

## **CABINET**

**8 FEBRUARY 2022**

### **MEDWAY BUS SERVICE IMPROVEMENT PLAN (BSIP) AND ENHANCED PARTNERSHIP (EP)**

Portfolio Holder: Councillor Phil Filmer, Portfolio Holder for Front Line Services

Report from: Ruth Du Lieu, Assistant Director of Front Line Services

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#### **Summary**

This report updates Cabinet on progress towards the development of an Enhanced Partnership (EP) for buses in Medway and the Council's potential role and responsibilities within that process. It seeks approval for publication of the draft EP by the end of April 2022 and the adoption of the final EP Plan and Scheme(s) following a statutory consultation period in accordance with deadlines to be determined by the Department for Transport.

#### **1. Budget and policy framework**

- 1.1. The Bus Service Improvement Plan (BSIP) has used Medway Council's existing Local Transport Plan as a base with also reference to Medway's Climate Change Action Plan, and Child Friendly City objectives.

#### **2. Background**

- 2.1. The Department for Transport (DfT) published its National Bus Strategy in March 2021, imaginatively entitled "Bus Back Better" The strategy changes the regulatory framework under which buses have operated for the past 35 years and will be supported by £1.4 billion of investment across England, along with a commitment to repurpose current funding. The main objective of the strategy is to provide passengers with more frequent, more reliable, easier to use, better co-ordinated and cheaper bus services. This new approach acknowledges the role the bus can play in achieving a net zero emission society and serves as a commitment to supporting bus and bus rapid transit schemes.
- 2.2. The National Bus Strategy required Local Transport Authorities (LTAs) to publish a Bus Service Improvement Plan, and thereafter set up an Enhanced

Partnership (EP) to implement it. An EP is a statutory arrangement under the 2017 Bus Services Act whereby the LTA and local bus operators work together to improve local bus services. The LTA has formal responsibility for making the plan, but at set points in the process it can only proceed with proposals with the support of a defined proportion of local bus operators.

- 2.3. Medway Council gave its notice to prepare an EP in June 2021. This was submitted to the DfT and formally published at [www.medway.gov.uk/bsip](http://www.medway.gov.uk/bsip)
- 2.4. This ensured that Medway Council and local bus operators continue to receive the COVID-19 Bus Services Support Grant (CBSSG). Going forward as part of a wider reform of the Bus Service Operators Grant (BSOG), the Government will consider only making the grant available to LTAs and operators in an EP. To date, the Government has provided Medway with £550k of CBSSG funding to support the viability of local bus services during the pandemic. From September 2021 the Council also received Bus Recovery Grant (BRG) funding from the DfT. The Council also receives £172k of BSOG funding each year for supporting bus services in Medway. From April 2022, only areas operating under an Enhanced Partnership will be eligible to receive the new funding streams from the Government's £1.4 billion budget.
- 2.5. On 29 October 2021, following approval by Cabinet, Medway Council published its BSIP and submitted this to the DfT, along with a spreadsheet detailing a scheme funding outline (decision number 110/2021 refers). The BSIP was developed in collaboration with local bus operators, and a period of consultation took place to advise community transport bodies and local businesses, services, and people. It will be updated annually and aligned with the Council's Local Transport Plan and Change Action Plan. It also links to 'Child Friendly Medway' objectives, and our City Bid status.
- 2.6. The EP Plan is not a statutory commitment but the Partnership's statement of ambition, which mirrors the BSIP. This will include the various initiatives set out in the BSIP. The EP Scheme is the mechanism by which the commitments made in the BSIP, and the EP Plan are delivered. The EP must have at least one 'Scheme', which would bring together a number of initiatives and be agreed with all the Partners.

### 3. Options

The following options are available to the Cabinet:

- 3.1. Option 1 - To publish Draft EP at [www.medway.gov.uk/bsip](http://www.medway.gov.uk/bsip) for a period of four weeks consultation and to engage with statutory consultees such as the Competition and Markets Authority and Kent Police.
- 3.2. Option 2 - To not progress with the development of an EP. This option is not advised as it may prevent the Council accessing central Government funding across all facets of local transport spending and would not demonstrate a commitment to the principles outlined in the National Bus Strategy.

