

Subject: Future of the Mobile Library Service
Date of Meeting: 24 January 2013
Report of: Director of Finance
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Wards Affected: All

FOR GENERAL RELEASE

1. SUMMARY AND POLICY CONTEXT:

- 1.1 The Mobile Library Service is due to operate until the end of March 2013. There has been extensive research into the future options for the Mobile Library since the proposal to close the service was first made as part of the February 2012 budget proposals. Significant consultation has taken place with community and voluntary sectors and with other public sector services to seek partnership opportunities. Two reports have been taken to the Economic Development and Culture Committee ("EDCC") to consider the options.
- 1.2 The EDCC on 15 November 2012 considered a wide range of options ranging from operating the Mobile Library on its current level of service, or on a reduced service, through to closing the Mobile Library and replacing it with an alternative service delivery model. Two of the options presented received support from members of the Committee.
- 1.3 The majority view was to recommend keeping the Mobile Library on a reduced timetable, and to purchase a new vehicle. The minority view was to support the recommendation for an enhanced Home Delivery Service that would deliver books and other resources to people in their own homes, and so effectively target service to those most in need. The details of these two options can be seen in 3.5 below.
- 1.4 The EDCC on 15 November resolved to recommend to the Policy and Resources Committee that its preferred Option 3, to run the Mobile Library Service on a reduced timetable for three days a week, is considered as part of the process for setting the budget for 2013-14 and 2014-15 over the coming months, this to include the purchase of a new replacement vehicle subject to the value for money assessment for both capital and revenue resources. An extract from the minutes of the EDCC meeting are attached to this report.
- 1.5 The budget implications of these recommendations and the sensitivity of the issue of the Mobile Library are such that Policy and Resources Committee are required to consider the recommendations of the EDCC, and to make a final decision on the future of the Mobile Library, including a decision on the whether a replacement vehicle should be purchased.

2. RECOMMENDATIONS:

- 2.1 To note the recommendations of the EDCC set out in 3.7 and 3.8 below.
- 2.2 To decide whether to approve the recommendation of the EDCC having regard to the value for money assessment as outlined in 5.1.6, and further financial implications as outlined in 5.1.7 below.

3. RELEVANT BACKGROUND INFORMATION/CHRONOLOGY OF KEY EVENTS

3.1 As part of required library service savings options for 2012/13 it was proposed to phase out the Mobile Library Service over three years from April 2012, saving £73,000 p.a. The actual running costs are £84,000 p.a.

3.2 The reasons for the original proposal were that:

- There is an excellent network of 14 libraries (12 community libraries and two central libraries) across the city
- 98% of all residents are within one mile of a library
- 71% (611) of registered mobile library borrowers already use one of the static libraries
- Only 253 registered borrowers are using the Mobile Library only
- The Mobile Library is relatively more expensive to run compared to the static libraries. Mobile Library cost per visit is £3.99, static libraries cost per visit is £1.77 (updated to 2011/12 figures)
- The services and facilities in the community libraries are more comprehensive than those provided on the Mobile Library.
- The Mobile Library has not been effective in reaching as many elderly, housebound or vulnerable people as we had hoped following the 2009 targeted promotion.
- Operating a Mobile Library service is not an effective way of delivering library services to the most vulnerable in our community, and other more effective operating models have been identified and proposed as part of the presentation of the options for the future.

3.3 At Budget Council on 23 February 2012 the following amendment was passed regarding the mobile library:

- £0.025m to help fund the annual running costs of the Mobile Library Service as a contribution towards securing its future as a combined mobile library and community advice outreach service.
- To work with the voluntary sector and seek contributions from partner agencies to fully fund the project.
- It is also proposed to amend the 2012/13 capital investment programme by allocating £0.120m from the Local Transport Plan (LPT) grant to purchase a new mobile library subject to the identification of the full running costs as set out above.

3.4 It has not been possible to identify partnership revenue funding to support the continued operation of the Mobile Library. Temporary funding has been identified from the General Fund Risk provision to enable the full Mobile Library service to continue to the end of March 2013.

