

# Southend-on-Sea City Council

Report of Executive Director for Neighbourhoods and  
Environment  
To

Cabinet  
On

12<sup>th</sup> January 2023

Report prepared by: Karen Gearing, and Roy Skinner  
(Strategic Transport Policy)

Agenda  
Item No.

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## Enhanced Partnership Plan (EPP)

Place Scrutiny Committee: Place  
Cabinet Member: Councillor Wakefield  
Part 1 (Public Agenda Item)

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### 1. Purpose of Report

- 1.1 The Department for Transport (DfT) in March 2021 published a National Bus Strategy for England titled “Bus Back Better”. The Bus Strategy sets out the policy priority for buses at a national level and requires Local Transport Authorities to have a Bus Service Improvement Plan (BSIP) and Enhanced Partnership Plan and Scheme (EPP) in place. This report seeks Member approval for the adoption of the Enhanced Partnership Plan (EPP).

### 2. Recommendations

- 2.1 **Approve the Enhanced Partnership (EPP) to be adopted to start on 1 April 2023 (attached at Appendix 1).**

### 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 sets out the policy priority for buses at a national level. The overarching goal of the strategy is:

*“...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 (LTA’s) were expected to adhere to the following timelines:

- By 30 June 2021 (LTA's) had to commit to establishing an Enhanced Partnership under the Bus Services Act 2017. (This was met by the Council)
  - By 31 October 2021 LTAs had to publish a local Bus Services Improvement Plan (BSIP), which is expected to be updated annually and reflected in the authority's Local Transport Plan (LTP) and other relevant plans such as Local Cycling and Walking Infrastructure Plans. (LCWIPs).
  - The Council adopted its BSIP in October 2021, following 6 weeks of consultation including bus operators, Members and residents.
  - By 1 April 2022 LTA's were required to have an Enhanced Partnership Plan in place. This timescale was subsequently amended to as soon as practically possible, as explained further below.
- 3.2 On 11 January 2022 DfT wrote to all LTA's stating that they were amending the EPP timescale and were asking LTA's to submit draft Enhanced Partnership Plans and Schemes to them by the end of April 2022.
- 3.3 On 4 April 2022 a further amendment was made after the DfT BSIP 1<sup>st</sup> tranche of funding announcement on 3 April 2022, where LTA's are now required to submit EPP's as soon as practicably possible.
- 3.4 The National Bus Strategy is explicit in priority for buses over other modes of transport, notably the use of the private car. Furthermore, the National Bus Strategy itself gives new requirements on all LTA's, which will significantly affect the plans for buses in the authority over the coming months and years.
- 3.5 The strategy makes it very clear that the Government expects LTA's to lead on the processes and setting up the arrangements set out in the National Bus Strategy to have an EPP in place. To assist with this, the Government made available during the 2021/22 financial year £25 million for capacity building, which can take the form of securing external consultants, or recruiting additional members of staff. Of this, £100,000 was made available immediately for each Local Transport Authority. A second payment of £62,000 was also received as Southend City Council's additional proportion of the funds.

#### **4 Enhanced Partnership Plans (EPP)**

- 4.1 The BSIP was adopted in October 2021 and this EPP is the implementation plan for the BSIP. This EPP includes the actions to carry out the bus service improvement plans which have already been adopted in the BSIP.
- 4.2 At the core of the strategy, is the need for LTA's to demonstrate that they are working with local bus operators to improve local bus services. The primary mechanism for this is an EPP. In summary, an EPP is:
- A formal agreement between the LTA and local bus operators to work together to improve local bus services. The LTA has formal responsibility for making the EPP scheme(s), but at set points in the process they can only proceed with their proposals if they have the support of a majority of local bus

operators. There are 3 main bus operators currently in Southend which are Arriva, First Essex Buses and Stephenson's of Essex. Due to route mileage, Arriva and First are the major operators.

