

AGENDA ITEM NO 7**BROMSGROVE DISTRICT COUNCIL****EXECUTIVE CABINET****12 MAY 2004****PROPOSED SHOPMOBILITY FACILITY**

Responsible Portfolio Holder	Councillor C B Lanham
Responsible Head of Service	John J Moody, Head of Community Safety & Engineering

1. SUMMARY

This report considers the possible methods of operation and funding of a proposed shopmobility facility in Bromsgrove town.

2. RECOMMENDATIONS

1. That the method of operation adopted for any shopmobility facility is as that laid out in section 6.2 by officers under the proposed methods of operation.
2. That the construction of any shopmobility facility is delayed until the building of a more accessible crossing over Market Street and the Spadesbourne Brook has been completed.
3. That officers investigate the possibility of a future partnership approach with other interested parties.
4. That the method of funding adopted for the operation of the shopmobility facility is as laid out in section 8.1, and the application of this method of funding is delayed until the shopmobility facility becomes operational.

3. BACKGROUND

A shopmobility facility would provide wheelchairs, powered wheelchairs, powered scooters, walking sticks, and zimmer frames for the mobility impaired. Anyone wishing to use the equipment would be required to register first, and to demonstrate that they are able to use the equipment safely. It is generally perceived that only the elderly or disabled make use of shopmobility – this is not necessarily the case as shopmobility units regularly loan equipment to short-term mobility impaired people, for example, people who have broken legs. The primary people using the proposed facility can be identified as the mobility-impaired. This can consist of the following subgroups; the elderly, the disabled, and the temporary mobility-impaired.

Provision of such a facility would have two main benefits. It would allow the mobility impaired access shops and services in Bromsgrove, and would also have a positive impact on the local economy. Research has shown that each shopmobility user spends on average between £30 and £50 per visit. Because of the lack of any historical data, it is not possible for any prediction to be made regarding usage, or possible levels of income to be generated. The Council is not currently in any competition to provide this service.

Officers have visited four shopmobility facilities in areas surrounding Bromsgrove District, and have drawn up detailed information regarding the operation and structure of each different facility. The following page details this information.

MERRY HILL SHOPMOBILITY

Hours of opening: 1000 – 2000 Monday to Wednesday
1000 – 2100 Thursday and Friday
0900 – 1900 Saturday
1100 – 1700 Sunday

Funded by: Commercial (Centre Management Company)

Number of members: 2500+

Number of managers:	1	Number of Scooters:	16
Number of staff:	23	Number of Wheelchairs:	109
Number of volunteers:	0	Number of Powered Wheelchairs:	2

Notes: The operation is part of the information centre and travel shop.
Tri-walkers are also provided for customers.

REDDITCH SHOPMOBILITY

Hours of opening: 0900 - 1700 Monday to Saturday

Funded by: Commercial (Kingfisher Centre Management Company), and also Local Authority (Redditch Borough Council)

Number of members: 3500+

Number of managers:	1	Number of Scooters:	40
Number of staff:	5	Number of Wheelchairs:	60
Number of volunteers:	0	Number of Powered Wheelchairs:	18

Notes: Walking sticks are also provided for customers.

STRATFORD SHOPMOBILITY

Hours of opening: 1000 – 1400 Monday
1000 – 1600 Tuesday to Friday
1000 – 1400 Saturday

Funded by: Local Authority (Stratford-on-Avon District Council) and charitable trust.

Number of members: 1254

Number of managers:	1	Number of Scooters:	8
Number of staff:	1	Number of Wheelchairs:	12
Number of volunteers:	0	Number of Powered Wheelchairs:	2

Notes: Tri-walkers, zimmer frames, and walking sticks are also provided for customers.

SOLIHULL SHOPMOBILITY

Hours of opening: 0930 – 1630 Monday to Saturday

Funded by: Charitable trust.

Number of members: 3000+

Number of managers:	1	Number of Scooters:	40
Number of staff:	3	Number of Wheelchairs:	32
Number of volunteers:	30	Number of Powered Wheelchairs:	9

Notes: There are two separate facilities, one in the town centre and one in the Touchwood centre.

There are three separate organisations that have been contacted asking for their views on such a proposal; these are Age Concern, Bromsgrove and District Action Group for Older People, and Bromsgrove and District Access Group. All three have responded positively, but there have been no direct offers of operational support in terms of staffing.

4. Financial Implications

4.1 Capital budget provision of £75 000 already exists for the construction of the facility, and there a revenue budget provision for the start up of the service of £15 000. Financial options for the long term sustainability are considered in section 6 below.

5. Legal Implications

5.1 In the event that the Council were to operate the facility, then it would be necessary to take reasonable steps to ensure that those people wishing to use the facility were able to do so safely, and had demonstrated this ability satisfactorily before using the equipment.

6. Staffing Options

6.1 There are four potential methods of staffing the facility, which are;

6.2 The Council funds the staff costs. This would provide certainty of cover and ensures a certain standard of service, but comes at a yearly cost to the Council.

