

Mobile Library and Library Service at Home Proposals

August 2014

Context

The vision for libraries in Worcestershire is that they work with the local community to ensure they deliver a wide range of relevant services and are right at the heart of their community. The County Council's Cabinet has stated that it is fully committed to maintaining a comprehensive and sustainable service in line with the Public Libraries and Museums Act 1964. In addition, as part of the Equality Duty, we ensure that we do not discriminate in access to services for people with protected characteristics and, under the Local Government Act 1999, that arrangements for the service secure best value. Statistics show that over 55% of older people who live alone have no access to personal transport and over 50% of Worcestershire is rural. Where these residents do not have access to public transport the mobile library becomes vital in preventing social isolation in our rural communities. With 21 libraries across the County, many of the County's residents do not have access to a local branch library and so the mobile library is their only service option.

Current Position

In January, 2013, changes were made to the service and the routes taken by the mobile libraries. Revisions As a result of these changes we now have 3 mobile libraries and the Library Service at Home delivering services to rurally isolated and older residents, hamlets, and sheltered accommodation across the county once every three weeks. It also visits urban areas when there is a particular need, for example Warndon when the library was relocated into The Fairfield Centre. The Equality impact assessment showed that older residents and those with disabilities would lose their access to a branch library and so the local mobile route was reconfigured to include a stop outside the old library building. This work was done with the financial support of the Parish Council.

Profile of Current Mobile Library/Library Service at Home Users

An estimated 28,000 visits are made to a mobile library each year in Worcestershire. 1266 people use a combination of both the mobile and a fixed branch library. There are 993 customers who solely use a mobile library.

Visits to mobiles have declined by 40% over the last 10 years and loans have decreased by 35%.

The cost of the mobile library service in 2013/14 was £3.11 per visit (compared to £1.97 for a branch library).

The Library Service at Home (LSAH)

LSAH delivers books and spoken word materials to individuals in rural and urban areas who are unable to visit the library due to age, disability or caring responsibilities. These customers receive either a visit on a four weekly basis from a member of staff using a dedicated vehicle or from a volunteer who delivers books chosen by a member of library staff in a branch library. A separate consultation with Library Service at Home customers is currently underway. If you would like to take part please go to www.worcestershire.gov.uk/librariesandlearning or call the Worcestershire Hub on 01905 822722

The LSAH is currently provided to 220 customers, issue figures are 19,350 [2013/2014 total] per annum. The cost per visit is £20.84 (2013/14)

Proposal

1. Dispose of all old mobile vehicles and, instead, provide the service using one new, replacement mobile library (using a relief vehicle during routine maintenance)
2. Reduce the frequency of visits (from and to) and remove some visits altogether.
3. Carefully revise the routes in a way that will maintain a county wide service which meets the Council's Equality and Best Value duties while, at the same time, making revenue savings in the region of £100k p/a

It is proposed that we:

- Dispose of all surplus vehicles and review/reduce staffing accordingly
- Revise customer eligibility criteria so that they take account of distance from a static service point, areas not served by public transport, age, disability and other relevant factors
- Review the Library Service at Home with a view to including customers in the countywide mobile service and/or providing support from branch library staff and volunteers (who would deliver the books).

To help meet the savings the county council needs to make, it is proposed that:

- The number of mobile library vehicles is reduced from three to one.
- Each stop is reviewed and a recommendation made to either retain it or put it at risk.
- Mobile stops that are within a 3 mile radius of a static library will be removed where appropriate.
- Mobile stops receive a visit on a 4 weekly basis rather than every 3 weeks.
- Combine stops where there is more than one stop in a village or nearby location.
- Provide a community collection in some village centres where stops are no longer viable.

Benefits	Risks
Revenue savings to the county council.	Volunteers could not be found to support service through branches
Ensures sustainability of a valued service moving forward.	
Meet our equality duty by focussing service on areas of highest need and minimising the risk of disenfranchising vulnerable users.	Legal challenge as majority of service users affected would have protected characteristics.
More reliable vehicle with less breakdowns and increased customer confidence	Possible redundancy costs if staff cannot be relocated
More flexible/multipurpose vehicle with internet capability which could be used by other councils/ other departments.	
Opportunity to engage volunteers and local	

people in supporting elderly members of the community.	
High quality, highly visible County Council shop window	
Enables us to mitigate service reductions in branches by utilising the mobile service	

Next Steps

- Use the Equality Impact Assessment process to help us to identify any individuals or groups who may be disadvantaged by these proposals. Use the consultation results to inform that assessment as part of the consultation process.
- Undertake three months' consultation with public (including those persons listed in section 3(2) of the Local Government Act 1999) and staff
- Assessment of whether the proposal secures best value – as per section 3(1) of the Local Government Act 1999
- Engage volunteers/branches to pick up customers within their catchment area
- Evaluate capacity for increasing community collections/library links.

How do we have our say on the proposals?

- You can complete a questionnaire at www.worcesterhire.gov.uk/librariesandlearning.
- Complete a paper copy of the questionnaire available from your mobile or local library.
- You can also contact Nicki Hitchcock on 01905 822722, email address nhitchcock@worcestershire.gov.uk or by post at Libraries and Learning, County Hall, Spetchley Road, Worcester, WR5 2NP.

Please give your feedback by **31st October 2014**