

Meeting: Cabinet
Date: 3 March 2025
Classification: Part 1
Key Decision: Yes
Title of Report: New North / South Bus Service

Executive Director: Alan Richards, Executive Director for Environment and Place
Report Author: Karen Gearing Strategic Transport Service Manager
Executive Councillor: Cllr Collins, Cabinet Member for Finance, Assets and Investments

1. Executive Summary

- 1.1. Currently there are no commercial bus services with a direct link between London Southend Airport and Leigh-on-Sea. It is proposed to introduce a new bus service from London Southend Airport and the Airport Business Park to Leigh-on-Sea Railway Station. This new bus service will support residents within St Laurence, Eastwood Park, Belfairs, Blenheim Park, Leigh and West Leigh Wards and enable new connections across the city.

2. Recommendations

It is recommended that Cabinet:

- 2.1. **Approve to proceed with the procurement to tender a new bus service from London Southend Airport and the Airport Business Park to Leigh-on-Sea Rail Station.**
- 2.2. **Delegate powers to the Executive Director for Environment & Place in consultation with Cabinet Member for Finance, Assets and Investments to authorise the final details of the new bus service and tender documents and appointment of the successful bus operator.**

3. Background

- 3.1. In March 2021 the Department for Transport (DfT) published The National Bus Strategy for England titled *Bus Back Better*. The Bus Strategy set out the policy priority of buses at a national level with the overarching goal “to get bus use back to what it was before the pandemic. Then we want to increase patronage and raise buses’ mode share. We can only do these things by ensuring that buses are an attractive alternative to the car for far

more people.” Local Transport Authorities were required to publish their Bus Service Improvement Plan (BSIP) and enter into an Enhanced Partnership (EP).

- 3.2. Having a BSIP and EP in place is critical to accessing future funding for buses and is a pre-requisite for accessing future government funding for all transport and highway schemes.
- 3.3. The DfT published ‘National Bus Strategy: 2024 Bus Service Improvement Plans: Guidance to local authorities and bus operators on 16 January 2024 and required Local Transport Authorities (LTAs) to submit a 2024 BSIP to DfT as a condition of the provision of DfT BSIP funding. The 2021 BSIP was updated and published on the council's website on 13 December 2024 (Appendix 2).
- 3.4. Consultation for the BSIP identified many residents wanted to see a route from Eastwood and Belfairs to Leigh-on-Sea and considered that such a service could enable new connections across the city and avoid the need to travel into the city centre to change buses. A bus service used to run for many years until 2015.
- 3.5. The BSIP identified gaps in the city where residents are not within a 5 minute walking distance to a bus stop that has a frequent bus service. The border of Belfairs and Eastwood Park wards have been identified as such, and this new bus service will support residents in these wards.
- 3.6. The proposed new bus service is expected to be half hourly Monday to Saturday, with a limited service to be supported on Sundays. The half hourly service will loop alternatively via the Launch Pad at the Airport Business Park and Holiday Inn bus stop at London Southend Airport and will support residents within St Laurence, Eastwood Park, Belfairs, Blenheim Park, Leigh and West Leigh wards. See Appendix 1 for proposed bus route.
- 3.7. Currently there are no commercial bus services with a direct link between London Southend Airport and Leigh-on-Sea via Eastwood, Belfairs and Blenheim Park. It has been an ambition of residents in Eastwood and Belfairs to have a bus service direct to Leigh and not require them to travel into the City Centre to then change buses to Leigh-on-Sea.
- 3.8. This new bus service will also support local businesses along the route including industrial areas of the city, that have no, or very few, bus services linking them direct to other parts of the city. These industrial areas include Airport Business Park, Aviation Way, Britannia Business Park, Rochford Business Park and Progress Road.
- 3.9. Essex County Council (ECC) are proposing to tender for a new bus service from Ashingdon to Leigh-on-Sea Rail Station via the Airport Business Park, Aviation Way, Tesco Superstore and Southend Hospital. ECC propose to tender the service when new bus stop infrastructure within the Airport Business Park and Aviation Way is installed. Officers are liaising with ECC

with regards to the bus stop infrastructure and will co-ordinate on bus timetables, to ensure a good connection to this service.

