

**CABINET – 7 OCTOBER 2015**

**FUTURE STRATEGY FOR THE DELIVERY OF MOBILE LIBRARY  
SERVICES – OUTCOME OF CONSULTATION**

**REPORT OF THE DIRECTOR OF ADULTS AND COMMUNITIES**

**PART A**

**Purpose of Report**

- 1 The purpose of this report is to inform the Cabinet of the outcome of the consultation exercise on the re-scheduling of the mobile library service and to propose a new model for the delivery of a revised service.

**Recommendations**

- 2 It is recommended that the Cabinet:
  - a) Notes the findings of the consultation and the revised list of mobile library stops that has been informed by that consultation;
  - b) Approves the implementation of a monthly schedule of mobile library service visits from January 2016 to a revised network of stops.

**Reasons for Recommendations**

- 3 The model agreed by the Cabinet for the future delivery of library services in November 2014 identified the provision of a mobile library service as part of its statutory offer. The current service is not consistent across the County and not flexible enough to respond to changes such as new housing developments and changes in patterns of use.
- 4 A re-alignment of the mobile library service would create the flexibility to respond to changes in demand for services due to new housing developments and would provide mitigating action in the event that any community does not take over the management of its local library under the service delivery model approved by Cabinet in November 2014. The review of the current deployment of the mobile library service sought to ensure that access to the book lending service is efficient and supports the current and future demands in a flexible and cost effective way.
- 5 The findings of the subsequent consultation indicate that given a choice between a three-weekly and monthly schedule of visits, a monthly schedule was the preferred choice.

**Timetable for Decisions (including Scrutiny)**

- 6 The Adults and Communities Overview and Scrutiny Committee will consider the report on 6 October 2015, and its comments will be reported to the Cabinet.

## **Policy Framework and Previous Decisions**

- 7 The 2014 Medium Term Financial Strategy (MTFS) was approved by the County Council at its meeting on 19 February 2014 and identified a reduction in funding for library services, including its supporting infrastructure. This saving consisted of a reduction in opening hours at market town and shopping centre libraries, a reduction in the bookfund, and the implementation of community managed libraries.
- 8 On 5 March 2014, the Cabinet approved a three month consultation on a proposed remodelling of the library service based on the following elements:
  - 16 major market town and shopping centre libraries funded by the Council with a 20% reduction in opening hours;
  - A support service that will enable local communities to run their local library;
  - An online library service available 24 hours a day, 365 days a year to those with access to the internet;
  - A mobile library service that will provide a regular library service to most villages without a static library.
- 9 On 19 November, 2014, the Cabinet agreed the proposed model and approved a review of the current deployment of the mobile library service to ensure that access to the book lending service was efficient and it supported current and future demands in a flexible manner. This review included a consultation period of three months with users and other key stakeholders in order to inform the delivery of the mobile provision across the County.

## **Resources Implications**

- 10 Members will be aware of the worsening financial situation which is reflected in the latest MTFS approved by the County Council on 18 February 2015. Savings of £2.6m will need to be made by the Communities and Wellbeing Service by 2018/19. However, the delivery of this year's savings target of £710,000 has been delayed by various issues including:
  - Judicial Review of the decision to close Snibston Discovery Museum;
  - Extended negotiations with Trade Unions regarding the reduction in opening hours at market town and shopping centre libraries ;
  - Changes to the timetable for the transfer of community libraries.
- 11 Delays in implementing this year's savings target means that savings have been made elsewhere within the department's budget.
- 12 Whilst the proposed changes to the mobile library service are not primarily about delivering savings targets, they have the potential to provide a more efficient service which will help relieve budget pressures in other areas of the library service. For example, reducing the number of vehicles used to deliver the mobile library service would deliver a saving of approximately £42.7k per vehicle which includes costs provided for in the Environment and Transport Department's budget. There is a potential for a saving of three vehicles from the six which currently provide the mobile library service which can then be used to provide an enhanced service to those communities where it has not been possible to identify a group to manage their

community library. In addition, the costs of implementing the proposed changes would be minimal.

- 13 The Director of Corporate Resources and the County Solicitor have been consulted on the contents of this report.

