

Subject:	Future of the Mobile Library Service – Extract from the Proceedings of the Economic Development & Culture Committee meeting held on the 15th November 2012		
Date of Meeting:	24 January 2013		
Report of:	Interim Lead Chief Executive Services		
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Wards Affected:	All		

FOR GENERAL RELEASE

Action Required of the Committee:

To receive the item referred from the Economic Development & Culture Committee and determine the action to be taken:

Recommendation:

- (1) To note the recommendations of the EDCC set out in 3.7 and 3.8 below.
- (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.

BRIGHTON & HOVE CITY COUNCIL

ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT & CULTURE COMMITTEE

4.00pm 15 NOVEMBER 2012

COUNCIL CHAMBER, HOVE TOWN HALL

MINUTES

Present: Councillors Bowden (Chair) Mac Cafferty (Deputy Chair), Brown (Opposition Spokesperson), Morgan (Opposition Spokesperson), Fitch, Janio, A Kitcat, Littman, Smith and C Theobald.

PART ONE**40. FUTURE OF THE MOBILE LIBRARY SERVICE**

- 40.1 The Committee considered a report of the Acting Director of Finance requesting that they express their views as to the preferred option(s) to be considered as part of the process for setting the budget for 2013-14 and 2014-15 over the coming months.
- 40.2 Following the decision taken by the Committee at its meeting held on 20 September 2012, the Mobile Library Service was due to operate until the end of March 2013. The purpose of this report was to inform Members of how the one-off funding shortfall of £17,000 for the Mobile Library for this year would be met, and set out options that could be explored to retain the service on an on-going basis.
- 40.3 Additionally, the Committee had requested that the further report for consideration at that days meeting, as well as detailing how the funding shortfall could be met also set out options that could be explored in seeking to retain the service.
- 40.4 It had not been possible to find the shortfall of £17,000 for the current year within the Libraries budget and this would need to be met from the General Fund Risk provision. This would be one-off funding for the current year only and would need to be included in a future Targeted Budget Management Report for reporting to Policy and Resources Committee.
- 40.5 It had not been possible to identify partnership revenue funding for continued operation of the Mobile Library, even when it had been confirmed that partners would not be required to find funding for the 10 year lifetime of the mobile library vehicle. Any shortfall in the revenue funding for the continued operation of the Mobile, as identified in the options set out in the report would need to be taken into account in the current budget process.
- 40.6 Options which could be explored for the future in order to retain the service together with options for additional or an alternative were presented in the table set out in the report.
- 40.7 Councillor Brown stated that her preference would be to go forward with Option 3 with the provision of a new vehicle. In answer to questions the Legal Adviser to the Committee, the Principal Solicitor, explained that committing to a continued service had required additional revenue resources to be identified and approved to cover the running costs. This had been a condition for committing the LTP capital expenditure. Officers had been unable to meet these conditions as laid down i.e., to find alternative sources of partnership funding for the revenue gap. In any case, the procurement itself i.e., the purchase of the new vehicle would need approval by Policy and Resources as was normal for all capital schemes.
- 40.8 Councillor Fitch stated that he was not happy to hear that money for the vehicle would need to be re-provided as he had understood that the money to purchase a replacement vehicle had already been set aside. It had been the clearly stated view of the majority of the Committee at its previous meeting that it wanted options to be pursued which would

retain and protect the service. On balance he would support Option 3, as this allowed the possibility for the service to be extended again if the budget situation improved in future.

- 40.9 The Chair stated that the original budget amendment of the Labour and Co-operative Group had placed conditions on the manner in which funding for the mobile service could be provided. Councillor Morgan concurred in that view, he also stated his views that, the Chair's reference to the mobile library as a "lorry based service" in a recently circulated Press release had been unhelpful. It had been the clearly stated view of the Committee that the service should be retained and on that basis he considered Option 3 as set out represented the most appropriate way forward.
- 40.7 Councillor Janio also expressed his support for Option 3 and stated that he could not understand why the money to purchase this vehicle needed to be re-approved by the Policy and Resources Committee, given that approval had already been given and the monies to do so set aside, if that was the case he felt that a mistake must have occurred. If the Committee were now being told that the vehicle could not be purchased in order to operate a reduced service that was disingenuous and ran totally counter to the views of the Committee.
- 40.10 The Legal Adviser to the Committee, The Principal Solicitor, reiterated his earlier comments. The Principal Accountant, explained that should the preferred option include the purchase of the new mobile library vehicle and the conditions were deemed as having been met it would still be necessary to seek approval from Policy and Resources Committee in accordance with the Financial Regulations in respect of the Capital Programme. If the conditions currently attached to the capital funding could not be met, then the capital expenditure was not authorized and the capital resources would then become available for the Council to commit in accordance with the budget process.
- 40.11 It was further explained that Financial Regulations required that value for money was obtained for both capital and revenue resources and needed to be taken into account when considering the options. The Council's external auditor was also required to give an opinion on the Council's arrangements for ensuring value for money. It should be noted that as some of the options included a reduced number of days of service provision this would need to be considered in evaluating usage of the asset.
- 40.12 Councillor Smith stated that he also supported Option 3 but was concerned that any decision taken by the Committee could be overturned at a subsequent meeting of the Policy and Resources Committee. If Option 3 was agreed and the view of the meeting was that that a new vehicle be provided to deliver that service he was anxious that that was relayed as a strong message to the Policy and Resources Committee so that they were mindful of that when making their decision.
- 40.13 The Chair stated that there appeared to be a consensus amongst opposition members that Option 3 was their preferred option and that in tandem with that it was also their preference that a new vehicle be purchased for delivery of that service. For clarity he asked Members to vote on each of the other options in turn, options 1-7. The outcome of the vote was 6 in favour of Option 3 with the purchase of a new vehicle and 4 in favour of option 7.

40.14 **RESOLVED** – That the Committee recommends to the Policy & Resources Committee that its preferred Option 3 as set out below, 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, as well as agreement from the Council's external auditor:

Details:

Operate the Mobile on a reduced timetable for three 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.

Costs

£47,000 for 2013-14

Reducing to £37,000 in 2014-15

Sources of Funding

£37,000 library budget for mobile

£10,000 from postponement of savings proposal for 2012-14

Risks/Opportunities

Service would be within current budget from 2014-15

There would be an estimates 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 loose their Mobile Library access.

(Note that some of those borrowers will also use a static library)

Note: The Committee also wished to place on record that the above is their preferred majority option and that 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 account of when the Policy & Resources Committee makes the ultimate decision in respect of this matter.