- 4.3 An EPP often comprises two parts: The Plan which defines the problems to be addressed, establishes an evidence base and sets out the ambition and targets to be achieved, and also; the scheme that develops the measures to be delivered by each partner.
- 4.4 Having an EP in place is critical to accessing future funding for buses and is a necessary pre-requisite for accessing future government funding for all transport and highways schemes (see 5.2).
- 4.5 From 1 July 2021, the COVID-19 Bus Services Support Grant (CBSSG), provided funding to bus operators as they recovered from the pandemic. This was only made available to support bus services in areas where the operator and the LTA are committed to being part of an Enhanced Partnership, and was required to be provided by 30<sup>th</sup> June 2021.
- 4.6 This discretionary funding was linked to LTA's Bus Service Improvement Plans (BSIP). There have been additional support measures by central government which have superseded the CBSSG by way of the Bus Recovery Grant (BRG), which is due to expire by 31 December 2022.

### **Cross-boundary services**

- 4.7 The majority of bus services in Southend are cross-boundary and Officers have worked and will continue to work in collaboration with Essex County Council colleagues. Improved bus services in Southend are being co-ordinated across south Essex, and the EPP includes for cross boundary services (with collaboration between Essex and Southend) to have the same branding and ticketing, as well as reviews of routes and investigating bus priority along key corridors.

### **Franchising**

- 4.8 The Bus Services Act 2017 provides automatic access to franchising powers to Mayoral Combined Authorities (MCA), akin to the system operated by Transport for London (TfL). The franchising powers within the Bus Services Act can currently be used by MCAs at any time, but only by other LTAs with the Secretary of State's consent and new secondary legislation.
- 4.9 DfT support the use of franchising and will allow any LTA which has the capability to do so to pursue franchising where it would not needlessly delay the provision of better services. This will include demonstrating the capability in traffic management necessary to ensure buses are prioritised appropriately. The Secretary of State will reserve the right to refuse an application for franchising if they believe a LTA does not, or will not, have the capability and resources to deliver the franchised model chosen; or that an EPP would deliver the improvements proposed more quickly and cost-effectively.

## **5. Implications for bus services in Southend**

5.1 The most significant implication of the Bus Strategy for the Council is financial. The Bus Strategy makes it clear, that the following funding sources are conditional upon the Council and local bus operators entering into at least an Enhanced Partnership:

- The COVID-19 Bus Services Support Grant (CBSSG) was providing funding for operators to keep services running as demand returns following the COVID-19 pandemic. Since 1 July 2021, getting access to this funding was made conditional on operators and councils committing to enter into an EPP. Without this immediate funding, many services would be financially unviable. This grant ceased on 31 August 2021 and was paid directly to the bus operators.
- The CBSSG has been replaced by the Bus Recovery Grant which started on 1 September 2021 and is scheduled to finish on 5 April 2022. To receive this grant adequate steps have to be taken in working towards an EPP or Franchising. The Bus Recovery Grant is paid directly to the Operators.
- Having an EPP in place will be a necessary pre-requisite to accessing future discretionary funding released through the National Bus Strategy. This funding, could range from transitioning to zero emissions vehicles, to supporting additional services.
- The Bus Service Operator Grant (BSOG) is a scheme that refunds (directly to the Operators) some of the fuel duty incurred by operators of registered local bus services. DfT is considering options for making this funding conditional on being part of an EPP. Without this grant, bus services across the City may become unviable.

5.2 In addition to these bus industry-specific funding allocations, as part of funding bids for Major Schemes in the future, LTA's will be expected to demonstrate and evidence how their proposals will prioritise buses meaningfully. This is not in terms of improving the general operational environment for buses (e.g. reduced congestion), but in terms of specific, dedicated improvements for buses (e.g. bus lanes and re-allocating road space to benefit buses).

### **5.3 Policy implications**

The National Bus Strategy places a significant emphasis on prioritising buses – alongside walking and cycling – as a mode of transport at a local level. LTA's will be expected to demonstrate that they are doing so through their delivery of bus service improvements in partnership with operators.

5.4 The National Bus Strategy does not, as a precondition, require local authorities to change local transport policies to access National Bus Strategy funding. But entering into an EPP will necessitate aligning Southend's transport policies to reflect the National Bus Strategy. This will be facilitated through the delivery of Local Transport Plan 4, with the development of the BSIP for Southend.

## **6. Other Options**

- 6.1 This Authority could choose not to have an EPP, however this will affect future funding from DfT on any minor and major transport highway schemes, that Southend bids for. This will also affect any funding that DfT allocate to bus operators in the City and any reduction in funding to the operators will affect bus services in Southend.

