

<b>TITLE</b>	<b>Enhanced Partnership for Local Bus Services</b>
<b>FOR CONSIDERATION BY</b>	Overview and Scrutiny Management Committee on 17 November 2021
<b>WARD</b>	None Specific
<b>DIRECTOR</b>	Steve Moore

## **OUTCOME / BENEFITS TO THE COMMUNITY**

Improved bus services which better meet the local needs of our residents and therefore are services which more residents choose to use. The wider benefits will be reduced congestion, improved air quality and reduced carbon emissions.

## **RECOMMENDATION**

The Committee is requested to:

- 1) Review the Local Bus Service Improvement Plan which is available to download from: <https://www.myjourneywokingham.com/bus-travel/enhanced-partnership/>
- 2) Review the information in this report on an Enhanced Partnership Agreement
- 3) Make suggestions on what Wokingham Borough Council's Enhanced Partnership Agreement with local bus operators should consider so that the desired BSIP outcomes are achieved. The committee must demonstrate that suggestions which are to be taken forward for inclusion in the Enhanced Partnership have clear and sufficient funding to support their implementation and the required outcomes.

## **SUMMARY OF REPORT**

The National Bus Strategy published in March 2021 required all Local Transport Authorities (LTA) in England and outside of London, to publish a local Bus Service Improvement Plan (BSIP) and agree an Enhanced Partnership (EP). The aim of the BSIP and EP is to raise the standards of local bus services and ensure that local bus services meet local needs. A failure to publish a BSIP by 31<sup>st</sup> October 2021 or agree an EP by 1<sup>st</sup> April 2022 would put at risk current and future funding from the Department for Transport (DfT) for both local bus services and other highway related schemes.

The Council published a BSIP on 28<sup>th</sup> October 2021. Our BSIP sets out the Council's high-level vision and ambition for the development of local bus services across the borough. An overview of the existing bus network on key corridors, in urban areas and in the borough's rural areas is provided. Targets for improving bus journey times, local bus service reliability, passenger numbers and passenger satisfaction are also identified. Broad overarching policies for supporting the desired improvements and targets are included in Section 4. The BSIP further commits to the provision of a passenger charter, a bi-annual monitoring report and to an annual review of the BSIP.

There is no certainty over the level of funding the Council might expect to receive from the DfT to support the delivery of BSIP outcomes.

An EP is the next stage in the process and will form the legally binding agreement between local bus operators and the Council for the delivery of improved local bus services in the borough. The EP is formed of two key components, an Enhanced Partnership Plan (EP Plan) and an Enhanced Partnership Scheme or Schemes (EP Scheme). The EP should focus specifically on the elements of the BSIP which will be delivered from 1<sup>st</sup> April 2022 onwards. Advice from the DfT is that the EP initially includes just one scheme. The EP may be varied later to include additional schemes.

The EP Plan will provide a high-level vision and review of existing local bus service provision for the whole borough for the period the EP is made, this will be in line with the detail already provided in the BSIP. The EP Scheme will detail what will be delivered, by whom, and by when, to achieve the desired BSIP outcomes.

The EP should be a negotiated agreement between the Council and local bus operators. The EP will be subject to a 28-day statutory objection period and a consultation period. For the EP to be formally 'made' it must be agreed by a defined proportion of local bus operators based on mileage operated within the borough. All local bus operators who operate on the corridor, or in the area covered by the EP, will be bound by the EP unless the category of service they operate is exempt. A forum will be set-up to oversee the governance and delivery of the EP.

The next steps to agreeing an EP are:

- November and December 2021 for agreeing, drafting and gaining legal approval for the EP
- January 2022 for the statutory objection period
- February 2022 for consultation on the EP
- March 2022 for Executive approval of the EP

## **Background**

### **Local Bus Service Improvement Plan (BSIP)**

The high-level ambitions of the BSIP are:

- To enable local bus services to recover to pre-pandemic levels and then to facilitate growth in bus passenger numbers
- To grow our bus service provision to ensure the right level of service in the right place
- For a bus network which supports the continued economic growth of Wokingham Borough and the wider Thames Valley region.
- To improve accessibility to transport services and the local bus network for communities in more rural and low-density areas.
- To have a greener bus network which harnesses the greatest opportunities to reduce carbon emissions and provides residents with greener travel choices.