6.3 The Council funds part of the staffing cover required, and the remainder of the staffing operation is funded and / or provided by a partnership organisation. This would ensure certainty of cover for part of the hours of operation, and reduces the costs to the Council. Other operators have expressed concerns about relying solely on volunteers, and this offers a compromise solution.

6.4 The operation is staffed solely by volunteers from a charitable organisation. This means that the responsibility for providing the operation lies with the charity, and also any cost implications. However, this may prove difficult and complicated to set up in the initial stages of operation.

6.5 The operation is staffed by shopmobility equipment providers who would be contracted to provide a minimum number of scooters for use by customers, but also use the facility as a retail outlet. Other shopmobility operators have expressed disquiet at this choice of operation as the retailer may try to pressure customers into buying equipment.

6.6 The option of running a commercial operation does not apply, as the Town Centre is not run by a commercial company.

7. Proposed Method Of Operation

7.1 Your officers believe that of the four models set out, the Stratford model is the most favourable method of operation for the following reasons;

- It would guarantee the operation of the facility for the first year, and avoid any potential for embarrassing periods of closure.
- It could act as a pump-prime for any charitable investment or involvement, and perhaps lead to different method of funding as detailed above.
- It would allow the Council to gauge usage figures, the amount donated by users, and whether the operation could be adequately funded by other means.

Disadvantages to the Council would be;

- The call on revenue costs would fall on the Council (although this could be off-set, this is dealt with in the funding section of this report).

Hours of operation would be 0900 -1700 Monday to Saturday, with one member of staff working five days per week, and one part time member of staff working one day per week and then covering any time off, such as staff holidays or absence.

An adequate mix of mobility aids has already been recommended as follows; 8 scooters, 2 power wheelchairs, and 12 manual wheelchairs. Scooters come in various sizes to support various weights of user, and the range supplied should include 6 average weight scooters, and 2 heavy weight scooters.

People wishing to use all forms of mobility aid are required to register first by filling in a simple questionnaire and providing proof of identity. People wishing to use scooters have to receive training prior to use, and also have to undergo a safety assessment as well. Forms for use by applicants are attached to the end of this report.

In order to guarantee that people wishing to use the facility can park nearby, separate parking provision solely for the use of shopmobility members must be made.

8. Funding

- 8.1 The cost of staffing the operation for one year would be around the £35 000 figure. The cost to the Council of permitting disabled badge holders to park for free is around £40 000 per year. This can be calculated by multiplying the current average revenue per space of £631 by the number of spaces for the disabled (53) plus the number who use other spaces for free (10), therefore this gives a figure of $£631 \times (53 + 10) = £39 753$. This proves that the cost of staffing the facility could in theory be offset directly by charging disabled persons to park. Many other Local Authorities do not offer free parking for disabled persons, such as Bournemouth, and Shrewsbury and Atcham Borough Council. The principle here is accessibility, and not the ability to pay.

The equipment can reasonably expected to last for five years, but there are maintenance costs involved which should be met by any donations made. The replacement of equipment should be prepared for in good time however, and the setting up of a registered charity (in conjunction with the consultation already proposed) that can apply for funding from diverse areas such as the national lottery should be seen as a matter of urgency.

Several companies have been contacted with a view to determining prices for providing the mobility equipment. Prices quoted for supply are generally far lower than those given out for members of the public. None of the companies were prepared to enter into a sponsorship arrangement where the equipment could be sponsored, although one company was prepared to operate the facility on our behalf.

Background Papers

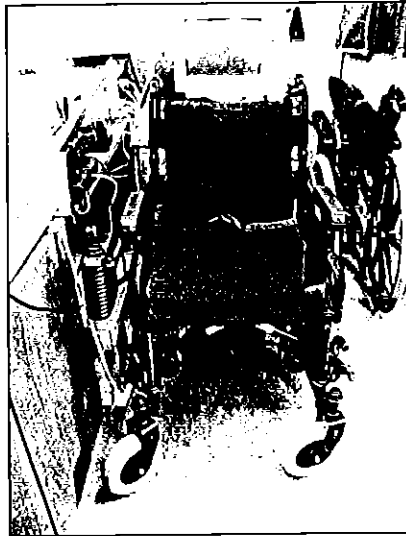
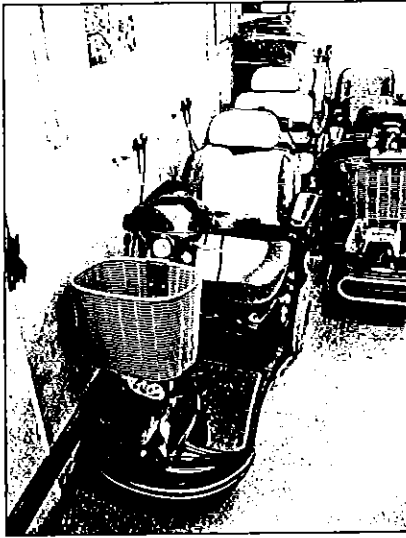
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Powered Scooter

Powered Wheelchair

Folding Wheelchair



Proposed Location Of Facility

