

Equality Impact Assessment



Name of project/proposal

Withdrawal of Mobile Library Service as part of Hampshire Library Service Transformation - Strategy to 2020

Contact name

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Purpose for project/proposal

Hampshire Library Service has to meet the challenge of providing a service that meets people's changing requirements of libraries in times of decline in use, whilst addressing the need to make savings by 2020, estimated to be £1.7 million, part of the impact of Government reduction in funding for Local Authorities. In response the Library Service has produced a Strategy to 2020 which sets out proposals that will ensure that it is sustainable and relevant to the changing needs of the people that use the service, whilst meeting reductions in the budget. One of the key proposals is to withdraw the Mobile Library Service by the end of June 2016 and provide customers who use the service with alternative methods of accessing a library service. This will contribute towards the efficiency savings required for 2017/18.

This EIA covers the proposal to withdraw the Mobile Library Service. There is a separate EIA that covers the other proposals laid out in the Strategy.

Consultation

Has a consultation been carried out?

Yes

There was a public consultation from 2 November 2015 to 16 January 2016.

Statutory considerations

Impact

Age	Low
Disability	Low
Sexual orientation	Low
Race	Low
Religion and belief	Low
Gender reassignment	Low
Sex	Low
Marriage and civil partnership	None
Pregnancy and maternity	Low

Other policy considerations

Poverty	Low
Rurality	Medium
Other factors	None

If other please describe

Geographical impact

All Hampshire

Have you identified any medium or high impact?*

Yes

No

Equality statement

Hampshire's Mobile Library Service is much valued by its customers, but use of the service has declined significantly. The number of issues of books from mobile libraries declined by almost 40% in the 5 years leading to 2011 and this was one of the drivers for a major review of the service in 2011. As a result the number of mobile library vehicles and the number of communities visited were reduced significantly in 2011. But use of the service continues to decline, with a 20% decrease in book issues from mobile libraries in the two years between 2012/13 and 2014/15. Recent analysis shows that only 2,230 customers borrowed books from a mobile library in the first 6 months of 2015, compared to the 203,000 customers who borrowed at least one item from a library. This means that only 1% of customers use the Mobile Library Service.

Another problem facing the service is the age of the mobile library vehicles. All five vehicles are almost ten years old and coming to the end of their lease. They are becoming increasingly unreliable and expensive to maintain but to replace the vehicles would be very expensive and enter the Library Service into a long term financial commitment. This is difficult to justify, taking into account the low numbers of people that use the service and the requirement for the Service to make savings estimated at £1.7 million by 2020, but likely to be higher.

The impact of the proposal to withdraw the Mobile Library Service is considered to be medium for Age and Rurality. The impact of the proposal on the other protected characteristics and policy considerations is considered to be low or none.

Impact – Age, Sex and Disability

The impact for Age is assessed as medium because 64% of mobile library customers are aged 60 and over compared to Hampshire libraries as a whole where 27% of customers are 60 and over. As older people tend to have more health and mobility problems than other age groups which can make it more difficult for them to travel, particularly if they do not drive, they will be more affected than other age groups if the Mobile Library Service is withdrawn. Children and young people will be less affected as only 13% of mobile library customers are children (0-17) compared with 32% for Hampshire libraries.

The impact on Sex is assessed as low. Over two thirds of mobile library customers are female but the proposal to withdraw the service will impact equally on both men and women.

The impact on Disability is also assessed as low. There is no data on the numbers of people with a disability that use the Mobile Library Service, but there may be some customers with a disability who will no longer be able to use the physical library service if the Mobile Library Service is withdrawn. For example, they may have sufficient mobility to use a mobile library which stops close to their home. Or, if they have a visual impairment, they may be comfortable walking round the familiar surroundings of their village but not a town.

Impact – Rurality

The impact for Rurality is assessed as medium because the Mobile Library Service only visits communities that are more than 2 miles from a static library and therefore the majority of mobile library stops are in rural locations. Depending where they live in Hampshire some people will have to travel over 10 miles to visit a library. This means that people living in rural locations will find it more difficult to visit a library if the Mobile Library Service is withdrawn. This difficulty will be increased if they have a disability that affects mobility, have to rely on public transport or have problems carrying heavy weights such as books for any distance, which they may have to do if they visit a library in a town.

