1.0 Purpose of Report

1.1 To update Cabinet on the progress of changes to the Shopmobility service and to advise Cabinet on the outcome of user consultation in May 2011.

2.0 Recommendations

2.1 That the Shopmobility service remains at Hampden Way for the present time following further consultation with service users.

2.2 That the City Council looks to commission a partner in the Third Sector to find a long term solutions both for the delivery of Shopmobility and it’s location within the City.

2.3 That the City Council ceases the concessionary parking in Hampden Way for the users of Shopmobility, with the exception of the seven disabled spaces offered.

2.4 The City Council does not yet implement a charge for use of the service, so as not to inhibit a potential partner with a predetermined pricing structure.

2.5 Officers liaise with Cheltenham Borough Council on the joint procurement of a service provider.

3.0 Background

3.1 Gloucester Shopmobility service aims to ensure that people with mobility problems are not disadvantaged in accessing the city’s facilities – retail, historic, spiritual or leisure. It provides battery powered scooters and wheelchairs to help people who have limited mobility through permanent or temporary disablement, illness, accident or age.

3.2 Shopmobility has been provided in Gloucester by the City Council since 1990. The service is free to use though users do pay a £2.50 refundable deposit that is sometimes left as a donation.
3.3 The overall fleet consists of a large number of scooters, manual and battery powered wheelchairs that users are able to book in advance or drop in and use in Hampden Way. Staff will also deliver to the bus or train stations by prior arrangement.

3.4 Although the service does not charge its users, it does raise funds by selling bric-a-brac and accepts donations which raised around £16,000 in 2010/11. This money is used to maintain the fleet, paying for repairs and servicing.

3.5 The site at Hampden Way consists of a number of cargo containers that house the fleet. A substantial amount of time is taken each morning and evening taking the vehicles in and out of these tightly packed containers. The site also houses a portakabin that serves as an office with a public toilet, staff toilet and small kitchen area.

3.6 Until 2009 it was intended that Shopmobility would form part of the Fourgate Centre. However, since this development did not progress, a more permanent location was required. After research by the Property & Estates Service, a purpose built location was deemed unworkable on the basis that it was cost prohibitive.

3.7 In October 2010 a review of other Shopmobility schemes from around the country was completed to benchmark the service offered in Gloucester (21 in total). This review showed Gloucester differed markedly from other services in that:

- Gloucester was in the minority in not charging a fee for the service. Fourteen services did charge, with an annual fee ranging from £5 to £25.
- Only seven of the twenty one other services were Council operated services. The majority, fourteen, were either provided by Voluntary & Community Sector (VCS) organisations.
- The size of fleet far exceeded that of other similar sized locations by population size. The fleet size has grown steadily as vehicles have been donated and because of the availability of the space, it has been conducive to hold a larger than normal fleet.
- The number of FTE staff was much lower in all other locations though some did utilise the service of volunteers.

3.8 Following a report to Cabinet in February 2011, Cabinet approved the proposal to move the service to the Eastgate Indoor Market. This recommendation was made based on a number of factors:

- 86% of Shopmobility customers stated they used the Eastgate Indoor Market.
- 64% of respondents rated Eastgate Indoor Market as an ‘Average or Good’ location, rising to 87% when including those who rated it as ‘Excellent’.
- The site had good access from a roof car park at the Eastgate Shopping Centre.
- It had ample disabled spaces that are located close to the elevator. This meant that access to the market is undercover in the main.
- Eastgate Market benefits from good pedestrian access from Brunswick Road and Southgate Street.
- Brunswick Road has a total of six bus stops along its length. Additionally we were proposing that dial-a-ride and taxis could drop off via Greyfriars.
• The proposed location was discussed with the National Federation of Shopmobility and met their requirements for a service provided within a multi storey environment.

3.9 The same report to Cabinet in February 2011 further recommended that the satellite service at Gloucester Designer Outlet Centre was closed. This service opened in May 2009 but usage was disappointing, serving only 2-3 customers daily.

3.10 It was further recommended that an annual fee of £20 be introduced to use the service in order to generate income and contribute to the savings outlined in the Three Year Money Plan.

4.0 Progress

4.1 Following a motion at the Council Meeting in April 2011, it was agreed that further consultation with Shopmobility users would take place, specifically relating to the relocation of the service to Eastgate Indoor Market. This meant that the introduction of fees and fleet reduction were also halted.

4.2 The closure of the service at the Gloucester Designer Outlet Centre continued as did a reduction to overall staff hours. The Shopmobility Service Manager resigned from the post, and the service became managed by a newly created position encompassing city centre management, Eastgate Indoor Market and Shopmobility.

