

Area North Committee – 23 February 2011

8. Langport and Somerton Links Community Transport (Executive Decision)

Portfolio Holder: Cllr Patrick Palmer, Area North
Strategic Director: Rina Singh, Place and Performance
Assistant Director: Helen Rutter, Communities
Service Manager: Charlotte Jones, Area Development Manager (North)
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Purpose of the Report

The purpose of this report is for councillors to consider a financial contribution to the South Somerset Links Community Transport Service (Links), as the third year of the three year Service Level Agreement (SLA) with South Somerset Voluntary and Community Action (SSVCA).

Public Interest

South Somerset Links Community Transport Service (Links) 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. The project operates from the Langport Information Centre, Bow Street, Langport and serves the residents of Langport, Huish Episcopi, Somerton and many of the neighbouring villages in Area North (including Aller, Curry Mallett, Curry Rivel, Drayton, Fivehead, Hambridge, High Ham, Isle Abbots, Kingsbury Episcopi, Long Load and Long Sutton).

At the Area North Committee meeting in July 2008, councillors approved the award of £5000 per year for three years (2008-2011) to the SSVCA for the Links Community Transport service.

Recommendation

Approve the award of £5000 to SSVCA for the Langport & Somerton Links Service as the third payment of the three year Service Level Agreement, allocated from the Area North Community Grants budget 2010-11 and subject to the South Somerset District Council standard conditions for Community Grants (Appendix A) and the fulfilment of the performance plan (see Appendix B), as agreed in principle in July 2008.

Application Details

Name of applicant	South Somerset Voluntary & Community Action
Project	Langport & Somerton Links Service
Project description	The service aims to provide transport to the people of Somerton, Langport and the surrounding villages who are currently unable to access public transport due to isolation, unemployment, disability or age. This includes providing access to transport where mainstream public transport services do not exist. The application is for continued financial support for the third year of a three year Service Level Agreement originally agreed in December 2008 towards the cost of the purchase of new software and revenue assistance.
Total project cost over three years	£88,775 (this included the purchase of new software in the first year)
Amount requested from SSDC for year 3 (2010/11)	£5000
Total amount of SLA over three years	£15,000 (16.9% of total project cost)
Special conditions	SLA between SSDC and SSVCA
Service Level Agreement monitored by	Teresa Oulds, Community Regeneration Officer (North)

The service:

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

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

Year	Mileage	Passengers
2006/07	48607	7079
2007/08	55658	8050
2008/09	57047	8274
2009/10	52939	8444
20010/11*	46680	6841

*These figures only go up to December 2010 and projected number of passengers by 31 March 2011 is 9120.

Since 1 April 2010, the service has carried passengers from 15 parishes within Area North, with the largest number of journeys being from Huish Episcopi (1659), Curry Rivel (1546), Somerton (994), Langport (441) and High Ham (449).

Evidence of financial need

The table below summarises the 2009/10 final accounts, along with the projection for 2010/11.

	2009/10 Budget	2009/10 Actual	2010/11 Budget	2010/11 Year to date + projected final quarter.
Income				
SCC grant	2,000	3,000	3,000	3,000
SDDC grant	5,000	5,000	5,000	5,000
Fares SCC	30,750	26,667	30,000	25,500
Private/cash fares	23,575	24,572	27,600	26,635
Annual fees	750	150	900	250
Donations/parish grants	4,100	5,423	4,800	5,000
Concessionary fares	9,225	10,200	10,500	11,500
Bank interest	250	1	0	0
Langport Town Council		1,000	1,500	1,500
Fuel rebate		1,495	0	2,118
Total income	75,650	77,508	83,300	80,503
Expenditure				
Wages	50,000	50,802	51,480	52,545
Mileage	2,819	749	1,020	640
Fuel	7,380	5,847	8,100	7,500
Vehicle repairs	2,000	4,612	3,900	5,000
Vehicle insurance	1,794	1,977	2,000	2,050
Phone	615	595	780	700
Stationery	205	32	240	120
Rent	2,000	1,417	2,000	2,000
Electricity	308	23	Incl in rent	Incl in rent
Office costs	1,025		1,020	1,600
Management charge	3,500	1,780	3,500	3,500
Replacement vehicle provision	4,400	4,400	5,000	5,000
Training		950	500	500
Total expenditure	76,046	76,684	79,540	81,155
Surplus/(deficit)	(396)	824	3,760	(652)

The current anticipated forecast anticipates a small deficit for the year that will be covered from previous surpluses. The budget supports a programme of replacement vehicles. The figures in the table above include the £5,000 grant from SDDC agreed under the SLA.

