

Date of meeting:	15/4/2021
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Department / Service:	Economy and Community

Title of Item: Review of the Mobile Libraries Service

Why is guidance needed?

During the Covid-19 crisis, a new arrangement was commenced for supplying a Mobile Service to Homes (monthly visits with a pack of books, usually for vulnerable users), and an on-request home book delivery service was established.

Instead of the usual vehicles, smaller vehicles were hired so that the drivers could conveniently reach all locations within the county. We have not yet restored the Mobile Service, which allows users access to the vehicle to choose books, for reasons relating to demand from users and safety.

Before restoring the Library service, the Mobile Library and Home Service drivers contacted all users to find out whether they wished to start receiving the library service again. Everyone who wanted a Home service currently receives services.

What is the guidance sought?

The purpose of this report is to obtain guidance on the Mobile Service to Homes following a review of the current and historical provision within the Library Service.

We have offered a number of options based on our findings in terms of the demand and current use of the service, and savings that can be made by reviewing the provision pattern.

It is our view that there is an alternative method for service provision following a period of testing demand during the Covid-19 crisis, and we are offering a new working model that will be more efficient in terms of resources, and able to satisfy the changing need and demand from users, allowing us to respond more flexibly to the needs of our users.

What are the background and relevant considerations?

1. The Mobile Service to Homes is currently provided by 3 vehicles serving 3 areas, namely
 - Arfon Mobile and Home Service
 - Dwyfor Mobile and Home Service
 - Meirionnydd Mobile and Home Service

2. Three full time drivers are employed; two vehicles are located at the Caernarfon Library Centre and one at Dolgellau Library.

3. During the period of the pandemic (since restoring services in July 2020), we have been able to provide the Mobile service with three drivers and three smaller vehicles, offering:
 - 3.1. A monthly Home Library service for users
 - 3.2. A book delivery service on request to the home for anyone who lives in Gwynedd. This can include reading packs prepared by staff members or requests for particular books.
 - 3.3. An Impact Assessment was undertaken on this new service - Gwynedd Libraries Home Delivery Service - Phase 1 Service Restoration after Covid-19 (see Link below)

4. In the Gwynedd Council Financial Strategy public consultation undertaken in January 2019, a proposal was introduced to reduce the mobile library service, visiting fewer stops, less regularly. Several observations were received expressing concern about the negative impact on disabled or vulnerable children/people should the mobile library service cease. (5)

5. In the Report on the Views of Service Users - the Library Service 2017-18 - Gwynedd Council by Wales Audit Office, (July 2018), the following recommendations are noted -
 - Ensure that there are effective arrangements for the sharing of information between staff in libraries and library service central managers.
 - Convey the results of future consultations so that service users understand the matters raised and what the Council has done in response.
 - Improve the level of assistance given to mobile library service users. Specifically
 - where possible, provide ICT equipment and access to the internet in mobile libraries to satisfy the needs of library users
 - consider how the service can be used to enable residents in rural areas to get hold of other Council services

6. Approximately 21,000 of Gwynedd's population (17%) live within 0.25 miles of a Mobile Library stop. We have been able to meet the target of the Welsh Public Libraries Standards Quality Indicators for '% of households within 3 miles of a permanent service point or within 0.25 miles of a mobile library stop', which is 80% of Gwynedd's population. By reviewing the Mobile and Home Service and ceasing to visit the mobile stop, this figure would fall to 63% and we would not achieve the current target. Having noted this, the seventh quality standards framework for Welsh Libraries is being discussed for 2021-2021, and it is possible that this target will be under review.

7. The current user figures for the Mobile Service are as follows (users of the monthly service, not the delivery service).

	Arfon	Dwyfor	Meirionnydd	Total
Adults	24	82	68	174
Children / young people	1	0	3	4
Housebound	91	71	139	301
	116	153	210	479

8. In a staff consultation held in November 2020 (a response rate of 66%), 90% of Gwynedd Libraries staff indicated that they agreed or strongly agreed that Gwynedd Libraries should be offering an on-request delivery service for anyone who wished to receive it. In service priority order, the following were noted:
 - Monthly Home Service
 - Delivery service on request
 - Mobile Service with a book van

9. In a Consumer Consultation held between December and January 2021, the question was asked

Would you like the Book Delivery service to be available in the future - even after libraries re-open?
 Out of 134 responses, 83% responded that they would like the service to continue to be available.
 (87% if only on-line responses are considered).

10. The options for providing the Mobile and Home Library Service, and financial implications

Please see the appendix that includes an assessment of the options' advantages and disadvantages.

Option 1

A (monthly) Home and Delivery Service provided by 2** smaller vehicles*, each with a driver:-

- 1 - Arfon/ Dwyfor
- 2 - Meirionnydd

*electric/hybrid vans

**following the retirement of a driver during the next 1-2 years. There would be a separate driver and vehicle for both Arfon and Dwyfor during the period prior to this.

Option 1 - Phase 1-2	Saving on the costs of running one vehicle Savings from one full time driver's employment Lower running costs for smaller vehicles (x 2) Long-term savings from purchasing large vehicles (x3). The cost of the current vehicles is around £100k each.	£4K £25K £3-4K Savings on renewing vehicles in the future (£20-40K+ to renew in 2021 and not purchasing a large vehicle)
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Option 2

A (monthly) Home and Delivery Service provided by 2* smaller vehicles, each with a driver:-

- 1 - Arfon/ Dwyfor
- 1 Meirionnydd

In addition to a (monthly) Mobile Service, provided by one vehicle and one driver for the county.

