



Buckinghamshire County Council Select Committee

Transport, Environment and Communities Select Committee

Report to the Transport, Environment and Communities Select Committee

Title:	Review of Mobile Library Services
Committee date:	Tuesday 23 January 2018
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Cabinet Member sign-off:	Councillor Noel Brown Cabinet Member for Community Engagement & Public Health

Purpose of Agenda Item

The purpose of this report is to provide the Transport, Environment and Communities Select Committee with an opportunity for the Committee to be informed about the progress of the review of Mobile Library Services.

The report is for information and consultation. The report provides information on the review of mobile services, the proposals for alternative service arrangements and the scope and methodology of the public consultation exercise. The report is also for consultation and provides an opportunity for the comments and views of the Select Committee to be included in the key decision report that will be submitted to the Cabinet Member for Community Engagement & Public Health in March 2018.

1 Background – current provision.

Buckinghamshire County Council has a statutory duty, under the Public Libraries & Museums Act 1964, to provide a comprehensive and efficient library service. Measurable national standards to gauge compliance do not exist and considerable leeway exists for local authorities to interpret this requirement individually.

The Mobile Library Service uses three vehicles to deliver bi-weekly visits to 139 locations. The majority of these stops are rural and isolated communities. Typically these visits extend from 10 – 20 minutes. A number of neighbourhood stops are also served in urban areas such as Aylesbury and High Wycombe.

New stops were introduced to serve communities where libraries had been closed as part of a review in 2007/08. Steeple Claydon, Stewkley, West Wycombe, Richings Park, Iver and Stoke Poges all receive weekly visits of approximately three to four hours.

The Mobile Library Service issued a total of 39,398 items during 2016/17. The total cost of the service is £180,000 and at £4.57 per issue, the mobile libraries are the most expensive part of the library service.

Out of the 137 English Library services, 86 do not operate any mobile library service at all. Hampshire and Hertfordshire stopped the service entirely in 2016 and offered a Home Library Service (HLS) as an alternative and Oxfordshire stopped completely in 2016 and offers home library service and library buddy arrangements as alternatives.

2 Summary

On 16th February 2016, Cabinet agreed that the Mobile Library Services fleet should reduce from three vehicles to one in order to deliver a saving of £98,000. The steer given by the Cabinet Member at the time was to delay the implementation of this decision but it is now intended to implement the reduction in 2018.

Many library customers use library buildings as well as mobile libraries for reason of convenience. A review of current Mobile Library usage has been undertaken with a focus on identifying how many mobile library customers only use mobile libraries and do not use any other library services. The focus on identifying ‘mobile only’ customers is because it is these customers who are most likely to experience difficulty in accessing library services if the current Mobile Library Service is reduced or discontinued.

The review indicated that usage is low with only 65 of the 139 stops being used by 'mobile only' customers. Of these 65 locations, 23 had a single 'mobile only' customer and only ten locations were used by ten or more 'mobile only' customers.

Alternative community based arrangements could be developed as a means of providing a more cost effective and sustainable alternative to mobile library services. An extension of the existing Home Library Service, Library Buddy (formerly named good neighbour) schemes and community based deposit collections or 'click and collect' arrangements would offer a more sustainable and effective way of ensuring that residents in rural and isolated communities are still able to access library services.

Two options were identified:

Option 1: Reduce from three vehicles to one to save **£81,250** in Year 1 and **£120,000** each year thereafter.

Option 2: Discontinue the service and reduce all three vehicles to save **£113,000** in Year 1 and **£180,000** each year thereafter.

It was agreed that a public consultation exercise be undertaken to gauge the views of residents on a proposal to discontinue the service and to also identify how alternative arrangements might be developed and marketed to ensure that mobile library customers can continue to access library services in the future.

The public consultation exercise took place between Wednesday 1st November to Sunday 31st December and 961 responses were received.

Detailed evaluation of survey responses will now take place and this will include an evaluation of the open ended comments and an assessment of how to prioritise work in developing alternative arrangements. This data will also be used to complete a detailed Equalities Impact Assessment (EIA).

