



## **Scrutiny Value for Money (vfm)** **Assessment Framework**

### **Introduction**

This vfm assessment tool provides a framework for members in partnership with services to work through and is divided into 3 broad themes:

1. What does it cost to provide this service? (economy)
2. How is this service performing? (efficiency)
3. What quality is the service being provided? (effectiveness)

For each of these themes there is the opportunity/potential for scrutiny panels with the service being assessed to benchmark with other service providers to give a clearer picture of relative performance.

The aim is that on completing this assessment scrutiny members will be able to make a judgement regarding the vfm provided by the service and identify and recommend any potential further action.

## **Shopmobility, Town Centre Walsall** **Assessment – September 2009**

### **Background & summary**

#### **Overview**

The Council Shopmobility service is based in the Saddlers Shopping Centre and supports people of all ages to visit the facilities in Walsall town centre. It offers a choice of powered scooters, powered wheelchairs or manual wheelchairs to best suit customer needs.

Since being launched in March 2006; over 750 members have registered to use the Shopmobility service, with the current average bookings per week being 54.

In addition, Shopmobility provides a first contact point to enquire about other disabled access issues including, Blue Badge applications, dropped kerbs, transport, mobility equipment and financial entitlements. Effectively the service has evolved in to a Disability access information signposting service.

The team comprises 3 contracted staff – the Shopmobility Manager, an Assistant Manager and a Part-Time Shopmobility Assistant. All staff provide high-quality customer care including individual consultation, assessment tuition and support in order to ensure customer comfort and confidence in using the equipment. In addition, Shopmobility is supplemented by two volunteer workers who undertake a wide range of customer liaison and other support roles.

The service is steered by a Management Board comprising of representation from the Cabinet Member for Regeneration, Regeneration Directorate staff, Walsall Centre for Independent Living, Walsall Disability Forum, Arthritis Care, Ring & Ride, Walsall Housing Group and NHS Walsall.

The team provides welcoming and extensive support to all customers, some of whom require significant assistance with what may be considerable physical or sensory disabilities, chronic sickness and mental health issues. The staff team also regularly delivers and collects equipment to customers from key points in town, such as the bus and train stations, Ring & Ride and taxi collection points.

Shopmobility makes a very real improvement to approximately 200 disabled people in Walsall per month by providing support, encouragement and equipment to enable people to visit the town centre with independence and dignity. The service provided has a significant impact on promoting healthier lifestyles, improving mental well-being, social interaction and access to leisure, cultural, educational and employment opportunities.

Shopmobility has regularly gained local and recently national recognition for a high quality of service provision, having won Walsall Disability Forum's Physical Disability award in 2008 and also being presented with a Best Practice Award from the National Federation of Shopmobility in 2008. Furthermore, the Shopmobility team was shortlisted for the Partnership Working category of Walsall Council's 2009 Team Awards and regularly receives enquiries from developing Shopmobility services, who consider Walsall to be a model of best practice.

The service currently receives funding from Walsall Council of approximately £66,000 per year although, to continue in its current form, additional funding of at least £20,000 needs to be identified or the Council face the choice of cutting parts of the service, the latter being an unpalatable option.

Several measures have been identified to try to meet the funding shortfall, with the main option being for Walsall Council to identifying full and ongoing revenue funding for the Shopmobility service.

A survey exercise has recently been carried out which conservatively estimates that the service is directly responsible for supporting a spend of approximately £90,000 per year within central Walsall.

# Scrutiny Panel Value for Money (vfm) Assessment

## Reason for considering / assessing this service

In order to demonstrate the value for money that the service provides to the Council when considered against the community and economic benefits which Shopmobility provides.

## How does this service support the priorities of the council?

Shopmobility supports several of the Council priorities, notably:

To ensure that citizens are healthy – Shopmobility allows increased independence for over 200 disabled people per month.

To ensure that citizens are safe and secure – the loan of disability equipment reduces the likelihood of slips, trips and falls for what are often elderly members of our community and service users are more able to avoid personal threat and street crime by using a mobility vehicle.

To ensure that citizens are enjoying a high quality of life – extensive informal and documented feedback from Shopmobility customers has demonstrated that they appreciate the service and that it makes a real difference to them.

