



# WOKINGHAM BOROUGH COUNCIL

A Meeting for an **INDIVIDUAL EXECUTIVE MEMBER DECISION** will be held in LGF9 - Civic Offices, Shute End, Wokingham RG40 1BN on **FRIDAY 10 NOVEMBER 2023 AT 10.30 AM**

Susan Parsonage  
Chief Executive  
Published on 2 November 2023

**Note:** Members of the public are welcome to attend the meeting or participate in the meeting virtually, in accordance with the Council's Constitution. If you wish to participate either in person or virtually via Microsoft Teams, please contact Democratic Services: [Democratic.services@wokingham.gov.uk](mailto:Democratic.services@wokingham.gov.uk)

The meeting can also be watched live using the following link:  
<https://youtube.com/live/ucK2n2gGwAs?feature=share>

This meeting will be filmed for inclusion on the Council's website. Please note that other people may film, record, tweet or blog from this meeting. The use of these images or recordings is not under the Council's control.



# WOKINGHAM BOROUGH COUNCIL

## Our Vision

*A great place to live, learn, work and grow and a great place to do business*

### Enriching Lives

- Champion outstanding education and enable our children and young people to achieve their full potential, regardless of their background.
- Support our residents to lead happy, healthy lives and provide access to good leisure facilities to complement an active lifestyle.
- Engage and involve our communities through arts and culture and create a sense of identity which people feel part of.
- Support growth in our local economy and help to build business.

### Safe, Strong, Communities

- Protect and safeguard our children, young and vulnerable people.
- Offer quality care and support, at the right time, to prevent the need for long term care.
- Nurture communities and help them to thrive.
- Ensure our borough and communities remain safe for all.

### A Clean and Green Borough

- Do all we can to become carbon neutral and sustainable for the future.
- Protect our borough, keep it clean and enhance our green areas.
- Reduce our waste, improve biodiversity and increase recycling.
- Connect our parks and open spaces with green cycleways.

### Right Homes, Right Places

- Offer quality, affordable, sustainable homes fit for the future.
- Build our fair share of housing with the right infrastructure to support and enable our borough to grow.
- Protect our unique places and preserve our natural environment.
- Help with your housing needs and support people to live independently in their own homes.

### Keeping the Borough Moving

- Maintain and improve our roads, footpaths and cycleways.
- Tackle traffic congestion, minimise delays and disruptions.
- Enable safe and sustainable travel around the borough with good transport infrastructure.
- Promote healthy alternative travel options and support our partners to offer affordable, accessible public transport with good network links.

### Changing the Way We Work for You

- Be relentlessly customer focussed.
- Work with our partners to provide efficient, effective, joined up services which are focussed around you.
- Communicate better with you, owning issues, updating on progress and responding appropriately as well as promoting what is happening in our Borough.
- Drive innovative digital ways of working that will connect our communities, businesses and customers to our services in a way that suits their needs.

For consideration by:

**Councillor Paul Fishwick, Executive Member for Active Travel, Transport and Highways**

**Officers Present**

**Rebecca Brooks, Senior Transport Planner**

IMD NO.	WARD	SUBJECT
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IMD 2023/28	All Wards	<p data-bbox="655 555 962 589"><b>FREE BUS TRAVEL</b></p> <p data-bbox="655 595 1334 772">To gain approval for introducing free bus travel from local bus stops in Wokingham Borough on selected dates in the run up to Christmas on all Reading Buses and Thames Valley Buses services.</p> <p data-bbox="655 815 1348 925">All free bus travel referred to above will be fully funded using grant funding from the Department for Transport (DfT).</p>	<b>5 - 8</b>
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<p data-bbox="140 994 312 1070"><b>Priya Patel</b></p> <p data-bbox="140 1070 233 1104"><b>Email</b></p> <p data-bbox="140 1104 379 1144"><b>Postal Address</b></p>	<p data-bbox="644 994 954 1030"><b>CONTACT OFFICER</b></p> <p data-bbox="518 1030 1107 1070">Head of Democratic &amp; Electoral Services</p> <p data-bbox="518 1070 975 1104">priya.patel@wokingham.gov.uk</p> <p data-bbox="518 1104 1238 1144">Civic Offices, Shute End, Wokingham, RG40 1BN</p>
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# Agenda Item IMD28

