



RHONDDA CYNON TAF COUNTY BOROUGH COUNCIL

**PUBLIC SERVICE DELIVERY, COMMUNITIES AND PROSPERITY
SCRUTINY COMMITTEE**

10th DECEMBER 2018

TRANSFORMATION OF THE MOBILE LIBRARY SERVICE

**REPORT OF THE DIRECTOR PUBLIC HEALTH, PROTECTION AND
COMMUNITY SERVICES**

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1. PURPOSE OF THE REPORT

- 1.1 The purpose of the report is to update Scrutiny on the proposals approved by Cabinet for the transformation of the mobile library service and to provide information on the plans for implementation of the changes.

2. RECOMMENDATIONS

- 2.1 It is recommended that the Members of the Public Service Delivery, Communities and Prosperity Scrutiny Committee scrutinise the content of the report; and
- 2.2 Consider whether they require further information on any aspects of the report.

3. BACKGROUND

- 3.1 A report was submitted to Cabinet on 22nd March 2018 outlining proposals to improve the quality and range of services offered by the mobile library service and recommending changes to the service delivery model to facilitate these developments.
- 3.2 The recommendations were to:
- Continue to maintain a mobile library service;
 - 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;
 - To initiate an eight week consultation on the proposals.
- 3.3 The reason for the recommendation was that the three mobile vehicles had been assessed by Fleet as being passed their economic and operational life and this afforded an opportunity for the Library Service to challenge the delivery model of the Mobile Service, identify opportunities to improve the Service and ensure it offers an equivalent service offer to that provided by static libraries.
- 3.4 Cabinet approved the initiation of an eight week consultation on the proposals. The full report can be accessed through the following link:
<https://www.rctcbc.gov.uk/EN/Council/CouncillorsCommitteesandMeetings/Meetings/Cabinet/2018/03/22/Cabinet22Mar2018.aspx>
- 3.5 The consultation on the proposals took place between 8th May and 3rd July and the consultation feedback report was considered by Cabinet on 20th September 2018.
- 3.6 The proposals were approved by Cabinet. The full report, including the Consultation team's analysis of the responses and the methodology for the consultation can be seen by following the link below:
<https://www.rctcbc.gov.uk/EN/Council/CouncillorsCommitteesandMeetings/Meetings/Cabinet/2018/09/20/Cabinet20Sep2018.aspx#>
- 4. CURRENT SITUATION AND NEXT STEPS**
- 4.1 All Elected Members have been consulted on the proposed centralised locations for delivery of the service. A timetable with confirmed locations has been developed and will shortly be distributed to Members.
- 4.2 Consultation with the unions and with staff affected by the changes have been undertaken. There will be no compulsory redundancies as there are vacancies within the wider library service for staff whose posts have been removed.

- 4.3 A training programme has been developed to up-skill staff who remain in the mobile library service focussing on key areas such as digital skills which is now a requirement of the role.
- 4.4 Contact is currently being undertaken with other Council services, in the first instance, to identify when they wish to have a presence on the mobile libraries and across which areas so that a timetable of advice sessions can be developed.
- 4.5 Marketing materials are being prepared and information is ready for uploading onto the corporate website and the Library Service Facebook page. Library managers are working with the press office to ensure the launch of the new model of delivery is highlighted in the local press.
- 4.6 Mobile librarians, who know their current customers very well, have been asked to identify those who may wish to transfer onto the @homelibraryservice as the eligibility criteria for accessing this service has been expanded to mitigate against any adverse impact on those who are most vulnerable.
- 4.7 The date for transfer to the new model delivery has been set as 11th February.

5. EQUALITY AND DIVERSITY IMPLICATIONS

- 5.1 A full Equality Impact Assessment was undertaken as part of the report to Cabinet as it was recognised that the proposals were likely to have most impact on those who had the protected characteristics of older age and disability.

6. CONSULTATION / INVOLVEMENT

- 6.1 As indicated in 3.5 a public consultation relating to the proposals has taken place between 8th May and 3rd July. A consultation on the location of centralised stops was undertaken with Elected Members. Finally a 10 day consultation was undertaken with staff affected by the changes in accordance with Council policy.

7. FINANCIAL IMPLICATION(S)

- 7.1 The change in model of delivery will result in revenue savings of £54,499 per annum. However, the capital investment made by the Council to maintain a mobile library service (that is the purchase of two new mobile vehicles) has cost £215,000 which has been funded through the Council's Fleet Management Service, as part of its vehicle replacement strategy 2018/19.

8. LEGAL IMPLICATIONS OR LEGISLATION CONSIDERED

- 8.1 There is no statutory requirement for the Council to provide a Mobile Library Service. 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 have clear quality indicators that library services have to abide by. These do not specify the need for a Mobile Library Service.

9. LINKS TO THE CORPORATE AND NATIONAL PRIORITIES AND THE WELL-BEING OF FUTURE GENERATIONS ACT.

- 9.1 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 will 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.
- 9.2 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.
- 9.3 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 have been **involved** through the consultation in highlighting issues of concern and providing feedback on the proposals. Feedback from customers will continue to be gathered as the new model of delivery is implemented as part of the service's commitment to continuous improvement.
- 9.4 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 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.

10. CONCLUSION

- 10.1 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.

- 10.2 However, despite all the efforts made to promote the service the number of customers that continue to 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.
- 10.3 The expansion of the eligibility criteria for the current Housebound Service and its rebranding as the @homelibraryservice should ensure that any adverse effect on those most in need will be mitigated and they will continue to have access to the books they want.
- 10.4 It is notable that of the 22 local authorities in Wales, only 14 currently retain a mobile service. Of these not all retain both a mobile service and an at home service and in some areas the at home service is delivered by volunteers, not library service staff. Difficult though this change to the provision in Rhondda Cynon Taf may be initially for customers and staff, it remains the best hope of sustaining the service over the longer term and ensuring that Rhondda Cynon Taf continues to deliver a comprehensive and efficient library service.

LOCAL GOVERNMENT ACT 1972

AS AMENDED BY

THE LOCAL GOVERNMENT (ACCESS TO INFORMATION) ACT 1985

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Background Papers

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