

**From:** Simon Jones, Corporate Director, Growth, Environment & Transport

**To:** David Brazier, Cabinet Member for Highways & Transport

**Subject:** **Bus Service Improvement Plan**

**Decision Number:** 21/00087

**Classification:** Unrestricted

**Electoral Division:** All

**Summary:** On 15th March 2021, the Department for Transport (DfT) published its wide-ranging National Bus Strategy entitled “Bus Back Better”. Under the Strategy, to maintain access to current funding and access future funding opportunities, KCC as the Local Transport Authority was required to commit to the introduction of Enhanced Partnerships with local bus operators by 1 July 2021 and publish a Bus Service Improvement Plan by 31<sup>st</sup> October 2021.

**Recommendation(s):**

The Cabinet Member for Highways & Transport is asked to:

- Publish on the KCC website and submit to DfT the pre-settlement funding version of Kent’s Bus Service Improvement Plan as shown at Appendix B and
- Delegate to the Corporate Director, Growth, Environment and Transport, in consultation with the Cabinet Member for Highways and Transport to approve any final amendments to reflect additional government guidance and non-material changes to the text of the Plan, prior to its publication.

The proposed Record of Decision is attached at Appendix A.

## **1. Introduction**

- 1.1 In March 2021 the Government published a National Bus Strategy for England. In response, on 28<sup>th</sup> June 2021 as part of the associated statutory process, KCC published its stated intent to enter into negotiations with bus operators to form an Enhanced Partnership agreement. The Enhanced Partnerships (EP) will cover the operation of all public bus services in the County from April 2022.
- 1.2 To support Enhanced Partnerships, all Local Transport Authorities (LTAs) are also obliged to form a Bus Service Improvement Plan (BSIP) which sets the aspirations for KCC and its bus operators over the period of National Bus Strategy and which also acts as a bidding document to support the initiatives developed as part of the BSIP.

## **2. Financial Implications**

- 2.1 The BSIP sets out how Kent intends to meet the objectives of the National Bus Strategy and includes a list of initiatives to deliver an improved bus network. The

BSIP has to be published by the end of October 2021 and submitted to the DfT who will then advise Kent's funding allocation.

- 2.2 Once this is known, the Enhanced Partnership can then be formed from the BSIP action plans for introduction from April 2022. It is by that point that the Council will need to have committed to investment in the partnerships and a further key decision will be taken at this stage to confirm KCC's investment.
- 2.3 If KCC does not comply with National Bus Strategy, this would put at risk significant annual funding for Kent's bus network

### **3. Policy Framework**

- 3.1 Working with partners to develop a Kent bus strategy is a key activity in the Strategic Delivery Plan which recognises the importance of public transport for Kent residents. The strategy will set out the role KCC will play and how we will work together with partners to achieve better services for Kent residents.

### **4. Bus Service Improvement Plan**

- 4.1 On 15<sup>th</sup> March 2021, the Department for Transport (DfT) published its wide-ranging National Bus Strategy; "Bus Back Better". The strategy sets out ambitious goals covering a range of key areas supporting bus operation and is backed by £3 billion of investment across England and a commitment to repurpose current funding.
- 4.2 There is an expectation that Local Transport Authorities will work closely in partnership with bus operators, particularly those with commercial services, to better integrate bus routes and ticketing to make travel easier for passengers via an Enhanced Partnership Agreement.
- 4.3 Investment is expected to facilitate this including both revenue funding (for example for reducing fares and increasing bus services) and capital funding (for example for measures to improve bus operating speeds by reducing delays).
- 4.4 The strategy also sets an ambitious timeline for LTAs to comply, to ensure continued access to both current and future funding. Operators will also need to co-operate with this process to retain their funding streams.
- 4.5 Due to the Government deadlines for publication, it has not been possible to follow normal governance processes for development and sign off of the BSIP but officers have sought to engage with all Members and other stakeholders throughout its formation to develop the priorities and initiatives set out in the plan. Officers have also developed a forward program that will allow for greater input to the version that will be formed following understanding of the funding settlement.
- 4.6 At the current time as there is uncertainty on how much funding will be available to Kent, the plan includes measures which do and do not require government funding. It seeks to be ambitious but make clear the reliance in many instances on Government funding. Bus operators would be expected to play their part with a share of investment as well, as will be defined in the Enhanced Partnership.

- 4.7 The BSIP will need to be updated at least annually and, in due course, will feed into Kent's Local Transport Plan (LTP). It has developed in collaboration with bus operators and local businesses and other key stakeholders.

## **5. Equality and data protection implications**

- 5.1 An initial EqIA screening has indicated that there are no expected adverse effects arising from the BSIP. Depending on funding levels awarded, there are potentially positive equality benefits.

## **6. Legal Implications**

- 6.1 Enhanced partnerships were introduced under the Bus Services Act 2017. They are agreements between Local Transport Authorities and bus operators to work together to improve bus services.

- 6.2 An Enhanced Partnership has two parts:

The Enhanced Partnership Plan which is a high-level vision with objectives for bus services in the local area. One Plan for the whole of Kent is proposed and;

Enhanced Partnership Schemes which set out requirements for local bus services and detail actions to be taken by the LTA to deliver the policies and objectives in the Enhanced Partnership Plan. These must be agreed by the LTA and most operators and set out any commitments from the LTA and standards to be met by the operators. Three Enhanced Partnership Schemes are proposed (for East Kent, West Kent, and Kent Thameside). Each will have its own action plans and it is anticipated that they will build on the positive work already achieved in Kent by the voluntary Quality Bus Partnerships.

- 6.3 Once an Enhanced Partnership Plan and Schemes are made by the Council, measures and facilities agreed by the authority will become a legally enforceable commitment.

## **7. Conclusion and next steps**

- 7.1 The National Bus Strategy requires KCC as a Local Transport Authority to enter into an Enhanced Partnership with local operators and publish a Bus service Improvement Plan which has to be published and submitted to the Department for Transport by 31<sup>st</sup> October.

- 7.2 Shortly following, we are expecting to receive notification of the associated final settlement which will allow for further consideration of the prioritisation of initiatives for delivery and the content of a second (post funding settlement) version of the plan which will be used to inform the detail an Enhanced Partnership Plan to commence from April 2022, subject to a further decision to be taken by the Cabinet Member for Highways & Transport.

## **8. Recommendations(s):**

- 8.1 Recommendation(s): The Cabinet Member for Highways & Transport is asked to:

- Publish on the KCC website and submit to DfT the pre-settlement funding version of Kent's Bus Service Improvement Plan as shown at Appendix B and
- Delegate to the Corporate Director, Growth, Environment and Transport, in consultation with the Cabinet Member for Highways and Transport to approve any final amendments to reflect additional government guidance and non-material changes to the text of the Plan, prior to its publication.

The proposed Record of Decision is attached at Appendix A.

## **9. Background Documents**

Appendix A Proposed Record of Decision  
Appendix B Pre-Funding Settlement Version of the Kent Bus Service Improvement Plan  
Appendix C EqlA

## **10. Contact details**

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