

Report to the Cabinet

Meeting to be held on Thursday, 5 September 2019

Report of the Head of Service - Libraries, Museums, Culture and Archives Service

Part I

Electoral Division affected:
(All Divisions);

Mobile Library Service - Evaluation of Consultation Results

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Executive Summary

This report summarises the results of the consultation over the future of the mobile library service and proposes ten criteria to be applied when planning the future delivery of the service.

Recommendations

Cabinet is asked to:

- (i) Approve the use of the ten criteria detailed in this report when planning the future of the mobile library service.
- (ii) Request a further report once public consultation has been conducted on the re-planned routes based on the ten criteria.

Background and Advice

Cabinet accepted a report on 17 January 2019 on the need to review the future of the Mobile Library Service and the Home Library Service. One of the three recommendations that were accepted was "Cabinet endorses the public consultation process for the future of the Mobile Library Service and requires a further report in mid-2019". The results of this consultation would then inform the criteria that Cabinet would be asked to agree when planning the future of the Mobile Library Service.

The consultation ran for eight weeks between 4 March 2019 and 28 April 2019. In total, 564 completed questionnaires were returned (441 paper questionnaire responses and 123 online questionnaire responses).

The analysis of the completed questionnaires was produced in June 2019.

Key findings:

1. Use of library services

- About four-fifths of respondents (82%) said that they use the mobile library service about every two or three weeks. A tenth of respondents (10%) said that they never use the mobile library service.
- About a quarter of respondents (26%) said that they visit a public library building in Lancashire about once a month or more. About a third of respondents (35%) said that they never visit a public library building in Lancashire.
- About a fifth of respondents (21%) said that they had used the Home Library Service in the last 12 months and about a sixth of respondents (17%) said that they had used the online library service in the last 12 months. About two-thirds of respondents (64%) said that they had not used the Home Library Service or the online library service in the last 12 months.
- About three quarters of respondents (73%) said that they don't think they are currently eligible for the Home Library Service.

2. The proposals for Lancashire County Council's mobile library service

- About two-thirds of respondents (68%) said that they agree with the proposal to standardise the frequency of visits to each mobile library stop from once every two or three weeks to once every three weeks.
- About four-fifths of respondents (81%) said that they agree with the proposal to change the minimum stopping time at each mobile library, increasing it from 10 minutes to 15 minutes.
- About two-fifths of respondents (39%) said that they agree with the proposal to remove the mobile library stops when they are within one mile of a public library building and about two-fifths (43%) said that they disagree with this proposal.
- A third of respondents (33%) agree with the proposal to merge some mobile stops when they serve the same community and over two-fifths of respondents (45%) disagree with this proposal.
- About three-quarters of respondents (74%) said that they agree with the proposal to remove mobile library stops that have not been used in the last six months and a tenth of respondents (10%) said that they disagree with this proposal.
- When asked what they think about our proposals for the mobile library and what, if anything, could be done differently respondents were most likely to respond with either a general positive comment about the service (42%), or say that some older/disabled people will struggle to borrow books (26%), or that the service is valuable to the community (25%), or that some people who live in rural areas will struggle to borrow books (24%).
- About a third of respondents (32%) said that they would not use the library service at all if their current mobile library stop was removed, three-tenths of

respondents (30%) said that they would use a Lancashire library building and about a quarter of respondents (27%) said that they would use the library service less often.

- When asked if they had any further comments to make about the mobile library service in Lancashire respondents were most likely to say that it's a valued community service (71%).

The following 10 criteria should be applied when planning the future of the Mobile Library Service in response to the results of the consultation:

- About two-thirds of respondents (68%) said that they agree with the proposal to standardise the frequency of visits to each mobile library stop from once every two or three weeks to once every three weeks.

Proposed criteria:

- 1. All mobile library stops will move to a three weekly frequency.** Three mobile libraries already operate on a three-weekly frequency so this will mean that the two-weekly routes will be replaced with a three-weekly frequency. Standardising stops to a three-weekly frequency is also consistent with the hire period for books and audiobooks. Each mobile library will require one maintenance day every three weeks when there are no scheduled stops.
 - 2. No mobile library routes will be scheduled between Christmas Eve to 1 January inclusive.** This is existing practice on most of the current mobile library routes.
 - 3. Mobile library routes will be maintained throughout the rest of each year whenever possible.** This will be achieved by using other library staff or casual staff qualified to drive the vehicles when the regular Mobile Library Officers are unavailable. On occasions when this is not possible, agency drivers would cover drivers' holidays and other absences whenever possible. Current practice is that mobile libraries do not operate when each driver is on leave, which can be up to four weeks per year (excluding the Christmas and New Year period).
 - 4. A mobile library vehicle will be held in reserve.** This will provide a replacement should any one of the operational mobile libraries be off the road due to mechanical or other problems to maintain continuity of service whenever possible. This is in line with existing practice.
- About four-fifths of respondents (81%) said that they agree with the proposal to change the minimum stopping time at each mobile library, increasing it from ten minutes to fifteen minutes.
- 5. The minimum stop time will be fifteen minutes and this will be incorporated into the re-organisation of the mobile library routes.**
- About two-fifths of respondents (39%) said that they agree with the proposal to remove the mobile library stops when they are within one mile of a public library building and about two-fifths (43%) said that they disagree with this proposal.

