

Cabinet Member for Fire and Rescue and Communities	Ref No: FRCXX 19/20
November 2019	Key Decision: Yes
Review of Library Offer	Part I
Report by Executive Director Place Services	Electoral Division(s): All

Summary

To achieve savings from the library revenue budget by ceasing the mobile library service, reducing evening opening hours where they currently apply. Some operational logistical changes have also been identified but these will have no impact on services to customers.

To continue to develop the Community hubs work to identify longer term corporate savings by more efficient use of corporate assets and service arrangements.

West Sussex Plan: Policy Impact and Context

We will continue, through our network of 36 libraries to provide access to books and information and to a wide range of services in addition to library activities for all ages that support in particular Best Start in Life, Independence for Later Life and Council that works for the Community.

Financial Impact

Revenue saving of £0.175m with additional corporate savings expected as part of Community Hub activity.

Recommendations

The Cabinet Member for Fire and Rescue and Communities is requested to approve:

- (1) the Cessation of the remaining mobile library services from April 2020;
- (2) the reduction in evening opening hours in the 4 main libraries with some minor adjustments elsewhere to ensure the offer is consistent across libraries from April 2020; and
- (3) minor logistical changes that will impact working practices but not customers

Proposal

1. Background and Context

- 1.1 In order to help meet the budget gap the Library Service has considered where it might be possible to make savings. It has identified areas where impact will be felt by the smallest number of residents, where the evidence indicates a fall in use, and where mitigation is possible.

2. Proposal Details

- 2.1 This proposal addresses only those savings which could be achieved within the library service by April 2020. Those are:
- Cease the service delivered by the 2 remaining mobile libraries
 - Close all libraries at 6pm, a proposal which affects only the 4 largest libraries where they have some 7pm openings.
 - To make minor internal logistical changes which will impact working practices but have limited impact on residents.

Mobile Library Service

- 2.2 We currently have 2 Mobile Libraries, Community Library 1 (CM1) based at Bognor and Community Library 2 (CM2) based at Horsham. We have been reviewing the service for economy and usage since the last formal review in 2011 and have postponed replacing the vehicles in anticipation of a saving requirement. Unfortunately following its pre-MOT in June 2019, we were advised by our transport colleagues that repairing CM1 would cost more than the vehicle was worth so reluctantly the vehicle had to be taken off the road and sold.
- 2.3 There is a direct correlation between the proposal to withdraw the mobile service and the maintenance of the static library network – especially those libraries in smaller communities. 25 of our 116 stops are closest to a Tier 6 Library.
- 2.4 Since CM1 had to be withdrawn existing mobile library users have already started gravitating to their nearest static library.
- 2.5 Use of the Mobile Library Service is in decline with a 27% drop in issues since the last review in 2011. Mobile Library customers now account for less than 1% of our total customer base, and some of those already also use a static library so for some the use of the mobile is a choice not a necessity. Many customers also choose to drive to a location where the mobile stops, so could drive to a static library.
- 2.6 Replacement of these large, very specialist, diesel vehicles is expensive. The last similar vehicles we bought were in excess of £0.1m to purchase. The likelihood is that both initial purchase and leasing costs will increase. Driving the vehicles round the County is not very environmentally friendly and the procurement of such vehicles is a long process (18 months on average), since they cannot be “bought off the shelf”. There is also a reducing number

of coach builders who specialise in this type of vehicle as demand nationally has dropped.

- 2.7 The service is much less cost-effective to deliver via a mobile than a static service. Time spent travelling between stops means that we are only able to deliver directly to customers on each mobile for 16 hours a week. Our smallest static libraries are open 24 hours a week, while providing a much wider range of stock.
- 2.8 Since the failure of CM1 a further 17% (112) of the customers have now joined a static library. Currently 51% of CM1 borrowers now hold dual membership so are in fact using the mobile but also travelling to a static library.
- 2.9 The failure of one of the vehicles has given us a unique opportunity to discuss the future delivery with customers and identify those most vulnerable and isolated, giving us a good idea of those who choose to use the mobile but who could visit a static library and those who need a service that delivers directly to them. There are a range of library services that currently reach out to the vulnerable or isolated that we can offer to residents.

Evening hours

- 2.10 In our large libraries, currently open 5 nights a week until 7pm, use between 6 and 7pm has been declining. It is in all libraries the quietest hour of the day. However, buildings on more than one floor require a staffing presence to maintain customer and staff safety and wellbeing, so per customer this is an expensive hour to offer.
- 2.11 Evidence shows the peak times for library use are during the day generally between 9am and 4pm, with a peak around 11 am. Experience shows that many people remaining in the library until 7pm have been in the library for a considerable time prior to that and are not just visiting within that hour. Residents can join, request, enquire and borrow digital books, magazines and audio 24/7 via the Library App or Website.

