

BRIDGEND COUNTY BOROUGH COUNCIL

REPORT TO CABINET

21 JANUARY 2020

REPORT OF THE HEAD OF OPERATIONAL SERVICES – COMMUNITIES

BRIDGEND SHOPMOBILITY SCHEME

1. Purpose of Report.

- 1.1 The purpose of this report is to seek Cabinet approval for proposals to meet the Medium Term Financial Strategy (MTFS) budget reduction requirement in respect of the operation of Bridgend Shopmobility Scheme.

2. Connection to Corporate Improvement Objectives / Other Corporate Priorities.

- 2.1 This report assists in the achievement of the following corporate priority/priorities:
- Smarter use of resources – ensuring that all its resources (financial, physical, human and technological) are used as effectively and efficiently as possible and support the development of resources throughout the community that can help deliver the Council's priorities.

3. Background.

- 3.1 Shopmobility is a scheme operated by Bridgend County Borough Council from premises within the Brackla multi storey car park which lends manual wheelchairs, powered wheelchairs and powered scooters to members of the public with limited mobility, to shop and to visit leisure and commercial facilities within Bridgend Town Centre. The facility is open **between 08:30am and 5.00pm** on Monday to Saturday.
- 3.2 Shopmobility in Bridgend is for anyone, young or old, whether their disability is temporary or permanent. It is available for those with injuries, long or short-term disabilities – anyone who needs help with mobility. Shopmobility is about the freedom to get around. There is no specific requirement for someone to be disabled to use it.
- 3.3 Shopmobility actively encourages inclusion and equality by providing the environment for wheelchairs, power chairs and scooters to be used safely.
- 3.4 The MTFS 2019-20 to 2022-23 budget reduction proposal COM 26, which was approved by Council on 20 February 2019 proposed savings of £5,000 in 2019-20 and a further £10,000 in 2020-21 predicated on the introduction of charging to users of the Shopmobility facility in Bridgend Town Centre to reduce/remove the current level of subsidy.
- 3.5 The provision is not a statutory duty and one not provided in other town centres of the county borough or in many of the town centres of neighbouring authorities. On this basis it is reasonable to investigate whether introducing charging for use is a

viable way of reducing the overall cost of the service. If however this does not prove feasible, in order to make the full saving required over successive financial years closure of the facility may prove necessary.

4. Current situation / proposal.

4.1 To utilise the Shopmobility Scheme customers are required to join the scheme for which there is currently no charge. Once registered, customers tender a £2 deposit for the use of the apparatus. On their return the £2 deposit may be refunded if requested. This deposit was first introduced some 15 years ago and has remained unchanged since then. Of note the majority of users currently donate the £2 deposit.

4.2 The figures shown in the table below gives a brief summary of Shopmobility finances for 2018/19 financial year.

Costs related to opening hours	£29,800
Total site costs, administrative expenses and maintenance of equipment	£8,200
Donations (4,056) hires	(£7,300)
Net operating cost	£30,700

4.3 As indicated in paragraph 4.2, the service receives donations of circa £7,300 from users of the service but still has a deficit of £30,700, which is subsidised by Bridgend County Borough Council. As well as the shortfall indicated above there are various indirect costs associated with the facility such as its location in the Brackla multistorey carpark which removes car parking spaces, and therefore potential income. Additionally, costs such as rates and utilities are absorbed in the Car Park management costs.

4.4 Some staffing costs are also absorbed, as when the current shopmobility staff are absent due to sick leave or on annual leave, then their shifts are covered by Council staff from other areas within the Communities Directorate.

4.5 Usage figures are as follows:

2016/17 recorded usage 4,088
2017/18 recorded usage 3,993
2018/19 recorded usage 4,056.

4.6 There are other Shopmobility schemes in Wales which have different ways of operating the scheme. These can vary between charging a membership fee every year, to also having a hiring out fee every time a mobility scooter is utilised.

4.7 A range of interventions have been explored based around differing operating models and examination of current usage. This examination resulted in the following proposals:

- **Change the opening time from 08:30am – 5pm to 10am - 4pm** - usage identified very few transactions before 10am, whereas the bulk of usage is between the hours of 10am until 4pm. This change would reduce the operational

time from 51 hours to 36 hours and make a financial saving in respect of operational costs.