To ensure that citizens are financially & materially secure - by setting reasonable charges for the service and by making referrals to welfare rights advice and benefits advice.

To achieve economic well-being – Shopmobility provides a service which adds considerably to the vitality of the town centre economy by allowing customers to shop in Walsall who may not be able to do so without the support of Shopmobility.

## COSTS

What does this service cost us?	
Gross revenue budget	<b>£65,787</b>
Capital Budget ( If applicable)	
<b>Employee related expenses</b> (Salary costs, Internal/External training etc)	<b>£48,602 budget</b> <b>£64,500 projected spend</b>
<b>Premises related expenses</b> (Energy/Water/Accommodation recharges)	<b>£0 budget</b> <b>£14,500 projected spend including rent, service charges and electricity</b>
<b>Transport related expenses</b> (Vehicle, fuel, public transport, car allowances etc.)	<b>£0 budget</b> <b>£1,325 projected spend including vehicle repairs &amp; maintenance</b>

<b>Supplies and Services</b> (Furniture, Professional Fees, Insurances, Advertising)	<b>£9,611 budget</b> <b>£6170.00 projected spend</b> <b>&amp; £1,650.00 projected spend</b> <b>£7,820.00 total projected spend</b>
<b>Other</b> (link into Annual Efficiency Statement and Gershon)	<b><u>Central Departmental</u></b> <b>£7,574 budget</b> <b>£8,643 projected spend</b> <b><u>Ventilation works</u></b> <b>£0 budget</b> <b>£15,000.00 projected spend</b>
<b>Income – Fees and Charges</b>	<b>£0 budget</b> <b>£5,000.00 projected income</b>
<b>Other Income</b> (Include Grant income)	<b>£39,003.00 funded from a temporary combination of Invest to Save Bid (one off), LABGI (one off) and carried forward budget.</b>  <b>NOTE – this other income is temporary funding and the service faces a shortfall of approximately £15,000 per year from 2011-12.</b>

### QUESTION?

**How do the costs identified above compare to other authorities / service providers?**

	<b>Walsall</b>	<b>Solihull</b>	<b>Wolverhampton</b>	<b>Sandwell</b>
Status	Council	Charity	Council	Council
Gross revenue budget	£65,787	£65,000	£160,000	£122,000
Capital Budget if applicable	NA	£5,000	NIL	NA
Employee related expenses	£64,500	£87,000	Not available	£100,000
Premises related expenses	£14,500	£3,829 * Rent-free accommodation provided for 2 units	Not available * Rent free accommodation	£9,000 * Rent free accommodation
Transport related expenses	£1,500	£3,654	Not available	£10,000
Supplies and Services	£7,820	£8,082	Not available	£16,000
Other	£23,750 See note above	£7,500 Estimate of central charges	£18,500 Estimate of central charges	£14,000 Estimate of central charges
Income – Fees and Charges	£5,000	£20,000	Not available	£1,800

Other Income (Include Grant income)	£39,003 – see note above	£25,450 Charitable grants and Touchwood funding	Not available	£30,000
<b>Total costs before income</b>	<b>£109,791</b>	<b>£102,565</b>	Not available	<b>£149,000</b>
<b>Total costs after income</b>	<b>£65,787</b>	<b>£57,115</b>	Not available	<b>£117,200</b>

### **Indicative budget forecast – Shopmobility – 2009-2013**

	2009-10	2010-11	2011-12	2012-13
<b>Expenditure</b>				
Employees	64,259	62286	63199	64124
Premises including rents	14,500	14935	15383.1	15844.5
Transport including equipment maintenance	1,325	1364.75	1405.69	1447.86
Supplies and services	6,170	6355.1	6545.75	6742.13
Central Council recharge including telephone charges	8,643	8,643	8,643	8,643
Ventilation works contingency	15,000	0	0	0
Private contractor fees	1,650			
Renewal of vehicles	0	0	0	0
<b>Total expenditure</b>	<b>109,791</b>	<b>93,584</b>	<b>95,176</b>	<b>96,802</b>
<b>Income</b>				
Sponsorship	-1,500	-2,250	-2,500	-2,750
Equipment hire	-3,500	-5,000	-5,500	-6,000
<b>Total income</b>	<b>-5,000</b>	<b>-7,250</b>	<b>-8,000</b>	<b>-8,750</b>
<b>Total budget requirement</b>	<b>104,791</b>	<b>86,334</b>	<b>87,176</b>	<b>88,052</b>
<b>Funding</b>				
Net Council revenue budget	65,788	69,036	70,965	72,937
Revenue carry over	0	22,453	5,155	0
2009-10 investment bid	45,000	0	0	0
LABGI balance	12,780	0	0	0
Carried forward funding	3,676	0	0	0
<b>Total funding</b>	<b>127,244</b>	<b>91,489</b>	<b>76,120</b>	<b>72,937</b>
<b>Budget surplus/shortfall</b>	<b>22,453</b>	<b>5,155</b>	<b>-11,056</b>	<b>-15,115</b>