We have 5 smaller libraries that open one night a week until 7pm. We would propose to adjust, but not reduce, their opening pattern so that no library is open beyond 6pm thus maintaining a consistent offer.

Minor Logistic Economies

- 2.12 By making some small adjustments to our interlibrary delivery service and working practices we can make some additional modest savings that customers will not be impacted by.

3. Consultation

- 3.1 With CM1 being taken off road in June, we have been running a replacement service using a significantly smaller Vauxhall Combo Maxi van. A much smaller stock was divided into crates to allow borrowers to choose books, as well as return any loans and make any requests. This will continue to run until the end of the current timetable on 30th September 2019.

- 3.2 This temporary solution has given us the opportunity to have some detailed discussions with users of the service and to consider future provision (these conversations have been done with a combination of Library staff independent of the Mobile Library Service). All conversations have been recorded in significant detail. Since the mobile was taken off the road, of the 670 residents who regularly use Community Mobile 1, 112 have already joined a static library. Adding that figure to those who already use the mobile alongside a static library (343 in total), over 50% of regular users have dual membership. The choice of material is much better in a small static library where residents can interact with staff, join other activities and access other services.
- 3.3 The current temporary solution has helped us to understand those who "like" using the service as distinct from those who "need" a service delivered to them. For many residents it is the social interaction they appreciate as much as the actual service provided - a chance to chat with neighbours and the staff on the Mobile Library.
- 3.4 From a Public Health perspective we know that there is a drive to ensure people remain active/engaged and participating in community activity wherever possible, visiting a library is a good example and we know for lots of our customers this is part of their weekly, sometimes daily routine. We have carefully considered the 670 regular users of CM1 and discussed their needs with the regular Mobile Library staff. We initially identified 47 vulnerable customers. However, following customer engagement, this number has increased to 57. If the decision is taken to cease the service these are the residents we will focus on and their need is recognised as much broader than just accessing the Library Service.
- 3.5 Our aim will be to work with our colleagues in Communities and Partnerships on local community solutions. We will recruit volunteers with the help of parish councils to deliver books and be reading friends via our existing Home Library direct service but will also look to explore what local groups and parishes can do to support us in serving vulnerable residents. In the current situation for customers of CM1, and while these volunteers are being recruited, we intend to hire a smaller van that can serve the vulnerable borrowers as an interim solution from 1st October. Maintaining the funding until April 2020 will allow us to continue to visit communities and individuals so that we can discuss with them the best possible mitigation.
- 3.6 Early work on the Community Mobile 2 has identified a further 45 vulnerable residents using that service and established that an even higher percentage of borrowers served by the vehicle have a dual membership.
- 3.7 Consultation regarding a modest reduction in opening hours beyond 7pm will be done with customers in the locations impacted during October.
- 3.8 There is no need for consultation about the small logistic changes.

4. Financial (revenue and capital) and Resource Implications

4.1 Revenue savings from the Library Budget will be £175,000 year on year from 2020. Savings related to ceasing the Mobile service will be made through staff reductions 2 x Drivers Grade 4 and an element of Library Assistant support on Grade 3 (£50k) plus running costs and maintenance (£40k). Savings from earlier closure will be all staff costs (£55k). The logistics savings are made up of transport, mileage and postal costs (£30k).

4.2 Revenue consequences of proposal

	Current Year 2019/20 £m	Year 2 2020/21 £m	Year 3 2021/22 £m	Year 4 2022/23 £m
Revenue budget	6.793	6.793	6.618	6.618
Change from Proposal	0	-0.175	0	0
Remaining budget	6.793	6.618	6.618	6.618

4.3 Capital consequences

	Current Year 2019/20 £m	Year 2 2020/21 £m	Year 3 2021/22 £m	Year 4 2022/23 £m
Capital budget	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A
Change from Proposal	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A
Remaining budget	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A

The effect of the proposal

4.4 If the three proposals are taken forward the Mobile Library Service will cease from April 2020 and no library will be open beyond 6 pm. The impact of the logistical savings will be internal and not affect customers

Future transformation, savings/efficiencies being delivered

4.5 We will continue via the Community Hubs programme to explore opportunities, based on the agreed principles, to bring services together under one roof making savings through asset reduction where appropriate. These will be the subject of future decision reports and member information and engagement. Closing libraries at 6pm may impact on the rollout of Community Hubs if partners would value being able to deliver their services

beyond 6pm. It would however be possible for other WSCC services to continue to deliver later if locking up procedures were agreed.