- 1 - Mobile

*electric/hybrid vans

Option 2	Savings on the costs of running two smaller vehicles would be cancelled due to the costs of running a county-wide Mobile vehicle Long term savings from purchasing large vehicles (x2)	£0 Savings on renewing vehicles in the future (£20-40K+ to renew in 2021 and not renewing a large vehicle and purchasing smaller vehicles)
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Option 3

Keeping the Status Quo, namely three Mobile vehicles, each with a driver providing a (monthly) Home Service and (monthly) Mobile service

- 1 - Arfon

1 - Dwyfor
1 - Meirionnydd

Option 3	No savings	£0
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Timetable

Following the Leadership Team's guidance on these principles, the timetable would be as follows:

February 2021	Receive guidance on the preferred option
February 2021	Develop an implementation model
March 2021	Consult with users
April 2021	Report for the Cabinet to agree on the way forward
May 2021	Implement the new model

Conclusion

Considering the evidence in the report and the engagement that has been undertaken thus far, the Service prefers the adoption of Option 1 as the best provision and implementation model for the future.

The lockdown period has obviously highlighted what matters to the residents of Gwynedd in terms of Library services, and being able to order and receive books at home on request is one of those needs. During this period, we have not received a single comment regarding the lack of availability of a Mobile Library in a village or housing estate. Therefore, during the lockdown period, access to library items has been available in a different way that satisfies the demand from the residents of Gwynedd, and it may be that the presence of a library vehicle as a congregation point in rural communities is no longer such a factor in providing and delivering a service as it once was.

The Members' guidance is welcomed, both on the content of the report and the direction that should be followed for the Mobile Libraries Service in the future.

Equality Impact Assessment

https://timau/safle/llyfrgelloedd/GwasLlyfr/Adfer%20Gwasanaeth%20%20Covid19/GwasCludo_Asesiad%20effaith%20cydraddoldeb.doc

APPENDIX 1

	Advantages	Disadvantages
Option 1 - Phase 1 A (monthly) Home and Delivery Service provided by 3 smaller vehicles*, each with a driver:- 1- Arfon	Able to provide a service to everyone who currently qualifies for the monthly service by delivering reading packs to homes, in addition to offering the delivery service on request.	Failure to reach the WPLS/SLICC target

<p>2. Dwyfor 3. Meirionnydd</p> <p>*electric/hybrid vans</p> <p>Option 1 - Phase 2 A (monthly) Home and Delivery Service provided by 2** smaller vehicles*, each with a driver:- 1 - Arfon/ Dwyfor 2 - Meirionnydd</p> <p>**following the retirement of a driver during the next 1-2 years</p>	<p>Savings from running one vehicle and employing one driver in the medium term</p> <p>Able to offer an additional delivery service by request, removing current obstacles to library use e.g. busyness of users / inconvenient opening hours / transportation issues</p> <p>Making the best use of the Library service's resources.</p> <p>Drivers like the new way of working.</p> <p>Reduction in carbon footprint due to lower fuel consumption for smaller vehicles, which will also be electric/hybrid vehicles.</p>	<p>Moving away from the Audit Office's recommendations due to changes to the service</p> <p>Unable to offer the opportunity for users to enter the van to choose books / meet other users</p> <p>Seen perhaps as a cut to a service - despite the fact that everyone who wants a service can still receive the service as usual.</p>
<p>Option 2</p> <p>A (monthly) Home and Delivery Service provided by 2 smaller vehicles*, each with a driver:- 1 - Arfon/ Dwyfor 1 Meirionnydd</p> <p>In addition to a (monthly) Mobile Service, provided by one vehicle and one driver for the county. 1 - Mobile</p> <p>*electric/hybrid vans</p>	<p>Achieves the current WPLS/SLICC target</p> <p>Better placed to achieve the Audit Office's recommendations</p> <p>Able to offer the opportunity for users to enter the van to choose books / meet other users</p> <p>Able to provide a Home service and a delivery service on request</p>	<p>No savings</p> <p>Low use of the Mobile Service anticipated, so a high cost in terms of use.</p> <p>Some stops attract 0 users over long periods.</p> <p>Continuous promotion is needed.</p> <p>Lower carbon saving.</p> <p>Lower job satisfaction for the Mobile drivers, as well as the implications of situating the vehicle at a central location in the county e.g. Porthmadog - if possible. Long travel distances from the 'depot', meaning that the vehicle is on the road for a significant amount of time. More wasteful of resources.</p>
<p>Option 3</p> <p>Keeping the Status Quo, namely three Mobile vehicles, each with a driver providing a (monthly) Home Service and (monthly) Mobile service 1 - Arfon 1 - Dwyfor 1 - Meirionnydd</p>	<p>Achieves the current WPLS/SLICC target</p> <p>Better placed to achieve the Audit Office's recommendations</p> <p>Able to offer the opportunity for users to enter the van to choose books / meet other users</p>	<p>No savings</p> <p>Low use of the Mobile Service anticipated, so not the best use of the service's resources.</p> <p>Removing the current Delivery service - unable to offer a Deliver service due to the vehicles' size (a problem noted by the Meirionnydd Library driver) and implications in terms of accessibility and time</p> <p>Seen as a step back from a service that has proved to be successful</p>

		<p>and popular. A move backwards rather than a move forwards.</p> <p>No carbon savings</p> <p>Contrary to the feelings and priorities of staff.</p>
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