

**REDDITCH BOROUGH COUNCIL**

**Executive Committee**  
2024

3<sup>rd</sup> September

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**Report title Redditch Shopmobility Future Operating Model**

Relevant Portfolio Holder	Councillor Stringfellow
Portfolio Holder Consulted	Yes
Relevant Head of Service	Judith Willis
Report Author	Job Title: Tara Day – Community Services Manager Contact tara.day@bromsgroveandredditch.gov.uk email: Contact Tel: 0787648279
Wards Affected	All
Ward Councillor(s) consulted	N/A
Relevant Strategic Purpose(s)	Living independent, active and health lives Value for Money
Non-Key Decision	
If you have any questions about this report, please contact the report author in advance of the meeting.	
This report contains exempt information as defined in Paragraph 3 of Part I of Schedule 12A to the Local Government Act 1972, as amended	

**1. RECOMMENDATIONS**

**The Executive Committee RESOLVE that**

- 1) Redditch Borough Council provide the Shopmobility service from a rented retail unit within the Kingfisher Centre as set out as Option 3 in the report.**

**The Executive Committee RECOMMENDS that**

- 2) The additional costs of £46,835 the Shopmobility Service in 2024/25 are met from balances; and**
- 3) The ongoing position be integrated with the Medium Term Financial Plan (MTFP) 2025/26 process to reflect the additional ongoing costs of £28,835 thereafter.**

**2. BACKGROUND**

- 2.1 The Redditch Shopmobility Service was one of the first such schemes to be launched in the country. The service used to have over 15,000

**Executive Committee**      3<sup>rd</sup> September  
2024

---

customer visits each year, however the service now has approximately 3,000 customer visits per year.

- 2.2 The Shopmobility service is available 9.00am to 4.00pm Monday to Saturday (closed on Bank Holidays). There is greater demand for the service in the mornings and mid-week.
- 2.3 The majority of customers use the Shopmobility service to access shopping facilities, cafes and appointments in the town centre, particularly within the Kingfisher Shopping Centre.
- 2.4 The service operates from car park 3 and provides motorised scooters, power chairs and manual wheelchairs. The service is staffed by 1 part time supervisor, 4 part time staff, 1 casual employee and 1 volunteer.
- 2.5 The service has been jointly funded by Redditch Borough Council and the Kingfisher Shopping Centre since 1989. This was originally 50:50 split of the direct running cost but this was capped at £40,000 for 2009/10 (paid to RBC by Kingfisher), a reduction of £26,000 on previous arrangements. This was further reduced in 2010 to £30,000 per annum. The Kingfisher Shopping Centre provides the accommodation at a peppercorn rent and covered the cost of utilities. This changed on 01/07/24 and the utility bills are now the responsibility of Redditch Borough Council.
- 2.6 The Shopmobility scheme is a discretionary service that currently operates at an annual cost to the Council, excluding support services costs as follows:

Direct service costs	£144,165
Income & Contributions	£ 66,000
Actual cost to the Council	£ 78,165

- 2.7 The Kingfisher Shopping Centre has changed ownership and they are looking to reduce costs. (See confidential Appendix 2) Officers have therefore considered various options for the future delivery of the Shopmobility service.

**3. OPERATIONAL ISSUES**

- 3.1 Shopmobility operates from the lower level of Car Park 3, which is quite isolated, and staff need to work in pairs for safety reasons. The building is exceptionally cold in winter, and the heating system is outdated and ineffective. As a result, utility costs are continually rising.

- 3.2 All equipment is old, worn out and is in need of replacing - there are frequent equipment breakdowns with rising service and maintenance costs.
- 3.3 Shopmobility customer service needs have significantly diminished in recent years resulting in fewer customers, reduced income and rising costs. It is unlikely that the demand will increase in future due to:
- Increased online shopping options.
  - More people have their own scooters they can use and are reluctant to hire one.
  - Remaining in the current site makes it difficult to promote and limits users to those who only use car park 3 or Dial A Ride.
- 3.4 Due to health and safety reasons of operating out of car park 3, two members are required on every shift. However often there is not enough demand for two members of staff per shift with the current number of customers.
- 3.5 Statistics showing the number of customers, frequency of use and income has evidenced a continuing downward trend over the last 10 years. There is significantly less demand from customers **15826** in 2013/14 and less than 20% of those customers, **3231**, in 2023/24.
- 3.6 A Shopmobility survey was undertaken at the end of 2023. Some comments / suggestions were:
- Shopmobility would be better more centrally located so that those using public transport could access.
  - Wasn't clearly signposted so no idea where it is.
  - The service helps with independence.
  - Cost was too high as the equipment needs upgrading.
  - Helpful and friendly staff.
- 3.7 83 people completed the survey – 51.8% currently use it; 20.5% used to use it; and 27.7% have never used it. Out of those who do use it 52.5% use it once per week; 16.9% use it once a month; and 20.3% use it occasionally. The majority of responses are very satisfied or satisfied with the booking system, opening hours and service accessibility.
- 3.8 The survey asked if Shopmobility was to relocate within the Kingfisher Shopping Centre would this help to make the service more accessible – 82 responses - 30.5% said yes; 40.2% said maybe; and 29.3% said no.