## 4. Advice and analysis

4.1. On 11 January 2022, the DfT confirmed that “once Government has confirmed final funding allocations, all LTAs will then be able to complete their final formal EP. Regardless of the level of funding awarded, the DfT want all EPs to:

- Commit the relevant authority or authorities to continue providing existing bus priority measures.
- Implement low or no cost improvements including Bus Passenger Charters and high-quality information for all passengers (as referenced in para one of the BSIP guidance).
- Be flexible to incorporate further enhancements through variation if funding becomes available.”

4.2. Medway’s adopted BSIP laid down seven objectives:

- 1) Prioritising buses in traffic
- 2) Improving the image of bus travel
- 3) Improving the passenger experience
- 4) Improve facilities for drivers
- 5) Offer simpler cheaper fares
- 6) Increase service levels
- 7) Improve information

4.3. The EP we will use the following approaches, however it is dependent on forthcoming funding from Government.

BSIP Objectives	EP Approach
1. Prioritising buses in traffic	Better parking enforcement Plan bus priority packages on a corridor-by-corridor basis (longer term interventions) Mitigate the impact of roadworks Deliver faster journey times and reliability improvements
2. Improving the image of bus travel	Increase the quantity of buses meeting higher emission standards
3. Improving the passenger experience	Increase the quantity of buses with on-board next stop audio-visual announcements Improve roadside waiting facilities Target investment in real time information screens at the busiest stops
4. Improve facilities for drivers	Increase the availability of toilets at key locations

BSIP Objectives	EP Approach
5. Offer simpler, cheaper fares	Develop an all-operator ticket for the Medway area Offer tap-in tap-out capability on all bus services Develop appropriate products for the youth market Co-operate with DfT plans for intermodal ticketing
6. Increase service levels	Increase evening frequencies on key routes Increase Sunday services on key routes Increase daytime frequencies on key routes Add earlier journeys to major employment sites, in conjunction with needs identified by Dept of Work & Pensions
7. Improve information	Maintain roadside timetable information Work with Kent CC on joint initiatives on digital information

4.4. The EP also documents obligations required by the Council, and the operators, within the EP and contains details on the partnership structure including voting arrangements which will ensure an equal balance between large operators, and smaller independents.

4.5. In a letter received from Government on 11 January 2022, the DfT advised that the timescale to submit draft EPs has been amended to be submitted by late April. Funding details for LTAs will be issued by Government “by February”. This will therefore enable us to update the final submitted EP with costed schemes.

## 5. Risk management

5.1. Risks associated with the recommendations set out in this report are summarised below:

Risk	Description	Action to avoid or mitigate risk	Risk Rating
Failure to adopt an EP by Government deadline or adopting EP policies that do not address the overarching aspirations of our BSIP and the National Bus Strategy, resulting in reduced levels of existing funding, and limited future	Government will assess EPs when making decisions about future public transport funding allocations. Government will also consider an LTA’s performance in relation to their EP policies when determining funding allocations for wider, non-bus local transport schemes. This	The National Bus Strategy confirms that progressing the steps set out in the strategy on time will ensure access to existing and new funding streams. This risk can therefore be mitigated by progressing the necessary actions to the prescribed timescales.	B2

funding opportunities.	could include LTP funding allocations.		
Failure to adopt an EP by Government deadline, or adopting EP policies that do not address the overarching aspirations of the National Bus Strategy, resulting in reputational damage and compromising agreed Climate Change Action Plan objectives.	The National Bus Strategy requires EPs to set out the Council's commitment to the principles outlined in the National Bus Strategy. It is therefore likely to have a political impact and generate significant local interest.	Progress the development of the Council's EP for publication by April 2022 incorporating the key elements set down by Government, and demonstrating a commitment to modal shift and climate change objectives set out in the National Bus Strategy.	B2

## 6. Consultation

- 6.1. The EP was developed after individual and collective consultation with Medway's six bus operators. Input has also come from responses from Transport Focus, the independent watchdog for transport users.
- 6.2. Regular online workshops, and virtual meetings have taken place with DfT and other LTA public transport teams. DfT also provide guidance and advice via an online forum, "Basecamp".
- 6.3. As per guidance from Government, a 28-day operator period of objection started on 10 January 2022. On conclusion of this and confirmation of Government funding, we are then required to consult with statutory consultees, including Kent County Council, Kent Police, the Competition and Markets Authority and Transport Focus.

