

<b>Subject:</b>	<b>National Bus Strategy: Bus Service Improvement Plan</b>		
<b>Date of Meeting:</b>	<b>21 September 2021</b>		
<b>Report of:</b>	<b>Executive Director Economy, Environment &amp; Culture</b>		
<b>Contact Officer:</b>	<b>Name:</b>	<b>Owen McElroy</b>	<b>Tel: 01273 293693</b>
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<b>Ward(s) affected:</b>	<b>All</b>		

**FOR GENERAL RELEASE****1. PURPOSE OF REPORT AND POLICY CONTEXT**

- 1.1 The National Bus Strategy, published in March 2021, set out a number of requirements for Local Transport Authorities (LTAs) in order to improve bus services and help them recover from the Covid-19 pandemic. This included forming of an Enhanced Partnership and preparing a Bus Service Improvement Plan (BSIP). The ETS Committee agreed to commence the process of forming an Enhanced Partnership in June 2021. The report to that meeting also committed to presenting the BSIP to the September 2021 ETS meeting. This is in order to meet the Department for Transport's (DfT) deadline of 31 October 2021.
- 1.2 The purpose of this report is therefore to present the draft BSIP to the Committee and to ask the Committee to approve this with delegated authority to amend, finalise and submit the document in advance of the DfT's deadline.

**2. RECOMMENDATIONS:**

- 2.1 That the Committee approves the draft BSIP.
- 2.2 That the Committee grants delegated authority to the Executive Director Economy, Environment & Culture to:
- (i) approve any amendments to the draft BSIP that the Executive Director may consider appropriate or expedient following further consultation with the Chair of ETS, Chair of the Quality Bus Partnership, ETS Lead Spokespersons and members of the Quality Bus Partnership; and
  - (ii) approve the submission of the final BSIP before the deadline set by the DfT (currently 31 October 2021).
- 2.3 That the Committee notes the receipt of a further £124,481 Capacity Funding provided by the DfT to the Council to respond to the tasks set out by the DfT in the National Bus Strategy and that the Committee agrees for such funding to be used in the development of Enhanced Partnership schemes.

### 3. CONTEXT/ BACKGROUND INFORMATION

- 3.1 The National Bus Strategy aims to improve bus services across the country and grow passenger numbers. This is in response to low usage and poor services in some parts of the country. The Strategy includes aspirations to increase service frequencies, simplify ticketing, improve bus journey times and reliability, and reduce fares. The purpose of BSIPs is to set out how councils and operators will work together to meet these aspirations.
- 3.2 The DfT has stated that councils must form an Enhanced Partnership with bus operators and produce a BSIP if they are to continue to receive both bus and non-bus transport funding from central government. This includes the support being provided to bus operators following the fall in bus passenger numbers as a result of the pandemic.
- 3.3 Brighton & Hove had relative success before the pandemic with some of the highest rates of bus use in the country. However, there is still significant potential to grow bus use and the DfT has said that “even in high-performing bus towns, further improvements (for instance to priority and fares) are always necessary”<sup>1</sup>. Increasing the proportion of journeys which are made by public transport will also be important if the Council is to meet its aspirations to be a carbon neutral city by 2030. It is also relevant to a number of the recommendations of the Climate Assembly including:
- Recommendation 2 that the public transport system should be affordable/accessible.
  - Recommendation 5 relating to the introduction of mobility hubs, which provide an interchange between different types of travel, including public transport and cycle hire.
  - Recommendation 7 to introduce a park and ride to minimise car use in the city.
  - Recommendation 8 to make public transport a more convenient alternative to driving a car.
- 3.4 The Bus Service Improvement Plan (provided in Appendix 1) outlines a series of proposals which will help the city to respond to the above. BSIPs are intended to be a high-level strategic document. This means that proposals, for example, for infrastructure improvements, do not need to be confirmed in detail at this stage. The next step of the process will be to develop ‘schemes’ as part of the Enhanced Partnership process which will include a formal written agreement between the Council and operators.
- 3.5 The proposals in the BSIP are currently unfunded. However, further detail is awaited from the DfT as to how funding announced in the National Bus Strategy will be allocated from April 2022. The DfT is encouraging councils to match the ambition shown in the National Bus Strategy in their BSIPs. This is expected to be one of the determinants of future funding alongside continued commitment to

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<sup>1</sup> National Bus Strategy: Bus Service Improvement Plans – Guidance to local authorities and bus operators (DfT, 2021, paragraph 51)

Active Travel as detailed in the revised Statutory Traffic Management Act 2004 Guidance issued in July 2021.

