

Safer and Stronger Communities Scrutiny Committee
18 June 2012

REVIEW OF MOBILE LIBRARY SERVICES

REPORT BY HEAD OF LAW AND CULTURE

Background

1. As part of the Council's commitment to delivering a comprehensive, high quality and efficient library service, Cabinet agreed, on 12th December 2011, that the Council will continue to provide services to groups and people who may struggle to get to a library, such as young people and their parents or carers, older people and those with disabilities.
2. This would include:
 - Ensuring the cost-effective and efficient use of the vehicular mobile library service. An overall saving of £84,000 was identified to be made from the Service by March 2014. The Service has already taken steps to achieve this savings target by moving to single staffing where possible on two of the existing mobile libraries.
 - Developing and extending the Home Library Service delivery for those with limited mobility.
 - Developing and extending the current book deposit scheme to allow us to provide access in areas where there is currently no service.

Current provision

3. Public service vehicles:

There are five vehicles, each serving designated geographical areas of the county on weekdays. These vehicles serve rural communities, towns and some areas of the city of Oxford including stops at schools, nurseries, playgroups, sheltered housing and residential homes. There are some 497 stops across the county.

Although twenty communities have weekly stops, most stops are visited on a two-weekly rota. The majority of stops last between 15 and 20 minutes.

Two further vehicles provide a dedicated service to support the literacy needs of primary age school children, serving 69 primary schools during term time; the majority of the stops deliver half day sessions.

4. Home Library Service:

Over 1,000 housebound people are registered with the library service; some being supported by friends and family and others by the Home Library Service. The Home Library Service delivers books and audio visual materials to individuals who are unable to leave their home unaided owing to age or disability. It is currently delivered by 58 volunteers, some of them members of the WRVS and some of them recruited directly by the library service, including some young people from an Oxford school. Volunteers visit about once every three weeks.

5. Deposit collections:

These collections are delivered by the Library Service transport service to care homes, nursing homes, and other institutions. Deliveries are normally made 6 weekly with books and audio materials being picked up from the local library in quantities that vary from about 20 items to over 100. Some 40 institutions currently receive this service.

Methodology and Timescale

6. Following the decision that will see all 43 public libraries remain open, with some sustained by volunteers working alongside County Council staff, the Service now needs to look at how mobile library services can complement and add value to that network, in a cost effective way that makes efficient use of resources to deliver library services at the point of need.
7. The rationale is to join up the existing disparate mobile library services outlined above to create a sustainable method of service delivery that can involve partnership working and community involvement.
8. The review will be one of a number of workstreams undertaken by the Library Service between 2012 and 2015 to deliver the overall Library Service Strategy, as set out in the Cabinet Report of 12 December 2011. The workstreams will be overseen by the Library Service Management Team under a programme management framework with support from the Strategy and Communications Team.
9. An officer project group has been established to review existing provision and use and to investigate how mobile library services are used elsewhere. An analysis of needs will inform a proposal for the future of mobile library services across Oxfordshire. A steering group, made up of relevant stakeholders and partners such as Age UK, ORCC and OCVA will ensure that all relevant stakeholders can contribute to the review and inform the proposal which will be taken to public consultation upon agreement with the Cabinet Member for Safer and Stronger Communities.
10. The proposal will be tested to ensure that groups with protected characteristics will not be adversely affected by any proposed change in service. The impact of any changes upon service users will be fully assessed. To that end a robust Service and Community Impact Assessment will be undertaken as part of the review process.

11. The views of local communities, existing customers and library staff will be sought during Autumn 2012. Depending upon the outcome of the consultation, it is expected that final recommendations will be brought forward in late Spring 2013 with a view for any decision to be implemented with effect from Autumn 2013.

Conclusion

12. The Committee is invited to comment on the methodology proposed and consider whether any additional stakeholder representation is required as part of the consultation process.

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