

**WEST OXFORDSHIRE DISTRICT COUNCIL**

**ENVIRONMENT OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE:**

**THURSDAY 20 JULY 2017**

**WITNEY SHOPMOBILITY SCHEME**

**REPORT OF THE HEAD OF ENVIRONMENT AND COMMERCIAL SERVICES**

**(Contact: Claire Locke, Tel: (01993) 861344)**

**1. PURPOSE**

To report on the current Shopmobility Service, and the future investment required and invite comments from Environment Overview and Scrutiny Committee on the service proposals, which will be submitted to Cabinet.

**2. RECOMMENDATION**

That the Committee note the contents of this report and provides comments on the future service to form part of the report to be submitted to Cabinet.

**3. BACKGROUND**

- 3.1. In 2003, the Council (WODC) entered into an agreement with Oxford City Council (OCC) for the provision of a Shop Mobility Service within Witney town centre. The aim was to provide free mobility equipment for those individuals with mobility impairments whilst using the shopping facilities of the town. The service is based in a council owned building adjacent to the public conveniences in Langdale Gate, and the equipment is to be used and returned by the client within the same day.
- 3.2. The contract with OCC was terminated in autumn 2013 and WODC brought the service in-house, creating an efficiency saving of £20,000.
- 3.3. The Council employs one part-time officer, who transferred from OCC to WODC, who manages the daily provision of this service. When this officer is on leave a Parking Civil Enforcement Officer covers this role. This in turn leaves the parking enforcement team under-resourced for these periods. This cost is not reflected in the financial summary as the CEO costs have never been recharged to the Shop Mobility service.
- 3.4. During 2013-14 the service was promoted in various magazines and leaflets, with an open day to raise awareness. No active promotion of the service has been undertaken since that time.

**Current Operation/Usage**

- 3.5. The service is operated four days per week; Monday, Wednesday, Thursday and Friday, 9:30am to 4pm. There are three disabled spaces in the Woolgate Car Park near the shop, and 29 spaces in Le Touquet Square next to Waitrose.
- 3.6. The shopmobility administrator takes bookings, provides training for new users, books the equipment out and in, and ensures the equipment is clean and fit for purpose.
- 3.7. All users are required to register with the service, fill in the application form and sign a health and safety disclaimer and declaration.
- 3.8. Usage figures are as follows:

<b>Year</b>	<b>Total uses per year</b>	<b>Average no of visits per day</b>
2009	561	4.6
2010	652	5.3
2011	462	3.1
2012	443	2.9
2013	502	2.4
2014	711	3.4
2015	594	2.8
2016	667	3.1

- 3.9. There are approximately 32 regular users who have used the service five or more times in the last 12 months.

### **Condition Survey of Equipment**

- 3.10. The Parking Manager commissioned a local company to carry out a complete condition survey of all the equipment and produce a report. In April they reported that two pieces of equipment were no longer fit for purpose or were irreparable as parts were obsolete. Since then a further scooter has broken down and could not be repaired. There are now just five motorised scooters remaining. There are also five manual wheelchairs which remain usable as long as they are regularly maintained and serviced.

### **Budget 2016/17**

- 3.11. The 2016/17 budget was as follows:

<b>Item</b>	<b>Amount</b>
Employee costs	£17,500
Supplies and Services	£6,300
Support Services	£4,100
<b>Total</b>	<b>£27,900</b>

- 3.12. The cost to user ratio is very high; assuming 667 users at £27,900 it is £42 per use. The Council does not charge users for this service but some users do make nominal voluntary donations. Approximately £400 has been received 2013 – 2016/17.
- 3.13. Historically the equipment has been maintained by a couple of the Parking Civil Enforcement Officers who have basic knowledge of the equipment. However, these staff are not trained or qualified to do this and this exposes the Council to a considerable risk, if a faulty scooter was to result in an accident or injury. Most of the equipment is now 10 – 15 years old and should be maintained and serviced by professionals and a replacement programme put in place.
- 3.14. A full audit review was requested by the Parking Manager, as they had identified a number of concerns and wanted the support of Audit in undertaking a service review. The Audit review highlighted shortfalls in the service provision and some risks, including:
- Lack of specific insurance for this service – appropriate levels of buildings, contents and liability insurance are needed
  - The need to review and improve procedures relating to personal safety, safeguarding, the Shopmobility staff guidance document, water testing, smoke detector testing, completion, updating and recording of user forms, fault reporting and recording of donations

