

BRIDGEND COUNTY BOROUGH COUNCIL

REPORT TO THE TOWN AND COMMUNITY COUNCIL FORUM

14 JULY 2014

REPORT OF THE CORPORATE DIRECTOR - COMMUNITIES

SHOPMOBILITY SCHEME

1. Purpose of Report

- 1.1 To provide an update to the Town and Community Council Forum on the operation of the Shopmobility Scheme in Bridgend Town Centre.

2. Connection to Corporate Improvement Plan/ Other Corporate Priority

- 2.1 The provision of a Shopmobility Scheme is an important part of the Council meeting its equalities responsibilities and ensures that those people with accessibility difficulties can more easily access Bridgend Town Centre and therefore plays an important part in the Council's priority improvement theme of developing the local economy.

3. Background

- 3.1 Shopmobility is a scheme operated by Bridgend County Borough Council from premises within the Rhiw 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 09.00am 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 need 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.

4. Current Situation

- 4.1 To utilise the Shopmobility Scheme customers are required to join the scheme for which there is no charge. Once registered, customers tender a £2 deposit for the use of the apparatus. On their return the £2 deposit is refunded if requested.
- 4.2 The figures shown in the table below represent the outturn position for Shopmobility finances for the 2013/14 financial year:

Total Salary costs	£19,136
Total site costs, administrative expenses and maintenance of equipment	£3,488
Grant from Bridgend Town Council	£(10,000)

Donations	£(5,630)
Total Shortfall	£6,994

- 4.3 As can be seen from the table above, the service receives a donation of £10,000 from Bridgend Town Council but still has a projected £6,994 shortfall which is subsidised by Bridgend County Borough Council. As well as the shortfall indicated above there are various absorbed costs associated with the facility such as the office space located in the Rhiw Car Park which removes car park spaces. Additionally costs such as rates and utilities, IT and management and support are absorbed in the Car Park management costs.
- 4.4 Some staff costs are also hidden, as when the current staff are absent due to sick leave or on annual leave, then their shifts are covered by Council Staff from other areas within the Directorate. It is also the case that there is no actual Shopmobility staff working on Saturday and this is currently covered by a member of Council staff from another part of the Directorate.
- 4.5 The customers utilising the facility in 2012/13 was 5,230, with 145 being new members. The figures are not yet available for 2013/14.
- 4.6 There are approximately 13 Shopmobility schemes in Wales at the current time and many have different ways of operating the scheme. These can vary between charging a membership fee every year to having a hiring out fee every time a machine is utilised.
- 4.7 In view of the ongoing subsidy, consideration is currently being given to refocusing the scheme. The scheme costs are underwritten by the Council with the support of £10,000 from Bridgend Town Council. In order to reduce the financial deficit which has been subsidised every year, various considerations are being made as to how the service could become more sustainable. Such suggestions include:
- Potential to introduce a member registration fee
 - Introduce a charge for equipment hire
 - Seek contributions from other local town and community councils
 - Seek external involvement to provide and develop the scheme
 - Seek other service providers to deliver mobility and other services.
- 4.8 Within Bridgend Town Centre there are aspirations to regenerate the area around the Rhiw Car Park and the impact of such changes needs to be considered within the timing of changes to the shopmobility provision.
- 4.9 This is especially the case if external providers are to be included in this service provision, as they would need to have definitive information as to the location and users for any such service within the Town Centre.
- 4.10 The proposals for Vibrant and Viable Places Grant are yet to be fully established, as the funding that has been announced is less than the programme of works originally identified. However, following the recent Welsh Government approval of the Council's revised proposals we anticipate the demolition of the existing Rhiw multi-storey car park and the redevelopment of that site. Clearly, this will have significant

implications for the Shopmobility Scheme both during the construction period and with regard to the development of a new car park.

- 4.11 Any new or revised Shopmobility Scheme will need to be either designed into the new car park or sited elsewhere. This provides an opportunity to amend or refocus the service if this is deemed desirable.

5. Effect upon Policy Framework and Procedure Rules

- 5.1 There is no effect on the policy framework and procedure rules.

6. Equalities Impact Assessment

- 6.1 Any changes to the Shopmobility Scheme would require a full impact assessment using the Council's Equalities Impact Assessment Toolkit.

7. Financial Implications

- 7.1 The financial implications are as set out in paragraph 4.2 in the main body of the report.

8. Recommendation

- 8.1 That the Town and Community Council Form note the report.

Mark Shephard
CORPORATE DIRECTOR - COMMUNITIES
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Contact Officer: Kevin Mulcahy, Group Manager Highway Services
Telephone: (01656) 642535
E-mail: Kevin.Mulcahy@bridgend.gov.uk
Background Papers: None