

## Sevenoaks District Council's response to the KCC Consultation: Making the best use of the Mobile Library Service

Response to questions set out in the KCC Mobile Library consultation document:

**Q4/a "We are proposing to use one criterion to assess the future of mobile library stops" Criterion: Stops that have had 2 or less visitors on average over the period October 2014- September 2015. What extent do you agree and are there any alternative criteria you think we should use?**

**Our response: Disagree.** This criterion reduces the number of stops in Sevenoaks District from 39 to 17. The list of Mobile Library Stopping Locations makes it clear that services would be withdrawn from some of our most rurally isolated communities. **The consultation document itself does not include the elderly who are likely to be the majority of current users.**

Sevenoaks District Council has just published a public consultation draft of the Community Plan 2016-2019 based on comprehensive consultation with our residents. This identifies a number of key issues and priorities for our District which we feel are directly relevant to this consultation. They suggest that the changes proposed could be excluding particularly vulnerable people from a service that they will find difficult to access by any other means in a District where rural isolation and access to public transport are key concerns:

- We have an ageing population with the number of people over 85 set to increase by 22.1% by 2020
- Despite excellent links to London, our residents have told us that they continue to find it a challenge to access key local services and facilities. They particularly felt the need for more frequent and timely services, more services at evening and weekends and for improved connectivity.
- These issues are compounded by the rural nature of a District. This means that many older people are socially isolated that find it difficult to access services by public transport.

Perhaps the extent to which other provision is available should be taken into account. For example in some of our rural locations, it is difficult for people to access superfast broadband, access to public transport and the extent of provision of a "Home Library" service. **Some regard should perhaps also be taken of whether the removal of any stop would completely deprive a community of any library facility, mobile or static.**

In addition, has the County Council considered whether there are any income generating opportunities that might support the continuation of the current stops, e.g. by providing other commercial services in rural areas that might help people in those isolated communities? Where take up is low, local promotional activity e.g. through the Senior Action Forum, could be helpful.

**Q5 Frequency of visits to each location - We are proposing to change the frequency of visits to each location every two weeks. To what extent do you agree or disagree with this proposed change?**

**Our response:** Don't know

**Q6. Changing the days we operate.** We are proposing to change the days we operate the Mobile Library Service from Monday to Friday to Tuesday to Saturday. To what extent do you agree or disagree with this proposed change?

**Our response:** Agree

**Q7. Increasing the minimum stopping time.** We are proposing to change the minimum stop time, increasing this from 10 minutes to 30 minutes. To what extent do you agree or disagree with this proposed change?

**Our response:** Agree

**Q7a. Please tell us the reasons for your answers in response to questions 5, 6 and 7**

**Our response:** Our response to these questions must be taken in the context of comments made in relation to the impact of proposed changes in Q4a. In the event that the service moves to a fortnightly schedule, we support increasing stop times from 10 minutes to 30 minutes. In such circumstances we also support a change in the days of operation to mitigate the impact of Bank Holidays. However, at this stage we need more information about the extent of provision of a "Home Library Service" as it appears that our most rurally isolated communities could be adversely impacted.

**Q9: Equality Impact Assessment**

***We have completed an Equality Impact Assessment on the review of the Mobile Library Service, and we welcome your views on the assumptions we have made. To view the document, go to [kent.gov.uk/mobile-library-service](http://kent.gov.uk/mobile-library-service) or ask to see a copy on your mobile library. Please write your comments here:***

**Our response:** That this has the potential to reduce isolation and loneliness due to the personal visit of a volunteer is only true where the "Home Library" service will operation.

Could more information please be provided about the extent of the provision of this service in our District?

**In addition, this consultation needs to sufficiently address the needs of elderly, isolated and vulnerable people. Could more information about the age profile of current users be provided and taken into account?**

**Q10. Anything Else? If you still have concerns about how you would access the library service in the future, or have any other comments, please let us know.**

**“Providing alternative access to library services”, page 10 of the consultation document.**

**Home Library Service** - Sevenoaks District Council regularly support the Sevenoaks Home Library Service through our Community Grant Scheme as it provides an important service to older people and people affected by long term health conditions, often living in rural isolation. However we would like Kent County Council to provide clarification on the extent of the provision of a “Home Library Services” in our District? Also could Kent County Council provide more information about whether the current “Home Library” service able/willing to undertake more visits, particularly to rural areas on the edges of the District and a time and frequency to suit the reader? As the “Home Library Service” also relies of volunteers, has any thought been given to whether there are enough volunteers to support a potential expansion of the service? We are aware that there is not an unlimited supply of volunteers and many organisations are competing for them. Has support for increased transport costs been factored in?

**Touch a new world scheme** - page 10 of the consultation document

**Our response:** Ordering books online many not be an option for many elderly people who do not use computers. Going forward, we expect that many residents will use and interact online; however, we are potentially many years away from that becoming a reality for some residents.

The public consultation draft of the Sevenoaks District Community Plan and the District’s Economic Development Strategy identifies the following as a priority “Improve broadband connectivity and promote digital inclusion”. Sevenoaks District Council would welcome an opportunity for Kent County Council to bring a discussion about this to the Sevenoaks District Local Strategic Partnership Older People’s Sub-Group. This would allow us an opportunity to address our current concerns about how we can get partners to work together and improve support for older and more vulnerable groups to get online and stay online.

**Static Libraries and services available online** - page 11 of the consultation document

**Our response:** We refer to previous comments about concerns expressed by residents as included in the Community Plan Public consultation draft 2016-2019. These relate to the difficulty that some of our older people have in using public transport to access services, concerns about reliability of the services and issues compounded by the rural nature of our District. This

makes it clear that some of our residents find it difficult to use public transport to access services.