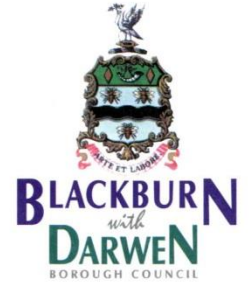


Executive Member Decision



REPORT OF: Executive Member for Growth and Development

LEAD OFFICERS: Strategic Director of Place

DATE: Friday, 9 July 2021

PORTFOLIO(S) AFFECTED: Growth and Development

WARD/S AFFECTED: (All Wards);

SUBJECT:

Approval to publish Notice of Intent to prepare an Enhanced Bus Partnership

1. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The Government published 'Bus Back Better', a National Bus Strategy (NBS) which sets out a bold ambition for what they want to achieve for the bus. Aspirations of the NBS include:

- More frequent buses
- Faster and reliable
- Cheaper
- More comprehensive
- Easier to understand and use
- Greener
- Accessible and inclusive by design
- Innovative and safe mode of transport
- Links to other policies and plans
- Support for LTA's to increase resource to skill up for the future

Two requirements of the strategy are for the Council and its operators and to enter into a statutory 'Enhanced Partnership' or Franchising Agreement to continue to receive funding; and deliver the improvements included within the published Bus Service Improvement Plan (BSIP). The appropriate arrangement for Blackburn with Darwen Borough Council is to enter into an 'Enhanced Partnership' and we submitted our expression of interest to do so to the Department for Transport (DfT) in April

2. RECOMMENDATIONS

That the Executive Member:

Approve the Council's intention to prepare an 'Enhanced Partnership' working in collaboration with all bus operators and Lancashire County Council to create a joint Bus Service Improvement Plan (BSIP)

3. BACKGROUND

'Bus Back Better', a National Bus Strategy (NBS) sets out clear objectives and requirements for Local Transport Authorities (LTA's) and links requirements to deliver upon these to ensure that funding is received post April 2022.

The timescales to adhere to this strategy have been and remain very challenging:

- 18th March 2021 - Strategy published
- 16 April 2021 – LTA's required to submit an expression of interest to receive the capacity building funding of £100K
- 30th June 2021 - Commit to entering into an Enhanced Partnership (EP), or have commenced statutory steps towards franchising. Failure to commit to EP or franchising will mean loss of CBSSG and other future funding streams
- 31 October 2021 - Publish initial Bus Service Improvement Plan (BSIP) with review periods
- 1 April 2022 - Enhanced Partnership in place for each LTA area

The 'Enhanced Partnerships' will be:

- Legally binding agreements between local transport authorities and bus operators and include what improvements will be made to bus services. The operators will still run the services
- Developed through negotiation
- Flexible – can cover anything except structure of commercial bus network and single-operator fare levels
- Monitor and report upon performance

Funding:

- Capacity funding of £100K already received following our initial expression of interest
- Further funding to come once statutory notice is issued, c.£15M split between all LTA's, our allocation is yet to be confirmed

The Bus Service Improvement Plans (BSIP) will deliver services that:

Are community-centred - The needs and concerns of the people who live, work and visit an area should be the driving force behind transport planning and bus service delivery. BSIPs must be developed "in collaboration" with all key stakeholders

Consider the transport landscape - LTAs should outline the challenges and opportunities facing bus services in their BSIP's. They should assess current provision, including community transport and shared transport options, the barriers to travel, whether bus use is in growth or decline, and the wider social, economic and environmental benefits of improving services

Are accessible - Every stage of a bus journey should be accessible, from planning a trip and buying a ticket to the infrastructure, vehicle and overall experience. Community engagement, particularly with disability groups and passengers is critical in identifying and overcoming barriers to travel

Are inclusive – We have residents without access to a bank account, mobile device or internet access, and many more who are old, vulnerable, or have poor mental health. Transport poverty is particularly challenging for these groups and leads to loneliness and isolation. No one should be excluded from travelling by bus

Are affordable - Buses give people access to life's opportunities through education, training and work. They improve health and wellbeing and are a green and sustainable transport option. Bus travel needs to be attractive enough that people choose to use it, and affordable enough that everyone can use it

