

Dorset Library Service

Briefing note about the implementation of agreed changes to the mobile library service

August 2016

In June 2016, the Cabinet approved changes to the mobile library service. The changes are:

- to maintain the mobile library service to residential homes and sheltered accommodation across the county
- to cease providing the public library mobile library service and to focus resources on providing alternative access to library services to those who cannot travel to a static library.

More information about the background and context to this change including the consultation results can be found at:

<http://dorset.moderngov.co.uk/documents/g902/Public%20reports%20pack%2016th-Jun-2016%2010.00%20People%20and%20Communities%20Overview%20and%20Scrutiny%20Committee.pdf?T=10>

(agenda item no 9)

The information below is intended to help local County Councillors when meeting with local parish councils and/or in responding to queries from local residents about the issue.

What is meant by alternative access to library services?

There are a number of ways in which people can continue to access to library services:

- the network of 25 DCC managed libraries plus the 8 community managed libraries. The consultation results showed that 61% of respondents said that they would use their nearest static library. 76% of the population in Dorset are within 2 miles of a DCC library and 94% of the population are within 5 miles of a DCC library. Please note that this does not include the 8 community managed libraries.
- Home Library Service for readers who are housebound, delivered in partnership with the Royal Voluntary Service (RVS). More information about this service is provided below.
- Access to e-books and e-audio downloads are available via the library pages on the Dorset for You website. These e-resources can be downloaded for up to a 2 week period and 'borrowed' free of charge. It is understood that using online services may not suit all users and that the broadband connectivity in some areas does not easily support online access. However for some mobile library users this will provide an alternative way of easily accessing reading materials.
- The good neighbour facility where family/friends/neighbours can borrow on behalf of an individual with an extended loan period and no overdue charges.
- Work in and with communities to help people continue to access library services.

What is the Home Library Service for readers who are housebound?

This is a service already offered by the library service from most of its libraries. Volunteers managed by the Royal Voluntary Service (RVS) deliver books (or talking books) to people who are unable to visit their local library due to a health condition, disability or frailty. Work is in hand to expand this service to visit areas which the mobile library currently serves. Books are chosen to meet the reader's preferences and normally delivered on a three weekly basis by RVS volunteers to the person's home. This service is provided free of charge.

How will mobile library users who are interested in the Home library service find out about it?

The library service has already started asking mobile library users about expressions of interest in using the Home Library Service. The staff on the mobile libraries know their users very well and are ensuring that people are aware of the service and gathering contact details of those interested in the service.

Later in the summer, these users will be contacted by either the library service or the RVS about the service.

When will the mobile library service cease?

There is work to be done during the autumn to ensure that the users are aware of the different ways in which to access library services and importantly to ensure that the Home Library Service has capacity (eg sufficient volunteers in the right area) to take on new users. We are expecting that the mobile library service will cease in early 2017. If more work is needed to expand the RVS service in some areas, then it may be necessary to continue with the mobile library service in that area for an additional period. It is expected that the service will cease completely by the end of March 2017 latest.

What about the value of the social contact that the mobile library visit can provide for some people?

The value of the social contact was part of the feedback from the consultation about the proposed changes. In some communities, there are other activities set up to coincide with the mobile library visit.

There is already work being done in some communities by the community development workers from the Partnership for Older People Programme (POPPs) to address the social aspect that the mobile library service offers.

What can local communities do to help with the change in service arrangements?

There are lots of different ways in which local communities can help.

Encouraging people to volunteer:

- to help with the Home Library Service as a RVS volunteer by contacting Maria Jacobson, RVS Volunteer co-ordinator (by phone 01305 236666 or by email dorsetwiltshirehub@royalvoluntaryservice.org.uk)
- to visit a library on behalf of someone else (as a “good neighbour”)
- some local people may be happy to drive people without a car to their nearest static library.

It would be helpful if local councils could ‘match up’ people who may be interested in the volunteering as a good neighbour with people who would benefit from this. Similarly with people who are able to take others to the nearest library.

Promote information about local community transport schemes (where available). Communities may like to consider setting up local transport schemes. Further information can be found at:

<https://www.dorsetforyou.gov.uk/community-transport-toolkit>

Some communities are already thinking about setting up local access to books by having a collection of books for exchange that have been donated by local people in a local facility such as the shop or village hall. One community asks for a small contribution for use of the books and then donates all funds raised to a local good cause. Some communities are running coffee at the same time to encourage the social contact.

Other communities are helping people get going with Kindles and other e-readers, using volunteers to show people how to use them.

Another idea would be that people could request books via the online catalogue with volunteers/others doing this for them if required and then collected from the nearest static library by volunteers.