## INDIVIDUAL EXECUTIVE MEMBER DECISION REFERENCE IMD: 2023/28

<b>TITLE</b>	Free Bus Travel
<b>DECISION TO BE MADE BY</b>	Executive Member for Active Travel, Transport and Highways - Paul Fishwick
<b>DATE, MEETING ROOM and TIME</b>	10 November 2023 LGF 9 - 10:30am
<b>WARD</b>	(All Wards);
<b>DIRECTOR / KEY OFFICER</b>	Director, Place and Growth - Giorgio Framaliccio

### **PURPOSE OF REPORT (Inc Strategic Outcomes)**

To gain approval for introducing free bus travel from local bus stops in Wokingham Borough on selected dates in the run up to Christmas on all Reading Buses and Thames Valley Buses services.

All free bus travel referred to above will be fully funded using grant funding from the Department for Transport (DfT).

### **RECOMMENDATION**

1. To approve the introduction of free bus travel from local bus stops in Wokingham Borough on Reading Buses and Thames Valley Buses on selected dates in the run up to Christmas using grant funding from the DfT.

### **SUMMARY OF REPORT**

To encourage the use of local bus services and reduce traffic on local roads in the run up to Christmas it is proposed to make use of DfT Bus Service Improvement Plan (BSIP) funding to provide free bus travel from local bus stops within Wokingham Borough on selected Saturdays and Sundays. Free bus travel is offered at a time when the cost of living and household expenditure is highest. The proposal will allow residents to shop locally, supporting local businesses in villages, on high streets and in town centres. The proposal will be extended to specific bus services on two Sundays to further support local community events. Encouraging local bus travel also has positive outcomes for local air quality and the climate emergency.

The proposed free travel days will be on the following dates:

- Saturday 18<sup>th</sup> November 2023
- Saturday 25<sup>th</sup> November 2023
- Sunday 26<sup>th</sup> November 2023 (Lion 4/X4 only for Wokingham Extravaganza)
- Saturday 2<sup>nd</sup> December 2023
- Sunday 3<sup>rd</sup> December 2023 (Orange 13/14 only for Woodley Winter Carnival)
- Saturday 9<sup>th</sup> December 2023
- Saturday 16<sup>th</sup> December 2023
- Saturday 23<sup>rd</sup> December 2023

Reading Buses and Thames Valley Buses will allow passengers to board the bus free of charge from any local bus stop within Wokingham Borough on the above dates. The operators will be reimbursed a fixed amount to cover the revenue loss for these days using BSIP grant funding from the DfT.

For anyone visiting the borough and therefore not a resident of Wokingham Borough, free travel will only be provided in one direction, unless an equivalent scheme is operating in the area where passengers board. For residents who wish to travel outside of the borough, usual fares will apply for the return journey, unless an equivalent scheme is operating in the area where passengers board for the return journey. Free travel will not extend to services which are not local bus service, for example park and ride services or football specials. Free travel will not be provided on any other operator's service during these dates, for example the Arriva 850 service.

## **Background**

Bus travel can provide access to jobs and education, support the local economy, and reduce social isolation, especially in more rural communities. Compared to other forms of transport, bus travel has greater benefit for allowing independence for younger and older residents as well as those with mobility difficulties. In general bus travel is more affordable than owning a private vehicle when all costs are considered on an annual basis. When well used, bus travel also provides positive outcomes for local air quality and the climate emergency, with one double decker bus having the ability to remove 75 private cars from local roads.

However, whilst the benefits of bus travel are well understood, the Covid pandemic had a significant impact on passenger numbers and therefore the viability of local bus service. In Wokingham Borough, passenger levels reduce to below 30% of their pre-pandemic levels. Whilst passenger numbers have now generally recovered to over 80%, there is still more work to do to see a full recovery.

In March 2021 the DfT published the National Bus Strategy – Bus Back Better. The central aim of Bus Back Better was to get more people travelling by bus – first, to get overall patronage back to its pre-COVID-19 level, and then to exceed it. Bus Back Better directed Local Transport Authorities to produce local BSIPs. BSIPs set out local measures to improve bus travel and achieve the DfT's central aim of increasing bus travel.

