

**ANGUS COUNCIL**

**NEIGHBOURHOOD SERVICES COMMITTEE – 19 NOVEMBER 2009**

**ACCESSING SERVICES IN RURAL AREAS**

**REPORT BY DIRECTOR OF NEIGHBOURHOOD SERVICES**

**ABSTRACT:** This report seeks Members approval to investigate the potential to develop mobile rural service in Angus

**1. RECOMMENDATION(S)**

It is recommended that the Committee:-

- (i) ask the Director of Neighbourhood Services to undertake work on:-
  - a) the development of a specification of potential services that could be delivered through mobile provision across Angus;
  - b) the development of a vehicle specification suitable to meet the requirements of a) above;
  - c) operational arrangements, costings and potential grant aid for the delivery of this model of rural service delivery.
- (ii) note the existing two mobile library facilities are due for replacement in the near future.
- (iii) authorise the Director of Neighbourhood Services to make any grant aid applications for the above purposes.

**2. BACKGROUND**

2.1 Rural Angus is a catch-all phrase which relates to the myriad of communities located across Angus, outside of the seven burghs. The Glens areas to the north include the only parts of Angus which are identified as being 'Remote Rural' by the Scottish Government, in that they are more than 30minutes by car from a town with a population of more than 10,000. These areas are the least populated and have a restricted road network and limited public transport.

2.2 As a result, people living in communities in rural Angus are heavily reliant on personal transport to access essential services and information in towns and villages across the county. Those who do not have access to a car are dependent upon public transport services or the generosity of friends, neighbours and family members to get to appointments, or engage with public service providers.

2.3 Angus Council currently provides mobile and a number of interactive and internet-based services. The mobile libraries move across the entire county, including the most rural areas, with communities being able to access this service weekly, fortnightly or monthly. In addition, Angus Council and the Angus Community Health Partnership have introduced a number of Telecare services to address the needs of vulnerable people in dispersed rural communities. Due to issues with internet access in rural Angus the on-line facilities remain inaccessible to some, particularly in the glens themselves.

**2.4 Context**

The Scottish Government recently commissioned a study into rural poverty, highlighting a variety of issues which lead to poverty in rural areas. A number of these factors relate directly and indirectly to transport, social isolation and inability to access essential services and information on a sustainable basis. One of the main recommendations associated with this study on Rural Poverty is that service providers should examine the potential for introducing mobile services in rural areas.

## **2.5 Current Access to Services**

Access to a GP Surgery is, along with a shop, primary school, petrol station and post office considered to be one of the five basic facilities which make for a sustainable rural community. The TACTRAN study demonstrates that 9% of Angus' population, including 59% of those living in the most rural parts of Angus are more than 30 minutes from their nearest GP by public transport, compared with 0% in Dundee, 18% in Perth and Kinross and 6% in Stirling. The NHS and other public sector agencies have produced a number of pamphlets and other advice dealing with health issues. Access to this information is generally from a GP surgery, health centre, hospital or online. Due to issues around access to appropriate broadband speeds and public transport to the facilities themselves, access to this type of information in rural areas remains limited.

- 2.6 A key concern among younger members of rural communities is access to recreational facilities and information regarding summertime events and this study uses access to sports centres for 10-15 year olds as an example. The statistics show that 16% of 10-15 years olds in Angus are more than 30 minutes from their nearest sports centre by public transport and perhaps more importantly, almost 60% in the most rural areas are more than 60 minutes away by public transport. This compares with 0% in Dundee, 12% in Perth and Kinross and 14% in Stirling. Angus Council and other service providers do provide a number of recreational opportunities in rural areas across Angus, one of the key issues centres on communication and awareness raising, particularly for younger members of the community who may not have access to leaflets, online information or read the local newspaper.
- 2.7 For a number of years, rural communities across Scotland have had particular issues associated with an ageing and declining population, as younger people move elsewhere for studies and employment.
- 2.8 Post Offices remain a key component of rural communities, a fact demonstrated across the country during the recent Network Change Programme taken forward by Post Office Ltd.
- 2.9 Angus has seven ACCESS Offices in each of the Burghs, supplemented by ACCESS Line for telephone enquires and ACCESS Online for internet based services. The ACCESS services are designed to make it easier for citizens to contact the council directly regarding a number of issues including payment of rent and council tax, reporting faults with council properties and making general enquiries about direct council services such as refuse collection. For those based in rural Angus, the options are often limited to the telephone service due to the inability to physically get to the ACCESS Offices and limited broadband and general internet access.

## **3. POSSIBLE WAY FORWARD**

- 3.1 Mobile services are not unique to Angus, being used by a number of local authorities and public sector partners across Scotland. The most popular mobile service provision tends to be a library service, although other examples include a Fire and Rescue Community Safety Information Bus in Dumfries and Galloway, a Mobile Crèche for rural areas of Perth and Kinross and a Health Awareness Bus supported by the Rotary Society in Aberdeenshire. Due to the issues highlighted above and a commitment to delivering services sustainably and collaboratively where possible, initial consideration has been given by providing additional information services in rural areas of Angus through a mobile asset.
- 3.2 This could contain the existing mobile services provided through Angus Council, as well as information and advice related to public services from across the Angus Community Planning Partnership. This could take the form of leaflets and pamphlets, or one-to-one advice provided by an appropriately trained officer from the relevant agency. In particularly sensitive cases, this advice could be provided in a private room within the vehicle, arranged through a pre-

booking system. The type of information and advice which could be considered for inclusion include;

- Information regarding Angus Council ACCESS Services
- Information regarding direct Council services such as Housing
- Community Safety, Fire safety and Policing information
- Physical and Mental Health advice
- Seasonal advice for vulnerable members of the community
- Advice around energy bills, fuel poverty and personal finances
- Information on leisure and recreation events and facilities
- Information on training and education opportunities, including Outreach services
- Voluntary organisations and voluntary opportunities

3.3 Such a vehicle could also be used at large events, such as Seafest, Glamis Festival and the Angus Show.

#### **4. OTHER ISSUES**

4.1 It is anticipated that the procurement and outfitting of two new purpose-built vehicles might cost in the region of £250,000 - £350,000.

4.2 External funding may be available from a variety of sources and this should be fully investigated.

4.3 The introduction of a service of this nature would allow citizens in rural parts of the county to access essential services and information in a more efficient and sustainable manner. This meets Angus Community Planning Partnership's commitments as set out in the Single Outcome Agreement 2009-12 and supports Scottish Government recommendations and commitments, as highlighted in their four key areas of importance for rural communities. In addition, tourist information services would benefit from this complimentary asset at larger events in the county.

4.4 As a result, it is suggested that the development of this new mobile asset is given further consideration as soon as possible.

#### **5. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS**

5.1 There are no financial implications arising from this report.

#### **6. HUMAN RIGHTS IMPLICATIONS**

6.1 There are no human rights implications arising from this report.

#### **7. EQUALITIES IMPLICATIONS**

7.1 The issues dealt with in this report have been the subject of consideration from an equalities perspective (as required by legislation). An [equalities impact assessment](#) is not required.

#### **8. CONSULTATION**

8.1 The Chief Executive, Director of Corporate Services, Head of Finance and Head of Law and Administration have been consulted in the preparation of this report.

**RON ASHTON**  
**DIRECTOR OF NEIGHBOURHOOD SERVICES**

**NOTE:** No background papers, as defined by Section 50D of the Local Government (Scotland) Act 1973 (other than any containing confidential or exempt information) were relied on to a material extent in preparing the above report.

**LCP/NS/RA/BDS**