3.5 The EDCC on the 15 November 2012 considered a wide range of options, of which two received support from members of the Committee:

Details	Costs	Sources of Funding	Risks / Opportunities
<p><u>Option 3:</u> Operate the Mobile on a reduced timetable of 3 days per week. Would reduce from 24 to 11 stops removing 13 of the least used. Also moving some stops to different days. Reduction of 20% of usage.</p>	<p>£47,000 for 2013/14 Reducing to £37,000 in 2014/15</p>	<p>£37,000 library budget for mobile £10,000 from postponement of savings proposal for 2013/14</p>	<p>Service would be within current budget from 2014/15 There would be an estimated 20% reduction in usage, affecting an estimated 547 borrowers. However, 387 of these borrowers also use another Mobile Library stop, so only 160 individual borrowers would lose their Mobile Library access. (Note that some of those borrowers will also use a static library.)</p>
<p><u>Option 7:</u> Replace Mobile with an expanded Home Delivery service to provide a more targeted service for those unable to get to a static library or use the Mobile Library. Home Delivery Library Officer would help housebound people select books using online catalogue and co-ordinate the regular delivery of the chosen books by volunteers.</p>	<p>£30,000</p>	<p>£30,000 library budget</p>	<p>Affordable within current budget. Would develop a targeted service to those unable to get to a static library or get onto the Mobile Library. Would remove Mobile Library service affecting an estimated 864 registered borrowers. However, 611 of these borrowers also use another Library, so only 253 individual borrowers would need to be found alternative library access.</p>

3.6 **Current Home Delivery / Housebound Library Service:**

Many housebound people get their library books friends or family, so are hidden in the loans of other borrowers, but they are missing out on the benefits of Housebound membership which includes longer loans and no overdue charges. Currently, 530 library users are registered as housebound, however only a handful (6) are currently actively using the service. We are seeking to extend this service to offer a volunteer recruited by the library service where no family or neighbour is available. We have recently recruited 20 library housebound service volunteers. The Library Service is also working in partnership with the Neighbourhood Care Scheme

to deliver books to some housebound people in the Patcham area, with the intention of extending this to other areas. Apart from providing the books and paying some volunteers' expenses, there is currently no council funding put into the provision of housebound library services.

- 3.7 The EDCC on the 15 November 2012 agreed to recommend to Policy and Resources Committee that its preferred Option 3 as set out above, is considered as part of the process for setting the budget for 2013/14 and 2014/15 over the coming months, this to include the purchase of a new replacement vehicle subject to the value for money assessment for both capital and revenue resources.
- 3.8 The Committee also wished to place on record that the above is their preferred majority option and that their preference is that delivery of this service is supported by purchase of a new vehicle and that they wish this to be taken into account when the Policy and Resources Committee consider the matter.

4. COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT AND CONSULTATION

- 4.1 The results of the consultation with the community and voluntary sector were reported to the EDCC on 15 November 2012. The Community and Voluntary Sector Forum (CVSF) were approached seeking potential community and voluntary sector partnership, involvement or funding opportunities to enable the continuation of the Mobile Library Service. There has been no interest shown by the CVSF to this proposal and they have recently clarified their position, clearly indicating this was too challenging a proposition in the current climate.
- 4.2 A range of other partnership and potential funding opportunities have been explored (e.g. with other public sector service providers). Although there are organisations interested in working with the Libraries to deliver services and develop positive initiatives by collaborative working, there have been no specific revenue funds identified.
- 4.3 Research into the national picture has also been done, looking at a number of partnership templates and if any of these has resulted in mobile libraries achieving sustained revenue funding. Whilst there are examples of good collaborative working similar to partnership initiatives above, there are no existing models of these contributing sustained revenue funding.

5. FINANCIAL & OTHER IMPLICATIONS:

Financial Implications:

- 5.1 The 2012/13 budget is £67,000 and, as previously agreed, the budget shortfall of £17,000 has been funded from the General Fund risk provision on a one-off basis to fund the £84,000 required to run the service until 31st March 2013.
- 5.2 The Budget Update report to Policy and Resources Committee on 29 November included an indicative savings proposal for a further budget

reduction of £30,000, therefore the revenue funding currently identified for 2013/14 and beyond is £37,000 p.a.

