their potential as they will have access to more online learning as well as books and printed materials. In addition, the new model of longer stops with Wi-Fi accessible vehicles and support to use digital equipment will help to promote and facilitate digital inclusion.
- **A Wales of cohesive communities** – having longer stops at central locations within communities will allow better opportunities for people to connect with each other. In addition, people will be able to access information on the mobile vehicle about their local community, its events and activities.
- **A Wales of vibrant culture and thriving Welsh language** – the vehicles carry a collection of Welsh-medium books for adults and children as well as materials related to local history and culture. With the addition of Wi-Fi, customers will be able to access further information on any cultural or historical matters of interest as well as gaining access to local history and family history sites. The mobile vehicles carry promotional materials such as theatre programmes etc and promote local events.
- **A globally responsible Wales** – Rhondda Cynon Taf's Library Service works with other library services across Wales to procure book stock and e-books/online stock to ensure that resources are used most efficiently.

### **13. CONCLUSION**

- 13.1 This report has provided Cabinet Members with details of the feedback from the consultation initiated by Cabinet in relation to the proposed changes to the mobile library service.
- 13.2 It is hoped that upon consideration of the consultation findings within this report, and the additional information provided, that Cabinet Members have the information required to enable them to make an informed decision on the proposed changes.
- 13.3 Should Members agree to the recommendation to modernise the mobile library service, a proactive marketing campaign will be undertaken to promote the enhancements to the new service.



**Other Information:-**

***Relevant Scrutiny Committee*** – Public Service Delivery, Communities and Prosperity Committee

**LOCAL GOVERNMENT ACT 1972**

**AS AMENDED BY**

**THE LOCAL GOVERNMENT (ACCESS TO INFORMATION) ACT 1985**

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**Background Papers**

[Cabinet - 22<sup>nd</sup> March 2018](#)

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