Evaluation

The performance plan within the SLA is attached as **Appendix B** with columns containing an evaluation of the targets for 2009/10 and new ones for 2010/11. The

targets have not changed greatly as the number of drivers and vehicles available limits the number of passengers that can be carried.

Additional information

- The number of miles covered by the vehicles has increased by 9% over four years, from 48,607 in 2006/07 to 52,939 in 2009-10.
- The number of passengers increased from 7079 to 8444, an increase of 19% over the same four years.
- A replacement vehicle has been purchased in the last year at a cost of £10,170, in accordance with the business plan. This is a Renault Master SWB with six passenger seats and space for one wheelchair (or four seats and two wheelchair spaces). This purchase both complements and increases the flexibility of the transport fleet. There remains provision for a replacement vehicle, which will need to be increased in order to replace another vehicle as necessary, in accordance with the vehicle replacement programme incorporated in the SLA.
- Over the past year the Somerset Rural Youth Project has for the first time used the service.
- The Royal British Legion used the service for the Remembrance Sunday Parade in Somerton.
- A new driver joined the service during the last year.
- Local Parish Councils were approached for funding with grants being received towards the 2010-11 budget year from: Long Sutton, Compton Dundon, Long Load, Pitney, Curry Mallet, Langport, Huish Episcopi and Fivehead.
- The project was nominated for an award from the NatWest Community Fund and received a grant of £1000.
- A donation of £1000 was received from Take Note, a local music group.
- All social services journeys undertaken by Links are commissioned through an open tendering process.
- The Community Transport Management Software that was purchased with part of the initial £5,000 continues to be very successful and the same package has now been bought for other community based transport services operated by SSVCA.
- The minimum fare was increased on 1 April 2010 from £4 to £4.80.
- 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.
- Dead miles (ie those that generated no income) in 2009/10 amounted to 939, accounting for 2% of the total mileage. This is about average for this kind of project.
- The office in Langport operates from 8.30am until 1.30pm each weekday. Telephone hours are from 9.30am to 12.30pm, but phone messages can be left at all other times. There is a high satisfaction level amongst passengers, with no complaints received in the last year.

The future

The impact of budget cuts at Somerset County Council, both within the transport sector and social services is not yet known but at the time of writing it seems reasonable to assume there will be an impact on Links. However, as a voluntary sector organisation, SSVCA is well placed to look for alternative sources of funding and will continue to work to ensure the viability of the service.

Summary and Recommendation

Links is much in demand and greatly valued by all its users. If the award were not made, access to services would deteriorate for the disabled and elderly residents in the area, particularly for those who use a wheelchair.

The Links service has generally met its targets for 2009/10, as laid out in the SLA. The accounts show that there is financial need for the £5000 from SSDC and it is recommended that this be awarded. The award of the final part of the SLA will ensure the project's continuation for the next year, giving time for other funding sources to be found and the impact of cuts to be assessed.

It is recognised that further innovation may be needed to retain or develop this service to local residents.

Financial Implications

The Community Grants budget for 2010/11 is £42,324, after commitments made during the year, and if this grant of £5000 is awarded, the balance for the current financial year will be £16,422.44.

Corporate Priority Implications

3.11: Increased choice and quality of life for older and vulnerable people by increasing the percentage of residents who feel that older people in their local area receive the services and support they need to continue to live independently at home.

3.29 Increase access to services and facilities by public transport, walking and cycling.

4.26 SST partners to deliver two services through or in partnership with the voluntary and community sector by 2010.

Area North Priority Implications

One Area North priority is to increase access to services to improve quality of life, through local and outreach services, transport and ICT.

Carbon Emissions & Adapting to Climate Change Implications (N188)

Use of a single vehicle to transport several people is more carbon efficient than the probable alternative, use of several cars. Continued use of this service would therefore result in lower carbon emissions than if the service did not exist.

Equality and Diversity Implications

The service is primarily aimed at older people, people with disabilities, people on a low income and people living in remote rural areas who have limited means to access alternative transport services.

Background papers

Area North Community Grants Report, 25 April 2007
 Area North Somerton & 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
 Joint Area North Committee Langport & Somerton Links Community Transport Report, 26 August 2009