



Cabinet report

Date **14 SEPTEMBER 2023**

Title **ISLE OF WIGHT BUS ENHANCED PARTNERSHIP PLAN AND SCHEME**

Report of **CABINET MEMBER FOR TRANSPORT AND INFRASTRUCTURE, HIGHWAYS PFI AND TRANSPORT STRATEGY**

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

1. The purpose of this report is to set out details of a proposed Isle of Wight Enhanced Partnership Plan (EP Plan) and Enhanced Partnership Scheme (EP Scheme), with the sole commercial bus operator, Southern Vectis, building on the Isle of Wight Bus Service Improvement Plan (BSIP) that was approved in October 2021.
2. The EP Plan (Appendix 1) sets a high-level vision for the Island's local bus service network, whilst the EP Scheme (Appendix 2) sets out current obligations on the Isle of Wight Council and Southern Vectis. Both documents have been co-developed by the Isle of Wight Council and Southern Vectis, engaging closely with neighbouring Local Transport Authorities (LTAs), and have been subject to an operator objection period and statutory consultation.

RECOMMENDATION

3. That Cabinet approves the Isle of Wight Enhanced Partnership Plan (EP Plan) and Isle of Wight Enhanced Partnership Scheme (EP Scheme), as detailed within, and appended to this report, as the local response to "Bus Back Better", the national bus strategy, building on the Isle of Wight Bus Service Improvement Plan (BSIP) that was approved in October 2021.
4. Furthermore, that authority is given to formally 'make' the EP Plan and EP Scheme in line with Government guidance, to include establishing the governance structure for the Enhanced Partnership.

BACKGROUND

5. This report sets out the details of Isle of Wight Council's proposed approach to the local delivery of the Government's National Bus Strategy through a BSIP, EP Plan and EP Scheme for the Island. The consistent policy themes running through the

National Bus Strategy are a green economic recovery, decarbonisation of transport and levelling up the economy.

6. The BSIP was prepared following extensive engagement with Southern Vectis and neighbouring Local Transport Authorities (LTAs). It also aligns with Council's Climate and Environment Strategy, as well as with the guiding principles of the emerging Hampshire Local Transport Plan 4 and strategic aim of promoting strong economic growth.
7. The Government initially announced that £3billion would be made available for Local Transport Authorities to bid for towards delivery of local measures. However, the spending review in November 2021 only included £1.2billion specifically for BSIPs.
8. The Isle of Wight BSIP was submitted to Government in October 2021, accompanied by a prioritised list of interventions, and set out the funding requirements to enable the Council and its partners to meet the commitments, ambition and targets set out in the BSIP. Though unfortunately, the Council was not successful in receiving an allocation from the initial round of funding.
9. However, following submission of the BSIP, the Council was then required to prepare an EP Plan and EP Scheme. Together these documents lay the foundation upon which the Council and Southern Vectis can take the first step in working towards realising the shared BSIP ambitions.
10. The EP Plan sets a high-level vision for the Island's bus network, including journey time and reliability targets, and the plans to deliver them. It largely replicates the Isle of Wight BSIP that was published in October 2021.
11. The main points of the EP Plan are as follows:
 - (a) Extent of the Enhanced Partnership
 - (b) Justification
 - (c) Why the Enhanced Partnership route has been chosen.
 - (d) EP Plan duration, review process and alignment to Council strategies
 - (e) Overview of the Island's Bus Network
 - (f) Analysis of the existing network to EP Objectives
 - (g) IWC EP Objectives
12. The EP Scheme, which accompanies the EP Plan sets out the agreed obligations on the Council and Southern Vectis as the local commercial bus operator. It also represents the mechanism by which the commitments made in the BSIP and EP Plan are delivered 'on the ground.' All parties are clear about their respective obligations, and they are, as far as possible, comprehensively, accurately, and unambiguously recorded.
13. The main points of the EP Scheme are as follows:
 - (a) Scope of the EP Scheme, commencement date and any exempted local bus services
 - (b) Obligations on the Isle of Wight Council
 - (c) Obligations on Southern Vectis
 - (d) Joint obligations
 - (e) Governance arrangements
 - (f) Review of the EP Scheme

14. At the time of drafting the EP Plan and EP Scheme, there was no clear funding available to deliver on the aspirations of the BSIP. Therefore, the EP Scheme was only able to contain quite limited statutory commitments where funding could be guaranteed.
15. However, in recent weeks the DfT have announced further BSIP+ funding and once agreed with Southern Vectis, it is intended that bespoke arrangements for varying the EP Scheme are utilised to include for measures that have funding to enable their delivery. Though the funding allocated to the Island, is not sufficient to deliver on all of the aspirations set out within the EP Plan and BSIP at this time.