6. Existing mobile library stops will not be taken out when the routes are reorganised simply because of their proximity to a fixed library building. All such stops (as of September 2019) will be incorporated into the re-organisation of the mobile library routes.

7. Requests for new stops within 0.75 miles (approximately a fifteen minute walking distance at an average walking speed) of a static library will not be accepted. Any members of the public requesting a stop within this radius will be contacted to see if they are eligible for the Home Library Service.

- A third of respondents (33%) agree with the proposal to merge some mobile stops when they serve the same community and over two-fifths of respondents (45%) disagree with this proposal.

8. The mobile library will continue to make multiple stops within the same community where these are part of existing routes and these will be incorporated into the re-organisation of the mobile library routes.

- About three-quarters of respondents (74%) said that they agree with the proposal to remove mobile library stops that have not been used in the last six months and a tenth of respondents (10%) said that they disagree with this proposal.

9. Any stop that is not used within six continuous months (approximately eight visits) will be discontinued.

- When asked what they think about our proposals for the mobile library and what, if anything, could be done differently respondents were most likely to respond with either a general positive comment about the service (42%), or say some older/disabled people will struggle to borrow books (26%), or that the service is valuable to the community (25%), or that some people who live in rural areas will struggle to borrow books (24%).

10. There are a number of communities that are by-passed by current mobile library routes. The relevant parish council will be consulted about the desirability of scheduling a mobile library stop within their community.

- About a third of respondents (32%) said that they would not use the library service at all if their current mobile library stop was removed, three-tenths of respondents (30%) said that they would use a Lancashire library building and about a quarter of respondents (27%) said that they would use the library service less often.

Noted.

- When asked if they had any further comments to make about the mobile library service in Lancashire respondents were most likely to say that it's a valued community service (71%).

Noted.

The ten criteria will be applied when planning the revised routes that the mobile libraries will use from April 2020. However, the public will be consulted over the new routes before they are finalised and adopted in 2020.

Implications:

This item has the following implications, as indicated:

Vehicles

There are currently seven mobile library vehicles of which six are used for the regular delivery of the service with one vehicle held in reserve to replace any vehicle that becomes unavailable. Cabinet has already agreed capital expenditure to replace the entire fleet of aging mobile library vehicles and the first three new mobile library vehicles will be delivered in late 2019. Moving the frequency of all the mobile library routes to three weekly will mean that only five rather than six vehicles are required for the regular delivery of the service with a sixth vehicle held in reserve. Therefore, a further three new mobile library vehicles will be brought into service in 2020.

The bases of the new mobile library vehicles will be reviewed as the new routes are planned but six of the existing seven bases would continue to be used.

Staffing

There are six full-time posts of Mobile Library Officers of which one post is currently vacant but temporarily filled until 31 March 2020. By moving to five mobile libraries delivering the service, the vacant post can be deleted when the new routes are introduced in 2020.

In order to comply with criteria three detailed above, casual or agency drivers would need to be brought in to cover drivers' holidays and other absences whenever possible. As the bases of the mobile library vehicles are reviewed, any changes to vehicle locations might require one or more posts to be re-located and appropriate staff consultation would be conducted.

Financial

The cost of the revised mobile library service would be contained within the existing revenue and capital budgets allocated for the mobile library service. There is the potential for realising savings by reducing the number of vehicles from seven to six. In addition, the staffing budget would reduce by moving from six to five full-time posts. This saving would offset the occasional cost of the use of casual drivers, to be used only when necessary to comply with criteria three detailed above.

Risk management

Legal

The mobile library service contributes to the overall offer and thus contributes to the council complying with the obligations of the Public Libraries and Museums Act 1964.

Equality Analysis

As all existing customers will continue to receive a Mobile Library Service and may be eligible to access the Home Library Service, no-one will lose access to the service. However, the proposed criteria relating to the minimum distance from a library for provision of a mobile library stop may have a disproportionate impact on some protected characteristics groups – e.g. older people or disabled people who have mobility difficulties who may find walking the proposed distances difficult. Whilst mitigation has been suggested via use of the Home Library Service, some borrowers could then lose the facility to browse and select books from a Mobile Library.

At this stage the proposal is to set out the criteria which will inform design of the new Mobile Library routes and service, so it is difficult to be specific about the potential impact. A detailed Equality Impact Assessment will be prepared to accompany the final proposal.

Personnel

As one of the six posts of Mobile Library Officer is filled temporarily until 31 March 2020, the number of posts can be reduced from six to five without any personnel issues. Any change to work location will require appropriate consultation with the staff involved.

List of Background Papers

Paper	Date	Contact/Tel
<u>Mobile Library Service Consultation report – 2019</u>	June 2019	Ian Watson 07833483410

Reason for inclusion in Part II, if appropriate

N/A