



Purpose: For Decision

Cabinet report

Date **14 OCTOBER 2021**

Title **BUS SERVICE IMPROVEMENT PLAN**

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

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

1. The purpose of this report is to set out details of a proposed Bus Service Improvement Plan (BSIP) for the Isle of Wight, as the first step towards development of an Enhanced Partnership (EP) with the local commercial bus operator, Southern Vectis. The Plan has been co-developed by the Isle of Wight council and Southern Vectis as the local commercial bus operator, as well as engaging closely with neighbouring Local Transport Authorities (LTA). The BSIP represents a collective series of ambitions for how bus services in Isle of Wight will be improved up to 2030 through co-ordinated investment, subject to securing newly available funding from central Government.

RECOMMENDATION

2. **Option 2:** That Cabinet approves the Isle of Wight Bus Service Improvement Plan (BSIP) as detailed within the report in line with 'Bus Back Better', the national bus strategy, in preparation of an Enhanced Partnership with local bus operators.
3. **Option 3:** That authority is granted to the Director of Neighbourhoods to make the necessary arrangements to formally submit the BSIP to the Government by the end of October 2021, so that it can be used to inform future funding allocations, and to undertake an annual review and minor updating of the BSIP every 12 months.

BACKGROUND

4. On 15 March 2021 the Government published 'Bus Back Better', England's first National Bus Strategy. It sets out the future of local bus services outside London and how they will be delivered through either formal partnership arrangements between local transport authorities and bus operators, or through franchising. £3billion is being made available to deliver the strategy. The National Bus Strategy and additional funding flowing from it, would contribute significantly to Isle of Wight Council's objectives of decarbonisation of transport and achieving carbon neutrality, with a shift to greener public transport. A single journey on public transport has approximately half the carbon impact of a car journey.

5. The strategy represents an opportunity for the Council to extend its existing partnership working arrangements with bus operators in order to enhance the quality and attractiveness of the bus network both for residents and visitors to the Island. The National Bus Strategy indicates that the level of funding to be received by Local Transport Authorities (LTAs) will reflect the level of local ambition demonstrated by the LTAs and their bus operators.
6. The strategy also set out the conditions which LTAs should adhere to, not only to access the national funding for enhancements; but to secure ongoing financial support for bus operations within in the authority area. The key milestones are:
 - 30 June 2021: commit to establishing Enhanced Partnerships under the Bus Services Act.
 - 31 October 2021: publish a local Bus Service Improvement Plan (BSIP) in line with the strategy requirements; and
 - April 2022: Have an Enhanced Partnership (EP) in place or be following the Franchising process.
7. At the meeting on 17 June 2021, the Council's Cabinet approved that a Statutory Notice should be issued stating the Council's intention to enter into Enhanced Partnerships with local commercial bus operator. As such the next stage to achieve, in line with above timeline, is the publication of a BSIP by 31 October 2021.
8. The BSIP sets out a high-level vision for improving local bus services and key interventions to deliver it, with the EP plan containing the detail of how these key interventions will be delivered.
9. Department for Transport (DfT) guidance for LTAs on preparation of BSIPs was published in May 2021. This states that within their BSIPs, LTAs need to cover:
 - future plans for provision of new bus priority measures within our main urban areas to enable buses to avoid delay at congestion hotspots;
 - targets for reduced bus journey times improved reliability, passenger growth and passenger satisfaction;
 - plans to make buses zero emission;
 - dealing with the under or over supply of buses on the network;
 - plans for fares and multi-operator ticketing;
 - addressing local air quality issues;
 - improving roadside bus infrastructure;
 - plans for expansion of Bus Rapid Transit networks;
 - steps being taken to produce a Bus Passenger Charter;
 - our network development plans (e.g. Key Corridors or Bus Rapid Transit or Mass Rapid Transit networks); and
 - plans for 'socially necessary' and new 'economically necessary' services.
10. The BSIP attached as Appendix 1 to this report, sets out the Council's and bus operator's shared high-level vision for the Island's bus network, including journey time

and reliability targets, and our plans to deliver them. It follows a template structure provided by the DfT

