

From: **Barbara Cooper, Corporate Director Growth, Environment and Transport**

To: **Mike Hill, Cabinet Member for Community Services**

Decision No: 15/00111(b)

Subject: **Decision on the proposed re-design of the mobile library service**

Classification: **Unrestricted**

Past Pathway of Paper: **N/A**

Future Pathway of Paper: **Cabinet Member decision**

Update report to the Growth Economic Development and Communities Cabinet Committee on 17th May 2016

Electoral Division: **All**

Summary: This decision paper summarises the results of the recent public consultation on proposals to redesign the mobile library service. The aim of this redesign is to provide a more efficient and effective service to residents of Kent. It details the recommended next steps and timeline to put the proposals into effect.

Recommendations: The Cabinet Member for Community Services take the decision to progress and implement the redesign of the mobile library service, in particular;

- a) To agree the proposed selection criterion that those mobile stops that received two or fewer visitors on average over the period selected will be withdrawn from the mobile library service.
- b) To agree the change in frequency of stops for every location to every two weeks
- c) To agree the change of days the service operates to Tuesday to Saturday
- d) To agree an increase in the minimum stop time to 30 minutes.
- e) To agree the changes proposed to the number of stops and the timetable as a result of the consultation feedback as detailed in section 5
- f) To agree to review the mobile library service on an annual basis.

1. Introduction

- 1.1 The financial challenge facing Kent County Council is significant and Libraries, Registration and Archives (LRA) is required to make £1.7 million savings over the next two financial years. LRA is looking at multiple ways of making these savings including the redesign of the mobile library service which is estimated to deliver £150,000 revenue savings per annum.

- 1.2 On 12 January 2016 the Growth, Economic Development and Communities Cabinet Committee endorsed the rationale behind the proposed redesign and supported the public consultation process.
- 1.3 Following completion of the consultation it has been agreed that this decision is taken by the Cabinet Member prior to the Cabinet Committee. This is due to the fact that the next meeting of the Growth, Economic Development and Communities Cabinet Committee is not until 17th May 2016 which would result in a month's delay in implementing this decision equating to a loss of savings of approximately £12,500. Therefore, in accordance with process set out in the Council's Constitution, the Chairman and Group Spokespersons for this Cabinet Committee, the Chairman and Spokesmen for the Scrutiny Committee and the local members affected were informed prior to the decision being taken and their views were recorded on the Record of Decision (See Appendix A).

2. Background information

- 2.1 The mobile library service currently consists of eleven mobile vehicles and one additional vehicle for use when others are off the road for essential maintenance. These vehicles currently deliver to 651 stops, Monday - Friday across all twelve districts of Kent.
- 2.2 The mobile library service has not been fundamentally reviewed since 2004, and in the context of the financial challenges and the fact that people are using and accessing services in different ways a review of the mobile library service is timely. Visitor numbers for the mobile library service have fallen by 20% and issues have fallen by 23% over the last three financial years as detailed in the table below;

	2012/2013	2013/2014	2014/2015
Issue total	192,781	174,268	148,147
Visitor total	75,666	70,215	60,725

- 2.3 The service is not currently offered consistently across the county; there is a vast discrepancy in the length of stops, (from ten minutes to over an hour and a half) and frequency (some weekly, some fortnightly and some monthly).
- 2.4 For the financial year 2014-15 the mobile library service cost £368,172 which includes staff salaries, maintenance costs and fuel.
- 2.5 LRA officers have conducted a full review of the service and proposed a redesign of the mobile library service based on the following criterion;

That mobile library stops that receive 2 or less visitors on average over the period October 2014- September 2015 will be withdrawn.

- 2.6 In addition to the review of the stops LRA also proposed additional service changes and service improvements to address the inconsistencies in service delivery across the county;
- Change the frequency of to every two weeks
 - Change the days the service operates to Tuesday to Saturday
 - Increase the minimum stop time from 10 minutes to 30 (stops currently above this time remain as they are)
- 2.7 The potential impact of these proposals would be that 368 stops across the county would be withdrawn leaving a service of 283 stops. It is predicted that this service could be delivered with five mobile libraries which equates to estimated revenue saving to KCC of approximately £150,000 per annum made up of staff and vehicle savings. Through the remaining stops, it is estimated that 80% of current service users will still be able to access the service.