- **Introduce a £5 annual registration fee** – An annual registration fee of £5 based upon approximately 200 members would provide a possible off-set in costs of £1,000 per year. Currently, any joining member receives a membership card after providing evidence of residence or provision of security against the loan of a scooter for persons residing outside the borough. The charge would offset the administration cost for production of the membership photo card, and maintenance of an up to-date database. The annual membership/renewal fee of £5 would include the first hire on renewal or new membership.
- **Introduction of a £5 fee when equipment is hired** – This would require Shopmobility members to pay for the service every time they use it instead of the £2 donation as is currently the case which based on 2018-19 usage would equate to a financial contribution of £20,280.
- **Seek Grant Funding** – As the provision is specifically aimed at persons with mobility issues it may be possible to secure government grants towards capital purchase of equipment. However, there are no guarantees that such funding would be forthcoming or be provided on a long term basis.

Consultation and Consideration of Proposals

- 4.8 The consideration of users paying for shopmobility services formed part of the Council's 'Shaping Bridgend's Future' 2018 consultation whereby respondents were 48% in favour of exploring options of charging for the shopmobility service.
- 4.9 In addition to this consultation, 281 letters dated 30 August 2019 were sent to current members of the scheme to gauge their views on the proposals regarding operational times and proposed hire charges. The greatest concern related to the charge for the hire of the mobility scooter. 39% of respondents indicated that a charge of £5.00 per hire would not prove affordable and made alternative proposals that have been considered in arriving at the proposed recommendations.
- 4.10 All expressed a dependency on this service in one form or another to assist in mobility issues. From this engagement it is recommended that the charge should be £3.00 per hire. Based on 2018-19 usage, this would equate to a financial contribution of £12,168.
- 4.11 In relation to opening times 80% of responses were not against such a proposal but 20% of responses did indicate that this may impact upon either early shopping or medical appointments. In consideration of the comments it is recommended to amend the proposal of opening times from 10am until 4pm to 9:15am until 4pm providing an operational time from 51 hours to 40.5 hours.

5. Effect upon Policy Framework & Procedure Rules.

- 5.1 There is no effect upon Policy Framework or Procedure Rules

6. Equalities Impact Assessment

6.1 An full equality impact assessment has been carried out and is attached at Appendix 1 for information.

7.0 Wellbeing of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015 Implications

7.1 The Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015 Assessment Template has been completed and a summary of the implications from the assessment relating to the five ways of working is outlined below in respect of the proposed changes to the Shopmobility Scheme:

- **Long-term**
The proposal seeks sustainable funding for the provision of the Bridgend shopmobility scheme.
- **Prevention**
The proposal seeks sustainable sources of funding for the shopmobility scheme to ensure that the facility can be correctly maintained and managed for the benefit of the membership
- **Integration**
The provision of a shopmobility scheme enables persons with mobility issues to access services within the town centre
- **Collaboration**
The facility enables persons without access to mobility scooters to spot hire to enable access to services within the town centre, thus the proposal seeks to ensure sustainability for such provision
- **Involvement**
The proposal has been subject to the Council's consultation process in regard of MTFs and engagement has taken place with scheme members.

8. Financial Implications.

8.1 The Medium Term Financial Strategy includes a budget reduction of £5,000 in 2019-20 with a move to full cost recovery beyond that. The proposals in this report seek to address the initial saving as well as mechanisms to move towards full cost recovery with implementation from 1st April 2020.

8.2 The following table is the potential impact of the revised proposals based upon 200 members and 4,000 hires per annum:-

Hire charge contribution	£12,000
Membership fee contribution	£1,000
Savings related to running costs	£10,000
Total	£23,000
External Grant contribution	£5,000

9. Recommendation.

9.1 It is recommended that Cabinet approves the following proposals to meet the MTFS budget reductions requirement in respect of the operation of the Bridgend Shopmobility Scheme with implementation from 1st April 2020:

- Changes to the Shopmobility opening time from 08:30am – 5pm to 09:15am – 4pm
- Introduction of an annual registration fee of £5, includes the first hire on renewal or new membership.
- Introduction of a daily hire charge of £3
- Delegated authority is given to the Corporate Director for Communities to authorise future changes to the Bridgend Shopmobility service

9.2 Cabinet should also note that Officers will continue to explore the opportunity for external grant funding to support the service.

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HEAD OF OPERATIONS – COMMUNITY SERVICES
January 2020

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Background documents:

Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015 Assessment - dated 19 Nov 2019