11. Section 2; of the BSIP summarises how the Southern Vectis bus network on the Island compares to the ten ambitions outlined in the DfT's May 2021 BSIP guidance. It describes the current levels of bus use and the main destinations bus passengers travel to. It outlines how buses are used and the key issues affecting bus services across the Island. Likewise, other factors that affect the use of local bus services including ageing population, car parking costs and availability.
12. Section 3; sets out a series of 'Headline' targets for reducing average bus journey times and for the percentage of bus services running on time. There are also countywide targets for passenger growth and customer satisfaction. The headline countywide targets are to:
 - Reduce average bus journey times by 5-10 percent across the Isle of Wight by 2025.
 - Improve bus journey time reliability with 90 percent of services operating on time (between 1 minute early and 5 minutes late) by 2025.
 - Increase frequency of bus links in rural areas to encourage 25 percent more bus journeys from rural locations by 2040. Working with Southern Vectis to identify areas for improvements.
 - Increase bus passenger satisfaction by 5 percent from a base of 92 percent (2019 – Southern Vectis survey results) by 2026/27
13. Section 4; sets out a high-level vision and a series of ten long-term commitments for how the Isle of Wight Council and Southern Vectis will work to improve the quality of local bus services on the Island. The key points are summarised below:
14. Section 5 - Reporting; this section shall set out the arrangements for publishing six-monthly performance against BSIP targets as well as the web address for the published location
15. Section 6 - Overview Table; this section shall summarise the key outputs of the BSIP and how it meets requirements set out in the Bus Back Better National Bus Strategy. The purpose of this section is to give readers, including passengers and the Department, an overview of the commitments in the BSIP which LTAs and operators will work towards to improve local bus services. LTAs should complete all sections of the template.

IWC and Southern Vectis have a shared vision for improving bus services on the Island:

16. "Within the Isle of Wight, both organisations recognise that local bus services are, and will remain to be, central to sustainable transport provision on the Island. The Bus Service Improvement Plan (BSIP) represents a once in a generation opportunity for the Isle of Wight Council to work in partnership with Southern Vectis, and other community operators, to shape local provision to meet the needs of Island residents and visitors into the future. Through partnership working and ongoing joint investment, the BSIP will enable passenger growth to meet the future needs of Island, whilst addressing emerging challenges including the reductions in greenhouse gases to achieve the Island's climate change objectives".

17. Our ten commitments – how we will achieve our vision
- (a) Commitment 1 - We commit to the delivery of intensive services and focussing investment on our bus network on the Island, ensuring that our bus routes and network serve this Island, and made easier to understand.
 - (b) Commitment 2 - Reducing journey times will not only increase the attractiveness of services and drive-up demand, but also improve efficiency and help to reduce costs. Therefore, we commit to investigating bus priority measures along key bus corridors, to speed up and improve reliability of bus services on well-used corridors.
 - (c) Commitment 3 - We will make ticket options easier to understand and improve the affordability of bus travel across the Island, but we will do this in a way that grows demand without undermining the viability of services. We commit to initiatives that will greatly simplify and reduce the complexity of tickets and fares (across all modes of public transport on the Island), developing tap-on tap-off capped fares as the centrepiece of a clear, ticketing strategy that provides bus customers with improved clarity on fares and better value for money.
 - (d) Commitment 4 - We will investigate options that will seek to improve the range of multi-operator bus/ferry/train ticketing for the Island, through liaison with the main transport providers for the Island.
 - (e) Commitment 5 - In extending the reach of bus services beyond current service patterns, we commit to ensuring that new early morning, evening and weekend services link in effectively to rail and ferry services and that mobility hubs are designed and located so as to encourage and enable easy onward travel by bus.
 - (f) Commitment 6 - We commit to ensuring that the local bus network continues to be presented as a single system that works well together, with clear passenger information.
 - (g) Commitment 7 - We commit to providing customers with a modern bus fleet with a high-quality on-bus environment that meets their needs and to working towards decarbonisation.
 - (h) Commitment 8 - We commit to working to meet and exceed the needs and expectations of bus passengers on the Island and give them a stronger voice.
 - (i) Commitment 9 - We commit to trialling innovative and value for money approaches to meeting the public transport travel needs of rural areas that cannot be viably served by conventional timetabled bus services.
 - (j) Commitment 10 - We commit to preparing plans and funding bids to secure investment to enable the longer-term transformation of networks through delivery of Bus Rapid Transit and other significant measures.
18. In addition to the above are proposals for improvements to the current bus network on the island raised by Southern Vectis which will be reviewed in partnership with the Isle of Wight Council's Highways and Transport leads (Appendix 2)

19. One of the priority schemes proposed by Southern Vectis are improvements to the Ryde Interchange as a key multimodal transport hub both for on Island and cross-Solent travel. It should therefore be noted that this proposal is due to be addressed within the current DfT funded improvement project for the Ryde Interchange, with works due to commence in early 2022 and completion by March 2023.

