RHONDDA CYNON TAF COUNTY BOROUGH COUNCIL

CABINET

22ND MARCH 2018

MOBILE LIBRARY SERVICE

REPORT OF THE DIRECTOR OF PUBLIC HEALTH, PROTECTION & COMMUNITY SERVICES IN DISCUSSION WITH THE RELEVANT PORTFOLIO HOLDER, COUNCILLOR J ROSSER

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1. PURPOSE OF THE REPORT

1.1 The report sets out a proposal to improve the quality and range of services provided by the Mobile Library Service to a standard comparable with that of static libraries whilst ensuring that the Library service remains accessible to communities throughout Rhondda Cynon Taf. It is proposed that the Council undertake an eight week consultation on these proposals and that a further report summarising the responses be presented to the Cabinet prior to any decision being made.

2. RECOMMENDATIONS

It is recommended that the Cabinet:

2.1 Consider the contents of this report.

2.2 Agree to maintain a Mobile Library Service.

2.3 Initiate an eight week consultation in respect of the proposal outlined in paragraphs 5.2 and 5.3 of the report, namely 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 access to, and rebrand the Library Housebound Service to the @HomeLibraryService.

2.4   Subject to 2.3 above, agree to receive a further report summarising the results and feedback from the consultation process prior to any decision being made in relation to the proposal.

3.   REASONS FOR RECOMMENDATIONS

3.1   The three Mobile Library vehicles are at the end of their economic and operational life. This creates the opportunity for the Library Service to challenge the delivery of the Mobile Service, identify opportunities to improve the Service and ensure it offers an equivalent service offer as that provided by static libraries.

4.   BACKGROUND

4.1   The way people use libraries and interact with the Library Service is changing. Static libraries in Rhondda Cynon Taf have been transformed to better meet customer needs and make the best possible use of public money. Visitor numbers to static libraries are now improving and customers can access a wider range of services and support at libraries particularly those that are co-located with other Council services.

4.2   407 adults responded to the service's Customer Satisfaction Survey in 2016 of whom:

- 84% indicated that the library had helped them to develop new skills,
- 86% stated that they had developed new interests and hobbies through attending the library
- 87% had found out information about their local community at the library, and
- 99% thought the standard of customer care was 'very good' or 'good.'

Of the 212 young people who responded:

- 60% used the library to use computers,
- 65% used the library to borrow books,
- 49% used the library to do their homework,
- 100% thought the library was a safe and friendly place
- 73% felt that going to the library helped them to read better, while
- 67% thought it helped them to do better at school.

These responses show that static libraries offer a range of services that benefit people of all ages.

4.3 Conversely, mobile library provision has remained relatively unchanged since its inception. It currently focuses on providing access to a range of books and reading materials in various formats for people who do not live near a static library, as well as providing some information and recycling bags. Customers can choose books on the vehicle itself or order books online or by phone and pick them up when the mobile library visits their area.

4.4 There are 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.

4.5 Although the geographical coverage is good, what is on offer is limited, in part due to the restrictive time slots. This situation has been exacerbated recently due to the fragile state of the mobile vehicles that has resulted in an inconsistent and unreliable service. 100 days of service were lost in 2016 due to vehicle breakdowns. 64 days were lost due to vehicle breakdowns between April and September 2017. In addition the cost of maintenance has escalated as can be seen in the table below:

Vehicle repair costs	2015/16 £	2016/17 £	April – August 2017 £	Total £
CN56 BUF	5,997	6,898	9,100	**21,995**
CU59 FHG	5,040	7,455	4,231	**16,726**
CU59 FJV	3,355	18,453	3,692	**25,500**

4.6 The Council's Fleet Management Service has concluded that the vehicles are at the end of their economic and operational life and need to be replaced if a mobile library service is to continue.

4.7 There is a high level of satisfaction among customers of the service. A Customer Satisfaction Survey undertaken in 2016 with mobile library members resulted in 180 responses:

- 99% of respondents rated the customer service provided by the community librarians as 'very good' or 'good.'
- 60% of respondents stated that they used the mobile service because it was 'convenient.
- 23% stated that they used the mobile service because they found it difficult to visit a static library.