The targets which the BSIP looks to achieve are:

- An 8% reduction across all key corridors and urban corridors combined by 2024/25
- 99.65% average reliability for bus services in the borough by 2024/25
- 3 million passenger journeys per annum by 2024/25

- 70% resident satisfaction levels with local bus services by 2024/25
- 95% bus passenger bus satisfaction levels with local bus service by 2024/25
- 58% resident satisfaction levels with public transport information by 2024/25

The BSIP contains policies which cover the following corridors and areas:

- A329 Bracknell – Wokingham – Winnersh – Reading Corridor
- A327 Wokingham – Finchampstead – Arborfield – Shinfield – Reading
- A33 Spencers Wood – Three Mile Cross and Reading Corridor
- A4 Reading – Twyford – Henley Corridor
- Earley/Lower Earley/ Maiden Erlegh area
- Woodley and North Earley area
- Wokingham Town area
- Rural and Low-Density areas

In addition to the above policies the BSIP contains a series of theme-based policies which are:

- Improved Fares
- Improved Ticketing
- Integration with walking and cycling networks
- Integration with rail networks
- Park and Ride
- Decarbonisation
- Network identity, passenger information, promotion and publicity
- Modern buses and Innovation
- Giving passengers a voice

### **Enhanced Partnership (EP) Agreement**

The EP Agreement is the delivery mechanism for achieving the BSIP outcomes. The EP is formed of an EP Plan and an EP Scheme.

#### Enhanced Partnership Plan

The EP plan provides the high-level vision for bus services across the borough and relates to the lifespan of the EP. The EP plan differs from the BSIP in that the BSIP sets out the longer-term vision and ambition for bus services across the borough. The statutory requirements for the EP plan are:

- A map of the geographical area covered by the EP – the DfT's expectation is that the EP covers the whole of the borough
- Details of how the EP plan is to be reviewed and when – the DfT expect the EP plan to be reviewed at least annually
- A summary of any available information on passengers' experiences if using bus services in the area and the priorities of users and non-users for improving them.
- A summary of any available data on trends in bus journey speeds and the impact of congestion on local bus services.
- What outcomes need to be delivered to improve local bus services in the plan area

- What overall interventions the partnership believes need to be taken to deliver those outcomes.

### Enhanced Partnership Scheme

The EP Scheme sets out the specific interventions which will be used to deliver the EP Plan. The EP scheme must consider the following in respect of the LTA:

- **'facilities'** which are physical assets such as bus stops, bus lane, traffic signal bus priority equipment, clearways, changes to parking provisions, real-time information and waiting facilities for example. The date from which facilities are to be provided and where from must be included.
- **'measures'** for which there is no definition in the guidance as the intention is to keep measures flexible. Given examples of measures are marketing schemes, parking charges, lower fares, or limits on number of roadworks on a particular corridor within a given period. Measures could also include commitments to studies or funding to be made available to support a service. The date from which the measures become effective needs to be included. In some cases it may also be appropriate to include an end date if this is different to the EP.
- **"provisions"** (if any) about the variation or revocation of the EP (including any dates on which they come into force or cease to apply).

The EP scheme must consider the following in respect of local bus operators:

- **'Route'** requirements (if any) that are to be provided by local bus operators (and the date from which they are to be provided). These may include frequency, timing, or type of service for example.
- **'Operational'** requirements (if any) that are to be provided by local bus operators (and the date from which they are to be provided). There are 5 categories of operational requirements:
  1. Vehicles (age, emissions, livery, Wi-Fi, USB, seating, size etc.)
  2. Information (timetables, fares, apps, printed information, branding etc)
  3. Dates of timetable changes (including amendments to statutory registration)
  4. Tickets (specific tickets or for specific people e.g., young people, multi-operator tickets, how they are paid for)
  5. Arrangements for the operation of the scheme

### Funding

It is still uncertain if the DfT will provide any funding towards facilities, measures, routes, or operational requirements which could be included in any EP. The DfT expects Councils to include existing funding for local bus services in an EP from April 2022. For Wokingham Borough Council the available funding will be:

- £810,400 for financial support towards local bus services
- £16,620 a year for maintaining the real time passenger information system

The Council also has available S106 funding associated with new development sites. The S106 funding could be used for the introduction of enhanced or new services associated

with the development sites, at the right time. Similarly, S106 funding has been secured for the provision of bus infrastructure associated with the new development sites.