3. Consultation

Public consultation commenced on Friday 22nd January 2016 for a period of six-weeks and closed on Friday 4th March 2016

- 3.1 The consultation was targeted specifically at current users of the mobile library service but, other stakeholders were also invited to comment, and information was available for Kent residents to respond. The aim was to enable people to;
- Read about the rationale for the proposals and detail of how this could affect the mobile library service
 - See how this might affect the mobile library stop they use
 - Feedback on the proposal via a questionnaire on the criterion proposed for the redesign, as well as chance to comment on the other service changes/improvements proposed and make alternative suggestions for the future operations of this service.
 - For those who would be unable to access a mobile library as a result of the proposal, information was included on alternative ways they would be able to access a library service, and provided an opportunity to comment on how suitable these would be.
- 3.2 A comprehensive information pack was sent to all current users of the Mobile Library Service (approx. 4200). In addition, the information was available on the KCC website, from each of the mobile libraries and from each of the 99 libraries. Additional response forms were available for those households with more than one mobile library user. Key stakeholders were invited to take part in the engagement as summarised below.

Stakeholder group	How contacted
Existing Mobile Library Customers	<p>Consideration was given to the profile of our current service users and it was agreed that the most effective way to ensure everyone had all the information was to directly post a pack to every household (4,192 Households were sent a copy with only 20 envelopes returned as the customer not known at that address. The pack included the engagement document, an introductory letter and a copy of the relevant district mobile A-Z list of stops. Recipients were also made aware that additional copies of all the documents, with a list of frequently asked questions and the equality impact assessment were available on our mobile vehicles or online.</p> <p>A freepost address was provided so that customers could return questionnaires at no cost to them.</p> <p>Email and telephone contact details were provided so that anyone could raise queries, or request the information in an alternative format. We had no requests for our documents in alternative format during this consultation.</p> <p>We also produced the document in Easy Read format, copies of which were available on the website, mobile and on request.</p>
Wider Library Service users	<p>A copy of the engagement document was available in all 99 libraries.</p> <p>Staff were encouraged to book people onto public computers if they wanted to view and submit a return via the website or print-off the necessary documentation for customers to take away</p>
Parish/Town councils where there is currently a mobile stop	<p>All parish and town councils where a mobile library currently visits were contacted via email or letter with a link to the website with all the information.</p>
District and borough Councils	<p>The leaders and chief executives of all district and borough councils were notified by direct email/letter.</p>
KCC Members	<p>All KCC Members were notified prior to the start of the engagement process, and provided with the consultation information.</p>
Press	<p>A county-wide press release was sent out at the start of the process, and a second one published 5 days before the end of the consultation period.</p>

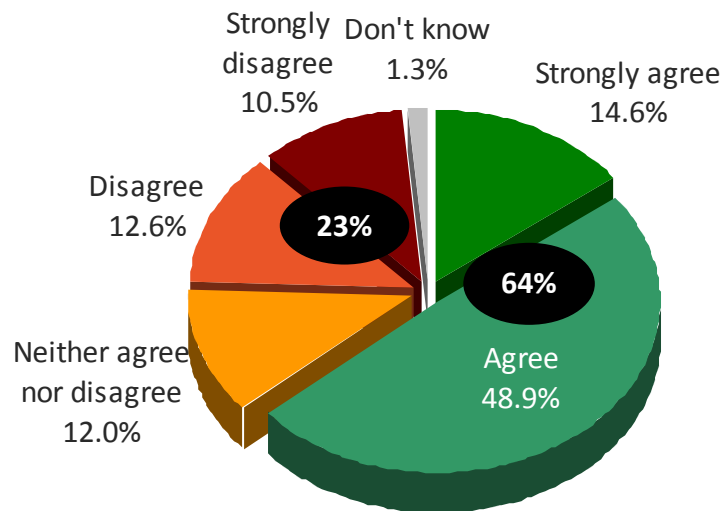
3.3 Alternative formats of the document were available on request (via a

publicised telephone number) and an Easy Read document was produced.