4.3 In May 2011, 136 Shopmobility users were consulted specifically on the proposed move to Eastgate Indoor market:

• 90% of users indicated that the Market was not their preferred location.
• Of these users (126), most cited access from the car park as their main concern with the move.
• 96 users also raised concerns with the access to Shopmobility via the lift.
• Of the users surveyed 80% used the Shopmobility service 3 or more times per week.

4.4 During the review of Shopmobility services in the UK, it was found that the majority of those surveyed (14 of 21) were provided by the VCS. In early June 2011 officers met with Third Sector Services, the current provider of Gloucester Community Transport to explore the synergies with providing a Shopmobility service.

4.5 Third Sector Services are currently working with Cheltenham Borough Council to undertake a feasibility study for providing this service for Cheltenham and see very real benefits in terms of economies of scale and customer benefits for providing the service in Gloucester.

5.0 Future Work

5.1 It is recommended that officers work with Third Sector Services to complete a feasibility study for the Shopmobility Service delivery in Gloucester.

5.2 As Cheltenham Borough Council are also working with Third Sector Services, officers will explore a joint procurement if this yields savings for all organisations.
5.3 It is recommended that at present we do not introduce the £20 annual fee to the service. Whilst the fee will add to the overall savings/income previously detailed in the Three Year Money Plan, it may limit the feasibility of a partner delivering the service if this fee is already imposed.

5.4 At present any user of Shopmobility may park free of charge in the Hampden Way car park, regardless of whether they are registered disabled or not. Had the service relocated to Eastgate Indoor Market, this practice would have ceased. It is recommended that although Shopmobility remains at its current location, the City Council ceases to allow free parking for all users of the service. Hampden Way does hold seven disabled parking bays which will still allow free parking for those registered disabled.

6.0 Conclusions

6.1 Shopmobility users are keen that the service remains in its current location and it is recommended that the City Council continues to provide the service in this location, however a more permanent solution is still required. The storage containers are old and are not designed for their current use.

6.2 Research has shown that Shopmobility services lend themselves well to being delivered by the VCS, as fourteen schemes around the country currently are. Therefore in order to safeguard the long term future of Shopmobility, it is vital that the City Council work with potential partners to achieve this. It is also beneficial to service users if the service is delivered by a partner who is already providing complimentary services such as Community Transport.

7.0 Financial Implications

7.1 The savings detailed for the service in the Three Year Money Plan have been realised for both 10/11 & 11/12 by staffing reductions. Therefore the proposal not to introduce the annual fee will not impact on the current savings projections.

7.2 As a result of the closure of the Shopmobility Service at Gloucester Designer Outlet Centre and changes to staffing structure, the employee costs are now budgeted at £65,000 instead of £139,000 in 2010/11, a saving of £74,000.

7.3 The Eastgate Market move did not allow Shopmobility to continue to generate income by the sale of bric-a-brac. In 2011/12 a total of £16,000 was generated by donations and other gifts. This includes the sale of bric-a-brac and donations of the deposits paid by users when hiring vehicles.

7.4 The cost of the renovations at Eastgate Market for three units will be required to be capitalised by the City Council.

8.0 Risk Management Implications (Authors to complete) Identify all key risks (scoring 8 and above) for the recommendation including the impact and likelihood of the risk occurring and what measures will be taken to mitigate the risk.

8.1 No risks are associated with this report.
9.0 People Impact Assessment (PIA):
Please ensure you complete this section even if a PIA is not required.

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<th>Question</th>
<th>Yes</th>
<th>No</th>
<th>Explanation</th>
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<td>Is a PIA required?</td>
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<td>Explanation: A full PIA was completed on the basis of moving the service to Eastgate Market. As the service is now to remain in its current location it is unnecessary to complete a PIA.</td>
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<td>Has an initial PIA screening been completed?</td>
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<td>Explanation: A full PIA was completed on the basis of moving the service to Eastgate Market. As the service is now to remain in its current location it is unnecessary to complete a PIA.</td>
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<td>Explanation: A full PIA was completed on the basis of moving the service to Eastgate Market. As the service is now to remain in its current location it is unnecessary to complete a PIA.</td>
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<td>Has the PIA identified any negative impacts on any protected characteristic or community cohesion?</td>
<td>Yes*</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>*Please ensure PIA is available</td>
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Any Further Relevant Information:

10.0 Other Corporate Implications (this may include Community Safety, Environmental, Staffing, Trade Union)

10.1 If the service is to be delivered by an external partner, it will require further consultation with staff. This may mean that some staff move to the service provider under a TUPE process.

Background Papers : SNR2010_21

Person to Contact : Jo Styles
Tel: 396336
E-mail: jo.styles@gloucester.gov.uk