Further developer funding forms part of the My Journey programme and can be used to contribute towards the promotion and marketing of local bus services.

Local bus operators are expected to contribute any planned expenditure which they have for the purpose of fleet upgrades, fleet renewals or route improvements.

Any suggestions made by the committee for measures, facilities, route requirements or operational requirements must be accompanied by a costed proposal. The costed proposal must demonstrate sufficient funding is available to allow their implementation in order to achieve the desired outcomes.

### Next Steps

- **November 2021** – set-up governance and agree priorities, measures, facilities, provisions, area/corridor covered, routes and operational requirements.
- **December 2021** draft EP Plan and Scheme
- **January 2022** publish notice that a scheme has been prepared
- **January 2022** Statutory Objection Period (28 days)
- **February 2022** Consultation Period
- **Mid-February 2022** Executive Process
- **31<sup>st</sup> March 2022** – Executive Approval
- **1<sup>st</sup> April 2022** EP must be “made”
- **14<sup>th</sup> April 2022** the latest date that we must publish a notice that the scheme has been made.

## **FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS OF THE RECOMMENDATION**

**The Council faces severe funding pressures, particularly in the face of the Covid-19 crisis. It is, therefore, imperative that Council resources are focussed on the vulnerable and 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)	n/a	n/a	n/a
Next Financial Year (Year 2)	Could lose £111,000 BSOG	Risk of £111,000 shortfall	Revenue

Following Financial Year (Year 3)	Could lose £111,000 BSOG	Risk of £111,000 shortfall	Revenue
-----------------------------------	--------------------------	----------------------------	---------

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

The Department for Transport have not yet confirmed what funding, if any, the Council can expect to receive to support the implementation and delivery of the BSIP or an Enhanced Partnership. It has been made clear that not producing a BSIP and Enhanced Partnership will not be seen favourably when bidding for funding for future bus and highways related schemes.

It should be noted that local bus services have been supported by Department for Transport funding throughout the pandemic. Local bus services are currently at 65% recovery levels. The Department for Transport have provided £134,000 to continue to support existing contracted services until the end of March 2022. The Department for Transport have indicated that further Covid related funding will only be considered for bus services that form part of an Enhanced Partnership agreement.

### **Cross-Council Implications**

A single BSIP and EP will be produced for Wokingham Borough rather than a joint BSIP and EP, this is due to the diverse nature of Wokingham Borough. It is recognised that there are significant cross-boundary travel movements and over 50% of local bus routes in Wokingham Borough have a destination in Reading Borough. Wokingham Borough Council will work closely with neighbouring local authorities to ensure the BSIP and EP align. Thought is being given to a joint forum for the delivery of EPs.

### **Public Sector Equality Duty**

The BSIP and EP allows the Council an opportunity to provide local bus service which better meet local needs. Through an analysis of the existing provision, it has been possible to identify any gaps in the provision where residents need may not effectively be met and then set out broad policies on these gaps can be addressed.

### **Climate Emergency – The Council has declared a Climate Emergency and is committed to playing as full a role as possible – leading by example as well as by exhortation – in achieving a carbon neutral Wokingham borough by 2030**

The BSIP aims to encourage more trips on local bus services. If there is a successful shift from car travel to bus travel this will reduce the number of miles driven, reduce carbon emissions and reduce congestion on local roads. The BSIP also includes a policy on decarbonation which aims for all fleets to be zero emission.

### **List of Background Papers**

Wokingham Borough Council Local Bus Service Improvement Plan available at:  
<https://www.myjourneywokingham.com/bus-travel/enhanced-partnership/>

Bus back better available at:

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/bus-back-better>

<b>Contact</b> Rebecca Brooks	<b>Service</b> Highways and Transport
<b>Telephone No</b> 0118 974 6000	<b>Email</b> Rebecca.Brooks@wokingham.gov.uk
<b>Date</b> 8 <sup>th</sup> November 2021	<b>Version No.</b> 1