Impact – other characteristics

The impact is also assessed as low for the other protected characteristics and policy considerations with the exception of marriage and civil partnership, which is assessed as none. We don't have data on the numbers of people that fall within these characteristics that use the Mobile Library Service, but it is possible that they may be impacted by one or more of the proposals. It is possible, for example, that someone who is transgender or transitioning may be comfortable visiting a mobile library where they know the driver and the other customers are neighbours, but not comfortable visiting a library in a busy town. Customers who use the Mobile Library Service are not charged for overdue books, but customers using static libraries are fined if their books become overdue. The worry about possible fines could prevent some mobile library customers from using static libraries.

Potential Mitigating Actions

For the 1% of customers of the Library Service that use mobile libraries, there are the following alternative ways to access library services:

- Visit one of Hampshire's 48 static libraries or 5 community managed libraries
- The Home Library Service or Good Neighbour Scheme
- Use the online library service, including eBooks, eAudiobooks, eMagazines and newspapers

The results of the public consultation indicate that the alternative of visiting a static library is least popular with mobile library customers. However data shows that of the 2,230 customers borrowing items from a mobile library, a third of these customers also borrowed items from a static library in the same period of time, so for these customers visiting a static library is a possible alternative.

Those customers who only use the Mobile Library Service will be contacted by the Library Service and offered the alternative of the Home Library Service. Here volunteers visit customers at least once a month with books selected specifically for them. Often this activity also provides invaluable social interaction for people who feel isolated with the volunteer staying longer than just a few minutes to chat about reading. There is also the Good Neighbour scheme designed for relatives or friends who exchange books on someone's behalf. Registration with the scheme means that no fines are incurred in the event of late returns to the library.

For those customers who are able to access and use IT, Hampshire Library Services provides a free and fast evolving online library service which includes the facilities to download eBooks, eAudiobooks, eMagazines and newspapers. There is also a wealth of eResources available to help improve knowledge of subjects for personal interest and also for more formal study. Although the perception is that mobile library customers, being older, are less likely to have access to IT or will be less adept at using IT and the internet, Data from the Office of National Statistics shows that

by 2013 91% of Hampshire's population had used the internet and the ongoing Hampshire Superfast Broadband Programme has resulted in 96% broadband coverage by 2016. The Library Service holds workshops and classes in the use of IT for beginners and improvers, and is investigating the potential for holding workshops on using the online library service in community centres or village halls in villages that currently have well used mobile library stops. The Library Service did consider the option of loaning free eReaders to mobile library customers but the results of the public consultation indicate that less than half of respondents who use the Mobile Library Service agreed with this suggestion.

The Library Service also consulted on the possible alternative of setting up new Community Library Exchange facilities in partnership arrangements with service providers in the local community so that items reserved online can be returned or collected closer to home. However research has shown these will be too expensive to set up for the amount of use they are likely to have.

We know that the Mobile Library Service is much valued and the results of the public consultation indicate that of those respondents who use a mobile library, 76% disagree with the proposal to withdraw the service. However overall 62% of all the respondents who took part in the open consultation agreed with the proposal to withdraw the service and in the separate telephone survey of Hampshire residents 75% of those questioned agreed with the withdrawal of the Mobile Library Service. Only 1% of Hampshire Library Service customers use the Mobile Library Service and it is the most expensive section of the Library Service to run (£3.95 per issue on a mobile library compared to £2.23 per issue in a static library). Although withdrawal of the service will have an impact on customers, especially those living in rural areas, the decline in use of the Mobile Library Service combined with the requirement to make savings of £1.7million by 2020 plus the need to invest in new vehicles if the service is to continue, means that it is difficult to justify keeping the service. To make similar savings to those gained from closing the Mobile Library Service (£360,000) by making other changes such as further reducing the Book Fund, reducing opening hours or closing libraries would have an impact on many more than 1% of Library Service customers.

Date to review actions

18 Apr 2017

Final decision date

Final decision date due

18 Apr 2016

Decision to be made by

Executive Member