

9. Area North Community Grants - Langport & Somerton Links Community Transport (Executive Decision)

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Purpose of the Report

The purpose of the report is for councillors to consider an application for a financial contribution towards the purchase of a replacement vehicle by South Somerset Voluntary and Community Action (SSVCA), for use by Langport and Somerton Links Community Transport Service.

Public Interest

SSVCA has applied for financial assistance from SSDC. The application has been assessed by the Neighbourhood Development Officer who has submitted this report to allow the Area North Committee to make an informed decision.

Recommendation

Councillors are asked to consider the following recommendation:

- That a grant of £5,000 be awarded to SSVCA towards the purchase of a replacement vehicle. This would be allocated from the Area North capital budget.

Application details

Name of applicant	South Somerset Voluntary and Community Action (SSVCA)
Project	Vehicle replacement for the Langport and Somerton Links Community Transport Service
Project description	Purchase of a second hand vehicle to replace an existing one that has been in use since 2003 and has high mileage and increasing maintenance costs.
Total project cost	£10,000
Amount requested from SSDC	£5,000 (50% of project cost)
Application assessed by	Teresa Oulds, Neighbourhood Development Officer
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Background information

The Langport and Somerton Links Community Transport Service (Links) provides a community transport service 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 service operates from the Langport Information Centre in Bow Street, Langport.

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

Area North has previously given financial support to Links, awarding £12,500 in 2007 towards the cost of a replacement vehicle and core funding and a further £15,000 spread over three years from 2008. The latter was managed through a Service Level Agreement and included a revenue contribution towards the running of Links and the purchase of computer software. The software has made a noticeable difference in the workload of the Manager and has made the planning of journeys much simpler and more efficient. It has also enabled the maintenance of accurate records and produce meaningful statistics on which to base future development of the service.

A second replacement vehicle was purchased in 2010 during the course of the Service Level Agreement at a cost of £10,170. Since then, SSVCA has continued to recognise the need to have a rolling programme of vehicle replacement and has made financial provision towards this.

Project description

It is proposed to replace a vehicle that is one of the original fleet and has been in use since 2003, accruing 179,000 miles in those 10 years. It was second-hand when purchased and is now incurring significant additional maintenance costs related to its age and use.

Evidence of need

South Somerset Links has seen an increased demand for its services since its inception, both as a result of an ageing local population but also with reductions in both the provision of central and local government funding for public transport. Links will remain a demand responsive service so the vehicle will be used as and when needed by people from the target group. The 2011 census has shown that South Somerset has 10,182 households without access to a car. For these reasons, a targeted community transport service is vital for the local population.

The number of passengers and live mileage covered has increased over the years (see below) and the loss of a vehicle would severely impact upon the quality of the service offered.

Year	Mileage	Passengers
2006/07	48,607	7079
2007/08	55,658	8050
2008/09	57,047	8274
2009/10	52,939	8444
2010/11	63,587	9279
2011/12	66,974	9939
2012/13	68,393	9812

As in previous years, the local town and parish councils have been approached for financial assistance towards the general running costs of Links and a total of £5850 has been received from Huish Episcopi, Langport, Somerton, Long Load, Long Sutton, High Ham, Curry Mallet and Martock. This is an increase on previous years and demonstrates the local support for the service.

The vehicle to be replaced is now 11-12 years old and each quarterly inspection results in repairs being needed. The last inspection found brake hose wear and a crankshaft pulley in need of replacing. A 2008 model replacement vehicle, adapted appropriately (preferably with five passenger seats and wheelchair accessible) will cost around £10,000. There is £5000 currently held in reserves towards the purchase. The projected accounts for 2012/13 (excluding that held in reserves) are shown below.

	2013/14 Projection
	£
Income	
Cash fares - from customers who usually have a bus pass	30,000
Private customer fares – invoiced to groups who do not qualify for a bus pass	6,000
SCC contracts	18,000
Membership fees	600
Concessionary fares	16,500
Donations – including parish and town council grants	4,920
Fuel duty rebate	3,700
Langport TC grant – shown separately as it is specifically towards the rent of the office space	1,500
TOTAL income	(£81,220)
Expenditure	
Wages and salaries	52,800
Volunteer mileage	480
Staff training	300
Vehicle fuel	9,960
Vehicle repairs/maintenance	6,960
Tyres	600
Insurance	2,500
Rent	2,000
Phone/broadband	720
Office costs	600
Software	1,310
Charity running costs	4,263
Marketing	240
TOTAL expenditure	£82,733
(Profit)/Loss b/f	£ 1,513

Anticipated benefits and outcomes

Links 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). As shown earlier in the report, the number of passengers and the mileage covered continues to increase and the purchase of a newer, more economical vehicle will allow the South Somerset Links to continue to provide a good service.

If the service were to reduce to four vehicles there would be a significant drop in the number of local people who could access the service and the overall service would become less demand responsive and less economical as a result.

It is anticipated that the replacement vehicle would be in use for the next 10 years and its general running costs financed from fare income.

Project cost and other funding sources

The vehicle would cost in the region of £10,000. Links has £5,000 available towards the cost. The town and parish councils have not been approached for funding for the vehicle as they have already contributed towards the general running costs of the service.

Evidence of local support

Financial support for Links has been received from Huish Episcopi, Langport, Somerton, Long Load, Long Sutton, High Ham, Curry Mallet and Martock parish and town councils.

Summary and recommendation

Links has been established since 2001 and has served increasing numbers of local residents since then. There is a need to replace a vehicle that has become uneconomic to maintain and councillors are asked to consider granting £5,000 towards the cost.

Financial implications

There is £94,658 available in the Area North Capital programme for Local Priority Schemes. If the recommended grant of £5,000 to Links is awarded, £89,658 will remain in this allocation for 2013-14 and for future years. In addition there is a further £176,528 unallocated capital for local investment.

Council Plan implications

- 1: Jobs. There is potential to increase access to work opportunities as a result of maintaining a reliable accessible fleet for community transport and the vehicle will provide the opportunity for people from rural communities to catch up with main public transport services such as the Langport/Taunton link.
- 4: Health & Communities. The vehicle purchase will improve access to both health services and other social opportunities to support good mental health and support for local isolated rural communities to that people can continue to live in them and access local services.

Area North Priorities implications

Self-Help - Help local communities be safe, strong and independent, with good access to the services and facilities they value.

Carbon emissions & adapting to climate change implications

Use of a single vehicle to transport several people is more carbon efficient than the probable alternative, the use of several cars. The continuation of this service,

particularly with a newer more fuel efficient vehicle, would therefore result in lower carbon emissions than if the service did not exist or if it continued with an old, high mileage model vehicle.

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: None
