

TITLE	Bus Service Improvement Plan
FOR CONSIDERATION BY	Community & Corporate Overview and Scrutiny Committee on 29 November 2022
WARD	None specific;
LEAD OFFICER	Director, Place and Growth - Steve Moore

OUTCOME / BENEFITS TO THE COMMUNITY

Improved bus services which better meet the local needs of our residents by improving access to jobs, health care and other services and amenities. The wider benefits will be reduced congestion, improved air quality and reduced carbon emissions.

RECOMMENDATION

The Committee is requested to:

- 1) Review the revised draft Local Bus Service Improvement Plan; and
- 2) Make suggestions on what Wokingham Borough Council's revised draft Bus Service Improvement Plan outcomes should include. The Committee must demonstrate that suggestions which are to be taken forward for inclusion are in accordance with the National Bus Strategy and are relevant and achievable for Wokingham Borough.

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). An EP is a legal partnership agreement which is agreed following the publication of the BSIP. The Council is expecting to form an EP during 2023.

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. The Levelling-Up white paper (February 2022) highlights the important role of bus services for access to jobs, retail, and services, as well as for business-to-business connectivity and achieving positive health outcomes. The Council's first BSIP was published on 29th October 2021. All LTAs are required to review their BSIPs on an annual basis.

Wokingham Borough Council was unsuccessful in achieving any BSIP grant funding. The BSIP has been revised to take account of feedback from the Department for Transport (DfT) and changes in the local bus market since October 2021. The key changes to the draft BSIP are:

- Updated background information
- Strengthening the role partnership working
- Revised targets and policies

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

The next steps to publishing a revised BSIP are:

- December 2022 for consultation with operators
- 26th January 2023 Executive Committee approval of the revised BSIP

- February 2023 publish revised BSIP

Background

Local Bus Service Improvement Plan (BSIP)

The objectives of the draft BSIP are:

- 1) To grow passenger numbers to pre-pandemic levels and to continue that growth
- 2) To return bus services to pre-pandemic levels, improve levels of service and extend to new areas of demand
- 3) For a bus network which supports the continued economic growth of Wokingham Borough and the wider Thames Valley region.
- 4) To improve bus journey times, reliability, and punctuality along key transport corridors.
- 5) Make fares affordable and simpler.
- 6) Deliver a greener bus network by reducing carbon emissions and provide residents with attractive greener travel alternatives.
- 7) Improve bus integration with rail passengers, cyclists, pedestrians and car drivers
- 8) Improve accessibility to transport services and the local bus network for communities in rural and low-density areas
- 9) Ensure bus travel is a safe means of travel

All BSIP targets are set out in Section 3. An overview of the required BSIP targets is shown in the table below.

Target	2018/19	2019/20	Target for 2024/25	Target for 2029/30	Target for 2039/40
Journey times on key corridors	No data	75.3 Mins	72 Mins	68 Mins	61 Mins
Reliability	No data	74.94%	80%	85%	90%
Passenger numbers	2.8 million	2.8 million	3.08 million	4.2 million	5.6 million
Average passenger satisfaction	64%	67%	70%	75%	80%

A delivery action plan and set of related proposals are set out in Section 4. The draft BSIP proposals focus on the key themes in the National Bus Strategy and are as follows:

- More frequency and reliable services
- Making fares affordable and simpler
- Delivering a greener bus network by reducing carbon emissions and providing residents with attractive greener travel alternatives
- Improving bus integration with rail passengers, cyclists, pedestrians, and car drivers
- Improving passenger engagement and satisfaction with bus services
- Improving accessibility to transport services and the local bus network for communities in more rural and low-density areas

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 when it is made in 2023.

The Council also has available S106 funding associated with new development sites. The S106 funding could be used to support bus services. 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 and to achieve the desired outcomes.

Next Steps

- **December 2022** – consultation with operators.
- **26th January 2023** Executive Committee Approval
- **February 2023** Publish revised BSIP

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)	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

The Department for Transport have not yet confirmed if and when any further funding, will be made available 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 future funding for both 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 81% recovery levels.

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 allow the Council an opportunity to improve local bus services. An Equalities Impact Assessment will accompany the final document.

Climate Emergency – *This 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 proposals for green travel which relate to decarbonisation.

Reasons for considering the report in Part 2

N/A

List of Background Papers

Draft BSIP November 2022
 Bus back better available at:
<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/bus-back-better>

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