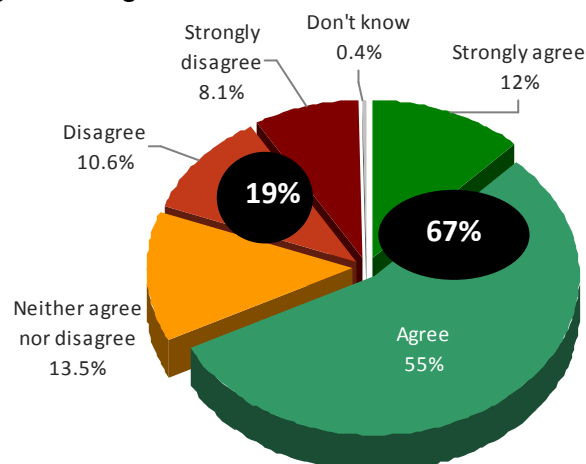
- 3.4 The consultation received a good response with a total of 1554 completed questionnaires received. This included 1,418 responses from individuals and 35 responses from a District/borough or Town or Parish council. 86% of the respondents were current users of the Mobile library service and of these customers 84% had used the mobile within the last month.
- 3.5 Due to the number of anticipated responses to this consultation, the responses were analysed by an independent market research company. A full copy of their report with detailed findings is attached as Appendix C.

4. Summary results of the consultation

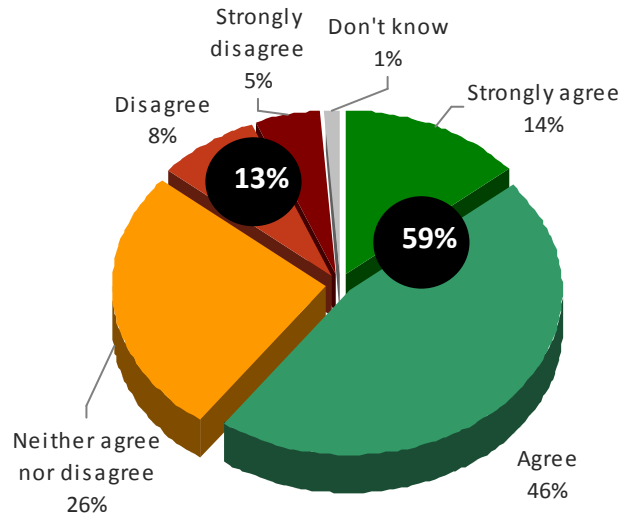
- 4.1 Respondents were asked to what extent they agreed or disagreed with the proposed criterion to withdraw the mobile library stops which had had two or less visitors on average over the period October 2014 to September 2015. On this question 64% strongly agreed/agree with the proposal. 23% strongly disagree/disagree



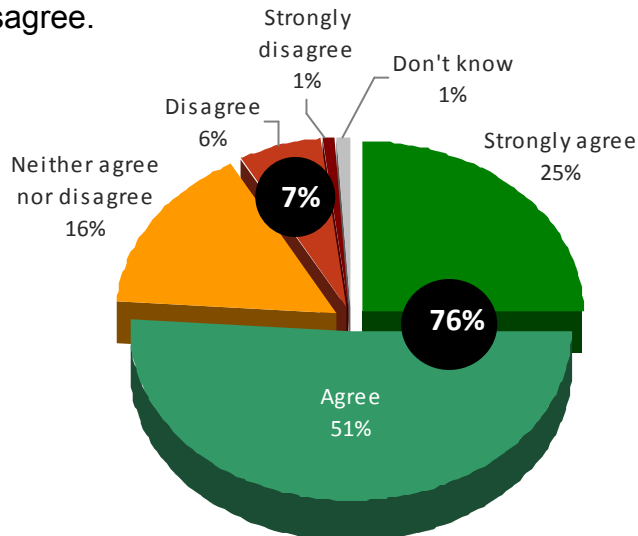
- 4.2 We asked to what extent respondents agreed or disagreed with the proposed change of the frequency of visits to each location to every two weeks. On this question 67% strongly agree/agree with the proposal. 19% strongly disagree/disagree