## **Other Shopmobility Schemes in Oxfordshire**

3.15. Other schemes are as follows:

- Oxford City Council provides a Shopmobility scheme in Oxford
- Cherwell District Council provides a Shopmobility scheme in Bicester
- South Oxfordshire District Council consulted on a Shopmobility scheme for Didcot in November 2015 and whilst they identified support for a scheme they decided not to proceed due to uncertainty regarding the amount of use of the scheme
- There is a Shopmobility scheme in the Castle Quay shopping centre, Banbury and one at Templars Square shopping centre, Cowley, Oxford, both of which are provided privately by the shopping centres

## **4. OPTIONS**

### **Service investment supported by partnership funding and/or sponsorship**

- 4.1. It is proposed that as the service requires further investment, partnership funding and/or commercial sponsorship is sought in order to protect future service provision.
- 4.2. In order to ensure that a safe and suitable service is offered to vulnerable members of the public and to protect the Council from legal, financial and reputational risk, the current service cannot continue. There needs to be investment in the service, with the purchase of new equipment, a maintenance contract and suitable insurance.
- 4.3. Each Scooter currently costs around £2500 new and the service really requires six motorised scooters plus the manual wheelchairs. In addition there are costs for the ancillary equipment including raincovers, ponchos, baskets, leg supports etc.
- 4.4. Whilst most of the equipment is 10 – 15 years old, there should really be a replacement programme with replacement far more frequently to ensure the equipment remains reliable. The NHS replaces mobility equipment every three years. It is likely replacement for the mobility service every five to eight years may be appropriate.
- 4.5. A capital allocation of £5000 per year for a replacement programme would allow complete replacement of scooters within three years and then replacement of ancillary equipment and wheelchairs in the following years before a rolling programme of scooter replacement needs to start again.
- 4.6. In order to support the costs involved in delivering the shopmobility service, funding via sponsorship or partnership subsidy will be sought. It may be possible through engagement with other public sector partners such as Witney Town Council or the Clinical Commissioning Group to seek funding for the scheme from them. In addition, as some Shopmobility schemes are funded entirely by shopping centres, it may be possible to secure sponsorship from the Woolgate centre or specific shops in the Town. Both of these potential funding routes will be fully explored.

### **Service Closure**

- 4.7. As an alternative, the Council could decide to cease its support of this discretionary service.

## **5. RISKS**

- 5.1. The Council needs to consider the following key risks:

- Failure to acquire suitable insurance may mean the council suffers legal, financial or reputational losses if a theft, accident or injury occurs
- Failure to secure a suitable professional maintenance plan for the equipment places the vulnerable users at risk as the equipment is more likely to breakdown while in use or malfunction increasing the risk of accident or injury
- Failure to invest in new equipment will mean the number of scooters and wheelchairs that breakdown will increase and the number available for use will gradually decrease as it is no longer economically viable to repair older equipment and parts may no longer be available

## 6. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

6.1. The financial implications are as follows:

<b>Service improvement</b>	<b>Costs</b>
Existing estimated annual service cost	£27,900
Insurance cost	£2,000
Maintenance plan	£2,000
<b>Total annual revenue cost</b>	<b>£31,900</b>
<b>Annual Capital allocation</b> for equipment replacement programme	<b>£5,000</b>

- 6.2. Including the annual capital costs, the revised costs above would mean this service would cost an estimated £55 per use based on current service take up.
- 6.3. The Council could introduce charges for this service but this would be highly likely to reduce usage further as those using the service are quite likely to be those who cannot afford to purchase their own scooter. If charges were set to cover service costs it is likely there would be no service users.
- 6.4. The capital allocation could potentially be met from the existing vehicle and equipment replacement capital programme.

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Background Papers:  
None