**Important note** – the table above is indicative and assumes that revenue budget is authorised to be carried forward between financial years.

## PERFORMANCE DATA

What is the inspection rating of this service and how has it changed over the last 3 years?  
(if applicable)

Shopmobility is not currently subject to formal internal or external inspection.

What performance indicators does this service have to demonstrate vfm?

Although no formal performance indicators are measured for the service, the service currently supports an average of 54 bookings per week and service targets are set to increase membership and bookings. Current performance comparisons from the first quarter of 2008 to 2009 stand at:

- 30% increase in membership
- 10 % increase in bookings
- 53 % increase in takings

What is in the Beacon Index?

There are currently no measures contained within the Beacon Index relating to the Shopmobility service.

Is this service on target to deliver efficiencies identified in their service plan? (If not, what corrective action has been taken?)

The service is not currently targeted to deliver service efficiencies via the service planning process although management have identified several ways in which it is felt that Shopmobility can operate more efficiently and these include:

- Combining cash collection with that arranged for the markets service and so preventing the need for Shopmobility staff to visit the Civic Centre Banking Hall as often.
- Recruiting additional volunteers to enable more support to Shopmobility staff and a lower requirement for the manager and senior manager to cover the service.

What control measures are in place?

Documented processes and procedures are in place for many aspects of service delivery, including use of equipment, demonstrations on equipment use for service users, recording equipment use, equipment recharging, cash collection and banking and all aspects of Health & Safety including the possible evacuation of the Shopmobility unit.

## QUESTION?

### How does performance identified above compare to other authorities / service providers?

Seasonal fluctuations and trends are mirrored across the other services consulted in Wolverhampton, Sandwell and Solihull. All three other services are long established compared with Walsall Council's 3 year old service, resulting in the respective higher number of registrations and proportionally higher usage and takings. A consensus on target setting is daily usage of 2% or more of membership or 10% per week, which all services generally achieve or exceed in fair weather. However extreme and unpleasant weather conditions significantly affect all services.

Facility	Walsall	Wolverhampton	Sandwell	Solihull
No of units	1	1	2	2
Opening hours	Mon, Tues , Wed, Fri & Sat: 9.30am-4.30pm	Mon-Sat: 9.00am-4.00pm	Car Park and Bus station sites: Tues-Sat: 8.30am-2.30pm	Drury Lane Mon-Sat: 9.00am-4.30pm Touchwood Mon-Sat: 9.30am-5.00pm Sun 11.00-5.00
Service hours	35	42	60	96
Staffing hours	79.5	Not available	163.5	274
Staffing/service ratio:	2.3	Not available	2.7	2.9
Location	Car Park	Street entrance with car park	Car Park and Bus Station	Car Park and Street
Registered users (Active)	750 (220) 29.3%	4,476 (650) 14.5%	5,000 (340) 7%	Not available (1439)
Blue badge parking charges	Yes	No	No	No
Ring & Ride point	No	Yes	Yes	Yes

Solihull have one of their two units located in the car park of Touchwood shopping centre, which is less affected by adverse weather conditions as the shopping centre can provide a wealth of retail and catering choices under one roof.

Comparisons are drawn with Sandwell, who are experiencing a downturn due to the diminishing retail sector in the town and charging increases, however the opening of a second Shopmobility in Sandwell bus station is generating a gradual increase in usage. Budgetary comparison with Sandwell is difficult at this stage as the service is in its infancy as a 2 site provider and budgets have not been specifically apportioned to the 2 sites.