3.9 Officers have considered 5 possible future operating models for the service (with a 6<sup>th</sup> option of no longer providing the service) and these are set out below:

**Option 1 – Remain in Car Park 3**

To remain in the current site would not enable the opportunity to promote the service and make it more visible – feedback from the recent survey suggested potential customers were not aware of the service or it was too far to get to from a bus stop. However if the service remained in Car Park 3 there would be no rental costs but the utility costs are approximately £12,000 per annum as the site is cold all year round and particularly during the winter months. The utility costs are now the responsibility of RBC since July 2024. The site is old and the electronic doors need replacing, again at a cost to the Council.

The first year cost of improving the facility and service cost would be £150,000. The future annual cost to the Council would be approximately £135,000.

**Option 2 - Provide the service from The Canopies**

To move to the units within the canopies would result in extensive work being undertaken to make the units fit for purpose and to have enough electricity to charge the scooters – the cost to do this would be approximately £67,000. The site is isolated and like with the Car Park 3 unit would be extremely cold during the winter and very isolating for staff and difficult to promote the service from this site. We would look to provide a cashless service (this would create a saving. It would be a challenge to promote the assisted shopping service or to take scooters to pick up points to be more accessible to customers as lone working would be an issue here as the site is remote, similar to Car Park 3.

The first year cost of moving to this site and service costs would be approximately £168,000. The future annual cost to the Council would be approximately £98,000

**Option 3 - Kingfisher Retail Unit – 9 George Walk**

To move to a site within the Kingfisher would result in further operational costs (see confidential Appendix 3). From this site there would be the ability to promote the service more; a warmer and welcoming environment; review hours and staffing/opening times; look to a cashless service (this would create a saving); promote the assisted shopping service; taking scooters to points more accessible to customers; and engage with the local retailers to promote further.

The Dial A Ride service takes customers to Shopmobility at Car Park 3 – they could continue to use this as a drop off point with the DAR staff liaising with the Shopmobility staff about booking times to ensure equipment could be taken to the customers.

The first year cost of improving the facility and service cost would be approximately £125,000. The future annual cost to the Council would be approximately £107,000.

**Option 4 - The service was to transition to Kingfisher Shopping Centre**

The service would be transferred to the Kingfisher Shopping Centre to run on a much reduced service. The Council would no longer manage or control the service.

The Kingfisher would require the Council to purchase 5 new scooters. There would be one off costs relating to the transfer of the service of **£54,000**.

There would be the initial expense of the new scooters and the redundancy costs. A reduced service would continue to be available for customers and RBC will make a saving of £95,000 per annum in future years. However it would lose control of the service and its future sustainability.

**Option 5 – Commission the service to a third party**

A local business or charity could elect to take over the management and delivery of the service. A procurement exercise would need to be authorised and subsequently a new provider of the Shopmobility Service is appointed, there will be direct TUPE implications. Given the predicted costs of the service, the chances of securing an alternative supplier is unlikely, particularly given the current conditions of Car Park 3 and the equipment, however it could be an option to explore.

**Option 6 – The Council cease operating the Shopmobility Service**

The service would cease operating with initial closure costs of approximately £50,000 if Shopmobility staff cannot be redeployed. Potential annual financial savings of between £98,000 - £135,000. The Shopmobility Survey and Equality Impact Assessment would suggest there are no other providers of the service locally and there could be social inclusion decline.

**4. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS**

- 4.1 If Redditch Borough Council continue to provide the service the option of procuring a leasing contract for the equipment needs to be considered as there is no capital money available to purchase new

**Executive Committee**      3<sup>rd</sup> September  
**2024**

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equipment. The option to lease the equipment would include all servicing and replacement of any equipment, as well as the option to increase the fleet during busier periods such as Christmas. The additional cost of approximately £15,000 per annum has been included in the costings for options 1,2 & 3.