### **Circulation under the Local Issues Alert Procedure**

- 14 As the proposals in this report affect a number of electoral divisions, this report is being circulated to all Members of the Council via the Members' News in Brief Service.

### **Officers to Contact**

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## **PART B**

### **Background**

- 15 The mobile library service is made up of six vehicles that currently deliver a two weekly basic book-lending service to 499 locations in rural villages, hamlets and isolated areas which do not have a static library. The service generates 195,000 loans to 3,800 users of which 2,100 use the service exclusively. The other 1,700 people are occasional users of the mobile library service who also use static libraries.
- 16 The review of the deployment of the mobile library service sits within the wider context of work to remodel the library service in order to meet MTFS targets, agreed by the Council in February 2015. The model, outlined in paragraph 8 includes the provision of a mobile library service that provides a regular service to most Leicestershire villages without a static library.
- 17 It should be noted that the provision of an alternative library service to those communities where it has not been possible to identify a group to manage their community library is not included in the review of the current mobile library service. This alternative service(s) will be identified, consulted on and implemented separately.

### **The Consultation process**

- 18 The Cabinet approved a three month consultation process on the deployment of the mobile library service on 19 November 2014. The consultation period began on 5 January 2015 and ended on 13 April 2015. The proposals outlined in the consultation sought to:
  - Change the frequency of visits to locations currently served by the mobile library service to either once every three weeks or once a month;
  - Update the network of mobile library stops to take account of new housing developments and to reflect actual usage;
  - Implement any changes from September 2015 (this was subsequently revised to January 2016).
- 19 The consultation comprised of the following elements:
  - Survey form accessible through the County Council's website for residents and stakeholders;
  - Hard copy freepost survey form available in all library service points and on request via dedicated telephone number;
  - Letter sent to mobile library users which outlined the key proposed changes and encouraged them to take part;
  - Easy read formats available by request or through the County Council's website;
  - Help line for anyone who wanted assistance in completing the survey over the telephone;
  - E-letter to Heads of schools;
  - Information booklet setting out proposals of the consultation.
- 20 The consultation was targeted at:

- The general public;
- Mobile library users;
- Stakeholders including local organisations, businesses, community groups and schools.

- 21 The consultation was publicised widely to residents through the media, social media, email newsletters, websites, local advertising and through Leicestershire Matters.
- 22 Staff were consulted on the proposals by providing access to the on-line information and on-line survey form (hard copy survey form where appropriate). Mobile library staff were engaged in a number of briefing meetings.
- 23 Reports outlining the detailed findings from the consultation, as well as the questionnaires, are attached to this report as Appendices A and B.

## **Summary of findings**

### **Public Survey**

- 24 During the three month consultation period, 602 people responded to the survey, of these:
- 78% were female;
  - 76% were aged over 65;
  - 36% had a long standing illness, disability or infirmity;
  - 71% were wholly retired from work.
- 25 The majority (93%) of respondents had used a mobile library in the last two years.
- 26 A monthly mobile library visit (42% of respondents) was the preferred option over a three weekly visit (25% of respondents). A major reason for this choice was that it made remembering the frequency of the stop easier.
- 27 The majority of people (59%) agreed with the basis on which the network of stops had been reviewed.
- 28 The survey asked whether respondents would be likely to use a range of additional services as part of the mobile library service. These included:
- Items for sale, including newspapers, greetings cards, postage stamps, stationery, mobile phone top up cards and gift vouchers;
  - Access to services and information including Councillor surgeries, health checks, tourist information, information from the Council's partner organisations and other local services;
  - Heritage services in particular travelling museum collections and displays.
- 29 Of these the sale of items and access to services and information received higher response levels (74% and 73% respectively). Further work will now be undertaken by the service to further investigate the provision of these additional services.