STRATEGIC CONTEXT

20. Creating an ambitious BSIP to fulfilling the above expectations and establishing an Enhanced Partnership with Local Bus Operators would have a positive impact on all four corporate priorities of the Council, as set out in the within the current [Corporate Plan](#) 2019-2022.
21. The Isle of Wight Council is currently developing a new Local Transport Plan (LTP 4) to reflect the significant changes related to transport since the current version was adopted in 2011, such as the need to tackle climate change, changes in national transport strategies and local housing/development needs. Although the LTP 4 is at an early stage of development, it is the intention that the BSIP seeks to address challenges already being identified and in turn the objectives of the LTP.
22. The BSIP will also be central to achieve the public transport related targets and objectives set within the recently adopted Climate and Environment Strategy for the Council to achieve its carbon net zero target date for the Island by 2040.

CONSULTATION

23. Between May and August 2021, regular meetings have been held with the local commercial bus operator as well as ongoing direct liaison between the team at Hampshire County Council and Go South Coast (Southern Vectis) on the drafting of the BSIP to ensure it truly reflects the partnership approach.
24. A workshop with bus operators and neighbouring LTAs was hosted by Hampshire County Council on 21 July to identify common ground and agree an appropriate level of ambition. Attendees agreed that central to being able to deliver the kind of year-on-year growth in bus passenger numbers that the DfT are seeking, is being able to offer bus passengers a quicker and more reliable bus service. Feedback from operators at the workshop, indicated that this would best be achieved through the delivery of widespread bus priority measures that are needed to improve bus journey times, punctuality and reliability. This has therefore been included as a key priority in the Isle of Wight BSIP.
25. Another key piece of feedback given by all the bus operators who attended the workshop was that in order for bus services to attract more passengers, it is very important to secure early political buy-in and support from Councillors for the principle of reallocating road space from general traffic to buses in locations on the highway network where traffic congestion is occurring, so that buses do not experience the same delays as other traffic. Speeding up journey times by bus would reduce operating costs and generate more revenue which in turn would allow operators to invest in more frequent services and new vehicles.
26. It was the intention that wider consultation would be undertaken with stakeholders during the development of the BSIP. However, the tight timescales set by the DfT has

meant that only initial correspondence has been had with the Isle of Wight Bus and Rail User Group. This feedback was included within the proposals raised by Southern Vectis for inclusion within the BSIP.

27. It is however the intention to re-establish regular meetings with the Isle of Wight Bus and Rail User Group, as well as other transport stakeholder groups.

SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

28. The previous Cabinet Report for the approval to publish the formal notice of intent and the BSIP process was discussed at the Policy and Scrutiny Committee for Neighbourhoods and Regeneration on Thursday, 8 July 2021.
29. Unfortunately, the schedule of the committee meeting dates and the tight timescales in which to produce the BSIP, means that the next opportunity to formally brief the committee is not until after the BSIP has been published.
30. Therefore, it was resolved to circulate a draft of the BSIP will have been shared with Councillors of the Policy and Scrutiny Committee for Neighbourhoods and Regeneration for comment prior to a final draft of the BSIP being submitted on 5 October.

FINANCIAL / BUDGET IMPLICATIONS

31. An Initial funding allocation of £100k capacity funding has been offered to all Local Transport Authorities, which the Isle of Wight Council has received. This funding is intended to ensure that Council has the sufficient resource to develop the BSIP and EP. To this end Hampshire County Council's Commercial Team have been commissioned to provide the necessary assistance.
32. Since the publication of the formal notice of intent an additional £50k of capacity funding has been allocated to the Isle of Wight Council to assist in resourcing the next stage of development of the BSIP and EP. This will hopefully ensure that we can continue to receive the necessary support from Hampshire County Council.
33. Consideration will also need to be made in respect of future staffing capacity, as such this will be reflected within the financial ask of the BSIP to ensure that there is sufficient staffing resource to manage the additional responsibilities regarding Public Transport and the management of the BSIP as a result of its adoption.
34. On commencement of the Enhanced Partnership, Local Transport Authorities (LTAs) will be able to access the £3bn funding being made available. The DfT have indicated that a proportion of the funding will be made available via an allocation basis to LTAs, whilst a further proportion is due to be made available via challenge fund against which LTAs can competitively bid. To this end it is a recommendation of the DfT that the BSIPs are ambitious as both funding routes will be based upon the levels of aspirations.

CARBON EMISSIONS

35. One of the key drivers for the National Bus Strategy are the national emissions and climate change targets, as the modal shift of the public from private car use to more sustainable modes of travel is crucial in achieving these targets.