3.6 Section 6 of the BSIP contains details of all proposed measures with a summary provided in Appendix E of the BSIP. These include proposals to:

- Maintain good frequencies on well-served routes.
- Trial improved frequencies on less-well served routes. This could include those supported by the Council to communities not served by the commercial bus network, such as Stanmer Park and parts of East Brighton, and commercial routes to towns to the north of Brighton & Hove.
- Establish a road map to all operators introducing zero emissions fleets.
- Exploration of additional limited stop services.
- Improvements to bus priority, including to consider the feasibility of further measures on the A259 and A23 south of Preston Park.
- Measures to simplify ticketing and ensure passengers are getting the lowest fares.
- Marketing campaign to encourage people back on to buses and encourage new users, including visitors to the city.
- Review of supported school bus services in response to requests from schools, to ensure fair and equitable provision across the city, and to encourage use of sustainable modes of travel to school.
- Continued improvement to stops, including shelters, accessible kerbs and the introduction of route and wayfinding maps.

3.7 Reference is also made in the BSIP to a Park & Ride trial; however, this would be subject to a separate decision by this Committee.

3.8 The BSIP will also contain targets which are to be agreed with operators and will be confirmed prior to completion of the final document. The DfT require targets to cover journey times, journey reliability, passenger numbers and passenger satisfaction. The majority of actions feed into these targets as summarised in Appendix E of the BSIP. Actions in other areas such as zero emissions vehicles will also be monitored and reported against.

3.9 The DfT require BSIPs to be updated at least annually whilst progress against targets should be published every six months. These updates and progress against actions will be made available on the Council's website and it is intended that a progress update on the BSIP will be provided to ETS Committee in Autumn 2022.

#### **4. ANALYSIS & CONSIDERATION OF ANY ALTERNATIVE OPTIONS**

4.1 The BSIP includes a range of measures that have been developed in response to each of the aspirations of the National Bus Strategy. These measures have been developed in partnership with bus operators and in accordance with the DfT's guidance on preparing BSIPs. There would be an option for the measures proposed to be more ambitious, for example, to introduce completely new bus routes or heavily subsidised fares. However, it is unclear what long-term funding would be available to support this and it could be that funding becomes a future liability of the Council.

- 4.2 There would also be an option to make the proposed measures less ambitious. However, BSIPs which do not reflect the ambitions of the National Bus Strategy are less likely to receive funding. Measures have therefore been selected which have the potential to encourage a significant shift in bus use. Future liabilities will be reflected in encouraging measures which are more likely to become self-sustaining in future and/or trial initiatives so success can be measured and changes made if necessary.
- 4.3 Another option is to pursue franchising. Franchising is where LTAs issue tenders for bus companies to operate in their area. This can follow a model where authorities specify route and service standards and provide funding to maintain these, as in London, or could be on an area basis with operators having more influence over service design. As Brighton & Hove is not a Mayoral Combined Authority, franchising requires new legislation and is likely to take a number of years. The DfT has also requested that authorities progress Enhanced Partnerships with operators in the first instance. If this BSIP and the Enhanced Partnership fail to deliver the benefits that the Council would like to see, the option of franchising remains open in future and the recommendations included in this report do not rule that out. In response to a decision by ETS members in June 2021, officers have commissioned a study to look at the feasibility of franchising which it is planned will be reported to the November 2021 ETS meeting. However, this has potential to have substantial cost implications that will need to be considered when looking at this option and any other operating models, such as local authority ownership of a bus company.
- 4.4 A final alternative option is to do nothing. This is not considered to be a viable option as the DfT has said that authorities that fail to comply with their requests to prepare BSIPs and form Enhanced Partnerships will not receive future funding. This includes both bus and non-bus transport funding which is outlined further in the financial implications in Section 7.

