

Meeting of:	Environment and Regeneration Scrutiny Committee
Date of Meeting:	Tuesday, 10 December 2024
Relevant Scrutiny Committee:	Environment and Regeneration
Report Title:	Greenlinks Community Transport Service Update Report
Purpose of Report:	To inform the committee of the status and future plans of the Greenlinks service
Report Owner:	Miles Punter – Director of Environment and Housing
Responsible Officer:	Kyle Phillips – Operational Manager Transport Services
Elected Member and Officer Consultation:	Committee Reports Finance
Policy Framework:	The report comes under the remit of the Environment and Regeneration Scrutiny Committee

Executive Summary:

- Greenlinks is a Demand Responsive Transport Service (DRT) and has been operating in the Vale of Glamorgan for 13 years. The service is operated using permits issued by Sections 19 of the Transport Act 1985 and can also operate under Section 22 permits.
- The Service forms part of the Council’s provision of public transport with the aim of providing transport for those who have no access to local public or private transport or those who are unable to access public transport due to physical or mental abilities.
- The Greenlinks service generally operates between 9:00 and 16.00, Monday to Friday; however, it is also available to hire in the evenings and weekends for group members.
- The service provides transport for health appointments, shopping, visiting relatives in care homes and accessing local community clubs to name but a few.
- The scheme currently has 2073 individual members and 133 groups. Since March 2023, 181 new members have joined the scheme.

- In 2023-2024 Greenlinks facilitated 4,870 passenger journeys. During quarter one and two of the 2024/25 financial year 134 active members used the service.

Between April and September 2024, 2498 passenger journeys were undertaken. It is forecast that 5000 passenger journeys will be undertaken in 2024/2025 which is showing an upward trend in the use of service but is still some way off the 10,000 plus that were undertaken prior to the pandemic.

- The Greenlinks service is dependent on Section 106 funding.

Recommendation

1. That the Committee considers the contents of the report.

Reason for Recommendation

1. To enable the committee to scrutinise the service and provide feedback on future plans.

1. Background

- 1.1** Greenlinks is a Demand Responsive Transport Service (DRT) which has been operational in the Vale of Glamorgan for 13 years. The service is operated using permits issued by Sections 19 of the Transport Act 1985 and can also operate under Section 22 permits.
- 1.2** The Service forms part of the Council's provision of public transport throughout the Vale of Glamorgan with the aim of providing transport for those who have no access to local public or private transport or those who are unable to access public transport due to physical or mental abilities.
- 1.3** The Greenlinks service generally operates between 9:00 and 16.00, Monday to Friday; however, it is also available to hire in the evenings and weekends for group members.
- 1.4** The service provides transport for health appointments, shopping, visiting relatives in care homes and accessing local community clubs to name but a few.
- 1.5** The Service currently operates using one paid driver, 12 volunteer drivers and two office staff. Volunteers tend to offer their services 1 to 2 days a week. On average this means we are able to offer 2 to 3 vehicles each week day.
- 1.6** The Greenlinks fleet contains 7 vehicles: two 12 seaters, two 9 seaters and 2 caddy's. An additional caddy is used by Dinas Powys Voluntary Concern, all of which are accessible.
- 1.7** Members of the scheme make a request for transport up until midday the working day before they wish to travel. Requests are then considered, and schedules drawn up based on the vehicles and drivers available with the aim of accommodating as many passengers as possible.
- 1.8** Previously under Section 22 permits, the G1 service, operated Monday to Friday, serving St Athan, Cowbridge, Bridgend and the surrounding small villages.

- 1.9** This was the only public transport provision in many of the villages connecting them to main villages/towns and other public transport routes such as the X2 (Porthcawl to Cardiff via Bridgend, Cowbridge and A48).
- 1.10** The G4 service, operated on a Thursday only, and provided transport to Culverhouse Cross and Cardiff, serving the coastal villages between Llantwit Major and Rhoose. As these were section 22 services passengers could use their concessionary bus pass in order to travel. Both these services were suspended during and following COVID due to lack of drivers.

2. Key Issues for Consideration

- 2.1** The scheme currently has 2073 individual members and 133 groups.
- 2.2** Since March 2023, 181 new members have joined the scheme.
- 2.3** In 2023/24 Greenlinks facilitated 4,870 passenger journeys.
- 2.4** During quarter one and two of the 2024/25 financial year 134 active members used the service.
- 2.5** Between April and September 2024, 2498 passenger journeys were undertaken. It is forecast that 5000 passenger journey's will be undertaken in 2024/2025 which is showing an upward trend in the use of service but is still someway off the 10,000 plus that were undertaken prior to the pandemic.
- 2.6** Between April and September 2024, the service received 1400 transport requests and was successful in accommodating 1156 of these. There were 244 requests that could not be accommodated either due to lack of available drivers or the service not being in or going to the area requested on a specific day. In addition to this Greenlinks has also accommodated 19 group bookings for:

Age Cmyru - Barry Nordic Walkers
Barry Island Lamplighter Orchestra
Barry Womens Institute
Golau Caredig Residents Association
Innovative Trust
Llantwit Major & Cowbridge Lions
Rhoose Bowling Club
St Illtyd Primary School
Vale Plus
Wick Pensioners Group

Funding

- 2.7 Greenlinks is currently funded by developer Section 106 sustainable transport contributions.

