

CYNGOR SIR POWYS COUNTY COUNCIL
PORTFOLIO HOLDER DELEGATED DECISION
by
COUNTY COUNCILLOR RACHEL POWELL
PORTFOLIO HOLDER FOR YOUNG PEOPLE AND CULTURE
December 2021

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REPORT TITLE: Transformation of mobile library service into an outreach and housebound model

REPORT FOR: Decision

1. Purpose

1.1 The purpose of the report is to agree the development of a library outreach delivery model to housebound and isolated residents in both rural and urban areas of Powys. In rural areas, this would replace the mobile library service, which is unsuitable for safe service delivery in the ongoing pandemic situation.

2. Background

2.1 The Library Service is working to achieve a transformation in service delivery alongside budgetary efficiency savings. The service is unable to financially sustain the current network of 2 mobile libraries and 17 static service points for the long term without such transformational activity. New operating models are required which meet the needs of residents (particularly the most vulnerable) and adhere to ongoing social distancing recommendations.

2.2 Due to the ongoing coronavirus situation, the mobile library service cannot operate in its previous way, as it is impossible to ensure customer and staff safety in terms of social distancing (due to the size of the vehicles) and the risk of infection. Mobile library customers are traditionally amongst the most vulnerable in our communities (the elderly, particularly 75+, disabled, those with mobility issues, and parents with new babies).

2.3 There are 2 mobile libraries in Powys, which serve rural villages and hamlets across Powys on a monthly timetable. The vehicle based at Newtown Area Library serves Montgomeryshire, whilst the Brecon based vehicle covers the Breconshire and Radnorshire areas of Powys. Residents receive 12 visits per year, most of which are around 10-15 minutes in duration. There are 4 part-

time staff delivering the service (1.8 FTE), supported by 2 relief staff on casual by claim contracts.

- 2.4 The library service is finding it increasingly difficult to recruit mobile librarians who have the required driving skills. People born after 1993 do not have the C1 category on their driving licences, so there is need to help new drivers to gain that category, as well as putting them through CPC driver training and providing digital tachograph cards for them. This creates a big financial investment in any new staff, particularly relief staff, to keep their driving qualifications up to date.
- 2.5 There are 573 active library members registered with the 2 mobile libraries across Powys, predominantly older people (403 people (70%) aged over 60), and with more female members (340, or 59%). Prior to the pandemic, the service visited 6 residential homes and 17 pre-school groups, as well as making home visits where people are unable to access the van even using the lift for disabled access. The mobile library reached some of the most vulnerable and isolated people in rural communities, and any change to the service needs to be very sensitively designed with clear alternatives in place, so that no-one is disadvantaged by any change to service delivery.
- 2.6 It must be recognised that the mobile library does not provide an equitable service to the most vulnerable and isolated residents in Powys, as it does not generally provide any service within urban areas that have a branch library. Powys is one of the very few authorities in Wales, and indeed across the UK, which does not operate a dedicated housebound library service to residents who are unable to access static libraries, irrespective of where they live in relation to a branch. The lack of an equitable housebound service affects the authority's ability to provide a "comprehensive and efficient library service to all persons desiring to make use thereof", as outlined in the Public Libraries and Museums Act 1964.
- 2.7 Since June 2020, the library service has been operating a successful Order and Collect library books scheme, which includes covid-secure doorstep deliveries where needed. Telephone calls from staff to mobile library customers have encouraged and supported customers to use either the online e-books or the Order and Collect service. Approximately 60% of the 573 active library members registered through the mobile libraries have used their library cards for Order & Collect book bags or to request books via branch libraries during the last 18 months. This does not include statistics for those who have used electronic resources via our library apps.

3. Advice

- 3.1 The tremendous community support response to the Covid-19 situation offers real and exciting new opportunities to deliver a better and more equitable outreach library service to vulnerable residents across all of Powys, through including isolated and housebound people in towns as well as rural communities. This is the key reason for this report at this time, to build on connections with these networks to develop an outreach service, which will

improve the reach and benefits.