Human Resources, IT and Assets Impact

- 4.6 If the decision is made to cease the Mobile Library Service then the remaining vehicle would be sold. CM1 only made £2,500 at auction – this would be put back into the service to support mitigation. There will be an impact from an HR perspective – one of the Mobile Library drivers has left WSCC to take up another driving role so only one Mobile Library Driver post will result in a redundancy. The mobiles are supported by a range of Library Assistants in both Horsham and Bognor libraries – so the staff saving cannot be attributed to one individual post. Therefore the savings will need to be achieved by natural wastage or by staff negotiation on reducing contracted hours. It is anticipated that this can be achieved by April 2020. The logistic savings do not have HR, IT or Asset implications only some minor changes to working practices that will be handled as business as usual.

5. Legal Implications

- 5.1 There are no legal implications in relation to these service change proposals.

6. Risk Implications and Mitigations

6.1

Risk	Mitigating Action (in place or planned)
Isolated/vulnerable residents find it difficult to access the library service if the Mobile Library is withdrawn.	Identifying those customers and their needs. Matching those individuals with other library services e.g. Home Library Direct.

7. Other Options Considered (and reasons for not proposing)

- 7.1 Replace the two existing vehicles – this would be expensive both in procurement time and purchase cost, and incur ongoing and increasing revenue costs – fuel, insurance, maintenance, staffing, training, stock Reduce to one vehicle, which would visit less often to those most isolated residents. This option would still incur costs, including fuel, insurance, staff, training and vehicle purchase/lease and reduce the opportunity for savings. Running it from one location would impact the mileage done, travel time plus fuel and maintenance costs.
- 7.2 Use a smaller vehicle (as used currently, as the interim solution). This is not an all -weather solution, does not answer the social engagement element, still doing lots of miles, still needs driver, fuel, maintenance and management. It provides limited choice – but could provide a bespoke service to those most vulnerable Parishes could have small collections which they borrow and lend to residents – this option would still need coordinating

and would thus incur costs both in staff and resources. We would have to limit number of parishes we chose or else it would involve the purchase of even more stock than the current mobile offer. In a time when savings must be secured we are not in a position to reduce one offer but expand another. A form of traded service model, perhaps asking Parishes if they would be prepared to fund. This would require significant financial investment in terms of management and implementation of a completely new model and would negate a significant element of the saving. The service does not currently have the capacity for this level of work and as with the option above this would incur additional cost.

- 7.3 Opening hours – we have considered seasonal hours – closing earlier during the winter – but this would halve the opportunity for savings, be more difficult for customers to remember and offer less consistent working hours to staff.
- 7.4 Introducing more significant reductions in opening hours would have a greater impact on larger numbers of residents. Whilst libraries are used by all sections of the community at all times of the day we can see some core patterns of use. Early in the day libraries are accessed by families with pre-school age children, residents who study/research all day and older residents who tend to start their day early. In the early evenings families call in on their way home from school pick up and between 5 and 6 the larger libraries (small libraries already close earlier) are accessed by those who are at work all day. We last had a full review of opening hours in 2011 when we had 10,000 responses to the consultation. An overall review of opening hours would impact all 36 libraries, all residents who use the library and the working hours of all staff working in those libraries and so would require further public consultation.

8. Equality and Human Rights Assessment

- 8.1 Removing the mobile library has the potential to impact most on those least mobile and unable to travel. However, our focus will be on those most vulnerable and our aim would be to match individuals up with a Home Library Direct or Digital Library Plus Volunteer or suggest the friends and family service (where a trusted friend or family member can borrow on a person's behalf). In the case of any residential homes or assisted living we will promote the existing Select and Collect service – where the venue selects a collection from their nearest library and all residents can borrow and return on site (100 books at a time for 10 weeks – no charge). The required equality impact assessment will therefore be undertaken as part of the mitigation work with these other services.

9. Social Value and Sustainability Assessment

- 9.1 Public Health colleagues promote the positive impact of people remaining active and getting out of the house and walking or travelling independently to access non-critical services. Whilst this will not be true of every current mobile library user many have already made the change and are using a static Library. Closing libraries earlier impact the smallest number of library users at the quietest time of the day and will also make modest savings on utility costs that sit outside the Library Service budget.

10. Crime and Disorder Reduction Assessment

10.1 None.

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Appendices None

Background papers None