A report on the consultation findings will be submitted to the Cabinet Member for Community Engagement and Public Health in March 2018 for a key decision.

3 Key issues

3.1 The review of usage

A review of customer data covering the two year period to 31st March 2017 was undertaken.

The review identified that 1,183 people had borrowed from a mobile as well as from a static library during this period. The total number of customers only borrowing from a mobile is 511.

Of the 65 stops used by these 'mobile only' customers during the period:

- 23 had a single customer
- 25 had 2-4 customers
- 7 had 5-9 customers
- 10 stops had 10 or more customers

Of the 511 residents who only use mobile libraries:

- The largest group are children and most of these children use the mobiles when at school
- Female usage is greater than male usage. This is in line with the overall service profile

Age group	Female	Male	No answer	Grand Total
Adult 18-64	102	36	4	142
Child <18	84	102	13	199
Over 65	75	32	8	115
Unknown	23	10	22	55
Grand Total	284	180	47	511

In addition:

- 4 users are recorded as having a disability
- 20 out of these 511 are recorded with an ethnicity other than White British

Further analysis was undertaken to better understand the use made at the ten busiest stops and to consider the alternative arrangements that could be developed.

Location	Usage	Notes and Mitigation
Dagnall School	35	Public stop near school, 34 users are school children. Market BCC Schools Library Service (SLS) to the school.
Westcott School	56	As above. Mainly schoolchildren. Market SLS to the school.
Bedgrove	49	1.7 mile from Aylesbury library and well served by buses.
West Wycombe Garden Centre	70	Mostly children. There is a community library in the village. Work with community library to engage children.
Denham Green - Moorfield Road shops	10	Mostly elderly users. Work with local community groups and venues to offer alternative 'click and collect' services and/or deposit collections.
Iver Village Hall	28	Mainly ages 18-65. Work with local community groups and venues to offer alternative 'click and collect' services and/or deposit collections.
Ritchings Park	19	As above
Stewkley North End	24	As above
Stoke Poges	31	As above
Steeple Claydon	24	Work with Steeple Claydon independent community library to offer alternative 'click and collect' services.

3.2 Alternative delivery arrangements

In reducing the number of vehicles, the following measures could be adopted to ensure that the proposal is 'rural proofed' and that residents are not excluded from library services.

- Home Library Service (HLS)
Where stops had less than 10 users who *only* used the Mobile Library Service, a home library service will be offered to all of the customers. The HLS currently visit 303 housebound residents. The eligibility criteria will be revised to include mobile library customers who do not use library buildings. The HLS is delivered by a volunteer who visits monthly with personally selected items. The HLS service would be offered to a max of 346 people.

- Community Transport
Publicise community transport schemes to mobile library users as a way to access building based library services.
- Virtual access
Publicise and deliver taster sessions of the online services for eBooks, eMagazines and eAudio for those customers with home internet access.
- Community based initiatives
Work with local community groups at existing community venues to provide regular deposits of books. A 'click and collect' service can also be introduced whereby resident's order books online and deliveries are made using the existing library courier service.

3.3 Public consultation

The public consultation exercise took place from Wednesday 1st November to Sunday 31st December 2018.

Key communications objectives:

- Maximise the profile of the consultation and volume of consultation responses through generating as many opportunities as possible for the public to hear about the consultation and participate
- Inform and engage key audience groups
- Clearly communicate the rationale for change to the service and the benefits of the alternative options

Key audience groups:

- Mobile library service customers
- All library users
- Elected Members
- Parish Councils and Town Councils
- Local Area Forums

Key messages:

- The current service is not sustainable and needs to change
- Service to current customers will continue in a different and better way to preserve access to library services for everyone
- We want to hear your views on the future of your mobile library services

A Member Briefing was delivered on 26th October 2017 and the consultation survey was launched on Wednesday 1st November.

Emails were sent to all 'mobile only' customers and hard copy letters & FREE POST envelopes were sent to 'mobile only' customers who did not have email addresses.

Letters were sent to all Parish Councils and Town Councils and Local Area Forums.

3.3.1 The Survey

The survey gathered information on the respondents i.e. age, gender, ethnicity, employment status, disability and post code.