CORPORATE PRIORITIES AND STRATEGIC CONTEXT

Responding to climate change and enhancing the biosphere

16. A sustainable public transport network is central to meeting the targets set within the Climate and Environment Strategy adopted by the Council in October 2021. The strategy identifies that private car emissions significantly contribute to the carbon emissions generated by the Island and therefore a sustainable public transport network, offering multiple vehicle occupancy capacity greater than private cars, is essential to meet the carbon zero targets set.
17. As such the report's recommendations would therefore have a positive impact on carbon emissions in ensuring continual support for the existing bus network, working with Southern Vectis for further enhancements and encouraging its use by Island residents as well as visitors. This in turn supports the Climate and Environment Strategy and the emerging Local Transport Plan objectives.
18. Additionally, in respect of the UNESCO Biosphere, the recommendation aligns with a number of UNESCO Sustainable Development Goals both directly i.e., Goal 11 Sustainable Cities and Communities and Goal 13 Climate Action and indirectly through the use of public transport; Goals 10, 8 4 & 3.
<https://www.un.org/sustainabledevelopment/sustainable-development-goals/>

Economic Recovery and Reducing Poverty

19. It is recognised that a sustainable transport network is vital to support economic recovery through connecting places of residence with education, employment and training venues, whilst offering an alternative to private car ownership. In addition, public transport companies offer employment opportunities and training to Island residents which is in itself important to the Island's economy. The recommendation of this report seeks to formalise the partnership with the local operator to pursue enhancement schemes to minimise the current economic impacts on the operation of local bus services, thereby seeking to ensure that the sustainable public transport network is maintained and where possible enhanced.

Impact on Young People and Future Generations

20. A sustainable public transport network is essential for young people and future generations, to access education, employment, social events, health appointments etc. The recommendation of this report seeks to minimise the economic impact of the Covid pandemic and recent inflationary increases on the operation of local bus

services, thereby seeking to ensure that the sustainable public transport network is maintained

Corporate Aims

21. As set out above, this reports recommendation is in line with the Key Areas for Action set out within the recently adopted Corporate Plan for 2021-2025, both in respect of supporting sustainable travel and local economic recovery.

CONSULTATION

22. In line with guidance issued by the Department for Transport (DfT), the Council has undertaken consultation to gain the views and support of stakeholders both on the existing bus network and potential improvements that could be made through the Enhanced Partnership.
23. In advance of the formal consultation, there was regular dialogue with Southern Vectis, so that there were no surprises in the draft EP Plan and Scheme. Especially as the EP could not be progressed without the formal agreement of the bus operators, but pleasingly no objections were received.
24. The requirements for consultation are set out in the Transport Act 2000 and consist of a two-part process i.e., an operator objection period and a subsequent statutory consultation. However, due to the tight timescales to have the EP Plan and Scheme adopted by the 30 September, and with the agreement of Southern Vectis, these ran at the same time from 1 to 28 July 2023.
25. This engagement took place with seven statutory consultees that were prescribed in the DfT guidance. There were no specific questions for respondents to complete, open comments were welcomed and unprompted. The prescribed statutory consultees who were engaged with were:
 - all operators of local bus services affected by any of the proposals.
 - organisations that represent local passengers (for the Island this was the Isle of Wight Bus and Rail Users group).
 - and neighbouring Local Transport Authorities (LTAs) who would be affected by the EP proposals.
 - the Police.
 - the Traffic Commissioner.
 - Transport Focus; and
 - the Competition and Markets Authority (CMA).
26. Four responses were received, Southern Vectis, Transport Focus, the CMA and the Police. There were no objections received, generally supportive and some suggestions on further improvements in future iterations should funding allow.

FINANCIAL / BUDGET IMPLICATIONS

27. Following an earlier announcement by the Government, in July 2023 the Department of Transport (DfT), announced an allocation of circa £295,000 to the Isle of Wight Council of BSIP Plus funding for the financial year 2023/24 & the same amount for 2024/25. This funding is to be used to support the local bus service network and enhancements in line with the published BSIP.

28. A condition of this funding is that the Isle of Wight Council adopts an EP Plan and Scheme by 30 September 2023. Otherwise, the funding will be limited to 50 per cent of the allocation announced, until they have been adopted.
29. Council has been successful in securing Local Transport Authority Bus Capacity Funding allocation from DfT. This shall be utilised to recruit an officer to oversee and managed the Enhanced Partnership, as well as other public transport related duties.
30. Likewise, the adoption of the Bus Service Improvement Plan along with the Enhanced Partnership agreement with local bus operators could unlock further additional funding from Department for Transport to fund further improvements to bus services across the Island.