4. Reasons for Decisions

- 4.1. This new bus service supports government's ambitions to get people using public transport and will support access for residents and businesses in St Laurence, Eastwood Park, Belfairs, Blenheim Park, Leigh and West Leigh wards.

5. Other Options

- 5.1. The alternative option is not to provide a new bus service and residents will access Leigh as they currently do either by driving, hiring a taxi, travelling to the city centre to access a bus service to Leigh, or not making the journey at all. Also, workers at the industrial areas along the route will continue to access these sites by car and hinder those that do not have access to a car.

6. Financial Implications

- 6.1. The Council received DfT revenue funding in 2023/24 of £479,250 and in 2024/25 a further £479,250. The Council has recently received notification of its 2025/26 allocation, comprising;

Revenue funding	£778,926
Capability funding	£63,000
Capital funding	£1,762,541

On 20 December DfT provided the conditions of the 25/26 funding and clarification that the previous allocations can be carried forward and "strongly encourage the use of Bus Grant funding by March 2026". Advice from DfT is that a three-year multiyear settlement is proposed for funding year 2026/27 onwards.

- 6.2. It is estimated that the cost per year will amount to approximately £450,000 for this half hourly bus service. It is proposed the new bus service will be supported by DfT BSIP revenue funding for 2 years with the aim for it to be commercially run thereafter. The tender will include a potential further maximum one year support subject to performance and future DfT grant funding.
- 6.3. The majority of the bus route has existing infrastructure in place with three new bus stops proposed on Progress Road, one northbound and two southbound. It is proposed to have bus shelters at these stops which would be relocated from bus stops which are currently unserved. A bus stop will also be reinstated eastbound on Whitehouse Road. The BSIP capital funding allocation will support these infrastructure works, which will be in place prior to the commencement of the bus service.

7. Legal Implications

- 7.1. The proposed bus service is on the procurement plan and will be tendered in accordance with open procurement procedures and open to all operators. If the operator is not already a member it will be required to join the Southend Enhanced Partnership where its interests would be represented on the Southend Local Bus Board and Southend Local Bus Forum.

8. Policy Context

- 8.1 This new bus service supports Southend Corporate Plan in improved cleaner transport system making Southend a healthier and more accessible place to live, work and visit. This proposed new service would support access to the Len Forge Centre, Belfairs Park and costal area. Supports, people live well, age well and care well and remain living independently in the community for as long as possible. Also supports thriving businesses, a strong local economy, a healthier, more productive labour market and people proud to live and work in Southend.

9. Carbon Impact

- 9.1. The operator of this new service will be required to provide Euro 6 buses as a minimum or lower emission bus for this new service. The existing infrastructure is not sufficient to request electric or hydrogen fuel buses.
- 9.2. This service seeks to improve north/south bus connections within the city and relieve the pressure on the north and west of the city for car journeys that could be taken by this new service.
- 9.3. The introduction of this bus service will support active travel and provide access to businesses along the route and the key destinations of Leigh and the Airport.

10. Equalities

- 10.1. The equalities assessment prepared for the BSIP will be reviewed and updated for this new service and considered within the procurement process.

11. Consultation

- 11.1. Consultation was undertaken during the development of the BSIP and businesses and residents raised the need for this service. Also, the proposal of this new bus service was raised at the Southend Local Bus Board and Southend Local Bus Forum, and with Southend Area Bus Users Group (SABUG), a key stakeholder.

12. Appendices

- 12.1. **Appendix 1**: - Map of North / South Bus Route
12.2. **Appendix 2**: - Bus Service Improvement Plan 2024

13. Report Authorisation

This report has been approved for publication by:		
	Name:	Date:
Executive Director(s)	Alan Richards	15 January 2025
S151 Officer	Joe Chesterton	15 January 2025
Monitoring Officer	Tim Row	31 January 2025
Relevant Cabinet Member(s)	Cllr Collins	28 January 2025