Continued

Recent increases in charging policies at Wolverhampton have resulted in a slowdown of take up of service whereas Solihull do not experience such reluctance from customers to pay an annual renewal of membership fee.

The Walsall service introduced a registration fee to new members from April 09 with a slight increase in daily charges to all users. New members are comfortable with the registration fee and existing customers have accepted the increase in charging.

It is commonly agreed throughout the Shopmobility service providers that accessibility to all forms of transportation and provision of free blue badge parking are the significant factors in maximising usage of the service. Services with a shop frontage generate more passing trade whereas car park based services will thrive where free blue badge parking is provided. Car park based services can create a barrier to users who rely on public transport including Ring and Ride.

The Walsall Council service location is most similar to Sandwell car park site. However does not have the advantage of free blue badge parking. The Touchwood car park site in Solihull offers more extensive and free parking in addition to unobstructed access into a very modern and occupied thriving shopping centre.

Wolverhampton adjoins both the Mander and Wulfrun Shopping centres with the advantages of a shop front, its own free car park and Ring and Ride pick-up/drop off point, whilst the Solihull Drury Lane site has shop front with adjacent free on road blue badge parking and ring and ride pick-up/drop-off points.

Comparison can also be drawn between the staffing & service hours figures, which clearly demonstrate that Walsall is staffed very leanly in comparison with other local services.

Walsall Council's service location compares unfavourably with all other sites in respect of visibility, access and car park charges incurred by service-users.

## QUALITY OF SERVICE

How does this service identify and evidence the quality of service provided:-

The service receives considerable verbal feedback from service users, which is supported by a recent survey indicating that they highly rate the quality of service which they receive with 92% stating the service provided is excellent and 8% that the service is good. In addition we carry out informal benchmarking with other comparable Shopmobility services.

Performance Indicator/ comparable data:-

Although no formal performance data is currently collated, Shopmobility is part of the newly formed West Midlands Regional Shopmobility forum, which aims to standardise registration and charging policies. Furthermore, the results from customer surveys provide valuable performance data.



## QUALITY OF SERVICE (continued)

Achievement of recognised standards, for example :-

- Service Standards in-house
- Charter Marks
- International Organisation for Standardisation (ISO)
- Investor in People (IiP)
- Service specific

As previously indicated, Shopmobility has gained local and recently national recognition for a high quality of service provision, having won Walsall Disability Forum's Physical Disability award in 2008 and also being presented with a Best Practice Award from the National Federation of Shopmobility in 2008 and regularly receives enquiries from developing Shopmobility services, who consider Walsall to be a model of best practice.

Customer Satisfaction:-

- Compliments / complaints / comments
- Surveys
  - Place survey
  - Tracker survey
- Service initiated feedback from customers
- Local Neighbourhood Partnership (LNP) feedback
- Partner feedback

As previously indicated, we have recently carried out a customer survey and have also received considerable verbal feedback from service users that they rate the quality of service which they receive and we carry out informal benchmarking with other comparable Shopmobility services.

Employee Satisfaction:-

Employee feedback and satisfaction is encouraged and monitored through regular one to one meetings and 6-monthly Individual Performance Management meetings.

How does the service plan to engage with the public / customers in the future?

- consultation strategy

We recently developed a survey questionnaire in order to gain more detailed feedback from service users and also regularly participate in external events in order to raise the profile and expand the customer base of the service. Furthermore, our regular customer newsletter updates customers about Shopmobility matters and invites feedback on all areas of the service.

## QUALITY OF SERVICE (continued)

How does the service effect the 6 strands of equality (Age; Disability; Gender; Race; Religion or Belief; Sexual Orientation)

The service is available to all, however naturally tends to be used by disabled and older people.

Is there a higher or lower participation in take up of the service from any of the six groups?

### Age:

Under 25	25-60	61-79	80 and over
2.2%	24.6%	58%	15.2%

73% of service users are over 60 years old

### Disability:

Physical Disability	Neurological disorder	Mental Health condition	Learning Disability	Accidental injury	Chronic Illness
66%	11%	1%	Less than 1%	2%	20%

98% of service users are disabled or have a chronic illness affecting their mobility.

