

Joint Area Committee - North - 26 August 2009

11. Langport and Somerton Links Community Transport (Executive Decision) (Excepted Business)

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Purpose of the Report

The purpose of this report is to provide an update on the outcomes the first year of a three year (SLA) with South Somerset Voluntary and Community Action (SSVCA) for the operation of the Langport & Somerton Links. Members will be asked to consider the continuation of the Service Level Agreement.

Recommendation

That members endorse the award of £5000 to SSVCA for the Langport & Somerton Links Service from the Area North Community Grants budget, as the second part of the three-year Service Level Agreement agreed by members of Area North Committee in July 2008.

Background

South Somerset Links Community Transport Service (Links) serves the needs of people requiring transport in the Somerton, Langport and surrounding areas. The project exists to provide transport to people who are unable to access mainstream transport services or do not have an appropriate mainstream service in their town or village.

At the Area North Committee Meeting in July 2008, members approved the award of £5000 per year for three years (2008-2011) to the SSVCA for the Langport & Somerton Links community transport.

The project operates from the Langport Community Office, Bow Street, Langport.

The service

Links has three main service users: individuals, groups and Somerset County Council Community Directorate, who are served by four cars which have each been adapted for wheelchair use. The service currently employs 11 part time paid workers and has six volunteers who use their own cars.

The number of passengers and mileage covered has increased over the years:

Year	Mileage	Journeys
2006/07	48607	7079
2007/08	55658	8050

2008/09

57047

8274

Since 1 April 2009, the service has carried passengers from 17 parishes within Area North, with the largest number of journeys being from Huish Episcopi (741), Somerton (523), Curry Rivel (476), Langport (335) and High Ham (121).

Evidence of financial need

The table below summarises the 2008/09 final accounts, along with the forecast for 2009/10.

	2008/9 Budget	2008/9 Actual	2009/10 Budget
Income			
SCC Grant	1,000	6,000	2,000
SSDC Grant	5,000	5,000	5,000
Fares SCC	30,000	26,272	30,750
Private/Cash Fares	23,000	22,750	23,575
Annual Fees	500	360	750
Donations / parish grants	4,000	4,130	4100
Concessionary Fares	9,000	10,529	9,225
Bank Interest	250	169	250
Total Income	72,750	75,210	75,650

	2008/9 Budget	2008/9 Actual	2009/10 Budget
Expenditure			
Wages	44,000	46,070	50,000
Mileage	2,750	2,400	2,819
Vehicle Fuel	7,200	6,499	7,380
Vehicle Repairs	3,600	4,778	2,000
Vehicle Insurance	1,750	2,322	1,794
Phone	600	372	615
Stationery	200	24	205
Rent	1,500	2000	2000
Electric	300	0	308
Office Costs	1,000	2,400	1,025
Management Charge	3,000	3,000	3,500
Replacement Vehicle provision	4,400	4,892	4,400
Loss on Sale	489	489	0
Total Expenditure	70,789	75,246	76,046

Surplus/(Deficit)	1961	(36)	-396
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A replacement vehicle was purchased in May 2009 (at a cost of £11,000). This reduced the reserves to a current figure of around £5,000, which will need to be increased in order to replace another vehicle later in the year, in accordance with the vehicle replacement programme.

The current budget anticipates a small deficit, however this will be monitored throughout the year. Grants from local parish councils are requested by SSVCA for the particular areas of benefit.

The figures in the table above include the £5,000 agreed under the current SLA.

Evaluation

The performance plan within the Service Level Agreement is attached as **Appendix A**, with two additional columns containing an evaluation of the targets for 2008/09 and new ones for the forthcoming year. The targets have not changed greatly as the number of passengers that can be carried is limited by the number of drivers and vehicles.

Additional Information

- All social services journeys are contracted by tender. The officer responsible for organising transport services for social services clients at Somerset County Council (Transporting Somerset) stated that Links provides an irreplaceable service within the Somerton and Langport area. It is the only viable option for wheelchair based transport and on the occasions it is not available it is normally necessary to reschedule the client's appointment to a time when Links is able to assist. If there was another vehicle available, she was sure they would wish to use it.
- The Community Transport Management Software, purchased with part of the initial £5,000, came into full-time use on 1 April 2009 and has proved very successful. The Chief Officer of SSVCA intends using the same package for the other community based transport services operated by the organisation.
- Over 2008/09, the vehicles covered 57,047 miles, 907 of which were "dead", i.e. they generated no income. This represents 1.5% of the total mileage and is accounted for by journeys to the garage for routine maintenance. Although a garage in Yeovil was used earlier in the year, the manager has started to use a local firm, based in Langport. Not only will this reduce the number of non-income generating miles, it will also benefit the local economy.
- Overall mileage has increased by 2.8% over the previous year.
- The majority of private passengers use a South Somerset travel pass, which reduces their costs considerably: a concessionary fare is 50% of the full price, capped at £6.
- Whilst fares were held in 2008/09, they had to be increased in April 2009 and any reduction in the grant would result in either a greatly reduced service or a further increase in fares.
- The need for community transport in the Langport and Somerton area, additional to public transport, remains a reality, evidenced by the increasing passenger numbers and the service's use by SCC social services.

Looking ahead

Over the forthcoming year, plans will be made to:

- Purchase a replacement vehicle according to the new vehicle replacement policy;
- Review the Terms of Reference and membership of the steering group
- Work with other local partners to provide transport for events in and around Somerton and Langport;
- Ensure the balance between social services clients and private individuals is maintained.

Conclusion

If the award were not made to SSVCA for the Links service, access to services would deteriorate for the disabled and elderly residents in and around the Somerton and Langport area. There is no obvious alternative, particularly for those who use a wheelchair.

The Links service has met its targets for 2008/09, as laid out in the Service Level Agreement. The passenger base has increased, the service is considered invaluable by the social services contractor and customer satisfaction is high. The accounts for 2008/09 and business plan for 2009/10 show that there is a financial need for the £5000 from SSDC and it is recommended that this be agreed.

Financial Implications

A payment of £5,000 was made in 2008/09 from the Community Grants Budget, with forward commitments of £5,000 in each of the next two years subject to budgetary provision, evidence of financial need, and satisfactory fulfilment of the service level agreement. This award of £5,000 will be from 2009/10 budget.

Implications for corporate priorities

- 3.12: Maintain the percentage of vulnerable people who are supported to maintain independent living.
- 3.13: Increase adults supported to live independently.

Other implications

Area North Development Priorities:

- Theme 2: Increase the availability of community and public local transport services, in particular to promote access to services and to reduce isolation.

Background papers: *Area North Community Grants Report, 25 April 2007*
Area North Somerton & Langport Links Service Report, 26 September 2007
Area North Community Grants Report, 23 July 2008
Joint Area North Committee Community Grants Outturn Report 2008/09 (Item for Information), 27 May 2009
