



<u>Committee and Date</u>	<u>Item</u>
Cabinet	
23 March 2022	
	<u>Public</u>

Shropshire Enhanced Bus Partnership Scheme

Responsible Officer

e-mail: James.willocks@shropshire.gov.uk Tel: 01743 254374

1. Synopsis

- 1.1. In March 2021, the Government announced a new, long-term National Bus Strategy for England. From April 2022, only LTAs with an Enhanced Partnership in place, or following the statutory process to decide whether to implement a franchising scheme, will be able to access new and existing streams of Government bus funding.
- 1.2. Shropshire Council published its notice of intention to form an Enhanced Partnership by the required deadline of the 30 June 2021 and to publish an initial scheme by the 1 April 2022. The Shropshire Enhanced Partnership Scheme has been created in collaboration with those Bus Operators operating a registered public bus service in Shropshire and the Shropshire Community Transport Consortium

2. Executive Summary

- 2.1 On Monday 15th March 2021, Government launched Bus Back Better, a £3 million national bus strategy for England outside London. It aims to rejuvenate local bus services for passengers.
- 2.2 The strategy was aimed at delivering cheaper, more frequent and more reliable bus services for passengers
- 2.3 The government requires all Local Transport Authorities (LTAs) to develop a Bus Service Improvement Plan (BSIP) and to set up an Enhanced Partnership, as defined in the Bus Services Act 2017.

- 2.4 On the 31st October 2021 the council published it's Bus Service Improvement Plan and submitted this to the Department for Transport.
- 2.5 The successful realisation of all BSIP themes, aims and objectives is reliant on funding coming forward through the BSIP process.
- 2.6 At the time of submitting this report, the BSIP funding allocation is unknown, but an announcement is expected from the Department for Transport later in March or early April 2022.
- 2.7 The council has previously published a Notice of Intent to proceed with the development of an Enhanced Partnership.
- 2.8 An Enhanced Partnership is the legal framework between the council and local bus operators to work together to improve local bus services for passengers. Creating an Enhanced Partnership does not however preclude the Council from considering franchising in the future.

3. Recommendations

- 3.1. To approve the formation of the Shropshire Enhanced Bus Partnership Scheme, as laid out in Appendix A
- 3.2. To note that the establishment of this initial scheme will not place any additional financial burden upon the bus operators or the Council, until the outcome of the Shropshire Bus Service Improvement Plan bid has been made known, at the time of writing this report the outcome of that bid is expected at the end of February 2022.

REPORT

4. Risk Assessment and Opportunities Appraisal

- 4.1. Once the outcome of the Councils Bus Service Improvement Plan funding submission is known, a revised Enhanced Partnership Plan will be submitted to the council's cabinet to reflect the ambitions that can then be achieved through any funding allocation, this will be accompanied by a more detailed assessment of any risks associated with the introduction of that revised plan.

- 4.2. An initial Equality, Social Inclusion and Health Impact assessment (ESHIA) has been completed and is attached as Appendix B
- 4.3. The initial Assessment has highlighted that there is potential for a Low Positive impact across all nine Protected Characteristic groupings set out in the Equality Act 2010, as well as the tenth grouping of people that we think about in Shropshire, of Social Inclusion. This is of particular relevance to Shropshire as a large and sparsely populated rural county, as this tenth category is there to help us to seek to ensure that we consider the needs of rural households, households on low incomes, households in fuel poverty, and those we may consider to be vulnerable. For these households, public transport via bus needs to present as a safe and economically viable proposition, as well as one on which they may reasonably depend in order to access education and training, employment, health care, and cultural, leisure, shopping and sporting facilities and services.
- 4.4. This assessment is based upon the current draft Enhanced Partnership Plan and Scheme (as we await the outcome of the Councils funding submission).
- 4.5. Should the Council be successful with its £98 million funding submissions thought its BUS Service Improvement Plan (BSIP) a new ESHIA will be undertaken. Shropshire has an ageing population: and an increasing proportion of bus journeys are made by concessionary pass holders, with a corresponding decline in use by fare paying passengers. The equality impact upon the intersecting groupings of Age, Disability and Social Inclusion may therefore present the greatest potential to move from Low Positive to Medium Positive. This is also the case with regard to health and well being impacts.
- 4.6. Should the Council choose not to form an EP scheme, there is a significant risk that the Council would lose its annual Bus Service Operators Grant of £512,447 and precluded from bidding for any future DfT funding awards.