- 16% of mobile library customers stated that they also used a static library; and
- 75% of respondents were happy with the length of stops.

4.8 The Public Services Delivery, Communities and Prosperity Scrutiny Committee held a series of meetings in 2016/17 to scrutinise the service. The Scrutiny Members recognised the value of the service and how highly regarded it was by its customers but noted that the level of use of the service was not as high as they would like it to be. The recommendations made by the Committee, such as pro-actively promoting the service to residents and highlighting the fact that the vehicles are accessible to wheelchair users, have been implemented.

4.9 However, the numbers of users that access the service remain low, despite all the efforts made to promote the service. There are currently 1,693 mobile library members in the county (compared to 39,272 static library members). The table below highlights the age distribution of the mobile library members:

Age	Number	Percentage
Over 60	1186	71%
40 – 59	175	10%
20 – 39	151	9%
10 - 19	107	6%
Under 10	74	4%

The percentage of over 60s using the mobile library service is consistent across each geographical area of Rhondda Cynon Taf at between 67% and 73%.

4.10 Combined book issues for 2016/17 on all mobile library vehicles was 39,900 which is less than the annual book issues for some of the individual branch libraries (e.g. Church Village library issued 45,846 books in the same period).

4.11 The impact of technology with access to e-books and materials online provides a different way for people who live further from a static library, to access reading materials. The table below shows a steady (albeit slow) increase in downloads over the past 3 years. Over time, the percentage of people who will choose to download books is expected to increase, so mobile libraries will need to offer something extra if they are to be sustainable and of benefit to customers over the longer term.

	2014/15	2015/16	2016/17
e-books	3,090	3,766	4,007
e-audiobooks	1,743	2,180	2,784

4.12 The current model of mainly short stops does not make it practical to facilitate access to Wi-Fi or allow customers to use public access computers that are now available on new library vehicles. There is no requirement under the Public Libraries and Museums Act 1964, or the Welsh Public Libraries Standards to deliver a mobile library service. However, if a library authority provides this service it is important that the mobile vehicle can offer free and reliable access to Wi-Fi. Short stops do not allow for this and the current fleet of vehicles do not have this facility.

4.13 Many local authorities across England and Wales that continue to maintain a mobile library service have remodelled their service to ensure it better replicates the services provided by a static library, and as a result, the mobile libraries in those communities are better utilised by the residents.

4.14 The mobile library service currently costs the Council £134,114. The average cost of a visit to a static library in 2016/17 was £2.29. The average cost of a visit to a mobile library in 2016/17 was £8.50, or £4.70 if we exclude the recent down-time and the cost of vehicle repairs. We need to ensure we maximise resident take-up of the Mobile Library Service, particularly in an economic climate where all public services are being challenged in terms of whether they offer value for money.

4.15 In reviewing the future of the Service, we need to consider how we can continue to widen access to library services across the County Borough but also improve the range and quality of services provided.

5.   PROPOSED WAY FORWARD

5.1 The Library Service Management Team has reviewed the Service and there are opportunities to remodel the operational delivery of the Service, expanding the services available on mobile libraries to attract more customers and make it a service that is fit for the 21st Century.

5.2 The proposal is to:

- Purchase 2 new purpose built library vehicles with access to Wi-Fi and easy to set up awnings/canopies.
- Reduce the number of mobile stops to 48 long stops of 2.5 hours each every three weeks focussed on communities where there are no static libraries.
- Continue to offer access to books, e-books and other printed material.

- Introduce access to I-pads and free Wi-Fi so that customers can access the internet and the Service will offer training from a volunteer or tutor on how to use digital equipment etc.
- Use the mobile vehicles as outreach hubs that can facilitate the delivery of advice and guidance to customers by other Council services and partner agencies on a rota basis, e.g. One4All customer service staff; the Council's Consultation team; MacMillan Cancer; and
- Park at central locations e.g. close to schools, supermarkets or GP surgeries to encourage more visits.

