

# FAREHAM

## BOROUGH COUNCIL

### Report to the Executive Member for Leisure and Community for Decision 23 May 2023

<b>Portfolio:</b>	Leisure and Community
<b>Subject:</b>	<b>Community Fund Application – Shopmobility</b>
<b>Report of:</b>	Director of Leisure and Community
<b>Corporate Priorities:</b>	Leisure Opportunities for Health and Fun

**Purpose:**

This report presents an application for funding under the Council's Community Funding Programme.

**Executive summary:**

Shopmobility Fareham is a charitable service that provides mobility scooters, electric and manual wheelchairs to people with limited mobility living within or visiting the Borough of Fareham. The service is available to all those in need, whether because of a long-term condition or a short-term impairment.

As well as enabling visitors to Fareham Town Centre to access the shops independently, the service also hires equipment to individuals to assist with mobility on holidays or trips.

All customers are given an assessment to help them find the right mobility aid and to ensure they are confident to use it. On average, approximately 160 individuals benefit from this service each month.

The Shopmobility Service is run by Communities First Wessex, who receive a Service Level Agreement grant from Fareham Borough Council of £7,350 per year. The purpose of this grant is to help make the Fareham Shopmobility Service affordable and accessible to all residents and visitors to Fareham Town Centre.

Fareham Shopmobility is currently located on the ground level of the Osborn Road Multi-Storey Car Park.

## **Background**

A report to the Council's Executive in May 2022 detailed plans for the regeneration of Fareham Town Centre, which included the demolition of the Osborn Road Multi-Storey Car Park. In its place, a new surface car park would provide 120 spaces, including 8 disabled bays.

The report made reference to the Fareham Shopmobility Service, confirming that officers would work closely with this service to identify a suitable alternative location ahead of construction.

## **Relocating the service**

Consultation with Communities First Wessex around the relocation of the Shopmobility Service has identified the following priorities: an accessible unit close to popular entrance points of Fareham Shopping Centre, space for Shopmobility's volunteers to carry out maintenance on the scooters, additional space to store lesser-used mobility scooters and space to store additional scooters for events, which helps Shopmobility generate additional income to supplement their service.

The current timeframe for relocation, due to the schedule of the Osborn Road Multi-Storey Car Park demolition, is summer 2023.

Following discussion with the Fareham Shopping Centre Manager, a suitable vacant unit within the Shopping Centre has been identified. It is next to the current One Community shop, close to the taxi rank by the south-east entrance and within a short distance from the Shoppers Car Park, providing good passing footfall.

It has a good-sized area on the first floor, accessible from the service area to the rear, which would be ideal for storing the additional mobility equipment that Fareham Shopmobility owns. It contains adequate space on the ground floor to welcome visitors and carry out minor servicing of equipment.

The unit would require Communities First Wessex to hold a lease, similar to those in existence for the other charities that are occupying vacant units in the Shopping Centre.

There would be no rental costs and as a result no guarantees on the duration for which Communities First Wessex would be able to occupy the unit. For this reason, there would be an expectation that all elements of the fit-out for the unit would be transferrable should Fareham Shopmobility be required to relocate in future.

Communities First Wessex would be eligible for relief from Business Rates for this unit, upon application.

## **Accessible Facilities**

It is essential that the Fareham Shopmobility Service remains accessible to customers, to enable them to retain their pledge of promoting independence for their users.

The closest car park, the Shoppers Car Park, is managed by Fareham Borough Council. Under the Council's management, individuals who are eligible for the Blue Badge Scheme and are a Fareham resident are able to access the car park free of charge. Those visiting the Town Centre who are not Fareham residents but have a

Blue Badge can park in the Shoppers Car Park but will be charged or can park for free in any of the Pay and Display surface car parks.

Fareham Shopmobility plan to include a service for those unable to walk to the Shopmobility shop or who do not have someone to collect the scooter for them, whereby it is brought to them if required, but they will need to be parked in the Shoppers Car Park to be able to access this service. This could extend to other car parks in the future but will be subject to volunteer availability.

To promote the seamlessness of this service, customers are encouraged to book their requirements from Shopmobility in advance. This arrangement has been in place for some time and works well for both the customer and volunteer/member of staff.

## **Volunteers**

As Fareham Shopmobility is a charitable service, many of its functions are undertaken by volunteers under the guidance of a paid member of staff.

Volunteers provide support with the meeting and greeting of customers, servicing the equipment and undertaking repairs.

In addition to being an accessible and welcoming venue for customers, it is essential that the unit provides a safe and comfortable base for the service's volunteers. To support this, Communities First Wessex will be carrying out risk assessments on the new operating procedures and will be supporting the volunteers through the changes.

The new unit will also provide Communities First Wessex with the opportunity to promote their other community services, such as Home Help and Dial-a-Ride.

Shopmobility's current opening days and times reflect their times of greatest demand. These are Mondays, Tuesdays, Thursdays and Saturdays from 9:30am to 4pm. These hours of operation will continue to be monitored and will increase if there is sufficient demand.

## **Community Funding Application**

An application to the Council's Community Funding for £6,646.98 has been received by Fareham Shopmobility for the costs associated with this move. The cost for the relocation of the Fareham Shopmobility Service has been identified as £7,146.98, which includes the creation of movable shopfront signage, the installation of necessary IT and electrical systems and the purchase of furniture for volunteers and customers. This will be a one-off outlay. Officers have worked closely with Communities First Wessex to identify opportunities to further reduce the cost of the relocation.

Shopmobility will remain responsible for all utilities, insurance and maintenance costs that are required for the unit. They will also fund, through Communities First Wessex, the publication of promotional leaflets for the service, which represents the additional £500 in the relocation costs.

Fareham Shopmobility's account details from 2021/2022 list a deficit of £4,037.68 for this service. Council Officers continue to work with Communities First Wessex to consider ways to ensure this service is financially viable, as it is a tremendous asset to the community.

Both Ward Councillors, Councillor Trott and Councillor Hamilton, are fully supportive of this request.

**Recommendation/Recommended Option:**

It is RECOMMENDED that this application be approved with the following conditions attached to the award:

- i. that a signed lease for the Shopping Centre Unit is provided prior to the transfer of funding;
- ii. that the relocation is completed prior to the close of June 2023; and
- iii. that the Fareham Shopmobility unit in the Shopping Centre will also be used to promote volunteering opportunities for Fareham based charities.

**Reason:**

This application meets the Community Fund criteria for financial support for community capital projects.

**Cost of Proposals:**

The total allocation towards the project will be £6,646.98, which can be met from the existing budget for the Community Fund Programme.

**Risk Assessment:**

There are no risks associated with this report.