4.3 We asked to what extent respondents agree or disagree with the proposal to change the days we operate the mobile library service from Monday to Friday to Tuesday to Saturday. On this question 59% strongly agree/agree and 13% strongly disagree/disagree.



4.4 We asked respondents to what extent they agreed or disagreed with the proposal to change the minimum stop time, increasing it from 10 minutes to 30 minutes. 76% strongly agree/agree with the proposal. 7% strongly disagree/disagree.



4.5 We asked respondents to consider the different ways to access KCC library services outlined in the consultation document and which of the options would be best for them. 47% felt they could visit a library building, 33% would want the Home Library Service, 22% online library services, 4% the Touch a New World initiative and 23% at this point put none of the above options. Some people have indicated more than one option. See section 6.1 for the further work we will be doing to mitigate the impact.

4.6 Finally we asked people to tell us after considering the proposal whether they would still be able to access library services. 77% said that they would, 11% don't know and 12% said no. See section 6.2 for further work we are doing to mitigate the impact.

4.7 LRA considers that the response represents an endorsement of the proposals that were put forward as part of this consultation

5. Changes to proposals as a result of feedback

5.1 There were a number of responses about the specific time of day that was being proposed for the stops. Due to the nature of delivering a service across the county it is unfortunately impossible to provide a service that stops at an ideal time for everyone. However, LRA has considered the comments made in the consultation and proposes to make the following changes to the timetables:

- Where local issues were raised that suggested that the mobile library would have problems stopping for practical issues e.g. congestion at a certain place on a certain day or at a certain time then we will look to adjust the time of the stop
- Where the stop is being used by a school and the new time has meant the school could not use the mobile we have looked to change the time or the day of the stop.
- We have also consulted with our mobile drivers and propose to make changes where they are needed for practical driving reasons.

5.2 The following developments to the proposed criterion for evaluating the number of mobile stops were also raised during the consultation and have been considered and proposed are accepted:

Proposed development	Result upon consideration
Make the period of time over which the stops were reviewed as current as possible.	We will change the period of data capture to cover a year up to the end of December 2015. This is the latest we can extend it to given the proposals were in the public domain from January while ensuring we are using the most up to date data..
Some locations are penalised by having more than one stop, with demand spread over them, and propose they should be able to combine data from these stops to give a single average score	To ensure fairness to those locations penalised by having more than one stop and proposed that all are withdrawn we have defined some clear criteria for judging these stops which is detailed in Appendix D.

5.3 The impact of accepting these two adjustments to the criterion means we are proposing to add back 23 stops to our routes and these can be accommodated with the 5 mobile libraries proposed.

5.4 The additional issues raised are considered in Appendix D.

6. Alternative ways to access a library service for those affected

- 6.1 For those users unable to access the revised mobile service, LRA staff will contact those customers who have expressed an interest in the Home Library Service and Touch a New World provision and arrange for these services to start for these customers. Those customers with a visual impairment will be contacted as the postal loan of audio books could be a good option for these customers.
- 6.2 Where a respondent has indicated that they cannot access a library service following this redesign LRA will make direct contact to discuss their specific requirements and ensure they are fully informed about the alternative options offered.