- 3.2 The library service has been working with some of the community response teams across Powys, to include book loans in their volunteer deliveries of groceries, prescriptions, and hot meals, as a valued boost to mental health and wellbeing. These groups support a similar demographic to the mobile library, but in all of the main towns as well as in the rural areas.
- 3.3 The library service has worked with PAVO to recruit library home delivery volunteers for the long term, with 21 people trained and able to make covid-secure deliveries. It is envisaged that the library service will continue to work through PAVO and the volunteer networks (with volunteers recruited through the library service directly if needed) and with Town and Community Councils, to maintain a service for vulnerable people.
- 3.4 Library Friends groups and existing library volunteers (who worked within libraries prior to lockdown) have also been very active in promoting the Order and Collect library books scheme and delivering to people's homes where needed.
- 3.5 It is therefore proposed to build on this covid-related work to develop a housebound library outreach service, to meet existing need as well as promote the benefits of books and reading to new audiences. This will include promotion of e-books and e-audio downloads as well as traditional books delivered with relevant safety precautions. This will be a sustainable service should any areas need to go back into lockdown, as it is based on remote delivery with no face-to-face contact (either digitally or through covid-secure doorstep deliveries).
- 3.6 The strength of volunteer interest and support for delivering library books gives the service confidence that the model can be sustained for the long term, recruiting new volunteers as required.
- 3.7 It is proposed the Library Programme Support Manager oversees the transition of mobile library service to a library outreach model, to ensure that no customers are left out, and to support with recruiting and training volunteers. The deliveries will operate around the branch library network, so will be locality based.
- 3.8 The Library Service will also further explore the potential to work with other services both within PCC, PAVO and the 3rd sector, where support staff are visiting residents for other purposes. This develops the outcomes of a joint working trial with housing officers in October 2019 - March 2020.
- 3.9 If conditions allow, it is proposed to link this new housebound model of doorstep deliveries and community collections with the beneficial outcomes of the Read & Remember ICF funded project, which focused on training volunteers to read aloud to adults living with certain life changing conditions. This could be recorded or over the telephone during isolation.

- 3.10 A further strand for transformational development is to tie in with Powys County Council's digital transformation programme. The library service is working with Supporting People and other 3rd sector support agencies on a pilot device loan scheme, with remote support, to help vulnerable residents to overcome isolation and address practical needs such as council transactions.
- 3.11 Block loans ("Community Collections") to residential homes, playgroups and central community locations in rural areas would take the place of short mobile library visits in due course, with quarantining of books to ensure safety as appropriate.
- 3.12 Long term benefits of the proposed change in service delivery include contribution to holistic health and wellbeing for both readers and volunteers, supporting the development of resourceful connected communities, and ensuring that service delivery can be maintained in the current and any future pandemic situations.
- 3.13 The Welsh Government is currently developing the 7th framework of Welsh Public Library Standards. The 6th framework ended in 2019/20, and we are currently between frameworks. If the service implements the model as outlined in this paper, the library service will be able to report on the new library outreach delivery models, which should increase contribution towards health and wellbeing outcomes and digital inclusion and improve performance data in terms of the number of active library borrowers in all of our communities.
- 3.14 In late 2020, the library service contacted all registered mobile library readers to gather their opinions on the options that would be available for them to obtain library books (using e-books, visiting their local branch, using Order & Collect, including deliveries, or no longer using the library service). 287 responses were received (i.e. 50.09% of users), of which 75% felt that the proposal was good or very good, 8% fair and 3% poor or very poor. 15% felt that they would use e-books, 30% would choose to go to their nearest library, 46% would use the Order & Collect service, with 20% needing volunteer deliveries. 9% would no longer use the library service.
- 3.15 The survey of mobile library users has provided a lot of very useful feedback that will help to shape the development of the outreach concept. 21% of respondents felt that they would still prefer to use the mobile library if it was available and hoped that it would resume. 6 respondents did not rank the options at all but expressed their view that they would only use the mobile library. Reasons included that the mobile library is one of very few services received by taxpayers in rural areas, highly valued for the knowledgeable friendly staff, opportunities to browse books, meet with neighbours, and obtain information. Some respondents misunderstood the concept and thought that online access would be essential for ordering books, whereas there would continue to be a telephone ordering system. Others value their independence highly, and do not want others to bring books for them. The impact on playgroups and children who use the mobile library was also highlighted.