LEGAL IMPLICATIONS

31. The preparation of the EP is the final step towards establishing an Enhanced Partnership Plan and Scheme under the Transport Act 2000.
32. The statutory basis and requirements in relation to Enhanced Partnership Plans and Schemes are set out in Sections 138A to 138S of the Transport Act 2000 (inserted by Section 9 of the Bus Services Act 2017) and regulations made under those sections.
33. Under Section 138R of the Transport Act 2000 the Council, in exercising its functions as a Local transport Authority in relation to Enhanced Partnerships and Schemes, has a statutory duty to have regard to the guidance issued by the Secretary of State.
34. At the Cabinet meeting on 16 June 2021 the Isle of Wight Council resolved to proceed with the development of an Enhanced Partnership. As a result, a notice of the intention to prepare an enhanced partnership plan and accompanying enhanced partnership schemes, as required, and set out in section 138F of the Transport Act 2000, has been published.
35. Having complied with the statutory requirements of the Transport Act 2000, the Council considers it appropriate to make the Plan and Scheme, it may do so by exercising its powers under Section 138G of the Transport Act 2000.

EQUALITY AND DIVERSITY

36. The council as a public body is required to meet its statutory obligations under the Equality Act 2010 to have due regard to eliminate unlawful discrimination, promote equal opportunities between people from different groups and to foster good relations between people who share a protected characteristic and people who do not share it. The protected characteristics are: age, disability, gender reassignment, marriage and civil partnership, pregnancy and maternity, race, religion or belief, sex and sexual orientation.
37. It is anticipated that the recommended option would have no negative impacts on groups with protected characteristics. This is on the basis that through the adoption of the EP Plan and Scheme, the Council will be able to maintain or even enhance

the local public bus network, which will benefit all Island residents as well as visitors.

OPTIONS

38. **Option 1** - That Cabinet approves the Isle of Wight Enhanced Partnership Plan (EP Plan) and Isle of Wight Enhanced Partnership Scheme (EP Scheme), as detailed within, and appended to this report, as the local response to “Bus Back Better”, the national bus strategy, building on the Isle of Wight Bus Service Improvement Plan (BSIP) that was approved in October 2021.
39. Furthermore, that authority is given to formally ‘make’ the EP Plan and EP Scheme in line with Government guidance, to include establishing the governance structure for the Enhanced Partnership.
40. **Option 2 – Not to approve the EP Plan and scheme.** Therefore, require further revisions to the proposed EP Plan and Scheme which would require further consultation.

RISK MANAGEMENT

41. The principal risk associated with this report is related to the option 2 of the report, should Cabinet choose not to approve the EP Plan and Scheme. This will result in the need to redraft the documents and repeat the statutory objection period with Southern Vectis, as well as the consultation.
42. This would lead to the Council receiving 50% of the allocated BSIP Plus funding in the short term and making it increasingly difficult to utilise the allocation due to the constrained timescales.
43. To assist in mitigating this risk, we are submitting the EP Plan and Scheme at the earliest opportunity prior to the deadline. Likewise, we have kept the Cabinet Member for Transport and Infrastructure, Highways PFI and Transport Strategy fully briefed.
44. A further risk is associated with utilising the BSIP Plus funding as an outcome of this decision and meeting the conditions of the funding. In particular, should we not agree with Southern Vectis how best to utilise the funding in a timely fashion, the Council runs the risk of not achieving the outcomes within 12 months of the funding award.

EVALUATION

45. The reports recommendation would contribute to maintaining the current network of local bus services in operation on the Island and create a formal partnership process with associated governance to enable future enhancements in line with the EP Plan, as well as other key Council priorities.
46. Delivery of the approach set out within the EP Plan and EP Scheme would enable the Council to further the work needed to meet the objectives set out within the Government’s Bus Back Better Strategy and the Island BSIP as well as maximising the likelihood of securing additional funding to deliver the proposed improvements. This work would build upon the already positive working relationship the Council

has with Southern Vectis and enable the best outcomes for Island residents, as well as visitors.

47. The intention is to 'make' the Enhanced Partnership in September 2023, in line with Government requirements. The EP Plan represents the County Council's ambition, with the EP Scheme containing the details of what the Council and Southern Vectis are able to commit to and will be updated using the bespoke variation mechanism as funding becomes available. The EP Scheme will also be reviewed on a six-monthly basis, to consider progress towards targets and outcomes.

APPENDICES ATTACHED

Appendix 1 – Isle of Wight Enhanced Partnership Plan 2023-2030

Appendix 2 - Isle of Wight Enhanced Partnership Scheme 2023/24

BACKGROUND PAPERS

National Bus Strategy - <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/bus-back-better>

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