7. The new mobile library service

- 7.1 In addition to the responses from the formal questions, respondents were also invited to comment on other aspects of the service. Having considered these suggestions, LRA is proposing the following additional actions:
- **Refresh of Mobile library book stock.** Reducing the number of mobiles presents a good opportunity for the stock on the mobiles to be reviewed and refreshed.
 - **Promotion.** Many comments were made in the consultation about a lack of promotion of the service. While vehicles themselves are a key part of the promotion of the service, as well as LRA promoting through posters, leaflets, social media and via the website this is an opportunity to review our approach. The focus will be to;
 - Advertise changes to the mobile customers and communities so all users are aware about new frequency, duration and times of the stop they use
 - Explore how the service can work in partnership with communities to promote the service.
 - **Potential need for new mobile stops in future.** The demographics of Kent are continually changing. LRA needs to consider how it will deliver a library service to these communities in the future, ensuring that provision meets local need and demand.
 - **Review of the LRA offer to schools.** While the mobile library service will continue to visit schools that have met the proposed criterion the consultation has raised the issue of whether a service aimed at the whole community can really meet the needs of schools. As a result LRA has instigated a review of its offer to schools. This will look at working in partnership with KCC Education and engaging with schools themselves about the future LRA offer.
 - **Reliability of the mobile vehicles.** Feedback from the consultation has

raised concerns about the frequency of vehicle breakdowns affecting service. LRA will be reducing the mobile fleet and by withdrawing the oldest vehicles the fleet will be more reliable. LRA will review the servicing and repair arrangements to ensure that when breakdowns occur the vehicle is back on the road as quickly as possible.

- **Annual review of the mobile library service.** As detailed in the consultation document, LRA will complete an annual review of the mobile service. This will be conducted a year from the launch of the new mobile library service and will use the criteria agreed for this review.

If the service wishes to propose new criteria for a redesign then this will be subject to a further decision and new public engagement process.

8. HR implications

- 8.1 Currently the mobile fleet comprises 11 mobile vehicles and a spare vehicle delivered through 11 full time equivalent staff (due to a job share this equates to 12 people).
- 8.2 By reducing the number of mobile libraries to 5 vehicles plus a spare the number of Full Time Equivalent (FTE) staff is reduced to 5 FTE.
- 8.3 The service will work with KCC HR to complete the necessary staffing review to achieve this reduction.
- 8.4 To mitigate the impact on the staff involved LRA will be offering staff the option of voluntary redundancy and the service is also holding vacancies across the service to try to minimise the need for compulsory redundancies.

9. Financial implications

- 9.1 The estimated revenue savings from having fewer mobile libraries and less staff are outlined in the table below;

Item	Predicted saving
Maintenance and fuel saving predicted by reduction to 5 vehicles and 1 spare vehicle	£63,201
Predicted staffing saving from reduction to 5 FTE	£102,823
Provision of any pension costs as result of restructure	-£15,000
Total Estimated Savings	£151,024

- 9.2 In addition the reduction in the number of locations required for garaging the vehicles overnight will generate some savings for KCC Property due to the fact that some leases will no longer be required.

- 9.3 Some one-off income will also come into LRA as a result of selling the withdrawn vehicles which it is proposed go towards LRA income targets for this financial year. Given these vehicles are quite old it is not expected that this will generate a large amount but will be confirmed once the vehicles are sold.

LRA will also be making a contribution to reserves this financial year (2016-2017) so that we can continue to replace the mobile libraries as they come to the end of their mechanical life.

10. Legal implications

- 10.1 As a public authority decision, the decision to be taken is open to legal challenge by judicial review. The Cabinet Member for Communities must ensure that he gives proper consideration to all relevant considerations in order for the Council's decision to withstand judicial scrutiny if challenged in Court. A challenge would focus on the legality of the decision-making process, not on the merits of the actual decision.
- 10.2 The Cabinet Member must consider the Council's statutory duty to provide a comprehensive and efficient library service for anyone wishing to make use of it. In order for a library authority to form a rational view of whether a proposed level of service is comprehensive and efficient, it must consider the needs that the library service has to meet taking into account all relevant factors.
- 10.3 The Council is required to fulfil its public sector equality duty contained in the Equality Act 2010 when carrying out its statutory functions, including its library function. Members should also consider the Social Value Act 2012 in tandem with the Duty of Best Value contained within the Local Government Act 1999 and the Council's fiduciary duties.
- 10.4 The Council has carried out a public engagement process. The Cabinet Member must consider all the feedback gathered during this process and the community issues that emerge from the Equalities Impact Assessment. The Cabinet Member must take all comments and alternative proposals into consideration when making the decision, and consider them carefully and reasonably, but he is not obliged to reject or follow any particular recommendation when taking a decision.