- 5.3 The options presented to EDCC included the costs of staffing, estimated running costs and equipment. EDCC was advised that any shortfall in revenue funding for the preferred option for 2013/14 would need to be addressed in the current budget cycle and future funding approved by Budget Council in due course.
- 5.4 The £120,000 capital funding identified for a new mobile library this year is subject to certain conditions as detailed elsewhere in this report.
- 5.5 EDCC were advised that should the preferred option include the purchase of the new mobile library vehicle, even if the conditions were deemed as having been met, it would be necessary to seek approval from Policy & Resources Committee in accordance with the Financial Regulations in respect of the Capital Programme. If the conditions currently attached to the capital funding cannot be met, then the capital expenditure is not authorised and the capital resources would then become available for the Council to commit in accordance with the budget process.
- 5.6 Financial Regulations require that value for money is obtained for both capital and revenue resources and should be taken into account when considering the options. It should be noted that Option 3 includes a reduced number of days of service provision which would need to be considered in evaluating usage of the asset. Under Option 3, the new service will be at a lower cost but with reduced usage of 20% and therefore although the new service would be at an improved cost per visit, the cost per visit will still be more than 50% higher than a static library. In addition, since the EDCC meeting, the Budget Update report to Policy and Resources Committee on 29 November identified a resource gap of £6.7m in the draft capital programme 2013/14. Given this updated position, Members may also wish to consider the 'opportunity cost' of this capital investment which could otherwise be utilised to avoid borrowing or reducing other investments in 2013/14 of an equivalent value. The Council's external auditor is also required to give an opinion on the Council's arrangements for ensuring value for money.
- 5.7 The decision by this Committee will be reflected in the budget strategies to be submitted through Policy & Resources Committee to Budget Council in February 2013. Should the preferred Option 3 from EDCC be agreed, the revenue shortfall in 2013/14 of £10,000 would need to be funded, the conditions regarding the capital funding would need to be amended as appropriate and the capital programme would need to be updated accordingly.

Finance Officer Consulted: Anne Silley

Date: 28/12/12

Legal Implications:

- 5.8 The context for the EDCC recommendations can be discerned from the attached minutes. In order for the EDCC's recommendations to be fully adhered to it would need to be agreed that the previous conditional

capital allocation for purchase of a new vehicle can still be applied notwithstanding the proposed change in service provision (i.e. to a 3 day service to 11 stops)...

Lawyer Consulted: Bob Bruce Date: 02/01/13

Equalities Implications:

- 5.9 The Mobile Library Service provides access to library resources in 24 locations around the city, and potentially provides a service to those who cannot get to a static library. Alternative provision can be provided for those who currently use the Mobile Library stops that would cease in a three day a week service. An equalities impact assessment has been completed. A supported Home Deliver service would reach more housebound people than the Mobile Library service, and would extend library services to those not currently able to get to a library service point.

Sustainability Implications:

- 5.10 A new Mobile Library vehicle would be more energy efficient than the old vehicle.

Crime & Disorder Implications:

- 5.11 None.

Risk and Opportunity Management Implications:

- 5.12 There is a risk that continuing to run the old vehicle would result in interruptions to service or costly breakdowns with uncertainty as to how long the vehicle would be able to continue. However the purchase of a new vehicle that is only used for three days a week would leave the council open to criticism of poor use of resources at a time of economic difficulty.

Corporate / Citywide Implications:

- 5.13 The operation of a Mobile Library Service is not critical to the effective delivery of the statutory duty to provide a comprehensive and efficient library service for the city. The evidence shows that given the number and spread of the static libraries, and the library borrowing data of the Mobile Library users, the library service can be efficiently and effectively delivered through the static libraries.

Public Health and Wellbeing Implications:

- 5.14 The positive health benefits of reading in the treatment of stress and mental health issues have been evidenced in national studies. The provision of a Home Delivery service for housebound people would have positive impacts on the health of housebound people who are particularly vulnerable to these health issues.

6. EVALUATION OF ANY ALTERNATIVE OPTION(S):

- 6.1 Alternative options were considered at the EDCC on the 15 November 2012, and the two preferred options have been outlined in 3.5 above.

7. REASONS FOR REPORT RECOMMENDATIONS

- 7.1 The EDCC on the 15 November 2012 resolved that the recommendations be put to the Policy and Resources Committee.

SUPPORTING DOCUMENTATION

Appendices:

1. Extract from the minutes of the Economic Development and Culture Committee 15 November 2012, covering the discussion on the Mobile Library Report.

Documents in Members' Rooms

None

Background Documents

None

