

Regeneration, Culture and Environment Overview and Scrutiny Committee

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Bus Service Improvement Plan

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Summary

This report provides an update on recent activity in relation to the Council's Bus Service Improvement Plan (BSIP) for Medway, and the opportunities presented by grant funding from National Government for 2025/6.

1. Recommendations

- 1.1. The Committee is asked to note the updates provided in the report and the work underway to support the continued delivery of Medway's Bus Service Improvement Plan in 2025/6.

2. Budget and policy framework

Budget Implications

- 2.1 Grant funding is provided by National Government to support the delivery of Bus Service Improvement Plans. Whilst Medway did not receive a funding award in 2021, a Bus Capacity and Capability Grant of £171,000 was received in 2022. The revenue grant was intended to enhance the capacity and capability of Local Transport Authorities to develop and implement bus service improvement plans and Enhanced Partnership Schemes by funding recruitment, staff training and consultancy support where required. The Council received BSIP funding of £768,780 in 2023/4 and 2024/5.
- 2.2 In December 2024, the Department for Transport (DfT) confirmed that Medway Council is allocated further funding for 2025/6. This comprises £1.148 million revenue funding, £0.094 million capacity and capability funding and £2.611million capital funding. It is allocated for the purposes of improving bus services and infrastructure and maintaining an effective Enhanced Partnership Scheme that delivers tangible improvements for bus passengers.

Policy Framework

- 2.3 Medway's BSIP aligns with national legislation and guidance and supports the principle of sustainable growth that underpins Medway's emerging Local Plan. The One Medway Council Plan prioritises creating clean, green, safe, and connected communities. Delivering the BSIP will support this priority by offering more travel options and promoting sustainable travel, which will benefit the health and wellbeing of Medway's residents. The BSIP aligns with Medway's local policies and plans in relation to transport, active travel and climate change and operates alongside Medway's Local Cycling and Walking Infrastructure Plan, Public Rights of Way Improvement Plan, and emerging River Strategy.
- 2.4 Medway's Local Transport Plan (2011-2026) identifies an increase in travel demand arising from population growth as a key challenge. Bus travel plays a key role in addressing this challenge by enabling a modal shift away from private motor vehicles to more sustainable modes. The plan aims to promote bus use by improving the quality and accessibility of public transport services that will help to reduce congestion and enhance air quality.

3. Background

- 3.1 In 2021 National Government announced a "Bus Back Better" initiative to revolutionise bus services across the country. As part of this initiative, the Department for Transport (DfT) required all Local Transport Authorities to publish a BSIP and form an Enhanced Partnership with local bus operators and other key stakeholders.
- 3.2 Medway Council submitted its first BSIP in 2021, followed by a revised version in 2022. An updated BSIP was submitted to the DfT in June 2024 and published on the Council's website. The BSIP includes a clear vision for:
- "A modern, sustainable public transport network for the residents of Medway that is reliable, accessible, affordable and carbon free, working collaboratively with partners to:
- Put passengers at the heart of everything we do, supporting equal opportunity of access to employment, education and other key services.
 - Respond to Climate Change by reducing congestion and allowing buses to move more freely through our communities."

Medway's BSIP is presented in Appendix One.

- 3.3 Enhanced Partnerships were established under the Bus Services Act 2017 and encourage Local Transport Authorities and bus operators to work collaboratively to improve bus services. They provide a flexible approach to address local needs and circumstances, integrate bus services with other modes of transport, and set out quality standards for punctuality, reliability, and vehicles. Medway's Enhanced Partnership aligns with the BSIP objectives for improving services, increasing bus usage, and contributing to environmental goals. It also provides the mechanism for communicating and

addressing network issues affecting bus services. Further details of Medway’s Enhanced Partnership are provided in Appendix Two, including the roles and responsibilities of the parties involved.

3.4 The BSIP and the Enhanced Partnership outline targets for bus service improvements and how they will be monitored. Key objectives focus on:

- faster and more reliable services on priority routes
- the image of bus travel and the passenger experience
- facilities for drivers
- fares and ticketing with simpler, cheaper fares
- bus passenger information
- network planning and improvements to service frequency and coverage

	Target 2023/24	Target for 2028/29	Description of how each will be measured
Journey time	76.08%	80%	Analyse Bus Open Data % of journeys on time at timing points
Reliability	86.5%	98%	Analyse Bus Open Data Number of journeys run in February 2024
Passenger numbers	7,657,389	9,000,000	Data from bus operators
Average passenger satisfaction	54%	65%	National Highways and Transportation Survey: measure of satisfaction with the local bus service overall.
Network Coverage and accessibility to services	78%	80%	Access to at least a 20-minute bus service on weekdays.