## **7. Reasons for Recommendations**

- 7.1 The recommendations in this report are to ensure that this Authority has an adopted Enhanced Partnership Plan as required by Government This will ensure that the reasons in section 5 are carried out.
- 7.2 Having an EPP in place will be a necessary pre-requisite to accessing future discretionary funding released through the National Bus Strategy. This funding could range from transitioning to zero emissions vehicles, to supporting additional services.

## **8. Corporate Implications**

### **8.1.1 Contribution to the Southend 2050 Road Map**

- 8.1.2 The EPP along with the BSIP will contribute significantly to a number of elements of the Council's vision, themes and outcomes, for example, improving transport provision and infrastructure, reducing carbon emissions, improving air quality and enhancing overall well-being. It will ensure that the bus services that people need are provided including those residents without cars.

### **8.1.3 The EPP will particularly help to deliver the Connected and Smart 2050 outcome.**

- Facilitate a wide choice of transport that improves accessibility, connectivity, and mobility to all residents, including , working with public transport providers to deliver long term aspirations.
- The EPP will help towards making public and private travel smart, green and clean.

### **8.2 Financial Implications**

- 8.2.1 The EPP is a legally binding document, and it is clear in the EPP that all schemes are subject to DfT funding. Therefore unless external funding is provided to implement the schemes no funding will currently be required to be provided by either Southend City Council or the bus operators.

- 8.2.2 DfT have indicated that there is a possibility a second tranche of limited funding could be available to those LTA's that were not successful in receiving BSIP funding (1<sup>st</sup> tranche). It is understood that there will be a revenue/capital split, however at this stage the split is unknown.

### 8.3 Legal Implications

8.3.1 The EPP, is a legally binding document and is a legal partnership, placing a liability on the Council and bus operators to deliver on its commitments to improve local bus services.

### 8.4 People Implications

8.4.1 The EPP will have an effect on all the citizens in the City including residents, visitors and businesses. The purpose of the EPP is to improve bus services and therefore to encourage bus usage and accessibility to residents.

### 8.5 Property Implications

8.5.1 There are no property implications associated with this report.

### 8.6 Consultation

8.6.1 The EPP is a legal document DfT were very specific in who the statutory consultees were to be consulted on, aside from the bus operators who were consulted first as required, the other statutory consultees were organisations that represent local passengers; other local authorities that would be affected by the proposals; the Traffic Commissioners; the chief officer of police for each area to which the plan relates; Transport Focus; the Competition and Markets Authority (CMA) and MP's.

8.6.2 This consultation process for the statutory consultees was carried out for the recommended period of 28 days from 20 June 2022 until 17 July 2022.

8.6.3 A follow up email was sent to those statutory consultees who hadn't responded allowing for a further week to send in any responses, no others were received.

8.6.4 The Competition and Marketing Authority requested for their role to be removed under the Governance section and following legal advice a further 28 days of consultation period (from 7 October 2022 until 3 November 2022), with the bus operators was carried out, with no objections received.

### 8.7 Equalities and Diversity Implications.

8.7.1 An Equality Assessment has been undertaken and indicates that the EP will not have an impact on people with a particular characteristic.

### 8.8 Risk Assessment

8.8.1 The Government have made it clear if the Council does not enter into an EPP then the risk is that Government funding will not be provided by DfT for any future highway schemes, or any future funding to bus operators.

8.8.2 Any schemes that arise from the EPP or BSIP will undergo a specific risk assessment.

8.9 Value for Money

8.9.1 The preparation of an EPP intends to bring new investment for bus services in the City which benefits residents, businesses and visitors along with the ability to bid for government funds to help growth in the bus market.

8.10 Community Safety Implications

8.10.1 Community Safety Implications will be taken into account when the EPP is developed.

8.11 Environmental Impact

8.11.1 The EPP will support a mode shift from car to public transport, which in turn will help to improve air quality for health and reduce vehicle emissions; by enabling a shift from private vehicles to bus in addition to promoting a low-carbon bus fleet.

## **9. Background Papers**

Bus Back Better – National Bus Strategy for England March 2021

National Bus Strategy Bus Service Improvement Plans (BSIP) guidance May 2021

Bus Services Act 2017 Enhanced Partnerships Guidance revised July 2021

Bus Service Improvement Plan 2022 – 2027 (adopted by Council in October 2021)

## **10. Appendices**

10.2 Appendix 1 Enhanced Partnership Plan and Scheme Document (for adoption)