

Cabinet

7 September 2021

Outline Bus Service Improvement Plan (BSIP) Approval

For Decision

Portfolio Holder: Cllr R Bryan, Highways, Travel and Environment

Local Councillor(s):

Executive Director: J Sellgren, Executive Director of Place

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Report Status: Public

Recommendation:

1. That Cabinet agrees the scope of the outline Bus Service Improvement Plan (BSIP) and supports the commitment of resources within existing budgets to take forward work to publish a first version of the BSIP by the end of October 2021.
2. That Cabinet agrees to delegate the approval of the final version of the BSIP to the relevant portfolio holder, in consultation with the Executive Director of Place before it is published.

Reason for Recommendation:

Seeking support to publish a first Dorset Council Bus Service Improvement Plan in response to Government's new National Bus Strategy (NBS) - Bus Back Better. The BSIP sets out a vision and priorities for the future of bus services in Dorset and will be a high-level bidding document used to secure capital and revenue grant funding from the DfT.

1. Executive Summary

- 1.1. On Monday 15th March 2021, Government launched Bus Back Better, a new national bus strategy for England outside London. It aims to rejuvenate local bus services for passengers.
- 1.2. The Government requires that a BSIP must be produced by all upper-tier authorities in England and cover each Local Transport Authority's full geographical area, all local bus services within it, and take proper account of the differing needs of parts of that area (e.g. urban and rural elements).
- 1.3. Dorset Council has begun an intensive period of engagement with a wide range of key stakeholders including elected members, town and parish councils, neighbouring Local Authorities, special interest groups and transport operators.
- 1.4. The BSIP will be a 'live' document and is required by Government to be refreshed annually. The Government has set a challenging timetable to develop and deliver the Council's first BSIP by the end of October 2021.

2. Financial Implications

- 2.1. Publishing the BSIP, strongly aligned with government policy, will enable Dorset Council to maximise income from external bidding opportunities.
- 2.2. The Council's performance with respect to the policies set out in the National Bus Strategy will be taken into account when considering funding allocations for wider, non-bus local transport schemes. Non-publication of the BSIP or poor plan making could result in reduced Local Transport Plan (LTP) and other government grant funding.
- 2.3. The Council has received two rounds of Local Transport Authority Bus Capacity (Revenue) Funding totalling £257,306 for developing local bus proposals as outlined in the NBS to help LTAs towards the development of their Enhanced Partnerships, and Bus Service Improvement Plans (BSIP) work, and to meet the timescales that go alongside that work. It is non-legally binding, as required in Section 31 grants.

3. Well-being and Health Implications

- 3.1. Improving health and well-being through improving accessibility, reducing social isolation and supporting people to maintain independent lives will be outcomes of the BSIP.

4. Climate implications

- 4.1. Transport has a significant part to play in reducing carbon emissions in Dorset and this will be a core objective of the BSIP.
- 4.2. The BSIP supports the LTPs objective of reducing Dorset's carbon emissions through transport and the delivery of actions set out in the Council's Climate and Ecological Emergency Strategy to improve the quality and availability of public transport to make services more attractive to the travelling public.
- 4.3. The BSIP seeks to achieve behaviour change and mode shift away from the private motor vehicle to bus travel. Evidence shows that reducing the number of cars on the road has the potential to lead to significant carbon emission reductions.
- 4.4. The BSIP will include a roadmap for moving to a zero emission bus fleet.

5. Other Implications

- 5.1. No other implications from the recommendations in this report have been identified.

6. Risk Assessment

- 6.1. Having considered the risks associated with this decision, the level of risk has been identified as:
 - Current Risk: Low
 - Residual Risk: Low

7. Equalities Impact Assessment

- 7.1. A draft Equalities Impact Assessment has been prepared and submitted to the Diversity and Inclusion team. The draft can be viewed in Appendix C.
- 7.2. The initial assessment has found that there were no negative impacts on Dorset Council residents' protected characteristics.
- 7.3. The Equalities Impact Assessment report will be updated upon completion of the baseline network assessment, and stakeholder engagement activities, and submitted ahead of publication of the final BSIP.

8. Appendices

- 8.1. Appendix A - Enhanced Partnerships and Franchising Technical Note
- 8.2. Appendix B - National Policy Context for Bus Service Improvement Plans Technical Note
- 8.3. Appendix C - Equalities Impact Assessment

9. Background Papers

- 9.1. There are no background papers for this recommendation.

10. Report

10.1. On Monday 15th March 2021, Government launched Bus Back Better, a new national bus strategy for England outside London. It aims to rejuvenate local bus services for passengers, making them:

- attractive for passengers
- cheaper
- easier to understand and use
- faster and more reliable
- greener

10.2. The Government requires that a BSIP must be produced by all upper-tier authorities in England and cover each Local Transport Authority's full geographical area, all local bus services within it, and take proper account of the differing needs of parts of that area (e.g. urban and rural elements). The DfT are looking for ambitious BSIP submissions that are seen as making a significant difference in terms of the bus network.

Scope of the BSIP

10.3. The BSIP will act on five key areas:

- Networks and services
- Fares

- Ticketing
- Passenger facilities
- Bus priority measures

10.4. Dorset Council's BSIP will align closely with other policies such as the Local Transport Plan and the Climate & Ecological Emergency Action Plan. We will closely collaborate with other teams such as Planning and Highways to make buses more attractive to users and to maximise the potential for modal shift from cars towards public transport. It should be recognised that a far-reaching programme such as the BSIP and its emphasis on increased use of public transport may not always align with the priorities of some community sectors. Examples of this may be around parking capacity for private car owners in town centres, bus priority lanes and access by buses to town centres. Dorset's BSIP will have a strong emphasis on providing bus access to people living in rural areas.