3.5 Medway Council, Kent County Council and local bus operators are working collaboratively to launch a Bus Passenger Charter in 2025. Bus Passenger Charters aim to improve the quality of bus services by setting clear standards that passengers can expect from operators. They focus on enhancing service reliability, providing passenger information, increasing accessibility, ensuring cleanliness and comfort, and promoting environmental sustainability. These charters are designed to create passenger-focused bus services, making public transport a more attractive and reliable option for everyone.

4. Advice and analysis

BSIP outcomes 2023 – 2025

4.1 Grant funding received for 2023/4 and 2024/5 has enabled the Council to support and enhance services, upgrade infrastructure and promote bus travel in accordance with the priorities and objectives set out in Medway's BSIP. A full breakdown of how the grant funding was allocated is provided in Appendix Three. The programme of service enhancements, initiatives and promotional activity was subject to discussion and agreement with the Portfolio Holder and the Council's cross-party Active Travel Group.

- Over £800,000 of grant funding has been used to support existing services subsidised by the Council, protect Medway's wider bus network, and to uplift frequencies. Priority for service enhancements was given to key bus corridors with the potential for future growth in passenger numbers.
- Three 'Free Bus Travel Weekend' promotions have taken place in Medway. The first included services across Kent and Medway in June 2023. This was followed by Medway-only free bus travel weekends in December 2023, September 2024 and two weekends in December 2024. In December 2024 the two free weekends saw passenger numbers increase by 38% compared to normal weekends.
- The Council worked with all bus operators across Medway to provide free bus travel for children between 20 July and 1 September 2024. Over 29,000 children travelled free during the summer, equating to approximately 800 passengers per day.
- In the summer of 2024, additional bus services provided travel to leisure destinations in Chatham, Gillingham, and Rainham, including Medway Park, The Strand, Riverside Country Park and Cozenton Park Sports Centre. Over 5,700 passengers used the service during the six-week period of operation.
- Thirty-two bus shelters will receive lighting upgrades to enhance night-time security. A further sixty-one bus shelters are subject to a refurbishment programme.
- Thirteen new high-definition CCTV cameras have been installed at Chatham Waterfront Bus Station, along with a new public address system to help improve safety and security for all users, and refurbished facilities for bus drivers.

BSIP revenue grant funding 2025/6

4.2 The revenue grant funding for 2025/6 will enable the Council to provide further financial support for bus services across Medway, including maintaining socially necessary bus services and improving service frequencies on key corridors. The potential enhancements currently under consideration involve

routes serving the Hoo Peninsula, Cliffe and Cliffe Woods, Medway City Estate, Rainham, and Gravesend, with options to improve frequencies and provide additional services in the evenings and on Sundays. Following the success of bus promotional activity and other initiatives in 2024, Free Bus weekends will also be considered for 2025.

BSIP capital grant funding 2025/6: Local Bus Infrastructure Plan (LBIP)

- 4.3 The capital grant funding for 2025/6 is provided for the delivery of highway infrastructure projects that will support faster and more reliable bus services on key routes and corridors. It may also be allocated to infrastructure that improves the perception of bus travel and the passenger experience, such as bus stops, shelters, interchanges and enhancements to personal safety.
- 4.4 A Local Bus Infrastructure Plan (LBIP) for Medway will identify a series of evidence-based interventions for the priority corridors identified in the BSIP. In developing the plan, all high frequency bus routes and corridors will be reviewed and short-, medium- and long-term schemes to improve the operational performance of bus services will be considered and appraised. This work will develop, where appropriate, the high-level interventions referenced in the BSIP. These include:
- traffic management schemes such as road layout changes and new or amended road markings to address 'congestion hotspots' identified in Medway's Local Transport Plan (2011-2026)
 - bus lanes, bus gates and other interventions that provide bus priority
 - changes to traffic signals
 - on-street parking controls
 - bus stop and shelter improvements
 - a new bus hub at Strood railway station to provide better access to the west and services to the Isle of Grain and Hoo Peninsula
- 4.5 The priority corridors identified in the BSIP contain high-frequency routes and serve highly populated areas with significant employment, education and leisure facilities:
- Service 101: Gillingham – Chatham – Bridgewood - Maidstone
 - Service 132: Chatham - Hempstead Valley
 - Services 140, 141 and 700: Chatham – Strood - Earl Estate
 - Services 145/146: Chatham - Warren Wood
 - Service 166: Chatham - Lords Wood
 - Services 175/176/177: Chatham - Medway Maritime Hospital- Gillingham
 - Service 182: Chatham – Gillingham - Twydall

Congestion hotspots are present on these corridors, which can impact on service reliability and journey times.

