

CABINET

DATE	3rd April 2024
REPORT OF	Councillor Stewart Swinburn, Portfolio Holder for Environment and Transport
RESPONSIBLE OFFICER	Carolina Borgstrom, Director for Economy, Environment and Infrastructure
SUBJECT	North East Lincolnshire Bus Service Improvement Plan
STATUS	Open
FORWARD PLAN REF NO.	CB 09/23/01

CONTRIBUTION TO OUR AIMS

The North East Lincolnshire Bus Service Improvement Plan (BSIP) contributes toward key Council priorities by enabling 'Stronger Economy and Stronger Communities'. The BSIP enables improved safety and sustainability and access to employment, education, training, and social opportunities.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This report summarises the requirements placed on the authority through the Government's National Bus Strategy and seeks appropriate delegations to approve submission of the NELC Bus Service Improvement Plan to the Department For Transport (DFT)

RECOMMENDATIONS

It is recommended that Cabinet:

- 1) Delegates authority to the Director for Economy, Environment and Infrastructure in consultation with the Portfolio Holder for Environment and Transport to:
 - a) Approve the submission of the NELC Bus Service Improvement Plan by 12 June 2024.
 - b) Approve any future variations or changes to the BSIP.
 - c) Procure measures identified in the BSIP.
 - d) Award contract(s) for the measures within the allocated budget to the project and to carry out all activity to mobilise and fully implement.
 - e) Present a progress report on the operation of the BSIP to the Economy Scrutiny Panel by 31 March 2025.

REASONS FOR DECISION

In October 2021, Cabinet approved the North East Lincolnshire BSIP, which set out the Council's plans and ambitions for BSIP funding, and enabled the Local Transport Authority and bus operator, Stagecoach East Midlands, to opt into an

Enhanced Partnership.

Following the successful submission of the BSIP, North East Lincolnshire Council was awarded £4.7m over three years to support local buses. On the 16 January 2024, the DfT published guidance to Local Authorities which set out the requirement for the BSIP to be updated and submitted to the DfT by the 12 June 2024 to enable the release of the 2024/25 funding allocation.

1. BACKGROUND AND ISSUES

- 1.1 On the 15 March 2021, the Government launched a new, long-term National Bus Strategy for England. The 'Bus Back Better' strategy sets out the vision and opportunity to deliver better bus services for passengers. The strategy aims to improve the quality of local bus services and increase bus passenger numbers.
- 1.2 To ensure the 2024/25 BSIP allocation is released to the Council, the Authority must update the BSIP to set out what the Enhanced Partnership has delivered in 2023, the plan for 2024, and the ambitions for 2025 and beyond.
- 1.3 The proposed updated North East Lincolnshire BSIP will, subject to approval, be presented to the Portfolio for Environment and Transport to approve prior to submission to the DfT.

2. RISKS AND OPPORTUNITIES

- 2.1 A key opportunity is the release of 2024/25 BSIP funding, which enables the Enhanced Partnership to continue to operate, and ensures ongoing support for local buses.
- 2.2 Once the Council has submitted the BSIP to the DfT, the plan will be assessed, and the funding released. Although timescales for future funding opportunities are not yet known, it is expected that all BSIP schemes included in the plan will need to be commercially viable and operate without any Council funding at the end of any external funding period.
- 2.3 The ongoing and future interventions and aspirations contained within the BSIP will need to be prioritised to fit the available external funding available.

3. OTHER OPTIONS CONSIDERED

- 3.1. **Option 1 – Continue with the 2021 BSIP and not update the document.** It is a requirement to update the BSIP in order to secure the release of 2024/25 funding and continue BSIP delivery, therefore this option is not recommended.
- 3.2. **Option 2 – Discontinue the Enhanced Partnership and pursue franchising.** Franchising powers are only available automatically to Mayoral Combined Authorities but can be provided to other authorities through secondary legislation. Authorities which are not Mayoral Combined Authorities and wish to pursue Franchising will need to satisfy the Secretary of State that they have the capacity and resources to do so. This option is not recommended at this time.

4. REPUTATION AND COMMUNICATIONS CONSIDERATIONS

There are potential positive and negative reputational implications for the Council resulting from this report. A formal Highways and Transport Engagement Process has been agreed by the Council and Equans for all major schemes. Comms and engagement associated with the delivery of BSIP projects will follow this process and seek to promote positive news opportunities and manage any negative reputational impacts.

5. FINANCIAL CONSIDERATIONS

- 5.1. The BSIP will set out how the Council has used the BSIP funding currently available to the authority, how the 2024/25 funding will be spent, and what the future aspirations are for the delivery of the BSIP.
- 5.2. It is expected that the continued delivery of the BSIP will require ongoing project delivery resource. The BSIP will include budget allocation to fund the required resources.
- 5.3. The continued delivery of the BSIP interventions will be dependent on the release of Government funding.

6. CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE IMPLICATIONS

The BSIP includes specific measures to support children and young people including ongoing financial support to improve local bus services and provide discounted fares for young people, which are seen as a priorities in the 'Bus Back Better' strategy.

7. CLIMATE CHANGE AND ENVIRONMENTAL IMPLICATIONS

The Government expects Local Authorities to develop ambitious strategies, targets, and measures for cutting carbon emissions from transport in their area and to work with bus operators to include ambitions to decarbonise the local bus fleet in their Enhanced Bus Quality Partnership.

8. CONSULTATION WITH SCRUTINY

The Economy Scrutiny Panel have previously been consulted on the initial BSIP on 12 October 2021 and received a report in relation to the original Plan.

9. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

The BSIP is funded through external grant and it is anticipated that all activities are funded within the allocated budget. The continued delivery of BSIP interventions is dependent on future funding allocations.

10. LEGAL IMPLICATIONS

- 10.1. Procurement exercises will be conducted so as to comply with the Council's policy and legal obligations, specifically in compliance with the Council's Contract Procedure Rules and the Public Contracts Regulations 2015, and supported by relevant officers.

- 10.2. Constitutional authority to modify policies within specific remits, rests with the portfolio holder.
- 10.3. The delegations sought are appropriate to an exercise of this nature and the referral to scrutiny as matters progress is prudent.

11. HUMAN RESOURCES IMPLICATIONS

There are no direct HR implications contained within this report.

12. WARD IMPLICATIONS

The BSIP contains interventions that impact on all Wards.

13. BACKGROUND PAPERS

- 13.1. National Bus Strategy, Bus Back Better
<https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/media/6086912fd3bf7f013c8f4510/DfT-Bus-Back-Better-national-bus-strategy-for-England.pdf>
- 13.2. North East Lincolnshire Council 2021 Bus Service Improvement Plan
<https://www.nelincs.gov.uk/assets/uploads/2021/10/NE-Lincolnshire-Bus-Service-Improvement-Plan.pdf>
- 13.3. October 2021 Scrutiny and Cabinet Report
<https://democracy.nelincs.gov.uk/wp-content/uploads/2021/10/3.-North-East-Lincolnshire-Bus-Service-Improvement-Plan.pdf>

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