36. Likewise, to achieve the merging local climate change strategy it essentially that there is a significant increase in the use of sustainable travel and bus travel is key to achieve this aim.
37. Further to this, the funding structure will incentivise investment in zero emission public transport services and networks, with such aspirations built into the BSIPs.
38. In respect of wider sustainability issues, it should be recognised that use of local bus services can:
 - Reduce congestion
 - Provide access to services (including health / education) for those without private transport
 - Prevent the need for car ownership
 - Allows visitors to arrive car-free
 - Link with other forms of public / active transport

LEGAL IMPLICATIONS

39. Following the publication of the BSIP the Isle of Wight Council will be required to enter an Enhanced Bus Partnership as per the Bus Services Act 2017 (which amends the Transport Act 2000).
40. The Department for Transport has produced a suite of guidance on the Bus Services Act, including, The Bus Services Act 2017: new powers and opportunities; Enhanced partnership creation; and Bus franchising creation.

EQUALITY AND DIVERSITY

41. 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.
42. Under the Equality Act 2010 the Council is required to have due regard to its equality duties when making decisions, reviewing services, undertaking projects, developing and reviewing policies.
43. Due regard to the Council's responsibilities under the Equality Act 2010 has been given at the formative stage of this proposal. An equality impact assessment has been completed and attached to this report as Appendix 2.

OPTIONS

44. Option 1: Not to produce a Bus Service Improvement Plan
45. Option 2: That Cabinet approves the Isle of Wight Bus Service Improvement Plan (BSIP) as detailed within the report in line with 'Bus Back Better', the national bus strategy, in preparation of an Enhanced Partnership with local bus operators.

46. Option 3: That authority is granted to make the necessary arrangements to formally submit the BSIP to the Government by the end of October 2021, so that it can be used to inform future funding allocations, and to undertake an annual review and minor updating of the BSIP every 12 months.

RISK MANAGEMENT

47. The key risk continues to be the tight deadlines set by the Government and the availability of the support and/or existing experienced Council employees required to establish the strategic documents.
48. There are potentially financial and reputational implications for not meeting the deadlines, such as the withdraw of Covid Bus Services Support Grant to local operators, loss of capacity funding and the subsequent funding being made available via the DfT to LTAs to achieve BSIPs and enter an Enhanced Partnership
49. It should be noted that local authorities who do not agree to publish a BSIP for their LTA area by 31 October 2021 are highly likely to lose out on future funding opportunities arising from £3billion of “Bus Back Better” funding that has been earmarked for allocating to LTAs. The Government has stated that ambition within BSIPs ‘will be rewarded’. Part of this funding is anticipated to be awarded by formula linked to population and part through competitive bidding.
50. Additionally, it should be recognised that the adoption of the BSIP and EP will increase the responsibilities placed on the Isle of Wight Council going forwards.
51. To mitigate these risks, commission is being sought with Hampshire County Council’s Commercial services via the Joint Working Agreement to provide the necessary support to develop the BSIP and EP. Furthermore, the Client Team within Highways CMT has successfully recruited a Transport Planner and on their commencement in role will further assist in managing the demands set by government to meet the tight timescales.
52. Consideration has also been given in respect of the BSIP to include a request for capacity funding to secure a Public Transport Officer who will manage the responsibilities associated with the BSIP and EP once established.

EVALUATION

53. Option 1 is not recommended as local authorities who do not publish a BSIP for their LTA area by 31 October 2021 are highly likely to lose out on future funding opportunities arising from £3billion of “Bus Back Better” funding that has been earmarked for allocating to LTAs. The Government has stated that ambition within BSIPs ‘will be rewarded’. Part of this funding is anticipated to be awarded by formula linked to population and part through competitive bidding. For this reason, also both Options 2 and 3 are recommended.

APPENDICES ATTACHED

- Appendix 1 – Draft Bus Service Improvement Plan for the Isle of Wight
- Appendix 2 – Southern Vectis proposed local bus service network improvements
- Appendix 3 – Equality Impact Assessment

BACKGROUND PAPERS

1. Bus Back Better (National Bus Strategy)/ [Bus Back Better publishing.service.gov.uk](#)/March 2021
2. National Bus Strategy: Bus Service Improvement Plans/ [Bus service improvement plan - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](#)/May 2021
3. The Bus Services Act 2017: Enhanced Partnership Guidance [The bus services act 2017: enhanced partnerships \(publishing.service.gov.uk\)](#) /July 2021

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