

Agenda Item IMD4

INDIVIDUAL EXECUTIVE MEMBER DECISION

REFERENCE IMD: 2022/04

TITLE	Consultation Response to Reading Borough Council's Enhanced Partnership Agreement
DECISION TO BE MADE BY	Executive Member for Highways and Transport - Pauline Jorgensen
DATE, MEETING ROOM and TIME	24 th March 2022 FF11 at 18:40
WARD	None specific
DIRECTOR / KEY OFFICER	Director, Place and Growth - Steve Moore

PURPOSE OF REPORT (Inc Strategic Outcomes)

The National Bus Strategy advised every Local Transport Authority in England, outside of London, to create an Enhanced Partnership (EP) Agreement with local bus operators as a basis for improving bus services. An EP is a legal agreement which has several statutory processes to go through, including a statutory consultation, before it can be legally made.

The purpose of this report is to gain approval for Wokingham Borough Council's response to Reading Borough Council's Enhanced Partnership Agreement for local bus services.

RECOMMENDATION

That the Executive Member for Highways and Transport approve the Council's response to Reading Borough Council's Enhanced Partnership Agreement for local bus services, as set out in Annex A to the report.

SUMMARY OF REPORT

Wokingham Borough Council (WBC) is a statutory consultee for Reading Borough Council (RBC) in the process of making an Enhanced Partnership.

RBC published their Enhanced Partnership Agreement for Statutory Consultation on 18th February 2022. The response attached as Annex A will be submitted on behalf of Wokingham Borough Council.

Background

WBC is supportive of the shared objectives of building a sustainable, efficient, and growing bus network that meets the needs of residents across both boroughs and welcomes the opportunity to work with RBC.

The key objectives of RBC's EP Plan align with the National Bus Strategy and additionally include the need to enhance bus access and facilities within Reading town center. RBC's Enhanced Partnership Scheme covers the whole of Reading Borough by targeting investment onto eight key corridors. Three of the eight key corridors facilitate local bus services originating in Wokingham Borough, these are:

- Southern Corridor – connects Reading town centre with housing south of Reading in Wokingham Borough
- South-eastern Corridor – connects Reading town centre with Royal Berkshire Hospital, University of Reading, Lower Earley and Thames Valley Science Park.
- Eastern Corridor – is the main access from areas east of Reading, into Reading town centre via the A3290

Twenty separate proposals containing a series of measures, facilities, and provisions for delivering improvements on the key corridors. WBC is identified as a key delivery partner for nine of the twenty proposals, in summary these are:

- Reviewing Service Frequency
- Increasing Bus Priority Measures
- Consideration for Bus Rapid Transit
- Integrating Services with other modes
- Simplifying Services
- Reviewing socially necessary services
- Investing in a Superbus network
- Bus Passenger Charter
- Strengthening Network Identity

WBC is supportive of joint working in circumstances where proposals align with both local authorities' Enhanced Partnership Plans, provide a benefit to both boroughs and where sufficient funding is available to ensure effective delivery.

RBC's EP Scheme requires local bus services, which are not otherwise exempt, to meet certain quality standards to make use of bus priority infrastructure and local bus stops within Reading Borough. The EP Scheme does not provide sufficient detail at this stage on what these standards might be. Whilst WBC fully supports the need for a certain standard of quality in local bus service provision, WBC is also mindful that any standards imposed must not prevent competition or be prohibitive to new routes and operators emerging in the local bus markets within either Borough.

The delivery mechanism and governance for RBC's EP Agreement is contained in the EP Plan. WBC welcomes the opportunity to be part of RBC's, Enhanced Partnership Forum and undertake an observer role on the Enhanced Partnership Board.

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 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)	n/a	n/a	n/a
Next Financial Year (Year 2)	n/a	n/a	n/a
Following Financial Year (Year 3)	n/a	n/a	n/a

Other financial information relevant to the Recommendation/Decision
None

Cross-Council Implications
Cross-boundary implications would be considered through Wokingham Borough Council's Enhanced Partnership Agreement.

Public Sector Equality Duty
An equalities assessment is not required as this IEMD relates to a legal agreement which Reading Borough Council will be making and implementing within Reading Borough. Any joint schemes which affect Wokingham Borough would be subject to Wokingham Borough Council's Enhanced Partnership Agreement and therefore subject to the related equalities assessment.

SUMMARY OF CONSULTATION RESPONSES	
Director – Resources and Assets	Any comments to be updated at meeting
Monitoring Officer	Any comments to be updated at meeting
Leader of the Council	Any comments to be updated at meeting

Reasons for considering the report in Part 2
N/A

List of Background Papers
Reading Borough Council's Draft Enhanced Partnership Agreement

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