From April to September 2024 the cost of running the services was:

Staff (office and paid driver)	£51,915
Vehicles (maintenance and fuel)	£16,565
Promotion	£587
Drivers (subsistence claims and training)	£2,425
Office Purchases	£376
Total	£71,868

This has been funded by:

Membership Fees	£1,262
Fares	£3,730
Bus Service Support Grant (one off)	£10,383
S106	£56,493
Total	£71,868

- 2.8 It is forecast that another £60,000 of Section 106 funding will be required for the service for the second half of the 2024/25 financial year
- 2.9 Options for funding in the 2025/26 financial year are being considered with options such as continued Section 106, Shared Prosperity and Bus Network Grant all being investigated.

Transport Officer recruitment

- 2.10 In September 2021, the officer responsible for managing the Greenlinks service moved over to the Fleet and Vehicle maintenance department. This left a void with the Transport Officer post advertised frequently from this time but unfortunately no applications were received until March 2024.
- 2.11 This meant the service was without a lead officer for a significant period and operated in a limited way with the focus being on providing passenger journeys. This meant promotion of the service, driver recruitment campaigns, reinstatement of Section 22 services and attempts to modernise the service could not happen.

- 2.12** Since May 2024, a Transport Officer, with responsibility for the management of the Greenlinks service has been in post and the service is once again operating in a progressive way.

Promotion of the service

- 2.13** Since May 2024 promotion of the service has been at the forefront of the lead officer's role.

The service has been promoted via the social media channels of:

- Community Hubs – Town Councils / Community Councils
- Libraries
- Vale Village hubs
- Vale Village email groups
- Dementia Friendly
- Y Galon Heart of the Community
- Cardiff and Vale Action for Mental Health and hospices
- Memory Jar
- Glamorgan Voluntary Service

Promotion of the service at events including:

- Dementia Friendly – Cowbridge Town Hall
- Green Libraries Week – Barry Library
- Green Libraries Week – Penarth Library
- Green Libraries Week – Llantwit Major
- Vale 50+ Forum – Civic Offices
- Memory Jar – Cowbridge

Forthcoming events that the Transport Officer will be attending:

- CT24 – The Voice of the Passenger (November 2024)
- Community Transport and Bus Reform (December 2024)
- Big Volunteering Fayre (January 2025)
- Vale 50+ Strategy 'have your say' (March 2025)

- 2.14** Paper advertising has been undertaken in The Glamorgan Star newspaper and Wenvoe What's on.

- 2.15** In addition, advertisements have been going out daily on Bro Radio. This started in August 2024 which supports the growth in membership.

- 2.16** A refreshed Greenlinks leaflet has been designed and will be in circulation before the end of the calendar year. It will be distributed to locations such as doctor's surgeries / libraries / village hubs throughout the Vale in the new year.

Driver Recruitment

- 2.17** Following the renewed promotional campaign, the number of drivers has increased from 6 to 12 in the past 6 months. Recruitment of drivers is a continual process, and to ensure Greenlinks remains sustainable, the service does require more volunteers.

Payments

- 2.18** Following the Covid-19 pandemic with Greenlinks running under restrictions, the process of paying for journeys was changed to payment on receipt of invoice as the service was unable to handle cash at that time. This process continued until March 2024.
- 2.19** There was a delay sending invoices out and some customers were sent bills for significant amounts for journeys undertaken. These members were contacted by telephone and informed they could set up payment plans to ease the financial burden. The majority of these have now been paid.
- 2.20** Payment by cash was re-introduced in April 2024 in place of invoicing and has resolved payment issues moving forward. Investigations into the use of allowing card payments on board the vehicles have also begun.

Electric Vehicles

- 2.21** As part of the Council's Project Zero commitment, in addition to the existing fleet, Cardiff Capital Region donated two electric vehicles to the Greenlinks Service. The vehicles were previously used as part of a "try before you buy" e-taxi scheme. These vehicles are currently being trialled and will replace two diesel fuelled vehicles in 2025, streamlining the fleet.

Membership Survey

- 2.22** A survey is being sent out to all existing Greenlinks members in January 2025 requesting feedback on what they would like to see from the service, and particularly the reintroduction of Section 22 services. The survey will pose questions such as "how easy do you find the process of requesting a journey", "what days would you use the service if G1 was reintroduced", "which payment

method would be your preference”, this will be sent in paper form and will also be available online.

G1 Service

- 2.23** The feedback from the member survey will inform how the G1 service operates going forward. The likelihood is the service will begin on a part time basis (2 days per week) until demand increases and additional days are viable.
- 2.24** As this service operates under a Section 22 permit – concessionary bus passes can be accepted once it is registered with the traffic commissioner. It also means that if the service does not run, the operator is likely to be imposed with financial penalties by the Traffic Commissioner. For that reason, it has been important to grow the number of volunteer drivers the service has, which will allow the paid driver to operate the service.