## **5. COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT & CONSULTATION**

- 5.1 The DfT does not require full public consultation to be completed when preparing BSIPs. The deadlines set by the DfT, combined with committee timescales, mean there has been very little time to produce the BSIP and, as such, full public consultation has not been undertaken. The reason for the deadlines set by the DfT is so that BSIPs are in place to help bus services recover from the pandemic.
- 5.2 These timescales are not within the control of the Council and indeed a considerable amount of additional work has been done using existing resources. Nevertheless, officers have sought to engage with representatives of bus users, disabled people and business groups in accordance with DfT guidance. The BSIP has also been developed in consultation with the Quality Bus Partnership. The Quality Bus Partnership is formed of all bus operators in the city and Brighton & Hove Buswatch who represent bus users.
- 5.3 The engagement undertaken is summarised in full in the BSIP (see Appendix 1, Section 4) with a full list of organisations contacted provided in Appendix D of the BSIP.

- 5.4 The formation of the Enhanced Partnership will follow a statutory process which will take place between October 2021 (following completion of the BSIP) and April 2022 (DfT deadline). In addition, specific schemes would be subject to public consultation and/or engagement with relevant stakeholders as they come forward. This will be subject to the nature of each scheme. For example, bus priority proposals would typically include a public consultation, whereas measures to improve bus accessibility would be subject to targeted engagement with bus users.

## **6. CONCLUSION**

- 6.1 This report has summarised the National Bus Strategy requirements and introduced the BSIP. As per the recommendations in Section 2, the Committee is asked to approve the draft BSIP and to provide delegated authority for the Executive Director to make amendments to, and submit, the BSIP before the DfT's deadline at the end of October 2021. This will be subject to further consultation with the Chair of ETS, Chair of the Quality Bus Partnership, ETS Lead Spokespersons and members of the Quality Bus Partnership.
- 6.2 The reason for requesting delegated authority to submit the final document is to be able to use the full time period provided by the DfT. This will allow the BSIP to be as high quality as possible and ensure that it fully reflects the Council's and Quality Bus Partnership's aspirations. It will also allow officers to respond to additional guidance and advice that is still being received from the DfT.

## **7. FINANCIAL & OTHER IMPLICATIONS:**

### Financial Implications:

- 7.1 In April 2021, the DfT made £100,000 of funding available to LTAs to support with implementing the immediate actions of the National Bus Strategy. This includes preparing the BSIP and forming an Enhanced Partnership. The Council has applied for and received this funding which is being spent on legal support, consultancy to update the Bus Network Review and consultancy to undertake a franchising study. The BSIP itself has been produced in-house by reprioritising existing resource.
- 7.2 An additional £124,481 was allocated to the Council by the DfT in August 2021 on a formula basis. This funding is intended to continue to support the formation of the Enhanced Partnership. The DfT require this to be spent on work associated with producing the BSIP and establishing the Enhanced Partnership, including developing scheme proposals and support with resourcing.
- 7.3 Some of the ambitions outlined in the National Bus Strategy and, consequently the Council's BSIP, are currently unfunded. Further detail is awaited from the DfT; however, and as noted elsewhere in this report, the BSIP aims to respond to the ambition of the National Bus Strategy which is a requirement for future funding. Available funding will be considered when implementing measures, such as additional services. If funding does not become available, some measures will not be implemented. If funding is time-limited, it is likely that changes will be implemented on a trial basis to ascertain whether usage increases to a level where they would be self-sustaining going forward. If this is not the case and

funding ends, any new trial services may need to be withdrawn or alternative funding identified by the Council.