The survey also gauged the level of support for the proposal, willingness to engage with alternative library service arrangements and also invited suggestions for community venues where deposit collections or 'click and collect' arrangements could be developed.

3.3.2 Narrative and infographic from the consultation survey

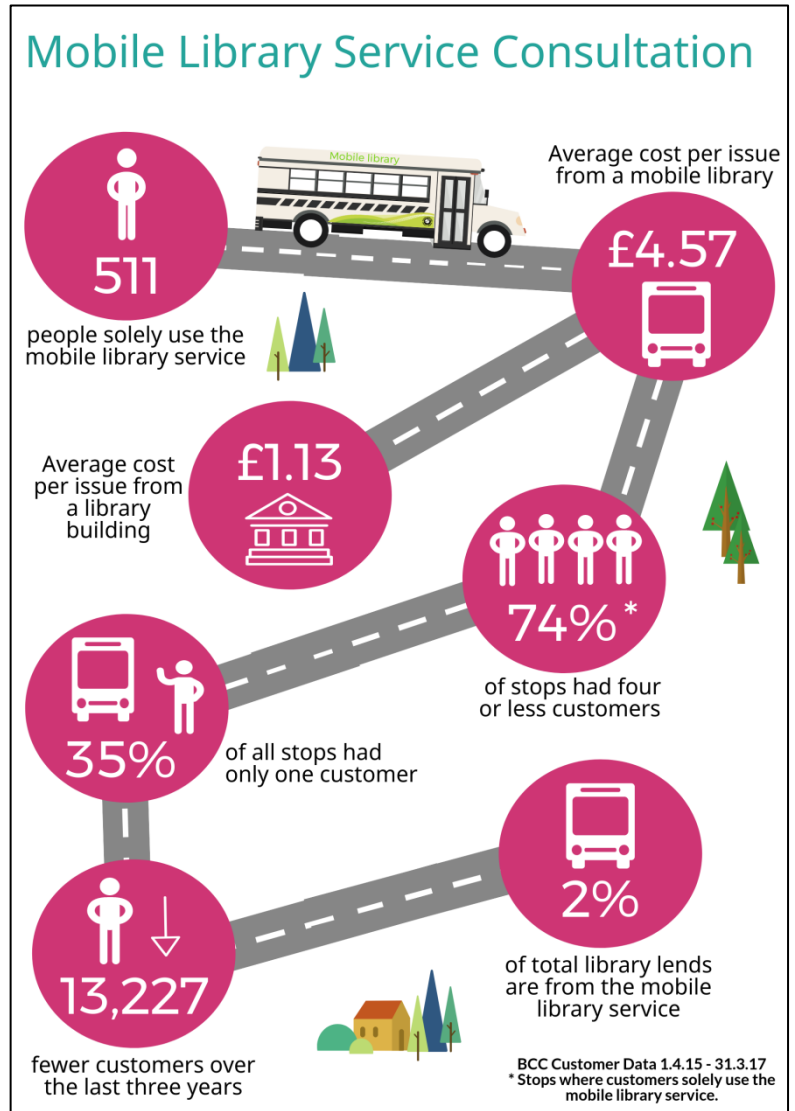
The consultation approach adopted was proactive in setting out the business case for change. The narrative (below) provided the wider financial context and the evidence base for the proposal.

Introduction

The County Council's budget has been steadily reducing in recent years, and there is now much less money available to us for funding all of the services that we have previously provided to our residents.

The library service has generated savings of £2,350,000 over the last eight years and this represents a reduction to our budget of approximately 40%. We have saved money through a combination of measures including management and staffing reviews, reducing back-room costs, making systems and processes more streamlined and the introduction of community libraries.

The library service still has a challenging savings target, with over £500,000 needed to be saved over the next two years, and so we need to continue to look



critically and creatively at every aspect of the service we provide.

When we reviewed mobile library usage over the last two years we looked at the number of customers using our library services. We found that 511 customers solely use mobile libraries and do not visit a library building. We also found that at one third of the service stops made by our mobile library vehicles there was only one mobile customer using the service. The cost of running the mobile service is also high and increasing, with the average cost per item issued at a mobile library being substantially higher than items issued at library buildings.