- 4.2 Impact of IFRS16 from 2024/25 for Local Authorities would need to be considered as to how we account for leases.
- 4.3 Redditch Shopmobility was free of charge up until April 2017 – current charges for 2024 can be found in Appendix 4. Research on charges by other Shopmobility services as follows:

**Shopmobility Comparable Data (August 2024)**

Provider	Annual Fee	Hire Costs
Redditch Borough Council	Yes £15	Yes Residents £4.70 Non-Residents £6.25
DIAL West Cheshire	Yes Residents £30 Non-Residents £35	Yes Members £4 Non-Members £12.00
Coventry City Council – operated by Mobility Pathways	No	Free of charge
Touchwood Shopping Centre – Solihull	No	No
Horsham District Council via Parking Services	No	Free of charge – donations welcome
Stratford Council transferred service to Active Mobility	No	Free of charge donations welcome (local residents only)
Stoke-on-Trent Council	Yes £24	Yes £2 for members £5 for non-members
Leominster Shopmobility (charity)	No	Free of charge – donations welcome
Age UK Merry Hill Dudley	Yes	£6 for 4 hours

**REDDITCH BOROUGH COUNCIL**

**Executive Committee**  
**2024**

**3<sup>rd</sup> September**

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	£12 annual £4 daily	
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**5. LEGAL IMPLICATIONS**

- 5.1 There is no statutory requirement for a local authority to provide/operate a Shopmobility service. Any decision however to discontinue a service, that has been previously provided, could be subject to challenge.
- 5.2 In addition to the general need to ensure that any decision is lawfully (i.e. an authority has the lawful power to make the decision, the decision is reasonable and fairly made) made, an authority has a more specific duty to ensure it complies with its duties under the Equality Act 2010.
- 5.3 Before taking a decision that may impact on persons with Protected Characteristics an authority must have 'due regard' for advancing equality which involves: (a) removing or minimising disadvantages suffered by people due to their protected characteristics (b) taking steps to meet the needs of people from protected groups where these are different from the needs of other people and, (c) encouraging people from protected groups to participate in public life or in other activities where their participation is disproportionately low.

**6. OTHER – IMPLICATIONS**

**Relevant Strategic Purpose**

- 6.1 Value for Money – the leasing option and the lower utility bills – opening times could support value for money as providing the service when it is most needed.  
Living independent, active and health lives – the service would continue to promote this if options 1,2,3 or 4 are chosen.

**Climate Change Implications**

- 6.2 All alternative options to that of the service remaining in car park 3, would bring about reduced carbon emission as heating requirements would be significantly reduced. All options provide for a reduced fleet which would also bring about carbon reduction.

**Equalities and Diversity Implications**

- 6.3 The service is primarily used by customers with restricted mobility to access shops and appointments in the town. Many of the service's customers are elderly and/or have physical disabilities and may rely on the service in order to maintain personal independence.



- 6.4 Due to the potential vulnerable nature of the users any proposed changes may cause some distress. Therefore, Officers will ensure there is clear communication with users and their family/carers about any changes to the service.
- 6.5 An equality impact assessment has been undertaken and shows that options 1 to 3 have no adverse impact compared to the current delivery model. Option 4 would provide a reduced service and could result in the service not meeting demand at certain times. Option 6 would impact on persons possessing a protected characteristic.

**7. RISK MANAGEMENT**

- 7.1 The recommendation of option 3 includes an initial investment of £18,000 to make the rented unit suitable for the service. There is a risk that the Kingfisher Shopping Centre does not renew the lease after 3 years. The service has always been reliant on the Kingfisher Shopping Centre and the Council has undertaken ongoing repairs, so this risk is no greater. Officers will regularly meet with the Kingfisher Management to promote its benefits and achieve a satisfactory lease renewal in the future.

**8. APPENDICES and BACKGROUND PAPERS**

Appendix 1 – Shopmobility Survey

Appendix 2 – Costings from Kingfisher (This advice is exempt as it relates to the financial or business affairs of any particular person (including the authority holding that information))

Appendix 3 – Costings for 9 George Walk (This advice is exempt as it relates to the financial or business affairs of any particular person (including the authority holding that information))

Appendix 4 – Redditch Shopmobility Charges

**REDDITCH BOROUGH COUNCIL**

**Executive Committee**  
**2024**

3<sup>rd</sup> September

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**9. REPORT SIGN OFF**

<b>Department</b>	<b>Name and Job Title</b>	<b>Date</b>
Portfolio Holder	Councillor Stringfellow	19 August 2024
Lead Director / Head of Service	Judith Willis Head of Community & Housing Services	13 August 2024
Financial Services	Debra Goodall Head of Finance & Customer Services	13 August 2024
Legal Services	Claire Felton Head of Legal & Democratic Services	13 August 2024
Policy Team (if equalities implications apply)	Rebecca Green Policy Manager	19 August 2024
Climate Change Team (if climate change implications apply)	N/A.	