Appendix 1 shows all current mobile library stops. They are split into three colours - Red is mobile E1, light Blue mobile E2 and Green mobile W2. **Appendix 2** shows the proposed longer stay stops and the branch libraries according to ward areas. **Appendix 3** shows the area within a two mile radius of the proposed longer stay stops and static libraries. **Appendix 4** provides a **sample** timetable for the proposed 2 new vehicles. It should be noted, however, that any final timetable would be subject to consultation with Elected Members and customers.

5.3 It is also proposed to expand the eligibility criteria for the Housebound Service in order to mitigate any adverse effect of reducing the number of stops and centralising the locations of the Mobile library Service, to include:

- People who suffer from mobility problems.
- People who suffer from long-term illness.
- People who live in excess of 2 miles from a library service point (static or mobile).
- Full-time carers.

5.4 In addition, it is proposed to rebrand the Housebound Service as the @HomeLibraryService to reflect these changes (The Housebound Service is currently only available for individuals who, through ill-health or disability, cannot leave their homes. It delivers books to an individual's home on a monthly basis). It is anticipated that this can be done within existing resources, although it is uncertain how many additional applications for this service we will receive.

5.5 Whilst the proposed changes have sought to ensure access to the library service is widened to all, with a greater range of services, some customers who have been used to having books delivered if not to their door, then to their street may not support this proposal.

5.6 If approved by Cabinet, this proposal would result in a reduction in the number of staff required to operate the service. 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.

5.7   The success of this service model will be dependent on the location of the new library stops. It is proposed that communities and all relevant stakeholders, including the Public Services Delivery, Community and Prosperity Scrutiny Committee and Elected Members would be canvassed via a consultation in order to identify the most suitable location 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.

6.   **EQUALITY AND DIVERSITY IMPLICATIONS**

6.1   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.

6.2   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.

6.3   An Equality Impact Assessment Screening Form has been prepared in respect of the proposed changes to the Mobile Library Service for the purposes of this report. The screening has identified a potential adverse impact on some vulnerable groups with protected characteristics (specifically older people) due to the proposed changes. Consequently a full Equality Impact Assessment would be undertaken to be informed by the consultation feedback and included in a subsequent report to Cabinet prior to any decision being made on the

proposal. The screening form can be accessed by contacting the author of the report or the Cabinet Business Officer.

7.   CONSULTATION

7.1   Based on the conclusions of Welsh Government's 'Expert Review of Public Libraries in Wales 2014', and given the proposed change to the Council's Mobile Library Service would be considered by the Expert Review as being "significant", the guidance provided by Welsh Government recommends '*The need to ensure a robust consultation is essential in order to take into account the views of the public.*'

7.2   It is therefore recommended that as the proposal outlined in the report would have an impact on the service delivered to current customers/service users that the Cabinet initiates an eight week consultation with all relevant stakeholders in relation to it.

7.3   Should the Cabinet initiate such a consultation it is recommended that the Cabinet agrees to receive a further report summarising the results and feedback from the consultation process prior to any decision being made in relation to the proposal.

8.   FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

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

8.2   If agreed, the changes would require the purchase of two new library vehicles at a total cost of £215,000, but it should be noted that the Council's Fleet Management Service, as part of its vehicle replacement strategy, has already set aside an adequate capital budget to replace two vehicles in 2018/19.

9.   LEGISLATION CONSIDERED

9.1   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 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.

9.2   Whilst there is no statutory duty on the Council to consult on this proposal it is recommended that a consultation be initiated prior to any

decision being made, given the impact of the decision and expectation of service users/stakeholders in addition to Welsh Government guidance.

9.3   Where consultation is undertaken it should be done when proposals are at a formative stage; give sufficient reasons for any proposal to permit intelligent consideration and allow adequate time for consideration and response. Cabinet would then be required to give conscientious consideration to the outcome of the consultation process prior to any decision(s) being made on the proposal.

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

10.1   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.

10.2   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 i**ntegrative** model of provision.

10.3   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.

10.4   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.

11.   CONCLUSION

11.1   It is proposed that the Council undertake an eight week consultation on proposals to improve the quality and range of services provided by the Mobile Library Service to a standard comparable with that of static libraries. These proposals will require capital investment in the vehicles and changes to the existing service model. The service will however remain accessible to communities across Rhondda Cynon Taf.