### Gender:

Male	Female
33%	67%

### Race:

White European/ Irish/ other	Asian/ Asian British/Pakistani/Bangladeshi	Chinese	Black /Black African/ Caribbean	Mixed race
95.8%	2.7%	0.2%	1.3%	0

Does the service have any negative or positive impacts on any of the six groups?

The service is considered to impact positively on all groups and not to impact negatively on any member of any of the main groups.

Service information is available in written translation in Bengali, Punjabi and Urdu. Further translations can be ordered on request. Links to Black and Asian communities are being improved and service information is due to be shared at the Independent Living Forum, targeting Caldmore Housing and day care services provided for Black and Asian elders.

### **QUESTION?**

**How does the quality of service identified above compare to other authorities / service providers?**

All of the services consulted regularly provide positive feed-back from their users. Shopmobility services are welcomed and appreciated by service-users their families and carers. The majority of service-users using Shopmobility would not be able to access town centre shops, facilities and services with out Shopmobility.

Feedback is also gathered with regard to access difficulties experienced by service-users who are car drivers and these people generally welcome accessible parking on the same level as shop/ restaurants cafes. The use of lifts can be difficult, time consuming and cause anxiety.

Ease and cost of car parking is a significant issue for customers who prefer to use a service where this is provided free with ample spaces within easy access of the unit. Customers using public transport require the facility to be within a short distance of bus station and drop off points and a street facing or ground floor location.

## OFFICERS TO COMPLETE FINDINGS OF THE ASSESSMENT BASED ON EVIDENCE GATHERED:

### *(Brief statement summarising the view of the Officers conducting the assessment)*

Carrying out this review has reinforced the views of the Officers involved that Shopmobility is a valued and well-appreciated service which provides support to hundreds of older, disabled and chronically ill people per year

The service was conceived, established and continues to work collaboratively in successful partnership with a significant number of internal and external organisations and continues to increase membership numbers whilst also fulfilling a number of Walsall Council's core priorities.

It is therefore felt that Shopmobility should be supported and developed as the town continues to move forward.

Under current arrangements, the operation does however face distinct financial pressures which will either require additional and sustainable funding or a reduction in the overheads of the service, the latter of which is not palatable for many reasons.

### It is our view that this service, in terms of vfm is:-



**Delivering services in an efficient and effective manner and demonstrating vfm in all areas**

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**Generally delivering an efficient and effective service and demonstrating vfm but needs to address the following issues:**

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1. Ongoing funding sustainability.
2. Suitability of location to ensure maximum take up and accessibility.



**In the majority of areas examined is not able to evidence that service delivery is efficient and effective or that vfm is being delivered. Our recommendation is that....**

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## The funding shortfall & possible solutions

Assuming that Council funding continues at current levels and that money is authorised to be carried forward between financial years, the costs of the service are funded for the current (2009-10) and subsequent (2010-11) financial years, although an annual shortfall rising to approximately £15,000 emerges from that point.

Given the current financial pressure facing Walsall Council, it is not considered feasible for Council funding to increase and so the following are considered as being the main options to meet the shortfall:

### **1. Application for Grant Funding**

Discussions have taken place with Walsall Partnership, who have indicated that it may be possible for Shopmobility to link to Working Neighbourhoods Funding, provided that a case can be made to demonstrate that Shopmobility is contributing to business growth in the town centre.

### **2. Combined premises with Walsall Centre for Independent Living**

Moves are currently being made to consider co-locating Shopmobility with the Centre for Independent Living as part of the a major new retail development. This could provide opportunities to combine and reduce costs, such as premises rents and energy charges. Furthermore, the expanded services available under one roof could support the co-location or co-ordination of other services, such as the Blue Badge scheme.

### **3. Charitable status**

Investigations are being made to attain charitable status for the service, possibly to link Shopmobility with the Centre for Independent Living. Charitable status would enable more fundraising to be carried out and would provide increased opportunities for grant funding bids. Merging the Shopmobility service with the Centre for Independent Living would create a number of operational benefits and would also support any future expansion of the overall services offered to the public.