Are available – BSIP's are expected to address the under and overprovision of bus services as well as integration with other modes. Using bus passenger data alone will ignore everyone not currently using the bus, as well as all those services where passenger data is not available. For services to be effective, they need to meet people's needs and this can only be achieved through proper community engagement

Prioritise buses - Delivering improvements to services and growing bus use are a fundamental requirement of BSIPs. Bus priority measures will ensure services are reliable and punctual, as well as faster and more convenient than travelling by private car, not only improving services but encouraging modal shift

Consider air quality and zero emissions – LTA's will need to demonstrate how air quality will be improved and zero emissions achieved. Greener cars are not the solution given that pollution from tyre and brake wear is greater than exhaust emissions. A bus, however, can take up to 75 cars off the road so getting more people on board is the way to a greener, more sustainable future

Include monitoring - To make sure the aims of the BSIP are achieved, LTAs will need to set targets for customer satisfaction, passenger growth, journey times and reliability. Provision for monitoring services, at the very least annually, will also need to be set out to ensure the BSIP is effective

Are a living document - BSIPs are not intended to be fixed, long-term transport plans. They should be revisited and updated regularly, to reflect changes in the transport landscape and the evolving needs of the community

4. KEY ISSUES & RISKS

If the Council does not engage with the requirements of this strategy then we will not receive funding from April 2022, when the new funding commences

5. POLICY IMPLICATIONS

The 'Enhanced Partnership' and subsequent Bus Service Improvement Plans will align with the joint Authority (BwD, LCC and Blackpool) Local Transport Plan and any successor documents

6. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

Current funding will cease post April 2022.

The Council currently receives circa £60k per annum Bus Services Operators grant (BSOG). Government expect all enhanced partnerships to be operational on April 2022, and that from this date only services operated under these statutory agreements will be eligible for the Reformed Bus Service Operators Grant. If we don't meet the deadline of April 2022 we will lose the reformed BSOG grant.

To ensure that the Enhanced Partnerships can be achieved the DfT has committed to providing capacity funding. To date we have received £100K with further funding to come once this statutory notice is issued, c.£15M split between all LTA's, our allocation is yet to be confirmed. This funding is for staff resource and to develop our infrastructure plan ensuring that we deliver on the vision and objectives of the partnership.

7. LEGAL IMPLICATIONS

The 'Enhanced Partnership' will require a legal agreement between the Council and all service providers. This agreement and our notice of the intention to prepare an Enhanced Partnership Plan will be undertaken in compliance with section 138F of the Transport Act 2000

8. RESOURCE IMPLICATIONS

The capacity funding received to date and further funding yet to be received from engaging in this process will fund our existing staffs and consultants required to develop the BSIP in collaboration with our service providers and LCC

9. EQUALITY AND HEALTH IMPLICATIONS

Please select one of the options below.

Option 1 Equality Impact Assessment (EIA) not required – the EIA checklist has been completed.

Option 2 In determining this matter the Executive Member needs to consider the EIA associated with this item in advance of making the decision.

10. CONSULTATIONS

Development of the BSIP and agreement to have an 'Enhanced Partnership' agreement in place is undertaken in collaboration with all service providers, community transport bodies and other relevant organisations, including neighbouring authorities

The BSIP will include a Passenger Charter which will be tied in to ambitions and targets, creating a passenger-centric view and public and stakeholder consultation will be required

Agreement of the BSIP will be subject to Executive Board Approval at October's meeting

11. STATEMENT OF COMPLIANCE

The recommendations are made further to advice from the Monitoring Officer and the Section 151 Officer has confirmed that they do not incur unlawful expenditure. They are also compliant with equality legislation and an equality analysis and impact assessment has been considered. The recommendations reflect the core principles of good governance set out in the Council's Code of Corporate Governance.

12. DECLARATION OF INTEREST

All Declarations of Interest of any Executive Member consulted and note of any dispensation granted by the Chief Executive will be recorded in the Summary of Decisions published.

CONTACT OFFICER:	Dwayne Lowe, Head of Highways and Network Operations, dwayne.lowe@blackburn.gov.uk
DATE:	18 th June 2021
BACKGROUND PAPER:	