

ANGUS COUNCIL

NEIGHBOURHOOD SERVICES COMMITTEE – 19 AUGUST 2010

ACCESSING SERVICES IN RURAL AREAS

REPORT BY DIRECTOR OF NEIGHBOURHOOD SERVICES

ABSTRACT: This report provides Members with a progress update with regard to proposals to enhance service provision in rural areas and makes recommendations for further work towards the delivery of this project.

1. RECOMMENDATIONS

1.1 The Committee:

- (i) Approve, in principle, the concept for the proposed service provision;
- (ii) Agree to the commencement of a public consultation process;
- (iii) Approve, in principle, the vehicle specification profiles;
- (iv) Agree to the deletion of stock reservation charges;
- (v) Note that a further report will be brought forward following the public consultation process which will set out the detail of the financial implications and the procurement process.

2. BACKGROUND

2.1 At the meeting of Angus Council's Neighbourhood Services Committee in November 2009, members agreed to investigate the potential to develop new mobile services for rural areas of Angus (Report 823/09). This report also refers to the necessary replacement of the two existing mobile library vehicles and discussions have considered the incorporation of the mobile library service into a vehicle(s) offering additional service provision. Following discussions among relevant officers, this report brings together recommendations for vehicle specification, the procurement process and the necessary consultation with relevant Council services, Community Planning Partners and local communities.

2.2 Reservation charges are currently applied at our full time libraries and had not previously been applied at the part-time libraries or mobile libraries. The rationale being that as the part-time libraries and mobiles had limited stock and opening hours then it was unreasonable to expect customers to pay for requesting material. This now results in customers who travel to a full time library since the closure of the part-time libraries being charged a reservation fee. This is anomalous, inherently unfair and does not provide equality of service throughout the district. It is proposed that we abandon the concept of reservation charges in order to provide a fair and free public library service throughout Angus and to promote the advantages of a genuinely district wide stock.

3. CONCEPT & SPECIFICATION

3.1 Discussions based on Report 823/09 have led to an agreement that it would be mutually beneficial to seek to develop a mobile service which includes the existing library provision, as well as additional public (Council and Community Planning Partnership) services. The nature of the appropriate additional public services will be determined through a public consultation exercise, although options are set out in the previous report. It is proposed that this enhanced service will have three main elements;

3.2 **Vehicle 1**

A larger vehicle is required to provide a mobile library service, with appropriate additional public services identified through public consultation. The vehicle will be in the region of 10.5 metres in length, 2.5 metres width and have a laden weight not exceeding 14 tonne [Category C License]. It is anticipated that, as well as the additional public service information and provision, this vehicle will contain IT provision, internet connectivity; a public/private consultation space with opportunities to engage and have discussion with the Angus Council ACCESS Service. Issues of internet connectivity in some parts of Angus may limit the availability of internet-based services. The routing and timetabling of the service is also subject to public consultation; however it is anticipated that Vehicle 1 will travel to the larger rural communities and other smaller communities with suitable road networks and will be stationary at these sites for significant time periods throughout the day i.e. measured in hours rather than minutes.

3.3 **Vehicle 2**

A second, smaller vehicle is required to provide a smaller mobile library service, additional public services and IT provision, including internet connectivity. Issues of internet connectivity in the most rural parts of Angus may limit the availability of internet-based services in Vehicle 2. The vehicle will be in the region of 7.5 metres in length, 2.5 metres width and have a laden weight not exceeding 7.5 tonne [Category C1 License]. It is anticipated that Vehicle 2 will provide services to communities which are inaccessible to Vehicle 1 or where population spread makes the use of Vehicle 1 impractical.

3.4 **Vehicle 3**

A third vehicle, smaller than both Vehicle 1 and Vehicle 2 is required to provide a more flexible service for the most remote, isolated or housebound communities and individuals. The vehicle will be in the region of 3-4 metres in length, 2 metres width and be broadly similar to a Ford Transit and specified to best cope with road conditions in the extreme rural areas of Angus. This service will be able to react to personal requests on a case by case basis. Vehicle 3 may also be able to offer an additional service in the Glens communities, by transporting collections of books, other reading material and relevant information leaflets and pamphlets to pre-agreed locations where they would be made available. Again, suggestions of this nature will require to be tested through a public consultation exercise.

3.5 **IT and Broadband Connectivity**

A key element of these proposals is being able to offer a purpose built IT suite with internet connectivity which is not available domestically in much of rural Angus. The availability of broadband and the type/speed of internet connectivity is dependent on the type of technology adopted, geographical location, and the ability for costs to be contained within available capital and revenue budgets. Cultural Services will work closely with the Information Technology Division to ensure that the best solution is identified in terms of cost and functionality. The routing and siting of the service will be dependent upon the availability and means of delivery of broadband at certain locations, as well as the results of the public consultation outlined below.