## Stakeholder Survey

- 30 A total of 20 stakeholder groups responded to the survey. Of these, 11 were parish/town councils, 6 were schools and 3 were other community groups (a local residents' association, a community library association and a village "friends" group).
- 31 Compared with the public survey, the stakeholder responses indicated a preference for a three-weekly rather than monthly visit. The most common reason for this (6 responses) was that a more frequent service was needed to meet current/future needs.
- 32 The majority of stakeholder responses (10 out of 12) agreed with the basis on which the network of stops had been reviewed. Where stakeholders disagreed, this was due to concerns regarding the growing population of the local areas and the potential impact of the transfer of management of community libraries to local groups.
- 33 As with the public survey, in response to the questions regarding the provision of additional services as part of the mobile library service, it was the sale of items and access to services and information which received the higher response levels.
- 34 In making a recommendation to Cabinet with regard to a three weekly or a monthly schedule, priority was given to the main consultation results on the basis that this represented actual library users.

## Revised network of mobile library locations

- 35 The survey proposed a revised network of mobile library stops. This revised network:
  - Took account of recent requests for new stops;
  - Included at least one stop in every village, hamlet or area currently receiving a mobile library service;
  - Excluded any stops with less than three regular users and where there was an alternative stop in the same village, hamlet or area.
- 36 The revised network of mobile library stops is attached to this report as Appendix C.
- 37 Analysis of the responses received from the public survey indicated that a majority of respondents (64%) thought that revising the network of stops would either make little or no difference to their ability to use the mobile library service or would make it easier. A further 10% of respondents stated it would make it easier for them to use the mobile library service.
- 38 As part of the stakeholder survey 12 comments were received regarding specific and additional mobile library stops and visit times. Of these, four comments related to villages with community libraries and therefore not included in this review of the mobile library service. Two additional stops have been added to the proposed network in response to three comments (Saxelby Road, Asfordby Village and Dunton Bassett Primary School, Dunton Bassett). Whilst the remaining six comments are to be further investigated by the department.
- 39 It should also be noted that in total further 39 stops have been added to the network that was initially proposed and these are shown in bold in Appendix C.

## **Conclusions**

- 40 The mobile library service is valued by its users and is seen as an important part of village life. The consultation has enabled the Library service to propose a revised network of stops that do not remove the service from any current community, but creates the capacity to respond more flexibly to new developments and may relieve budget pressures in other areas of the library service. For example, the revised service will be delivered using three vehicles therefore the remaining vehicles can be utilised to provide an enhanced service to those communities where it has not been possible to identify a group to manage their community library.
- 41 The mobile library service will continue to review and respond to local demands and ensure that it represents an efficient and flexible way of providing access to library services across the County as part of its statutory provision.

## **Background Papers**

Report of the Cabinet to the County Council meeting, 19 February 2014 - Medium Term Financial Strategy 2014/15 to 2017/18

<http://ow.ly/JmQUZ>

Report to the Cabinet, 5 March 2014 - Consultation on Proposals for Changes in the Delivery of Community Library Services

<http://ow.ly/JmQOC>

Report to the Cabinet, 19 September 2014 - Outcome of Consultation on Proposals for Changes in the Delivery of Library Services

<http://ow.ly/JmQGv>

Report to the Cabinet, 19 November 2014 – Future Strategy for the Delivery of Library Services

<http://ow.ly/JmQwT>

Report to County Council, 18 February 2015 – Medium Term Financial Strategy 2015/16 – 2018/19

<http://ow.ly/SbldW>

## **Appendices**

Appendix A – Proposed Changes to Mobile Libraries - Main Consultation Survey Results

Appendix B – Proposed Changes to Mobile Libraries Stakeholder Consultation Survey Results

Appendix C - Proposed Mobile Library stops from January 2016

Appendix D - Equality and Human Rights Impact Assessment – Mobile Libraries Services

## **Equalities and Human Rights Implications**

- 42 An Equality and Human Rights Impact Assessment (EHRIA) for the proposals has been completed and is attached as Appendix D. The EHRIA identified a number of potential barriers to using the service exist particularly for disabled and older people. However, there a number of mitigating actions either currently in place or which require some further investigation. These include:

- a) Provision of the Home Library Service to those who cannot leave their homes;
- b) Provision of accessible mobile library vehicles;
- c) Possible provision of wheeled book carriers for loan or purchase by customers;
- d) Increased loan limits;
- e) Publicity material regarding dates of mobile library visits.

43 The EHRIA process is iterative in nature and the Equality and Human Rights Improvement Plan outlines mitigating actions to be monitored as the changes to mobile library deployment are made.