5. Financial Implications

- 5.1 The establishment of this initial scheme will not place any additional financial burden upon the bus operators or the Council, there is within the scheme the option to vary its ambitions once the outcome of our funding submission is known

- 5.2 Once the allocation of the funding allocation is known, a Cabinet report will be submitted to highlight the specific details of that award and the impact it will have on the public transport network and the benefits that will bring.
- 5.3 Should there be no funding awarded a report will be submitted to Cabinet detailing the potential impact that will have on the public transport networks going forwards.
- 5.4 Failing to form an Enhanced Partnership with the bus operators would preclude the LTA and bus operators from receiving any funding from the £3bn budget to support buses through the Governments Bus Back Better Strategy. It would also prevent the LTA from submitting future funding bids to support Public Transport.
- 5.5 In addition, failure to form an EP would also bring to an end the annual ringfenced Bus Service Operator's Grant (BSOG) of £512,447 which is paid to the Council to part fund operator provided bus services.

6. Climate Change Appraisal

- 6.1. In its recently published Decarbonising Transport Plan, the government set out its vision for a net zero transport system. In the plan, public transport and active travel will be the natural first choice for residents' daily activities. We will use our cars less and be able to rely on a convenient, cost-effective and coherent Shropshire public transport network. The bus can be the most efficient user of road space and a vital part of an environmentally friendly local sustainable transport system.
- 6.2. In order to meet this ambition, funding through the Department of Transport's Bus Back Better Strategy will be crucial and a statutory requirement to attract that funding is to have an Enhanced Partnership Scheme in place.

7. Background

- 7.1. In March 2021 the government published 'Bus Back Better, a National Bus Strategy for England', which highlighted a general decline in bus patronage since the 1950s whilst traffic congestion and emissions have continued to increase. COVID-19 has caused a significant shift from public transport to the private car. To avoid the worst effects of a car led recovery the government wants the country to shift back quickly, by making radical improvements to local public transport as normal life returns. Government considers buses are the quickest, easiest and cheapest way to do that.

- 7.2. Greater emphasis will now be placed on partnership working, where Local Transport Authorities (LTAs) and bus operators form statutory partnerships to define bus networks, service levels, and fares strategies. The government expects all LTAs to develop Bus Service Improvement Plans (BSIPs) and set up Enhanced Partnerships (EPs), as defined in the Bus Services Act 2017. The strategy represents the greatest change since 1985 and provides the opportunity to give LTAs more control.
- 7.3. Through the strategy, LTAs and bus operators are asked to commit to forming a statutory Enhanced Partnership (EP) and to jointly develop a Bus Service Improvement Plan (BSIP). Dependent on how ambitious the BSIP is, LTAs and bus operators could benefit from £3bn of total government funding.
- 7.4. Bus Partnership Schemes are partnerships between the Council and Local Bus Operators to improve the quality of public transport, details of how the Partnership scheme will operate is highlighted in Appendix A
- 7.5. On 30 June 2021 the Council committed to forming an Enhanced Partnership with the bus operators across the area. In line with government's tight timescale, on 31 October 2021, the Council published its Bus Service Improvement Plan (BSIP), developed jointly with the bus operators., community transport organisations, based upon the comprehensive customer engagement survey and the resulting ambitions of local people and visitors.
- 7.6. A BSIP was published by the required deadline and submitted to the Department for Transport (DfT) setting out indicative capital and revenue spend required to implement the plan in future years.
- 7.7. Once the draft EP Plan and Scheme had been prepared, a statutory consultation of key stakeholders on the draft EP Plan and EP Scheme was undertaken, this statutory stakeholders were, Transport Focus, Chief of Police, Traffic Commissioner, Bus Users Shropshire, Competition and Markets Authority and Neighbouring Local Authorities.
- 7.8. The government recognises the time pressures that LTAs are under and understands that the ambitions within it will be limited whilst the funding position is unknown.
- 7.9. This initial EP Scheme can be amended at a future point once the outcome of the Councils £98 million Bus Service Improvement Plan funding submission is known.
- 7.10. The EP Plan and Scheme will be published on the council's website.

8. Conclusions

- 8.1. The Council needed to form and publish an Enhanced Partnership Plan and Scheme to ensure it was in a position to qualify for any current and future funding awards.
- 8.2. The Council submitted a very ambitious package of transformational changes to the DfT as part of its BSIP submission and when the outcome of that funding bid is determined, we will submit a variation of the current EP scheme to cabinet, which will reflect these ambitions.

List of Background Papers (This MUST be completed for all reports, but does not include items containing exempt or confidential information)

- Shropshire’s Bus Service Improvement Plan Prospectus, submitted to the Department for Transport.

Cabinet Member

Cecilia Motley

Local Member

All

Appendices

- Appendix A – Shropshire’s Enhanced Partnership Plan and Scheme
- Appendix B - ESHIA