4. PUBLIC CONSULTATION

- 4.1 In order to develop a sustainable service that meets the needs of Angus' citizens, it is necessary to undertake an extensive public consultation exercise. This public consultation exercise, managed through Cultural Services, with support from the Local Community Planning Teams will seek views on the following issues;
- The nature of the additional public services to be provided in the vehicles;
 - The provision of additional services, e.g. a private meeting space;
 - The routing and timetabling of the service.
- 4.2 The results of the public consultation will play an important role in the development of a cost-effective and balanced service, through the creation of relevant criteria, in order to determine which aspects of the service are most appropriate for each community. No firm details are being proposed at this stage; however it is felt that a combination of individual physical mobility, geographic distance from fixed full-time libraries and public transport provision, combined with the public consultation results should provide a sound basis for these criteria.
- 4.3 The consultation itself will consist of public notices in local newspapers, inviting comments; letters to key groups across the county; a page on the Have Your Say database; and public meetings at key locations in rural Angus. It is suggested that the consultation commences on Monday 30 August, ending on Friday 24 September, with feedback provided thereafter.

5. PROCUREMENT ARRANGEMENTS

- 5.1 It is anticipated that the procurement process would begin soon after the consultation process outlined above has informed the detail of the vehicle specification profile, subject to financial and information technology requirements being satisfied. Once started, it is anticipated that the procurement procedure should be concluded within 6 months, with the intention being to try and achieve tender award early in financial year 2011/12.
- 5.2 The procurement evaluation procedure followed will be a single stage Open ITT EU one with the contract evaluation and award being assessed on the basis of the most economically advantageous tender [MEAT] with an anticipated 70:30 cost:quality split.
- 5.3 The department will work closely with the Corporate Procurement Team to ensure compliance with Financial Regulations and effective progress in the procurement process. In line with the term of the revised financial regulations approved by the Council on 24 June 2010, it is intended that procurement authority will be requested in the report which will be submitted following the conclusion of the public consultation.

6. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

- 6.1 Whilst there are no direct financial implications resulting from the recommendations of this report, the ultimate procurement of appropriate vehicles will obviously have financial consequences. Members are asked to note that detailed financial implications will be set out in the report to be presented following the conclusion of the public consultation.
- 6.2 For information at this time, however, Members should note that £180k has been provided for the replacement of the current mobile library vans in the Neighbourhood

Services Capital Budget for 2010/11 within the General Vehicle Replacement Programme. In addition to this, a request has been lodged with the Scottish Government to make use of the remaining Angus Rural Services Priority Area budget (£52k), coupled with funding applications to the Fairer Scotland Fund (£20k), Rural Tayside Leader (£50k) and Rural Broadband Scheme (£30k). The outcomes of these requests for funding are unknown at this time, however, should they all be successful, a total capital budget of £332,000 may be available. As noted above, fuller consideration of the capital funding requirement for the proposals outlined in this report and comparison with available funding will be detailed in the future report to Committee. This report will consider any curtailment of the proposals that is considered necessary in light of available capital funding, together with the associated revenue budget implications and how these will be funded.

- 6.3 In respect of the removal of library stock reservation charges, income from these amounted to £1,350 in 2009/10 and the effect of the deletion of these fees will be contained within the libraries revenue budget.

7. HUMAN RIGHTS IMPLICATIONS

- 7.1 There are no human rights implications arising from this report.

8. EQUALITIES IMPLICATIONS

- 8.1 The issues dealt with in this report have been the subject of consideration from an equalities perspective (as required by legislation). An equalities impact assessment has been undertaken.

9. SINGLE OUTCOME AGREEMENT

- 9.1 This report contributes to the following local outcome(s) contained within the Single Outcome Agreement for Angus;
- Communities in Angus are safe, secure and vibrant;
 - People in Angus can access amenities and services through a variety of affordable and sustainable means;
 - The places in which we live in Angus develop in a sustainable manner;
 - A good quality of life is enjoyed by all in Angus.

10. CONSULTATION

- 10.1 The Chief Executive and all Angus Council Directors, the Head of Law and Administration and Head of Finance have been consulted in the preparation of this report.

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NOTE: No background papers, as defined by Section 50D of the Local Government (Scotland) Act 1973 (other than any containing confidential or exempt information), were relied on to any material extent in preparing this paper

CS/LCP/NS/BDS/CD/LH