

Communities Committee

Item No.

Report title:	Mobile Library Service
Date of meeting:	4 July 2018
Responsible Chief Officer:	Tom McCabe – Executive Director, Community and Environmental Services
Strategic impact <p>Norfolk is a rural, geographically dispersed county and consideration of rural service delivery is of key importance, particularly with respect to socially isolated and vulnerable groups.</p> <p>The content of this report are reflective of the Council's strategic aspirations:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Offering our help early to prevent and reduce demand for specialist services• Joining up our work so that similar activities and services are accessible, done once and done well• Being business like and making the best use of digital technology to ensure value for money• Using evidence and data to target our work where it can make the most difference	

Executive summary

A Member workshop was held in March 2018 to gather feedback and views as to the requirements and future direction of the Mobile Library service.

This paper outlines proposed principles for rural service delivery, proposed criteria for mobile route planning, as well as presenting some viable alternatives to rural service delivery be piloted, such as "Pop up Library". Half the vehicles in the current fleet are coming to the end of their working lives and we have reached a point where the right thing to do is to consider how we provide these services in the future.

Any future service delivery plans for Mobile Libraries need to be tied into the emerging Norfolk Futures programme and its defined outcomes: there are interdependencies around the issues of social isolation and loneliness, information and advice provision, and prevention, to name a few. Norfolk County Council will need to ensure that all services are considered holistically in terms of the ability to deliver the highest impact for residents at the lowest cost.

Recommendations:

Members are recommended to:

1. **agree the proposed priorities for rural service delivery**
2. **agree the proposed criteria for mobile route planning**

1. Introduction

- 1.1. The Mobile Library service currently uses 8 vehicles to deliver fortnightly or 4 weekly visits to 1568 locations in Norfolk. 7525 individuals used the mobile library service in 2017/18. 58% of these *only* used the mobile library service, the rest used both a mobile library and a building based library.
- 1.2. A Member workshop was held in March 2018 to look at the situation and seek NCC Member views, ideas and opinions on the current service and potential changes. Feedback included a wide variety of ideas and views with no clear consensus on the potential way forward, although it was felt that the service should be based on resident need.
- 1.3. To meet the continuing challenges faced by the mobile library service, this report outlines proposed priorities for rural service delivery and proposed criteria for mobile route planning, as well as some new delivery options to explore as pilots.
- 1.4. A survey of mobile library customers in 2017 revealed that,
 - 97% of respondents used the service for borrowing books and 16% used the service to find out information.
 - 11% said they used mobile libraries to meet friends
 - 78% of respondents saying that they made positive connections with other people when the mobile library visited.
 - 75% of respondents said that they felt less isolated because of their mobile library use.
- 1.5. The average number of visitors per stop is 4.46. In 2017/18, 293,883 items were borrowed from the County's mobile libraries and they welcomed just over 84,000 visitors. The cost of delivering the mobile library service in 17/18 was £447,765. Each visit to a mobile library costs £5.32. The average number of items borrowed per visitor is 3.49. This compares to a cost of £1.19 per visitor and an average of 1.17 items borrowed per visit to a building based library (excluding the Norfolk and Norwich Millennium Library).
- 1.6. In 2017 out of the 137 library services in England, 86 (62%) did not operate a mobile library service at all. Most mobile library stops are in rural communities. The majority of stops are over 2 miles away from a building based library. Typically, a mobile library visit extends from 10 to 20 minutes with only 22 stops lasting for more than an hour.
- 1.7. The mobile library service was originally established in 1953. Use of the service peaked in 1969. Over the years, in response to budget reductions and changes in the rural population, the mobile library service has reduced the size of its fleet, undertaken route reviews, rationalised the frequency of visits and changed visit times.

2. Proposals for future service delivery

2.1. Proposed priorities for the rural service delivery

These principles have been developed in line with the developing Norfolk Futures programmes *Local Service Strategy* and *Smarter Information and Advice*. The aim of the Local Service Strategy is to target NCC services in the places where they are most needed through reduction of duplication, targeting resources where we can make the biggest difference, and enabling people to do more for themselves. Where advantageous, cross council services will be represented in the offer e.g. Public

Health, Adult Social Care etc.

