



Committee report

Committee	POLICY AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE FOR NEIGHBOURHOODS AND REGENERATION
Date	23 SEPTEMBER 2022
Title	UPDATE ON THE BUS SERVICE IMPROVEMENT PLAN FOR THE ISLAND
Report of	CABINET MEMBER FOR INFRASTRUCTURE, HIGHWAYS PFI AND TRANSPORT

SUMMARY

1. The purpose of the report is to provide an update on the development of the Bus Service Improvement Plan adopted in October 2021 and an outline of the progress to date, current position, next steps and key points for noting at this stage.

BACKGROUND

2. On 15 March 2021 the Government published 'Bus Back Better', England's first National Bus Strategy. It set 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. With £3 billion being made available for Local Transport Authorities (LTAs) to deliver the strategy.
3. 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.

PROGRESS TO DATE

4. To meet with the requirements and timescales set out within the National Bus Strategy, the Isle of Wight Council adopted a local Bus Service Improvement Plan at Cabinet in October 2021. This document was created in partnership with our local commercial bus operator Southern Vectis, setting out future targets and ambitions for the Island's bus service network.
5. Following the adoption of the local Bus Service Improvement Plan, a DfT issued proforma was completed setting out the financial ask of the Isle of Wight Council to achieve the targets and ambitions from the £3bn budget

available. Attention was then turned to developing the Enhanced Partnership agreement with Southern Vectis to formalise the partnership by April 2022.

6. However, in the months following the submission to the DfT it was announced that the overall budget available has been reduced to £1.4bn, therefore Local Transport Authorities (LTAs) were advised that it is likely that not all would receive an allocation sufficient to meet their initial targets and ambitions. Likewise, it became evident that the ask of all of the LTAs combined was far greater than even the original budget of £3bn.
7. The final outcome of the funding allocations was that a significant proportion of England's LTAs received either limited funding or none at all. As a result, the Isle of Wight Council did not receive any funding, nor did the neighbouring authorities of Hampshire County Council and Southampton City Council. It was only Portsmouth City Council which received the majority of their funding request
8. As a result of the variable funding outcome, the DfT relaxed the strict timescales that LTAs had to work to previously under the original guidance, for those with no allocation.
9. Due to the lack of funding and the relaxed timescales, the focus of the relevant officers has had to turn to working with Southern Vectis in establishing the necessary level of financial support to maintain/protect the current network of local bus services, mitigating the low level of patronage since the Covid 19 pandemic.
10. Feedback on the Local Bus Service Improvement Plan has since been received and likewise a meeting has been held with the regional representative who has been tasked with assisting Local Transport Authorities to improve their BSIPs.

NEXT STEPS

- Finalise the Enhanced Partnership with Southern Vectis
- Review and update the Local Bus Service Improvement Plan
- Utilise the Enhanced Partnership Officer capacity funding received from DfT to employ a new member of staff on a fixed term to lead on the establishment of the EP, to review the BSIP annually and assist with managing public transport.
- Continue to work with Southern Vectis and other local public transport operators in seeking to achieve the local ambitions set out for public transport.

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