

DERBYSHIRE COUNTY COUNCIL

IMPROVEMENT AND SCRUTINY – PLACES COMMITTEE

22nd January 2014

Report of the Strategic Director, Health & Communities

**MEETING BUDGET REQUIREMENTS - PROPOSED CHANGES TO THE
MOBILE LIBRARY SERVICE**

1 Purpose of the Report

To inform members of the Improvement and Scrutiny – Places Committee of the options proposed for achieving cost reductions from the Mobile Library Service.

2 Information and Analysis

- 2.1 Currently, the mobile fleet consists of two Maximum Capacity Vehicles (MCVs) and eight standard mobile libraries. The MCVs are used to serve larger communities without a branch library, usually for a half or full day on a weekly or fortnightly basis. The standard vehicles provide shorter visits on a fortnightly basis, mainly serving smaller, rural and more inaccessible communities and some suburban locations.
- 2.2 Mobile library stops are generally not provided closer than 1 mile from a branch library. The 10 vehicles make almost 1,300 individual stops across the county, accounting for approximately 17% of total library service issues and approximately 7% of the total number of library service visits.
- 2.3 The total cost of the mobile service is £720,000 and of this, £190,000 is apportioned to the two MCVs. A total of 18.2 fte staff are employed in the service.
- 2.4 The mobile service is currently used by a range of customers: older people, families, schools, playgroups, nurseries and young people. By its very nature, the service reaches and touches the lives of some of the county's most vulnerable people, including housebound customers who receive their library service directly from a mobile library.
- 2.5 Four options for achieving cost reductions have been approved by Cabinet:

Option 1: Withdraw all ten mobile library vehicles and cease to provide a mobile service

Option 2: Withdraw eight standard mobile library vehicles, and maintain the two MCVs to provide a limited mobile service.

Option 3: Withdraw eight mobile library vehicles, maintaining one MCV and one standard mobile library. The MCV would be used to serve larger communities whilst the standard vehicle would be used to deliver to housebound clients and to maintain the service to as many schools as possible.

There are a number of permutations between options 2 and 3 which will be explored through initial engagement and consultation with the public.

Option 4: Community offer. In areas of Derbyshire changes to the mobile library service would mean that many individual stops will no longer be provided. However, should a community group or organisation wish to provide a more local service, e.g. in smaller rural villages, then the County Council may be able to offer appropriate support. An example of such provision might be:

- Working with communities to develop a network of drop-off points in accessible premises and other locations e.g. Children's Centres

2.6 In line with the Council's commitment to transparent decision making and in order to ensure that all those affected have the maximum opportunity to comment on any proposed change, it is proposed therefore that the Council undertakes:

Stage 1: An initial phase of consultation with the public to:

- Set out the financial context and challenges within which any decisions on future service delivery will need to be made
- Set out and share some broad principles for the future delivery of the public library service
- Share and explore the four headline options outlined above
- Receive feedback on the potential impact of any/all of those options
- Within the scope of the engagement process, identify more detailed options for changes to the mobile library service – particularly in relation to options 2 and 3

The Council's existing engagement mechanisms, including the Citizens' Panel and Consultation Compact, will be used to support work at Stage 1 to ensure that input from both library users and non-users is secured as far as possible and that vulnerable groups are provided with the best opportunities for input. On-line surveys, social media and face to face meetings e.g. at town and parish councils may also form part of this initial process.

Stage 2: Engagement on Detailed Options

The feedback received at Stage 1 will then be analysed and used to further develop the four initial options into more detailed proposals.

These proposals will then form the basis of more targeted discussions with key groups (particularly those groups identified through the analysis of Stage 1 feedback), affected individuals stakeholders and communities to explore issues in more detail, potential impact, scope for refinement, opportunities for mitigation of impact etc.

In addition, specific dialogue will be undertaken at this stage with any community, voluntary or other organisation coming forward in relation to option 4.

It is proposed that an equalities impact assessment be undertaken in parallel with the above engagement process and that identified issues, feedback and proposals be used to inform the assessment.

An outline timetable for the above process is set out below:

- December 2013 to January 2014: desktop exercise to establish a clear understanding of the baseline of current mobile provision
- January to February 2014: Stage 1 engagement with public
- March 2014: Evaluation of results, consultation with elected members and preparation of detailed options
- April to end June 2014: Stage 2 consultation with the public on detailed options
- July and August 2014: Evaluation of feedback and preparation of final proposals
- September 2014: Cabinet report

3 Financial considerations:

- 3.1 **Option 1.** The withdrawal of the whole mobile service will realise a saving of £720,000, which it is anticipated will be achieved over the period of two years, 2014/15 to 2015/16.

Option 2. The withdrawal of the eight standard mobile library vehicles with the retention of the two MCVs will realise a saving of £530,000, which it is anticipated will be achieved over the period of two years, 2014/15 to 2015/16.

Option 3. The withdrawal of eight library vehicles, with the retention of one MCV and one standard mobile library vehicle will realise a saving of £560,000, which it is anticipated will be achieved over the period of two years, 2014/15 to 2015/16.

Option 4. It is not possible to quantify the exact saving from this option until the level of community interest and the degree of financial support required from the County Council has been determined.

- 3.2 In the past, the County Council has been successful in disposing of surplus mobile library vehicles and there is a modest demand from other local authorities and private buyers. However, the potential sale of eight or more vehicles is unprecedented. The fleet of mobile library vehicles were acquired by County Transport through capital borrowing and are leased back to the Department. Of the ten vehicles in the fleet one comes out of its lease period in January 2014 but the remaining nine vehicles still have outstanding lease costs associated with them. These lease costs would still need to be paid on the vehicles until such time as either the lease expired or the vehicles were sold. The length of time these costs would remain a revenue charge on the Department cannot be determined at this stage.

4 Human Resource considerations:

- 4.1 The proposals in this report would be subject to formal consultation with staff and the trade unions and will be undertaken in accordance with the Council's Recruitment and Selection Policy and Procedure and the Redundancy, Redeployment, Protection of Earnings and Buy Out of Hours Policies.

5 Legal and Human Rights Considerations:

- 5.1 There are two specific legal matters which the Council must consider when making the decision in due course regarding the future of the Mobile Library Service.
- 5.2 The first is the Council's duty in relation to the Public Libraries and Museums Act 1964 section 7 which states:

'It shall be the duty of every library authority to provide a comprehensive and efficient library service for all persons desiring to make use thereof.'

5.3 In fulfilling its duty the Council should have particular regard to the desirability of:

- i) Securing that facilities are available for borrowing books, records, films etc. sufficient in number, range and quality to meet the needs of all, and the special requirements of adults and children*
- ii) Encouraging adults and children to make full use of the service and provide advice*

5.4 The second specific duty is in relation to the Equality Act 2010 which states the Council should give 'due regard' to the need to eliminate discrimination, harassment and victimization, and to advance equality of opportunity and fostering good relations, in the exercising of its functions [such as library provision]. This need for 'due regard' specifically applies to nine protected characteristics set out in the Act, including age and disability. An equality impact assessment will consider these issues and will form part of the subsequent report to Cabinet.

6 Other considerations:

In preparing this report the relevance of the following factors has been considered: prevention of crime and disorder, environmental, health, personnel, human rights, property and transport considerations and information governance.

7 Strategic Director's Recommendation:

That the Improvement and Scrutiny – Places Committee notes the report.

David Lowe
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