- Offer the provision of face to face information and advice in rural areas
- Provide services to older people with access to limited transport
- Be the face of the County Council in rural Norfolk where other services are less visible
- Support rural community cohesion in locations where the shop, pub and post office may have closed by giving an opportunity to reduce social isolation
- Support early years development and literacy for children and families in rural areas
- Promote the development of digital skills and technology for service delivery

2.2. Proposed criteria for mobile route planning

The proposed criteria for defining a mobile library stop are:

- The location is two miles or more from a library building
- The stop will address the highest need and impact on the population
- There are no other “stops” or immediate local service provision
- There will only be one stop to serve the needs of a rural community (currently there could be 2 stops in close proximity).
- Stops will be assessed as to their accessibility and predicted demand patterns
- Each stop will last for at least 20 minutes allowing time for information and advice provision and/or social interaction
- Stops will be set at predictable, regular time intervals to allow residents to plan

2.3. Routes will be reviewed on a 6 monthly basis to see how they are working.

After an initial period we will review the service annually to make sure it is still meeting the criteria above and take account of any changes in demand. In the interim, if local circumstances change, the service will respond where we can to change the service to that area in a timely manner

3. Proposed pilots for Rural Service Delivery

3.1. The model for the delivery of rural library services needs an overhaul and will take into account the emerging Norfolk County Council Local Service Strategy. Half the vehicles in the fleet are coming to the end of their working lives and we have reached a point where the right thing to do is to look at how we provide these services. We will be looking at a range of options to reach people in more isolated places, including encouraging more people to get involved through volunteering, setting up “pop up libraries” - small libraries that can be set up in any suitable venue, such as a village hall, or community centre, piloting a new multipurpose drop pod option and encouraging more people to take advantage of the Home Library Service (currently delivered in partnership with RVS). There is no “one size fits all” solution, but one option is explored in more detail in 3.2 as an example; the full range of options are described in more detail in appendix 1. It is intended that all of the options are trialled to determine the best service mix across the county.

- Pop up library
- Supported Volunteer Community Libraries
- Home library service
- Digital Offer – inc promotion of the Libby library app
- Transport for customers to bigger hubs

- 3.2. **Pop Up Library.** A member of NCC staff with a vehicle delivering and setting up and running a “pop up” library. This would use specially designed and built units to provide a selection of material for people to borrow, connectivity to the internet so that information and advice could be offered. This would include working with partners and other NCC services to expand the offer available.

We would be able to work with groups that are interested in exploring other ways to provide library services in future, such as community-run libraries. There is a dependency on the consistency of the support available, including premises and volunteers. Early investigations indicate this would not be a workable model in all areas of the county.

4. Issues, risks and innovation

- 4.1. Substantial changes to rural service delivery will be subject to an equality impact assessment, however the risks to vulnerable groups will be minimised if the proposed principles and route criteria are adopted.

It is likely that the local service strategy will take a “risk stratification” approach to ensure that services are targeted where they are most needed.

- 4.2. The new models being proposed as part of the pilot take an innovative approach to rural service delivery and therefore it is important that they are properly planned and evaluated. Where possible, learning and experience from other parts of the UK public sector and best practise have been applied.

5. Financial Implications

- 5.1. There are no additional financial implications at this time.

Officer Contact

If you have any questions about matters contained in this paper or want to see copies of any assessments, eg equality impact assessment, please get in touch with:

Officer name : Jan Holden

Tel No. : 01603 228910

Email address : janet.holden@norfolk.gov.uk



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1. Library pop ups

- The pop up library arrives in a van with a staff member
- Take advantage of wi-fi in village halls, community centres and other locations
- Deliver a pop up library for 3.5 hours in morning or in afternoon/early evening
- Full library experience
- Self service
- Activities for early years, digital literacy, literacy, healthy libraries and reducing social isolation
- School holiday activities for children
- Opportunity to deliver to 30 locations per month, per van
- Frequency of pop up depends on local needs
- Opportunity to work with local volunteers to add value/transport people to the pop up
- Other NCC and district council services / other services delivered in the same location at the same time
 - Children's Services
 - Adult Social Care
 - Health
 - Specialist information, advice and guidance
 - Social Prescribing

2. Supported Volunteer Community Libraries

Local communities are supported to deliver a community library based in a community location. Availability depends on volunteer capacity

- **Library service supports with:**
 - A supply of books
 - Access to technology/systems to enable library operations to take place
 - Advice to communities on delivery
- **Community provides:**
 - Location
 - Volunteers to operate
 - Range of activities

3. Transport for customers

- Work with community transport providers to arrange transport for groups of customers to go to their nearest branch library
- Customers get access to a larger range of materials and activities for longer
- Good neighbour scheme – neighbours take people without transport to the library

4. Home Library Service

- Currently delivered to about 1500 customers in Norfolk.
- Current delivery partner is RVS
- Personal visit by a volunteer every 3/4 weeks with a selection of books
- Safe and well check/longer social contact
- Opportunities to work with volunteers to deliver digital inclusion

5. Digital offer

- Offer a tablet and introduce customer to the library e-book offer
- Access to digital inclusion training
- Access to other e-library resources
- Access to other NCC information and advice via the tablet
- Customer provides own wi-fi or via community wi-fi