

TITLE	Revised Local Bus Services Improvement Plan
FOR CONSIDERATION BY	The Executive on Thursday, 26 January 2023
WARD	(All Wards);
LEAD OFFICER	Director, Place and Growth - Steve Moore
LEAD MEMBER	Executive Member for Active Travel, Transport and Highways - Paul Fishwick

PURPOSE OF REPORT (INC STRATEGIC OUTCOMES)

Revised Bus Service Improvement Plan which includes proposals which represent a change of policy. The Department for Transport (DfT) will use the document to award future bid funding.

The benefits to residents are:

- Improved accessibility to jobs, retail and services
- Improved business-to-business connections
- Reduced social isolation
- Reduced carbon emissions
- Improved air quality and congestion

RECOMMENDATION

That the Executive

- 1) Approve the Revised Local Bus Service Improvement Plan for publication, with the delivery of proposals subject to Department for Transport funding being available.

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 and will bring this document to the Executive Committee separately for approval.

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. The Department for Transport (DfT) will use the revised document as a means for awarding any future funding for local bus services.

Wokingham Borough Council was unsuccessful in achieving any BSIP grant funding in May 2022 for the October 2021 submission. Therefore, the BSIP has been revised to take account of feedback from the 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 of partnership working
- Revised targets and policies

There is still no certainty over whether any funding will be made available to the Council from the DfT to support the delivery of BSIP outcomes.

BACKGROUND

The Revised BSIP has been written in accordance with the National Bus Strategy and the associated guidance issued by the DfT. The Revised BSIP also takes account of feedback from the DfT in relation to the Council's first BSIP. Bus services play an important role for providing access to jobs, retail, and services, as well as for business-to-business connectivity and achieving positive health outcomes. Bus services have recovered to 81% of their pre-pandemic passenger levels.

The objectives of the Revised 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

The revised BSIP has been presented to the Community and Corporate Overview and Scrutiny committee on 29th November 2022.

Next Steps

1. To publish the Revised BSIP on the MyJourney website by 31st March 2023.
2. To negotiate with local transport providers on detailed measures and facilities which will form part of the schemes to in the Enhanced Partnership.
3. Agree a passenger charter with local transport operators as to the level and quality of services our residents can expect.
4. To follow the statutory consultation process to make a legally binding Enhanced Partnership.
5. To bring back an Executive report on the Enhance Partnership Scheme prior to the Enhanced Partnership being made.

BUSINESS CASE

If we do not publish an annual update to the BSIP and go on to make an Enhanced Partnership, then we will potentially lose £111,000 pa in Bus Service Operator Grant (BSOG) funding (full year affect).

All proposals are subject to Department for Transport funding being available to deliver them. If we do not make any changes to the BSIP then the Council is unlikely to be successful in achieving any future bid funding for improving local bus services.

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

Other Financial Information

The recommendation will cost £0 if it is agreed and will avoid a potential revenue loss of £111,000 pa. All proposals contained within the Revised BSIP are subject to Department for Transport funding being provided.

Stakeholder Considerations and Consultation
Consultation on the BSIP has been undertaken based on the advice provided by the Department for Transport.

Public Sector Equality Duty
An Equalities Impact Assessment has been undertaken and approved by Inclusions Team.

Climate Emergency – <i>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</i>
The BSIP includes ambitious policies which will help the Council reach carbon neutrality by 2030, for example by implementing electric buses and reducing the need for a private car.

Reasons for considering the report in Part 2
Not Applicable

List of Background Papers
Revised Local Bus Service Improvement Plan (Revised BSIP)

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