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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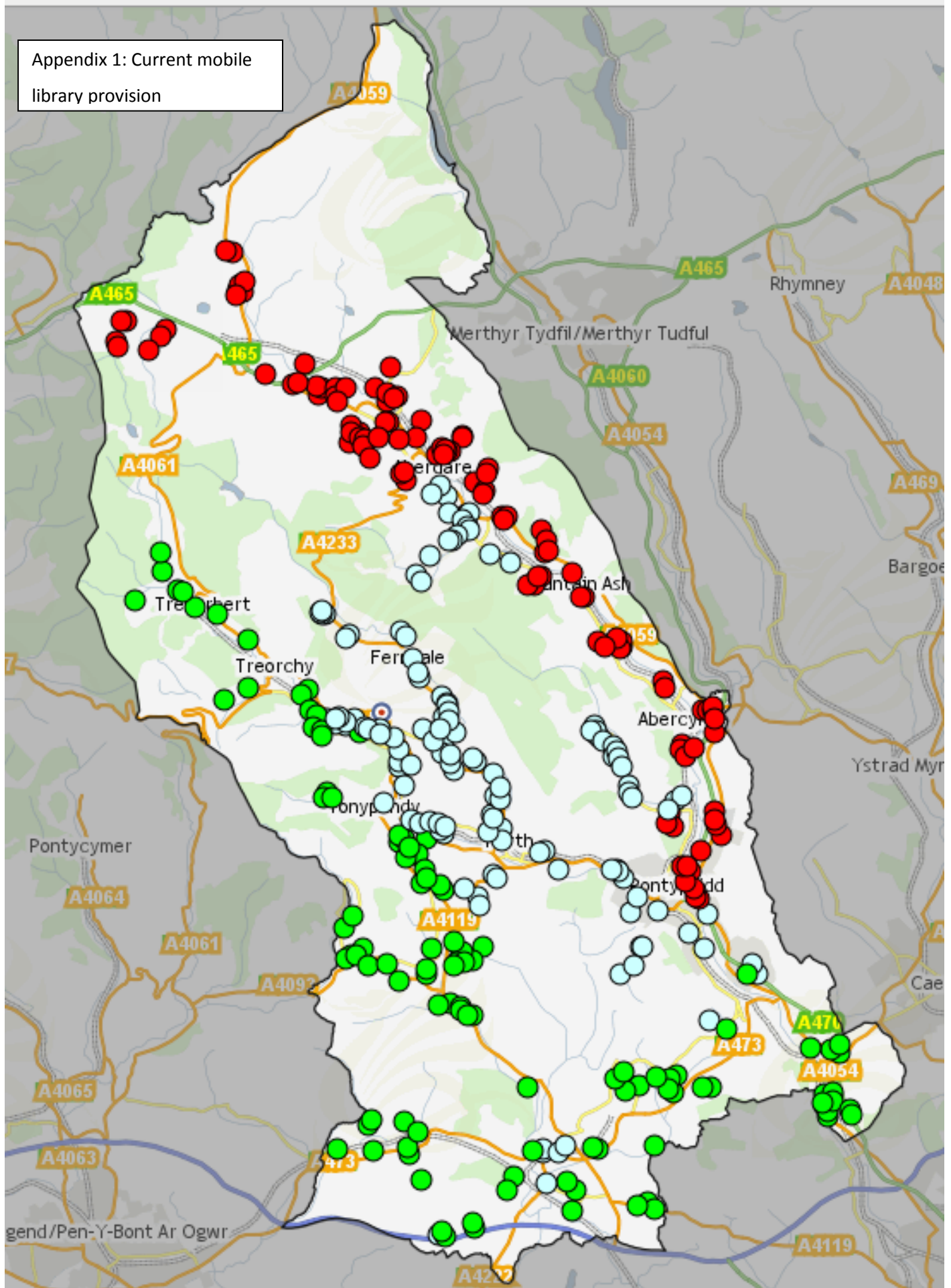