11. Equalities implications

- 11.1 As a result of the consultation the initial Equalities Impact Assessment (EIA) for the mobile redesign proposal has been updated and is included as Appendix E.
- 11.2 The Cabinet Member for Community Services is asked to note the findings of this assessment.

12. Key risks and mitigation

12.1 There are a number of risks involved with the proposed redesign. However, provision has been made to mitigate these risks in the following ways:

12.2 Alternative service provision not being in place for those affected by the redesign.

LRA has been planning for the potential need to increase the Home Library Service and the Touch a New World service and following this decision plans will be put in place to ensure all those requesting an alternative service option are followed up. This will include recruitment of additional Home Library service volunteers as needed to meet demand.

12.3 Some users unable to access the library service following the redesign.

Work will be undertaken to contact those specific users who indicated that they would not be able to or would not wish to use any alternative library services. They will be encouraged to share the reasons for their feedback and we will discuss with them whether any of the alternative services may be accessible to them.

12.4 Problems with the new routes and timings once in operation.

The routes have been through checking involving the current mobile drivers but it is proposed that there is an initial 'settling in period' of one month for the new routes to enable small changes to the timetable to be made where any 'teething' problems can be addressed. Final timetables can then be confirmed.

12.5 Not communicating the changes to customers effectively.

Promotional material and information will be available to inform of the changes and notice will be given in advance of any changes coming into effect. For more detail see below.

13. Next steps

13.1 To deliver the redesign the following actions are planned:

- Letter to all mobile customers to update them that a decision has been taken and to thank those who contributed to the consultation and where to find information
- Confirm the mobile library timetable
- Formal staff consultation and staffing review to begin
- Contact customers affected to arrange the alternative service options
- Contact customers who have indicated that they do not feel they will still have access to a library service to discuss their specific need.
- Advertise to customers the cessation of the current mobile library

service and the launch and promotion of the new service.

- 13.2 To mark the change of service it is proposed that there is a two week period where there will be no mobile service in the county. Customers will be made aware of this and no books will be due back for the duration of this period. The two weeks will be used to withdraw the mobile libraries that will no longer operate, relocate the mobiles to their new bases, complete the necessary stock work and give time for the mobile staff to familiarise themselves to the new routes.
- 13.3 The expected launch date of the new mobile library service is late July 2016. A date will be confirmed once all details are confirmed.

14. Recommendations:

Recommendations: The Cabinet Member for Community Services take the decision to progress and implement the redesign of the mobile library service, in particular;

- a) To agree the proposed selection criterion that those mobile stops that received two or fewer visitors on average over the period selected will be withdrawn from the mobile library service.
- b) To agree the change in frequency of stops for every location to every two weeks
- c) To agree the change of days the service operates to Tuesday to Saturday
- d) To agree an increase in the minimum stop time to 30 minutes.
- e) To agree the changes proposed to the number of stops and the timetable as a result of the consultation feedback as detailed in section 5
- f) To agree to review the mobile library service on an annual basis.

15. Background Documents

Report to the Growth, Economic Development and Communities Cabinet Committee on 12th January 2016 –

<https://democracy.kent.gov.uk/ieListDocuments.aspx?CId=833&MId=6114&Ver=4>

16. Contact details

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Appendices:

Appendix A- Proposed Decision Sheet

Appendix B- Copy of the Mobile library public engagement document

Appendix C- Lake Market Research Report

Appendix D- Alternative criteria for the mobile redesign considered.

Appendix E- Updated Equalities Impact Assessment