10.5. The BSIP will align with our neighbouring authorities' BSIPs which is particularly important for those bus routes that cross authority boundaries. The BSIP will address the inter-relationship between the geographical areas of Dorset and BCP in terms of transport e.g. travel to work areas.

10.6. The BSIP structure is broadly set around three areas that are moved through in sequence:

- Current state - a baseline review of the current bus network within the Council area. To include: an outline of the current bus network; a description of current key performance indicators and operational metrics; the level of Council subsidy; and, geographic and demographic influences on the current network.
- Future state – proposed changes to the bus network across areas required by the DfT. To include: outline plans for network remodelling; the likely revised ratio of commercial: supported activity; bus priority measures; delivery of lower average fares and integrated ticketing; and, innovations in service delivery mitigating external network influences.
- Targets and Deliverables - a range of targets to be met by the future state network across predetermined Government metrics. Targets are set for 2025 and 2030 from a baseline 2022 position. To include; a set of performance targets designed to be ambitious but ultimately deliverable through effective and efficient collaborative working; and, the range of

supporting policies and delivery tools that the Council and operators will apply to the bus network to deliver the BSIP aims and objectives. It will also note how the BSIP will be reviewed, updated and maintained as a “living” document.

10.7. The main areas that the DfT are keen for BSIPs to explore with respect to bus service improvements across the Council area include:

- Investment on key corridors
- Routes that are easier to understand
- Significant increases in bus priority
- Lower and simpler fares
- Seamless, integrated local ticketing between operators and across all types of transport
- Integration with other modes
- Presentation of the local bus network as a single system that works together with clear passenger information
- Modern, zero emission buses
- Giving bus passengers more of a voice and a say
- Improving safety and perceptions of safety
- Increasing the role of Demand Responsive Transport, community transport and socially necessary travel in improving access to bus travel

10.8. BSIPs must include a bus passengers’ charter (BPC). This is to enable passengers to hold LTAs and operators to account for delivering against the BSIP. The BPC will set out for passengers what they can expect from operators delivering services. The BPC is designed to give bus users rights to certain standards of:

- Service (including punctuality)
- Vehicle cleanliness
- Proportion of services operated

- Information provision
- Redress – methods that a user can follow to receive customer satisfaction in a complaint and these must be at a local level with local means of resolution
- Recourse – enabling passengers to provide feedback on how LTAs and operators are performing in meeting the commitments in the BSIP.

Public Engagement

10.9. Dorset Council has begun an intensive period of engagement with a wide range of key stakeholders including elected members, town and parish councils, neighbouring Local Authorities, special interest groups and transport operators. We want to work with all stakeholders to deliver the BSIP together. In addition, a public survey was launched at the beginning of August. We intend to use the feedback from this engagement to fill in any gaps in our data, understand the priorities and to help develop ambitious and challenging future state plans that we can all agree on. The Council is also required to form a Bus User Forum and create a Passenger Charter.

10.10. Themes emerging from the engagement work completed to date include:

- The need to make bus services more frequent, reduce journey times and improve reliability to make the bus a more viable alternative to travel by car.
- The need to ensure that bus services are attractive, joined up and easy to use by everyone.
- Rural parts of Dorset need greater access to public transport.

10.11. Further engagement work is planned throughout August and September ahead of publication of the first BSIP.

Governance and Timeline

10.12. The Council will deliver the BSIP through the establishment of an Enhanced Partnership. The Enhanced Partnership (EP) is the legal framework between the council and local bus operators to work together to improve local bus services for passengers including defining bus networks, service levels and fare strategies (See Appendix A for a detailed explanation of Enhanced Partnerships). The EP will ensure the BSIP is delivered and provides mechanisms for the authority and bus operators regarding performance and adherence. The Governance structure of the

EP will be determined at a later date and will be the subject of a separate cabinet report.

10.13. The BSIP will be a 'live' document and is required by Government to be refreshed annually. The revisions and annual reviews are designed to ensure that BSIPs remain relevant and that they are working as intended or amended to ensure that there is greater success for the following period.

10.14. The BSIP must set out the arrangements for publishing six-monthly performance against BSIP targets.

10.15. The timescales set by Government to develop and deliver the Council's first BSIP by the end of October 2021 and activate the Enhanced Partnership by April 2022 are challenging. The key milestones are:

- June 2021 – Council published Notice of Intent to proceed with the development of an Enhanced Partnership
- July 2021 – Stakeholder engagement round 1, data gathering and network baselining
- August 2021 – Public survey launched, stakeholder engagement round 2, future state network development and BSIP outline
- September 2021 – approve BSIP scope (Cabinet meeting 7th September), draft BSIP and stakeholder engagement round 3
- October 2021 – Publish first BSIP and EP formal discussion and notice
- November 2021 – EP Statutory consultation
- December 2021 – Finalise EP
- January 2022 – Second EP formal notice (if required)
- March 2022 – Formal making of the EP
- April 2022 – Activate EP

11.

Footnote:

Issues relating to financial, legal, environmental, economic and equalities implications have been considered and any information relevant to the decision is included within the report.