3. How do proposals evidence the Five Ways of Working and contribute to our Well-being Objectives?

Long Term

- 3.1** The Greenlinks Transport Service has been operational for over 13 years, and although there has been a disruption in the service, the service is growing again. Due to the nature of the Service it continues to require financial support to deliver an accessible service to residents of the Vale. Providing a Service that allows residents to live in their own homes for longer and in more rural areas of the Vale is a longer-term benefit to the Council and its residents.
- 3.2** The Greenlinks service can assist in filling the gaps in the public transport network.

Prevention

- 3.3** The provision of a demand responsive transport service assists in the reduction of unnecessary mileage and provides a different, more sustainable and viable mode of public transport.
- 3.4** Greenlinks may be able to assist in the prevention of gaps within the local transport network.

Integration

- 3.5** The Greenlinks Service forms an integral part of the Council’s public transportation plan ensuring that all areas of the Vale of Glamorgan has access to

public transport where it is not viable to operate a more traditional 'timetabled' service. The Service also improves access for those with impaired mobility.

- 3.6** The 'All Wales Transport Strategy', has community transport as a key component of the Transport Network, particularly linking in with other modes of transport.

Collaboration

- 3.7** The continued development of the Greenlinks Service is achieved in collaboration with other CT operators within the Vale to provide the greatest coverage and opportunities for the residents of the Vale to access public transport.

Involvement

- 3.8** As the Greenlinks Service is demand responsive, it automatically responds to and is aware of the needs of the Greenlinks members catering where possible for the greatest demand. It will continue to evolve following involvement from members.
- 3.9** The Greenlinks service is operated by several volunteer drivers whose involvement greatly benefits the local communities.

Well-being Goals

- 3.10** The Council continues to support the running of the Greenlinks Community Transport service to transport passengers in and around the Vale, including areas without local bus services and to ensure the service is operated in line with accessibility regulations.

4. Climate Change and Nature Implications

- 4.1** The Council continue to encourage the use of public transport services and/or active travel. The aim being to reduce individual car journeys in as many areas as possible thus reducing carbon emissions throughout the Vale. Greenlinks supports this aim by providing access to public transport in areas where traditional public transport is not viable.
- 4.2** The addition of two electric vehicles into the Greenlinks fleet is contributing to the Council's Project Zero campaign and will assist in trying to reach net-zero carbon by 2030.

5. Resources and Legal Considerations

Financial

- 5.1** The funding required for delivering the Greeninks service for the 2024/25 financial year is predicted to be in the region of £120k.
- 5.2** Section 106 sustainable transport developer contributions currently fund the Greenlinks service. The amount required is offset by membership fees and fares as well as a one-off annual Bus Services Support Grant (BSSG) payment.

Employment

- 5.3** The Service is administered with two members of office staff, one paid driver and a number of volunteer drivers. Recruitment of volunteer drivers is a continual process, working with partners such Glamorgan Voluntary Services (GVS) and Job Centres.

Legal (Including Equalities)

- 5.4** The running and maintenance of the vehicles will continue to comply with legislation as identified in the terms and conditions of the Section 19 and Section 22 permits and Driver and Vehicle Standards Agency (DVSA) requirements for operating a public service vehicle. This involves daily visual checks on the vehicles completed by drivers ensuring the vehicle is fit for purpose, eight weekly safety checks, services and MOT's as required.
- 5.5** The Greenlinks service offers fully accessible vehicles with most services running door to door meaning residents can travel easily regardless of any mobility impairments.
- 5.6** The Greenlinks service supports the Council's vision of a well organised transport network which helps to increase mobility and accessibility.

6. Background Papers

None

THE VALE OF GLAMORGAN COUNCIL

REQUEST FOR 'CONSIDERATION OF MATTER' BY SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

Name:
Cll Christine Cave

Ward:
Llandow

I request the consideration of a report on the following matter.

Subject:

The Greenlinks bus service. The service is the only way many people (including the majority of older people) can leave the rural villages in the Western Vale. The rural villages often do not have any other bus service. Over the last year, I have had several reports of the service being very poor indeed. For example, several elderly people in Llangan / Treoes were given an annual bill running into several hundred pounds. This is not acceptable especially for people such as pensioners who are on a fixed income and have to budget accordingly. There have also been problems with the booking system with many people reporting that their calls are not returned. This leaves people not knowing if they will be able to travel or not. I do realise there have been problems with no member of staff in the office and an insufficient number of volunteer drivers but who let this service get like this? Someone should be accountable and learning should come from this in order to ensure we don't have a second rate service once again in the rural Vale.

Scrutiny Committee – Environment and Regeneration

I am not a member of the above Scrutiny Committee
(* Please delete as appropriate).

Reason(s) for request.

As set out above.

Signed **Christine Cave**

Date 14th October 2024

FORM TO BE RETURNED TO THE CHIEF EXECUTIVE



Date received 15/10/2024 Chief Executive's Signature.....

(Upon receipt in writing of the request, the request will then be forwarded by the Democratic and Scrutiny Services section to the appropriate Director(s) who will be required to prepare a report for consideration by the relevant Scrutiny Committee(s). A copy of the request will also be forwarded to the relevant Chair for information).