4.6 The LBIP for Medway will be developed in the following stages:

- A review of background information and scoping, including a workshop with stakeholders
- Data analysis and categorisation of issues, using GIS bus performance heat maps and the Analyse Bus Open Data system to identify operational performance issues and areas for network improvements
- Identification of potential mitigation measures, the production of draft schematic layouts and establishment of evaluation criteria
- Scoring of routes, production of a ranking table and categorisation of schemes
- Initial proposals and production of a draft LBIP including schematic layout plans

4.7 It is anticipated that the draft LBIP will be completed by 31 March 2025, in readiness for a period of wider engagement and consultation and progression through Medway’s governance processes. The draft LBIP will facilitate the production of a Delivery Plan, which is required by the DfT as part of the BSIP grant funding agreement. The Delivery Plan will list schemes to be delivered with the grant funding and provide an initial assessment of the likely outcomes and contributions to Medway’s BSIP, Local Transport Plan (LTP) and wider policy objectives. A change control process will enable the Delivery Plan to be updated as necessary following publication of the agreed LBIP.

5. Risk management

5.1 The following table considers risks arising from the content of this report:

Risk	Description	Action to avoid or mitigate risk	Risk rating
Lack of a strategic plan for the delivery of highway infrastructure to support the priorities and objectives set out in the BSIP	Without a strategic plan for infrastructure improvements, creating a Delivery Plan (a grant funding requirement) would be difficult. This could lead to slow and unstructured scheme delivery without proper evidence and prioritisation. This would impact on the delivery of Medway’s BSIP vision and priorities and wider	Develop a Local Bus Infrastructure Plan to identify a series of evidence-based interventions for the priority corridors identified in the BSIP. Utilise the emerging Plan to produce a prioritised Delivery Plan for submission to the DfT.	All

Risk	Description	Action to avoid or mitigate risk	Risk rating
	objectives for sustainable transport. It may also compromise Medway's ability to secure further grant funding from National Government.		
Insufficient funding to deliver the priorities and objectives in the BSIP and wider Council plans, policies and strategies	Ambitious plans for delivering strategic public transport objectives may be challenging to deliver within the budgets available.	Develop and implement a prioritised Delivery Plan to align schemes and projects with available budgets, exploring alternative funding opportunities where appropriate.	CIV
Lack of support for infrastructure improvements identified by the LBIP	Highway infrastructure schemes put forward by the LBIP may be perceived as detrimental to other modes of travel and taking priority over other highway infrastructure or maintenance projects.	Develop and implement a plan for consultation and engagement with stakeholders. Ensure schemes align with the Council's wider strategic plans and policies and can be adapted as appropriate following consultation and engagement processes.	BII

Likelihood	Impact:
A Very likely B Likely C Unlikely D Rare	I Catastrophic II Major III Moderate IV Minor

6. Consultation

- 6.1. The Council's BSIP was subject to consultation and engagement prior to publication. An engagement and consultation process for the LBIP will be established as part of the development of the delivery plan.

7. Climate change implications

- 7.1 [The Council declared a climate change emergency in April 2019](#) - item 1038D refers, and has set a target for Medway to become carbon neutral by 2050. Transport is the largest greenhouse gas emitting sector in the UK, accounting for around 26% of total emissions. Medway's Climate Change Action Plan identifies transport as one of its key priorities for combatting climate change.
- 7.2 The BSIP supports modal shift aspirations and the associated improvements to air quality, carbon dioxide emissions and congestion, and aligns with Medway's ambitions to achieve Net Zero emissions by 2050.
- 7.3 One example includes a pilot project to upgrade a couple of Medway's bus stop shelters to Living Roof Bus Shelters. These will be powered by solar panels, contributing to renewable energy use and reducing carbon emissions. Additionally, the living roofs will attract and support local wildlife, enhancing biodiversity in urban areas. This project not only aims to improve air quality but also to create greener, more sustainable public spaces for the community.

8. Financial implications

- 8.1 The costs associated with the development of the Council's BSIP, LBIP and Enhanced Partnership have been fully met through grant funding from National Government. The grant funding has also enabled the Council to enhance services and maintain financial support for Medway's established network of socially necessary bus routes, despite an increase in the cost of providing these services from 2023.
- 8.2 Future costs associated with enhancing bus services, delivering highway infrastructure and promoting bus travel in accordance with Medway's BSIP objectives will be met through grant funding from National Government in 2025/6. The Council also has access to funding from the annual Local Transport Plan capital grant and Section 106 contributions allocated to public transport and infrastructure improvements.
- 8.3 If projects are not delivered in accordance with an agreed Delivery Plan or change control process, the DFT may require grant funding to be returned and funding for other projects may be held back. This could impact on the Council's ability to maintain existing levels of financial support for bus services across Medway.

9. Legal implications

- 9.1 There are no legal implications arising from the recommendation set out in section 1 of this report.

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Appendices

Appendix A: Medway's Bus Service Improvement Plan

Appendix B: Enhanced Partnership Plan and Scheme

Appendix C: BSIP grant funding spend allocation to 2024

Background papers

None