Many recent efforts have been made to increase income for the Shopmobility service and these have included:

- Increases to membership and equipment usage costs.
- Introduction of selected retail goods for sale from the Shopmobility Unit.
- Creation of a donated book area which are exchanged for cash donations to the service.
- Ongoing contact with businesses in order to encourage further sponsorship of Shopmobility equipment.

Furthermore, approaches have been made to a number of possible funding sources, notably the Big Lottery Fund, to assess whether funding is currently available to support the service. In the case of the Big Lottery, they are unable to consider bids which simply fund existing activities.

## Other options

Another approach which could be adopted could be to reduce the costs of the service as an attempt to meet the £15,000 shortfall. ***However, it is important to note that, although there are several ways in which this could be done, none of the following options represent what are considered to be palatable solutions:***

### 1. Transfer of the management of the service

An option which has been raised previously could be to transfer the management and running of the service to an organisation independent of Walsall Council.

Whilst the option of outsourcing the management of the service may seem attractive, this is not considered to be the most viable option due to the fact that charitable control of the service would be preferable, especially given that recent examples of local organisations running voluntary services in Walsall have not proven to be very successful.

### 2. Reduction in the daily opening hours of the unit

In order to reduce staffing overheads, revised opening hours of 10.00am-3.00pm could be considered for the unit. Based on this, an estimated reduction of £8,000 per year could be realised.

### 3. Reduction in the number of days the unit is open

Although the ideal aspiration would be to extend the days of opening of the service, reduced opening days could be considered in order to cut the staffing overheads. Customer usage is currently sporadic on Mondays and Saturdays and the closure on these days could reduce overheads by an estimated £12,000 per year.

It should however be noted for options 2 or 3 that a reduction of the hours or days of service offered threatens the current accreditation to the National Federation of Shopmobility, whose general standard is set to provide a minimum of 6 hours service on six days per week. The current accreditation is based on Walsall being a developing service which is currently provided on five days per week, with a possible view to six day opening as service expands.

Furthermore, neither options 2 or 3 are considered desirable due to the following threats which would arise:

- Lowered image of Shopmobility in Walsall Town Centre in relation to neighbouring towns.
- Reduced disability service provision in Walsall.
- Reduced visits to Walsall by Shopmobility customers, many of whom favour additional opening hours and would be unlikely to remain loyal if hours were cut.
- Loss of income to town centre retailers.
- Increased income to neighbouring towns which provide a more extensive Shopmobility service.
- Negative publicity for the Council and the town.

# Scrutiny Panel Value for Money (vfm) Assessment

## Forward Looking Statement

It is intended that the Shopmobility service will continue to grow and flourish and several plans are currently in place for the future:

1. To continue to increase publicity for the service.
2. To build upon successful partnership and sponsorship arrangements.
3. To increase the volunteer support for the service.
4. To continue to build the representation and profile of the Shopmobility Management Board.

As previously highlighted, given the current financial pressure facing Walsall Council, it is not considered feasible for Council funding to increase and so the following main options exist to meet the shortfall:

1. Pursuing links to Working Neighbourhoods Funding.
2. Combining premises with Walsall Centre for Independent Living to provide a better location for both services.
3. Exploring Charitable status in conjunction with the Centre for Independent Living

The overall intention is to build a successful Council service into an even better facility both in the short, medium and long-term.

## **Testimony from Andrew Moulton, Walsall Disability Forum and current Chair of Shopmobility Management Board.**

Since the onset of Shopmobility it has been a positive and successful service that has and is growing by membership and popularity day by day. It gives and reaches out to a diverse and multicultural area of communities, along side of this it reaches out to a vast variety and different disabilities and impairments across Walsall. It addresses in the local area agreement and service delivery area, however it does need a lot more engagement and resource support from this area to acknowledge the targets it addresses and meets.

These service delivery and priority areas are namely listed below:

- Health
- Social Care
- Leisure and culture
- Older Peoples Services
- Economic and Regeneration
- Safer and Stronger

These areas above cross cut due to the vast area of needs met, if the priorities and services were to acknowledge and address the needs met it would enable the service to become more sustainable along with a long term approach, the service needs to move from its current location to a more viable and affordable site to operate from. Now is the time that opportunity offers itself in the new development of a major new retail site.

