

Statement regarding BSIP Decision by Government

Cabinet 6th April 2022

Having heard from all three Councillors, the questions posed have similarities. I will attempt to respond to all three at once and take supplementary questions at the end.

We were extremely disappointed by the rejection of Shropshire Council's Bid for funding from the Bus Services Improvement Programme. We were particularly perplexed as we were told by the Department for Transport that we had submitted a very strong bid, and were encouraged by the DfT to be ambitious in formulating our bid. We more than fulfilled that criteria, producing a bid which included greener transport, revised park and ride plans and demand responsive options in rural areas which have had no public transport for many years. We consulted widely with our residents and had a high level of responses. In addition we formed an Enhanced Partnership with our providers, as required by DfT.

The fact that none of our neighbouring authorities – Worcestershire, Telford/Wrekin, Herefordshire, Gloucestershire or Warwickshire – received funding for their bids appears to demonstrate that the Government was perhaps concentrating on urban areas as opposed to the needs of a large swathe of rural authorities. Whilst I appreciate that transport initiatives for rural areas can be more complex to provide I would argue that they should carry equal weight as that given to urban schemes.

Since receiving this news we certainly have not been idle, and neither have our MPs, who strongly supported our original bid. Philip Dunne has already met with Baroness Vere, the Transport Minister, whilst discussions are ongoing between our MPs, the Leader and the Transport Secretary, Grant Shapps, to understand

what we can do to ensure we receive those transformational funds to update and enhance our public transport offer – which was the whole thrust of our BSIP bid.

In direct response to the requests made in the emergency questions: within the next few weeks we will set up a Members' Briefing Session to enable all Members to understand fully the different elements of the current bus system, its limitations and the issues that we face. We will also explain further how we wish to transform Shropshire's the system.

We will also set up a cross-party working group to look at creating a sustainable transport network that is fit for purpose and covers all areas of our county. This group could undertake discussions with individual bus operators, franchises, Bus Users and other interested parties.

In the meanwhile we understand there is likely to be a further round of funding and we have placed a call with DfT to gain insight into why our original BSIP failed and how we can make improvements to a future bid.

I hope members will agree that this gives us a positive route forward and I am happy to take supplementary questions from Cllrs Dartnall, Boddington and Vasmer.

Cecilia Motley

Cabinet Member, Communities Place Culture Leisure Tourism & Transport

April 2022