- 3.16 The difference between respondents who have used alternative ways of accessing library services during the lockdown and those who had not was very marked. Those who have used library services in different ways were very pleased with them, whereas those who have not, were not keen and would prefer the mobile library. All of these views will be taken into consideration in seeking the best way forward for each library member.
- 3.17 Approval is therefore sought to restructure the mobile library service into a library outreach model, working with volunteers and partners in each community, to develop a more equitable service to housebound and vulnerable residents in towns and rural areas across the county, at reduced cost to the authority. It is intended to contact all of the existing registered members to ensure that they are able to access library books if they would like to.
- 3.18 No charge will be made for book loans (whether electronic or physical), nor for the provision of information to individuals, in line with the core public library entitlements for Welsh residents as outlined by Welsh Government, and in line with the legal requirements of the Public Libraries and Museums Act 1964.

4. Resource Implications

- 4.1 The transformation described above has the potential to deliver an improved and more equitable service at reduced cost, through working with partners and communities to reach vulnerable people in towns as well as in rural areas. Savings will include vehicle running costs, capital receipts for the sale of the 2 vehicles, and staff savings, creating total revenue savings of £90,797.
- 4.2 Removal of the 2 vehicles would decrease pressure on Fleet services and depots, in terms of servicing and operating costs.
- 4.3 Staff will be taken through the Management of Change process and there will be some redundancy costs with this proposal. Some additional capacity will be built into the library delivery system (equivalent to 1 day per week salary for the driver, plus an allowance for fuel).
- 4.4 The projected budget retained for 2022/23 in order to deliver the service in alternative ways comprises the following elements:
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| Volunteer expenses: | £3,000 (estimate) |
| Delivery driver (0.2 FTE): | £6,262 (inc. oncosts. 7 hrs/week, ad hoc use) |
| Extra fuel for deliveries: | £500 (estimate) |
| Total: | £9,762 |
- 4.5 A projected budget of £10,000 per annum will be retained in following financial years, to cover volunteer expenses and additional deliveries. Whilst considered unlikely, any cost over and above this amount will be found within existing service budgets.

4.6 Devices for loan have been sourced through grant funding, at no cost to the library service base budget, through the Welsh Government's Circular Economy Fund. Library service staff are working up the detailed scheme with ICT colleagues.

4.7 The Head of Finance (Section 151 Officer) notes the content of the report in particular the resources implications set out in section 4 and can support the recommendation.

5. Legal Implications

5.1 Legal: The recommendation can be supported from a legal point of view

6. Monitoring Officer

6.1 The Head of Legal and Democratic Services (Monitoring Officer) has commented as follows: " I note the legal comment and have nothing to add to the report".

7. Data Protection

7.1 The proposal does involve processing of personal data for the purpose of providing a library service. The Data Protection Officer comments: Names and addresses and possibly other personal data would need to be shared with delivery partners and volunteers, to facilitate service delivery. Activity will be undertaken to ensure compliance with data protection legislation, such as the identification of relationships between parties, and the development of appropriate documentation to support this proposal.

8. Comment from local member(s)

8.1 Local members comments have not been sought as this would impact on all communities across Powys.

9. Integrated Impact Assessment

9.1 An impact assessment for the proposal has been prepared and is attached.

10. Recommendation

10.1 It is recommended that the Powys Library Service implement an alternative library outreach delivery model to housebound, vulnerable and isolated residents in Powys, in place of the mobile library service. This would deliver improved service reach at a reduced cost, whilst minimising risk during the ongoing pandemic.

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DELEGATED DECISION NEW REPORT TEMPLATE VERSION 2