# AUTHOR: WENDY EDWARDS, HEAD OF COMMUNITY SERVICES. TEL. NO 01443 744111
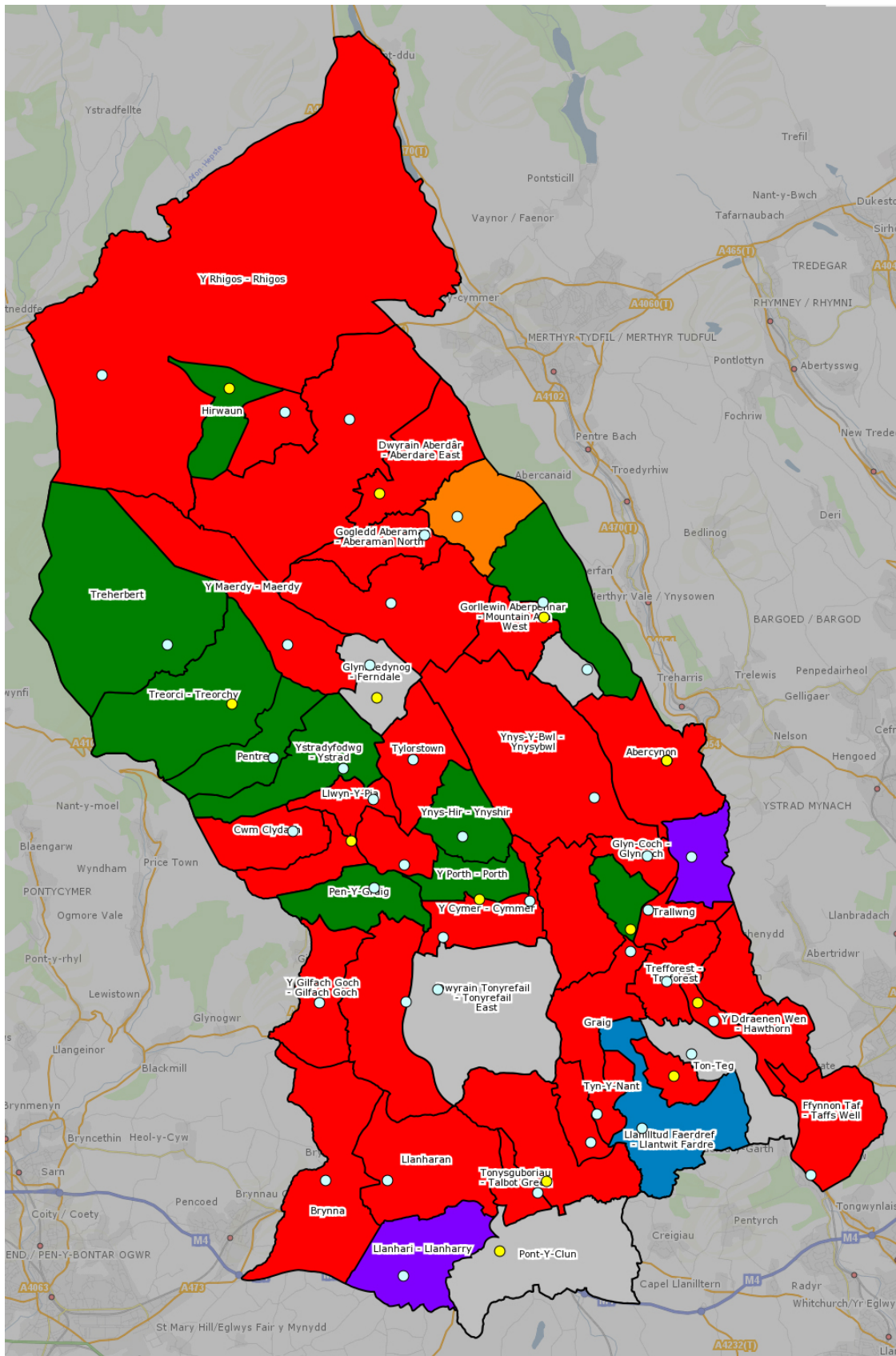