We are proposing that from May 2018 the current mobile library service is discontinued. However, we are committed to ensuring that all of our mobile library customers will still be able to access library services and so we are proposing to put in place alternative community-based options.

Why are we consulting?

We would like to know what you think of our proposals for discontinuing the current mobile library vehicle service and for your views on alternative options that we could develop. Under our proposals, mobile library customers could be served by a range of different options including the Home Library Service, wider provision of online library lending services and working with interested local communities to develop community-based options such as 'click and collect' schemes.

We want to provide a more flexible, community-based library service that is still easily accessible for all of our library customers, and a service that can be adapted to suit the differing needs of local communities.

We want you to get involved and let us know your views through this consultation – this is your opportunity to have your say on our proposals and share your own ideas. We hope that as many people as possible will take part in the consultation so that together we can shape a library service for the future.

How to have your say:

The consultation is available online until the closing date of 31 December 2017 at www.tinyurl.com/bucksmobile. You can also complete the consultation online in any of the main libraries. Paper copies of the consultation are also available at main libraries and at mobile library service stops.

4 Resource implications

The Mobile Library Service costs £180,000. The mobile library vehicles are leased and there will be early termination penalties when the leases are surrendered. The vehicles would be auctioned, and the potential penalties shown below are calculated based on what we expect the vehicles to fetch at auction. Costs and savings for the two options can be calculated as follows:

Costs / savings	Option 1 Reducing from 3 vehicles to 1 £000's	Option 2 Discontinue service £000's	Option 1 (Year 2) Reducing from 3 vehicles to 1 £000's	Option 2 (Year 2) Discontinue service £000's
Employee costs (Drivers)	(60)	(90)	(60)	(90)
Lease	(48)	(72)	(48)	(72)
Fuel	(12)	(18)	(12)	(18)
Potential penalty for early termination of lease	22.5	44.3	0	0
Full year saving	(97.5)	(135.7)	(120)	(180)
10 month saving	(81.25)	(113)		

Potential Savings

Option 1: Reducing from three vehicles to one

Reducing two vehicles generates an estimated full year saving of £97,500. If implemented from June 2018, the saving will be £81,250 i.e. 10/12 of full year savings. The penalty costs in Year 1 are one-off costs, so full year savings from Year 2 will be £120,000.

Option 2: Discontinue the service

Reducing three vehicles generates an estimated saving of £135,700. If implemented from June 2018, the saving will be £113,000 i.e. 10/12 of full year savings. The penalty costs are one-off costs, so full year savings from Year 2 will be £180,000.

5 Next steps

The public consultation exercise took place between Wednesday 1st November and Sunday 31st December 2017 and a total of 1061 responses have been received. Work will now take place to evaluate the consultation data.

- Particular attention will be paid to the responses from 'mobile only' customers. We will also use post-code information and community venue suggestions to identify the areas where a particular interest in 'click and collect' or deposit collection services might apply
- Consultation data will also be used to develop a detailed Equalities Impact Assessment EIA

A report on the consultation findings will be submitted to the Cabinet Member for Community Engagement and Public Health in March 2018 for a key decision. This report will include comments received at the Transport, Environment and Communities Select Committee.

Local engagement with County Councillors, Parish councils and voluntary and community organisations has taken place throughout the consultation. Work to develop the following initiatives will be progressed.

- Engagement in Ivinghoe electoral division by BCC Councillor Anne Wight with Marsworth Parish Council and Cheddington Parish Council considering opportunities to work with the library service
- Meeting to develop a community library offer in Iver village involving local residents, Iver Parish Council and BCC Councillor Louisa Sullivan
- Preliminary discussion with BCC Councillor Roger Reed to identify opportunities to work with local venues in Denham Village
- Engagement with Steeple Claydon Parish Council to identify how BCC can support the Independent Community Library in delivering a 'click and collect' type offer
- Agreement to work with Cholesbury cum St- Leonard Parish Council to deliver alternative arrangements at Coppice Farm Park