To support the implementation of BSIPs, the DfT has made various funding available to LTAs. Wokingham Borough Council were awarded just over £400,000 in 2023/2024 financial year, with a similar amount in 2024/2025. The Council will also use some of this funding to support the reintroduction of Winnersh Triangle Park and Ride.

Using a small proportion of the above funding it is proposed to introduce free bus travel on selected weekend days in Wokingham Borough in the run up to Christmas. Providing free bus travel in the run up to Christmas allows an alternative option to car travel, at a time when residents are mostly likely to make local journeys where the bus could be a feasible alternative. The aim is to restore confidence in bus travel and encourage residents who may not otherwise consider using the bus, to give the bus a try. For residents this proposal will come at a time when the cost of living is highest, with increasing fuel bills coupled with other financial pressures associated with Christmas.

With half of all bus travel now being for leisure, eating out and shopping, the offer of free bus travel will further support local businesses and high streets by offering an additional benefit to shop locally within the Borough.

The proposal has been designed around typically the busiest shopping days in the run up to Christmas, supporting footfall to town centers. The addition of the two Sundays aims to support two specific community events, Wokingham Winter Carnival, and Woodley Christmas Extravaganza.

The free travel initiative will be promoted through My Journey and by local operators.

**Business Case**

The cost to provide free travel on all identified dates is £47,871. The cost will be fully funded by BSIP grant funding from the Department for Transport. BSIP grant funding can only be spent on improvements to local bus services within a limited timeframe.

For anyone visiting the borough and therefore not a resident of Wokingham Borough, free travel will only be provided in one direction. For residents who wish to travel outside of the borough, usual fares will apply for the return journey. The only exception to this will be if neighboring authorities offer an equivalent scheme, in which case neighboring authorities will have separate arrangements with local bus operators and will cover the cost of bus travel from the point where passengers board.

Free travel will not extend to services which are not local bus service, for example park and ride services or football specials. Free travel will not be provided on any other operator’s service during these dates, for example the Arriva 850 service.

The national £2 fare cap and concessionary passes will continue to be valid where the payment of a fare is still applicable.

**FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS OF THE RECOMMENDATION**

***The Council faces unprecedented financial pressures as a result of; the longer term impact of the COVID-19 crisis, Brexit, the war in Ukraine and the general economic climate of rising prices and the increasing cost of debt. It is therefore imperative that Council resources are optimised and are focused on the vulnerable and on its highest priorities.***

	How much will it Cost/ (Save)	Is there sufficient funding – if not quantify the Shortfall	Revenue or Capital?
Current Financial Year (Year 1)	£47,871	Yes	Revenue Grant Funding
Next Financial Year (Year 2)			
Following Financial Year (Year 3)			

**Other financial information relevant to the Recommendation/Decision**

The first instalment of revenue grant funding was received by Wokingham Borough Council at the end of September 2023. Funding is time limited; all funding must be spent within 12 months of receipt and not later than 31<sup>st</sup> March 2025.

**Cross-Council Implications** The provision of a free bus travel on these days has a positive impact on the climate change emergency, local air quality and congestion for all destinations in Wokingham Borough as well as to destinations in the neighboring boroughs of Reading, Bracknell, Windsor and Maidenhead and Surrey.

**Public Sector Equality Duty**  
A stage one Equalities Impact Assessment has been undertaken.

<b>SUMMARY OF CONSULTATION RESPONSES</b>	
<b>Director – Resources and Assets</b>	
<b>Monitoring Officer</b>	
<b>Leader of the Council</b>	

<b>For Highways use only</b>	
<i>If your item is not about a highways matter you do not need to complete the Town and Parish Council information or the Local Ward Member information</i>	
<b>Town and Parish Councils</b>	
<b>Local Ward Members</b>	

**Reasons for considering the report in Part 2**

**List of Background Papers**

<b>Contact</b> Rebecca Brooks	<b>Service Place</b>
<b>Telephone No</b> Tel: 0118 908 8302	<b>Email</b> rebecca.brooks@wokingham.gov.uk