

**SOUTHEND-ON-SEA ENHANCED
PARTNERSHIP PLAN 2023-2028 AND
SOUTHEND-ON-SEA ENHANCED
PARTNERSHIP SCHEME**

Meeting of Southend on Sea Local Bus Forum

**Date: Monday, 4th September, 2023
Place: Committee Room 1 - Civic Suite**

Present: Councillor Kevin Buck (Southend-on-Sea City Council) (Chair)

Southend-on-Sea City Council: Richard Lumley
Arriva: Chris Burley (attended remotely)
First Essex: Jullian Elliott
Stephensons of Essex: Bill Hiron
Bus Users UK: Jennie Martin
Castle Point Borough Council: Maria Hennessy
Essex County Council: Helen Morris (attended remotely)
Essex Police: David Gardiner
SABUG (Southend Area Bus User Group): Peter Slattery
Transport Focus: Mike Bartram (attended remotely)

Secretariat: John Austin, Conor Jones

1 Introductions, Apologies for Absence, and Statement of Quoracy

D Kudla (Rochford District Council), S Gloyne (Southend BID) and Councillor D Garston (Southend-on-Sea City Council).

2 Governance Arrangements, insofar as they affect the Local Bus Forum

A summary of the arrangements for the Enhanced Partnership (EP) (that was submitted to and passed by Cabinet at its January 2023 meeting) was given. It was explained that the Enhanced Partnership is a Legal Agreement governing the provision of bus services within the area of Southend-on-Sea City Council and it consists of a Plan and a Scheme. The EP is based fundamentally on Southend's Bus Service Improvement Plan, that was submitted to the DfT in October 2021. Governance of the EP takes the form of two separate bodies, the Southend Local Bus Forum (this Meeting) and the Southend Local Bus Board.

The Local Bus Board's primary function is to advise and agree on, and manage, the delivery of the EP Plan and Scheme. The Local Bus Forum's primary function is to set the strategic direction of the Enhanced Partnership. It has two formal roles: appointing the Chair of the Local Bus Board, and considering and making recommendations on any variations proposed by the Local Bus Board on the Enhanced Partnership Plan or Scheme.

The initial invitations to organisations to join the Local Bus Forum, as listed in the EP, were explained, as were the expectations of Forum members.

The Local Bus Forum will meet at least annually but may meet more frequently if, for instance, the Local Bus Board proposes a variation to the Enhanced Partnership Plan or Scheme.

3 Members of the Public Invited to Ask Questions or Make Comments on the Agenda Items

A member of the public asked how the Council will spend the welcome, but limited, BSIP+ money that has recently been awarded by DfT in respect of Southend's Bus Service Improvement Plan, in the light of several current issues. These include the current cost-of-living crisis, the fact that the Council does not invest in any tendered bus services, there is low car ownership in parts (a quarter of Southend residents do not own a car), and also a changed environment following the pandemic.

It was explained that this will be a matter for the Local Bus Board to consider, and will be discussed at the initial meeting of the Board (which is planned for the end of September).

ITEMS FOR INFORMATION

4 Current Status of Enhanced Partnership and of Local Transport Board

Since the Enhanced Partnership was passed by Cabinet in January 2023, to take effect from April 2023, a special BSIP Capacity grant from DfT has funded the appointment of a Public Transport Manager (J Austin) until end March 2025. Both the Local Bus Forum and the Local Bus Board are being set up, with this being the initial meeting of the Forum and the initial meeting of the Board being expected to be in September.

Issues that are expected will be discussed at the Board which include a) Evening services for some routes that do not have this, b) Buses on links that have been removed in the past (e.g. Carlton Avenue and Central Avenue / North Avenue), and c) digitalisation of the all-routes Octopus ticket (covering Castle Point and Rochford Districts, as well as Southend). It was acknowledged that buses are probably more likely to be used by lower-income residents and that the Forum should reflect this in its strategic direction.

It was noted that the way in which the funds can be spent is limited by DfT revenue grant conditions which must be spent by the end of determined time periods, and must be used for specific bus service or network improvements rather than, for instance, a general marketing campaign.

It was noted that the DfT was now being very active in supporting the process of taking forward BSIPs generally (and in related aspects, e.g. funding competitions such as ZEBRA). Guidance on revisions to the BSIP and on measuring performance against targets in the BSIP is expected. A revision to the BSIP will need to be both ambitious and realistic, taking account of the limitation of available funding but being creative in its consideration of funding opportunities.

ITEMS FOR DECISION

5 Setting the Strategic Direction of the Enhanced Partnership

The 7 objectives of the Bus Service Improvement Plan (and hence of the Enhanced Partnership) are as follows:

1. Manage the highway network to improve the reliability of local bus services;
2. Make local bus journeys quicker, especially on key routes in Southend;
3. Improve the quality of bus stops and waiting facilities for all users of local bus services;
4. Deliver a more integrated public transport network that is easy for everyone to use;
5. Improve the quality and accessibility of bus service information through all media channels;
6. Improve the quality standards of local bus services, including reducing emissions;
7. Market and promote local bus services in a holistic manner.

The Forum's view was that the two first objectives of improving reliability and making local bus journeys quicker are of overwhelming importance and should therefore be the focus of the Enhanced Partnership's strategic direction.

It was pointed out that all the key bus corridors in Southend struggle with punctuality and that improving the reliability and journey time of bus services would make them both easier and more efficient to operate, but would also make them more attractive and thereby increase patronage. The focus of reliability improvements needs to be on quick wins in highway improvements.

Poor reliability leads to a whole generation of potential bus passengers being lost to the bus (and using the car instead), so is fundamental to the continuance and development of Southend's bus network. Development of an integrated bus network, through better interchange and waiting areas in the form of Mobility Hubs (which relate to Objectives 3 and 4) can help make the bus network more attractive but only when there is a route to the delivery of the fundamentals of reliability and faster bus travel on key corridors (as in Objectives 1 and 2).

Improvements to ticketing and fares help deliver a more integrated network: at the same time they can speed up boarding and hence contribute to improving reliability. However, the societal downsides of going cashless also need to be considered: it is important that the needs of all users are considered when the bus network is being reviewed. In this respect, the reintroduction of compulsory stops could help visually-impaired bus users.

This item of these Minutes will become the Report submitted to the Local Bus Board as the Local Bus Forum's guidance on the direction of the Enhanced Partnership.

6 Nomination of and voting on candidates for Chair of Southend Local Bus Board

Jennie Martin MBE, Chair of Bus Users UK, offered herself as candidate for election as Chair of the Southend Local Bus Board for the next 12 months and was duly elected unanimously.

7 Nomination of and voting on any additional representatives from other groups to attend future Forum meetings

Bus Users UK proposed that Campaign for Better Transport be invited to join the Local Bus Forum as a Member for future meetings. This proposal was voted on and received unanimous approval.

8 Date of First Meeting of Southend Local Bus Board (now that its Chair has been appointed following the vote in 6. above)

The first Board meeting was proposed during the week commencing 25 September, the date and time were not confirmed in the meeting. The date and time of 29 September at 1400 were confirmed subsequently.

9 Date of next Annual Meeting of Southend Local Bus Forum – proposed for Wednesday 4 September 2024

This was agreed. It will be communicated again nearer the time.

10 Any Other Business

Support offered by members of the Forum to help develop revisions to the BSIP and to assist in its execution through the Enhanced Partnership (e.g. in supporting any working groups that the Local Bus Board may choose to set up) was welcomed.

The meeting concluded with thanks to the Forum members for their time and contributions.