- 7.4 The Enhanced Partnership process will require more ongoing administration than the current Quality Bus Partnership, for example, the need to report progress every six months. The cost of this in officer time is currently unclear; but it is likely to be less than the amount of funding the Council could miss out on were it not to comply with the DfT's instructions.
- 7.5 Were the Council to choose not to agree to the requests contained in the National Bus Strategy, it would not receive Bus Service Recovery funding. During the pandemic, the government has provided Covid Bus Service Support Grant (CBSSG) funding to provide for the loss of revenue caused by lower passenger numbers. This includes payments to the Council for supported bus services and has been necessary to keep services running. In September 2021, this will be replaced with a new recovery fund that is intended to support bus operators whilst passenger numbers remain lower than they were before the pandemic.
- 7.6 This amount will be dependent on how quickly passenger numbers return and if these reach pre-pandemic levels. It is not possible to predict this but, based on current levels of support, were passenger numbers to reach 75% of pre-Covid levels this would be approximately £900k per year. This will be lower were passenger numbers to return at a quicker rate. In addition, savings may be obtained as a result of the re-tendering of some routes. The latter was agreed by Policy & Resources Committee on 1 July 2021 and the procurement process is ongoing.
- 7.7 Where there is a failure to form an Enhanced Partnership or agree a BSIP through no fault of commercial bus operators, the DfT has said that bus operators will continue to receive funding directly.
- 7.8 Finally, were the Council not to comply with the requirements to produce a BSIP and form an Enhanced Partnership, it would not receive future grant funding for improving bus services. In addition, the DfT has said "Government will also take into account an LTAs performance with respect to the policies set out in the Strategy when considering funding allocations for wider, non-bus local transport schemes"<sup>2</sup>.

*Finance Officer Consulted: John Lack*

*Date: 12/08/2021*

Legal Implications:

- 7.9 The Environment, Transport & Sustainability Committee is the appropriate committee for the recommendations set out in paragraph 2 above in accordance with Part 4 of the Council's constitution.
- 7.10 The BSIP and the Enhanced Partnership proposals will need to be prepared in accordance with the requirements of the Transport Act 2000 and the Bus Services Act 2017.

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<sup>2</sup> National Bus Strategy: Bus Service Improvement Plans – Guidance to local authorities and bus operators (DfT, 2021, paragraph 39)

Equalities Implications:

- 7.11 An Equalities Impact Assessment will be produced as part of the development of the Enhanced Partnership to consider the impact of different options.
- 7.12 Were ETS Members to oppose the recommendations of this report and alternative funding not identified, it is possible Council-funded services would need to be withdrawn from 2022-23. Bus services supported by the Council include those to areas with no commercial bus service. By the nature of these locations and distance to alternative services, it is more likely that older and mobility impaired residents will be more disadvantaged by a withdrawal of services.

Sustainability Implications:

- 7.13 Returning the proportion of trips undertaken by bus to pre-pandemic levels and growing this further will be important in helping the Council to meet its targets around climate change, including commitment to a net zero carbon city by 2030, and air quality. The aspirations of the National Bus Strategy and report recommendations are consistent with these aims.

Brexit Implications:

- 7.14 None identified.

Any Other Significant Implications:

- 7.15 None identified.

Crime & Disorder Implications:

- 7.16 None identified.

Risk and Opportunity Management Implications:

- 7.17 Risks identified at this stage are covered by financial and equalities implications above.

Public Health Implications:

- 7.18 Reducing the number of trips made by private car has benefits for air quality whilst bus use has the potential to encourage active travel through walking to bus stops and reducing the need for car ownership.
- 7.19 Complying with the National Bus Strategy requirements will mean the Council continues to be eligible for future DfT funding for cleaner vehicles and the opportunities this brings to improve air quality.

Corporate / Citywide Implications:

7.20 Improving bus services can contribute to a number of the Council Plan outcomes, including around supporting the economy and helping residents to live healthier lives but, in particular, it will help with the outcome to be 'a sustainable city'. In terms of buses, the plan seeks to:

- Protect vital bus services, including those the Council supports in outlying areas.
- Increase bus use by supporting multi-operator fare payment technology.
- Improve air quality through clean, efficient buses and seek further investment in zero emissions buses.

7.21 These aims are reflected in the measures proposed in the BSIP.

## **SUPPORTING DOCUMENTATION**

### **Appendices:**

1. Draft Brighton & Hove Bus Service Improvement Plan (BSIP)

### **Background Documents**

1. National Bus Strategy – Bus Back Better (March, 2021):  
<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/bus-back-better>
2. National Bus Strategy – Bus Service Improvement Plans: Guidance to local authorities and bus operators (May, 2021):  
<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/bus-service-improvement-plan>