On the whole an excellent and proficient service with dedicated staff and, even if it were agreed that the service needs to be further integrated into the Voluntary and community sector regime, the Council still need to support this very needed and high priority service that gives disabled and impaired people the vehicle and facilities to shop within the retail sector bringing in extra profits and spend in Walsall. Disabled people in Walsall are a major contributor to the retail, business and public sectors.

If this service was refused the funds it desperately needs maintain its operation it would have a detrimental and devastating effect not only on the town and its services etc but also and more so to the growing number of disabled and impaired people who live work and visit this great town of Walsall.



## **MEMBERS TO COMPLETE FINDINGS OF THE ASSESSMENT BASED ON EVIDENCE GATHERED:**

### **The VFM Process**

I found the VFM review to be a powerful tool in highlighting the key functions, benefits and challenges for the Shopmobility Service. I have welcomed the opportunity to discuss with officers a wide range of issues relating to the service as well as working together to identify possible options in relation to the future of the service.

### **The importance of the Shopmobility Service**

The VFM process has helped demonstrate that the Shopmobility Service is both successful and highly valued. It serves a significant number of local residents from across our community and assists in improving their quality of life. As a market researcher I was particularly interested in the survey undertaken of service users regarding their typical spend in the town centre, including discussing with officers regarding some of the questions that would be included to assist in ensuring that useful conclusions could be drawn from the responses of service users. The survey provides strong evidence that the service provides to users, it also makes a valuable contribution to the growth of the local economy and I hope this provides support for the bid for WNF funding. However, the review has also demonstrated that when compared with its local peer group the service provides good value for money. In my view it is generally expected that a town of the size and status of Walsall should operate a Shopmobility service and so it is considered essential that the service is preserved and maintained.

### **Current challenges**

It is apparent that the service is facing a critical time and must pursue its short term objective of meeting a shortfall in funding of up to £15,000 to ensure its future beyond the financial year 2010-2011 as a priority. Many of the existing challenges were inherited and include the location of existing premises which mean that the service is not fully accessible to all potential users, due to parking and other restrictions, neither does it have the prominent position officers would like it to occupy within the town centre to promote use of the service. This has an impact on the level of income that the service can generate. At the same time the level of rent the service is currently required to pay does not reflect its non-commercial nature.

I very much welcome the efforts of the officers responsible for the service in responding to the financial pressures being experienced by the Council in seeking to identify alternative sources of funding and income in working towards the delivery of a more sustainable service. However, I share the view of officers that if a funding bid is unsuccessful a reduction in operating days or hours should not be contemplated, particularly because of the potential impact on service users, the local economy and the Council's priorities.

### **Looking to the Future**

A key element of the VFM activity was identifying as well as further developing medium and long-term opportunities to support the sustainability of the service. It is clear from my discussions with officers that the ambition is to make the service more sustainable. I particularly welcome the proposed combination with the Walsall Centre for Independent Living for both co-location of the service as well as charitable status, with economies of scale being amongst the benefits. I support this and the other proposals developed by the Shopmobility service and recommend them to the Panel.

**It is our view that this service, in terms of vfm is:-**



**Delivering services in an efficient and effective manner and demonstrating vfm in all areas**

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**Generally delivering an efficient and effective service and demonstrating vfm but needs to address the following issues:**

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**1. Ongoing funding sustainability.**

**2. Suitability of location to ensure maximum take up and accessibility.**



**In the majority of areas examined is not able to evidence that service delivery is efficient and effective or that vfm is being delivered. Our recommendation is that**

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Finally, I would like to thank the following for their contributions the VFM exercise:

Chris Gregory, Business Development Manager, Walsall Council  
Lyn Eshelby, Shopmobility Manager, Walsall Council  
David Williams, Solihull Shopmobility  
Vel Finney, Wolverhampton Shopmobility  
Andrew Kilmurray, Sandwell Leisure and Cultural Services  
Geoff Deakin, Sandwell Leisure and Cultural Services  
Farzana Mahmood, Sandwell Shopmobility  
Janet Ellis, Sandwell Shopmobility  
Andrew Moulton, Walsall Disability Forum/ Shopmobility TCW Management Board Chair  
Louise Mabley, NHS Walsall

Councillor Rose Martin

Social Care and Inclusion Scrutiny and Performance Panel