Background Papers

None

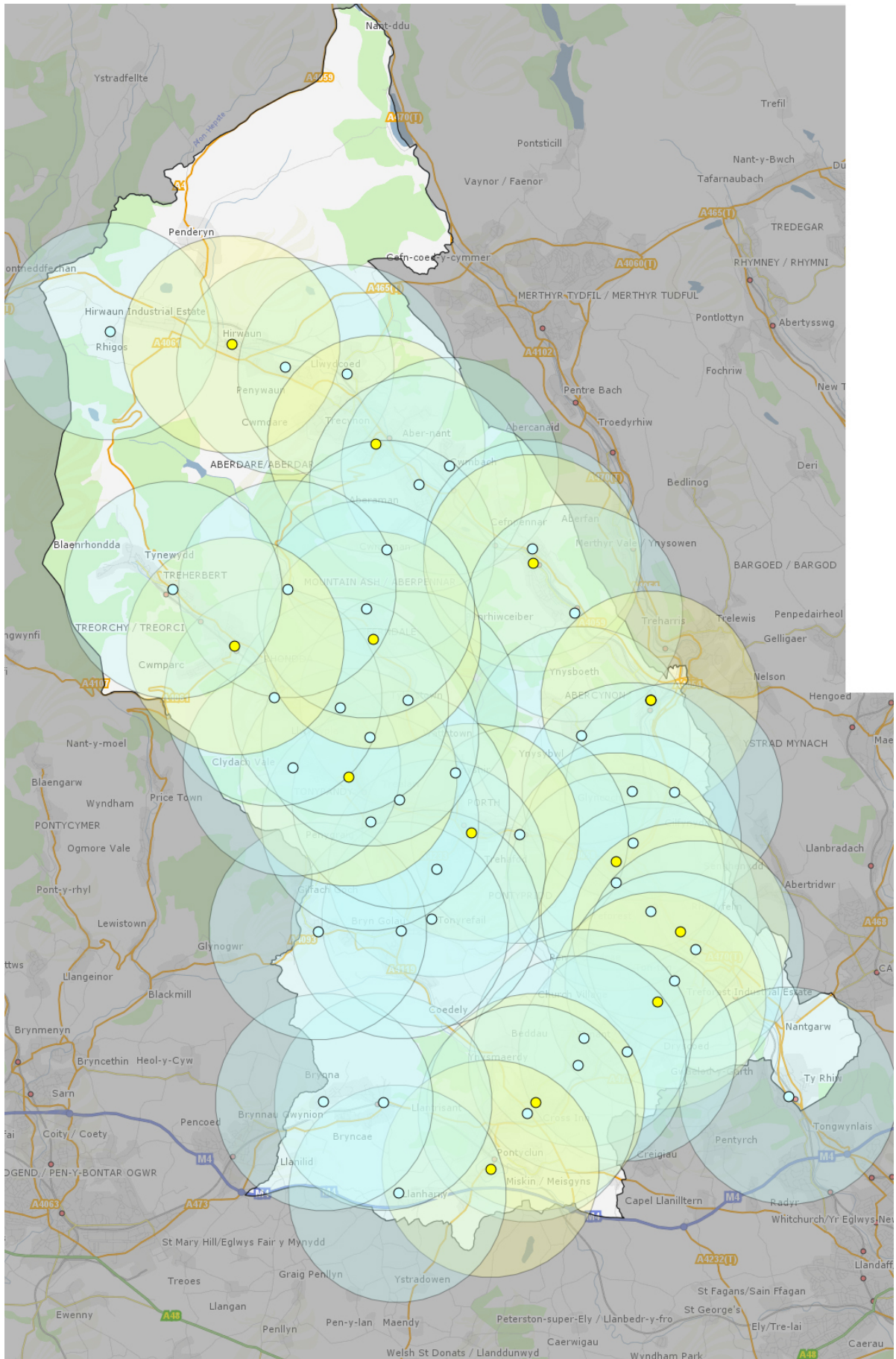**Officer to contact:** Wendy Edwards. Tel. No. 01443 744001

Appendix 1: Current mobile library provision

Appendix 2: Map showing proposed mobile stops (blue) and static libraries (yellow).