## 7. Climate change implications

- 7.1. [The Council declared a climate change emergency in April 2019](#) and has set a target for Medway to become carbon neutral by 2050.
- 7.2. The BSIP/EP makes reference to Medway's Climate Change Strategy and in particular the following targets:
  - Continue to deliver bus infrastructure improvements, and explore opportunities to facilitate the use of ULEV on bus routes in Medway
  - Maintain productive relationships with local bus operators with a view to establishing a 'Bus Improvement Plan' and introduce data reporting to include fleet comparison and journey time information

- Explore opportunities for phased uptake of ULEV on supported bus routes
- Work with local bus operators to develop a strategy that facilitates the introduction of electric buses in Medway, including the identification of funding opportunities at national level
- Tackle congestion hotspots through Variable Message Signs (VMS), traffic signal infrastructure and programming upgrades and smart cities initiatives
- Improvements to the operation of traffic signal-controlled junctions and crossings through programming changes or upgraded equipment
- Continue with our proactive and dedicated approach to improving air quality across Medway through the delivery of the Air Quality Action Plan.

## 8. Financial implications

- 8.1. Progressing the development of Medway's EP does not have any resource implications for existing council budgets. The actions will be progressed and funded by a DfT via a grant over a three-year period.
- 8.2. Approaches set out in the EP are costed and spreadsheets were also sent to the DfT. Implementation of the objectives and commitment to the necessary expenditure would only be progressed if approved and would be aligned to the promise of £ 1.4 billion of national funding set out by Government in the National Bus Strategy, and how much Medway will receive. If insufficient funding is forthcoming from Government via BSIP funding, future schemes that are small scale could see some LTP budget being used, subject to the agreement of the Portfolio Holder.
- 8.3. It is stated within the BSIP Guidance that: "Government will also consider an LTA's performance in relation to their BSIP policies when determining funding allocations for wider, non-bus local transport schemes."

## 9. Legal implications

- 9.1. The Bus Services Act 2017 amended the Transport Act 2000 to make provision for EP schemes and plans.

## 10. Recommendations

- 10.1. It is recommended that the Cabinet:
- i) Supports the creation of an Enhanced Partnership for Medway in accordance with the National Bus Strategy.

- ii) Approves the submission of the draft Enhanced Partnership Plans and Schemes as set out at appendix B to the DfT by the end of April 2022.
- iii) Delegates authority to the Deputy Chief Executive and Director of Place, in consultation with the Portfolio Holder for Frontline Services, to negotiate and agree on behalf of the Council any amendments to the draft Enhanced Partnership's Plan and Scheme(s) arising from the statutory consultation and publish the final EP by the date to be determined by the DfT.

## 11. Suggested reasons for decisions

- 11.1. To ensure that Medway Council demonstrates its commitment to the principles outlined in the National Bus Strategy by implementing an Enhanced Partnership, thereby securing existing funding allocations, and putting the Council in a position where it can bid for future funding to improve public transport in Medway.

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### Appendices – included in Supplementary Agenda No.1

Appendix A - Medway Bus Service Improvement Plan  
Appendix B - Medway Draft Enhanced Partnership

### Background papers

DfT, Bus Back Better: National Bus Strategy for England  
<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/bus-back-better>

National bus strategy: bus service improvement plans – guidance to local authorities and bus operators  
<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/bus-service-improvement-plan>

Bus Services Act 2017: Enhanced Partnership creation  
<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/bus-services-act-2017-enhanced-partnership-creation>

Delivering Bus Service Improvement Plans using an Enhanced Partnership  
[https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment\\_data/file/1002507/national-bus-strategy.pdf](https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/1002507/national-bus-strategy.pdf)