Appendix 3: Map Indicating 13 static libraries (yellow spot) and 48 mobile library stops (Blue dots) with two mile radius.

Appendix 4: Example of stops that could be facilitated under the proposal

RCT has 52 wards 13 of which have a static library. These are: Abercynon, Aberdare East, Church Village, Ferndale, Hirwaun, Llantrisant Town, Mountain Ash-West, Pontyclun, Pontypridd Town, Porth, Rhydyfelin Central, Tonypandy and Treorchy.

Below is an example of a timetable that could be accommodated under this proposal (subject to consultation with Elected Members and the community):

Mobile Library 1					
Week 1	**Council Ward**	**Location**		**Council Ward**	**Location**
Day 1: am	Maerdy	Maerdy Road (Flats)	**pm**	Ferndale (Blaenllechau)	Bell Centre
Day 2: am	Tylorstown	Lidl's car park	**pm**	Ynyshir	War Memorial
Day 3: am	Cymmer	Waun Wen Centre (Trebanog)	**pm**	Rhondda (Trehafod)	Trehafod Road (Shop)
Day 4: am	Tonyrefail East	Sport Centre	**pm**	Tonyrefail West	Rhiwgarn Community Centre
Week 2					
Day 1: am	Ystrad	Leisure Centre car park	**pm**	Llwynypia	Partridge Road/ Williams St
Day 2: am	Trealaw	Brithweunydd Road (Garage)	**pm**	Penygraig	Roundabout car park
Day 3: am	Cwm Clydach	Wern St (Post Office)	**pm**	Pentre	Opposite old library
Day 4: am	Treherbert	Shops near old library	**pm**	Rhigos	Heol Y Graig (School)
Week 3					
Day 1: am	Pen-y-waun	Haulfryn Community Centre	**pm**	Aberdare West (Llwydcoed)	Shop Merthyr Road
Day 2: am	Aberaman North	Lewis Street	**pm**	Cwmbach	Bro Deg
Day 3: am	Aberaman South	Fforchaman Road (C Centre)	**pm**	Mountain Ash east	Dyffryn Rd Bowls Club
Day 4: am	Penrhiwceiber	Old Library	**pm**	Ynysybwl	Robert St (Spar)

Mobile Library 2					
Week 1	**Council Ward**	**Location**		**Council Ward**	**Location**
Day 1: am	Treforest	Brook St (Near University)	**pm**	Hawthorn	Hawthorne Inn
Day 2: am	Ton-Teg	Ruthin Way (Upper Church Village)	**pm**	Taffs Well	Cardiff Road Post Office
Day 3: am	Llantwit Fadre	New Inn – Llantrisant Road	**pm**	Tyn-y-nant	Tynant Road (Old Library)
Day 4: am	Glyncoch	Porcher Ave (Shops)	**pm**	Cilfynydd	Wood St (Near old Library)
Week 2					
Day 1: am	Trallwng	Ralph St (Near Hotel)	**pm**	Graig	Fernbank House (Vacinity)
Day 2: am	Beddau	Manor Chase/ Cwrt Y Waun	**pm**	Talbot Green	Ely Valley Road Car park
Day 3: am	Brynna	Williams St/ Southall St	**pm**	Llanharry	Llanharry Road (post Office)
Day 4: am	Llanharran	War Memorial – Hillside Ave	**pm**	Gilfach Goch	Cambrian Ave (Post Office)
Week 3					
Day 1: am	Homes*	-	**pm**	Homes*	-
Day 2: am	Homes*	-	**pm**	Homes*	-
Day 3: am	Homes*	-	**pm**	Homes*	-
Day 4: am	Special Location*	-	**pm**	Special Location*	-

*These stops are dedicated to visiting sheltered housing complexes, residential homes and specialist facilities such as mental health units. If required these stops could be used for other purposes. However, we would need to continue to provide some sort of library service for these venues either through the '@homeservice' or through the deposit collections service. (There would be an implication in terms of resources for these.)