

Report to:	EXECUTIVE
Relevant Officer:	Alan Cavill, Director of Communications and Regeneration
Relevant Cabinet Member	Councillor Neal Brookes - Cabinet Member for Enforcement, Public Safety, Highways and Transport
Date of Meeting:	11 October 2021

BUS SERVICE IMPROVEMENT PLAN

1.0 Purpose of the report:

1.1 To approve the draft Bus Service Improvement Plan and agree to an Enhanced Partnership Plan and Schemes document being produced so the Enhanced [Bus] Partnership can be established by 31 March 2022.

2.0 Recommendation(s):

- 2.1 To approve the draft Bus Service Improvement Plan attached at Appendix 6a
- 2.2 To grant authority to the Director of Communications and Regeneration to make any necessary minor amendments to the Bus Service Improvement Plan before submission to the Department for Transport by end of October 2021.
- 2.3 To agree that an Enhanced Partnership Plan and Schemes document be submitted to a subsequent Executive for approval so that the Enhanced Partnership can be established by the deadline of 31 March 2022, liaising closely with local bus operators and Lancashire County Council on cross-boundary issues.

3.0 Reasons for recommendation(s):

- 3.1 The National Bus Strategy (2021) is clear that both a Bus Service Improvement Plan and Enhanced Partnership (both Plan and Schemes) are initiatives the Government want local transport authorities to implement. Government have made it clear that future funding in 2022-23 onwards is linked to these commitments.
- 3.2 Is the recommendation contrary to a plan or strategy adopted or approved by the Council? No

3.3 Is the recommendation in accordance with the Council's approved budget? Yes

4.0 Other alternative options to be considered:

4.1 None.

5.0 Council priority:

5.1 The relevant Council priorities are both:

- "The economy: Maximising growth and opportunity across Blackpool"
- "Communities: Creating stronger communities and increasing resilience"

6.0 Background information

6.1 Following Cabinet Member decision (PH47/2021), the Council is committed to an Enhanced [Bus] Partnership, which will need to be established by the end of March 2022 with all elements having the aim of improving local bus services for passengers and increasing bus patronage. The Enhanced Partnership (EP) will take the Bus Service Improvement Plan (BSIP) forward. The Bus Service Improvement Plan outlines how Blackpool Council, working closely with local bus operators, will deliver key elements of the National Bus Strategy (2021). A Bus Service Improvement Plan is the essential first step as it will be the extent of its ambition that will be crucial when Government decides how any new funding is allocated.

6.2 From the position of achieving an approved Bus Service Improvement Plan, the agenda will move to translating this into an Enhanced Partnership (EP) arrangement, which will be binding between the Council and the local bus operators. It has been made clear within the Bus Service Improvement Plan that the current network has been run commercially without tendered services. The Council's resource situation means that if the Bus Service Improvement Plan's stated aspirations are to be achieved, all network and infrastructure improvements will have to be paid for from external resources and an Enhanced Partnership can only proceed on this basis.

6.3 For an Enhanced Partnership to be established, an Enhanced Partnership Plan and Schemes document need to be produced. This will need to be agreed with all local bus operators and the neighbouring local transport authority, Lancashire County Council. It will then be brought to a subsequent Executive in early 2022 for approval.

6.4 An Enhanced Partnership is a statutory partnership between local transport authorities and local bus operators that sets out how they will work together to deliver Bus Service Improvement Plan outcomes in the defined geographical area set out in the Enhanced Partnership. An Enhanced Partnership only applies to registered local bus services, not coach services, community transport services or other types of road passenger transport.

6.5 Does the information submitted include any exempt information? No

7.0 List of Appendices:

- 7.1 Appendix 6a: Draft Bus Service Improvement Plan
- Appendix 6b: Outline Funding Template

8.0 Financial considerations:

- 8.1 Only Local Transport Authorities with a published Bus Service Improvement Plan (BSIP) will be eligible to bid for any new sources of bus funding from the Government's £3bn budget. The Bus Service Improvement Plan contains a completed outline funding template. From April 2022, the new discretionary forms of bus funding from Government will only be available to services operated, or measures taken, under an Enhanced Partnership. Any new services/enhancements suggested within the Enhanced Partnership (EP) Plan would need revenue subsidy. The EP plan will make clear that this subsidy must be provided externally or the new enhancements will not happen.

9.0 Legal considerations:

- 9.1 The Bus Services Act 2017 amended the Transport Act 2000 to provide local transport authorities with powers to reform the bus market and these provisions provide for new types of partnership schemes and the option to franchise bus services. Statutory requirements for Enhanced Partnerships are laid out in sections 138A-138S of the 2000 Act (and regulations made under those sections).

10.0 Risk management considerations:

- 10.1 None.

11.0 Equalities considerations:

- 11.1 Local buses are a vital resource for less able people in Blackpool's community. Clearly the economic impact of having to use taxis and private hire to get around town has a disproportionate impact on partially sighted, less ambulant and poorer members of society.

12.0 Sustainability, climate change and environmental considerations:

- 12.1 Bus use, especially on newer cleaner buses (Euro 6 standard) and electric buses, is more sustainable than private car use. Greater bus patronage in Blackpool will contribute to improved local air quality and to climate change mitigation. The National Bus Strategy (2021) identifies clean air and climate change combating objectives. These objectives are in line with the Council's own environmental commitments, particularly the climate emergency. It also supports/assists in implementing the Blackpool Local Plan Part 1: Core Strategy's goals,

objectives and policies:

- Goal 1 - Sustainable regeneration, diversification and growth.
- Objective 4 - Enable easier and sustainable journeys within Blackpool and the Fylde Coast by integrating transport systems and promoting sustainable modes of travel.
- Policy CS5: Connectivity point 1 (c) states: "Working with bus operators and developers to provide enhanced bus services with efficient, comprehensive routing served by high quality infrastructure, providing bus priority measures where appropriate to enable services to operate efficiently."

13.0 Internal/external consultation undertaken:

13.1 Bus Operators' Forum – 7 September 2021 meeting; attended by key stakeholders, including local bus operators and Lancashire County Council.

14.0 Background papers:

14.1 None.

15.0 Key decision information:

15.1 Is this a key decision? Yes

15.2 If so, Forward Plan reference number: 15/2021

15.3 If a key decision, is the decision required in less than five days? No

15.4 If **yes**, please describe the reason for urgency:

16.0 Call-in information:

16.1 Are there any grounds for urgency, which would cause this decision to be exempt from the call-in process? No

16.2 If **yes**, please give reason:

TO BE COMPLETED BY THE HEAD OF DEMOCRATIC GOVERNANCE

17.0 Scrutiny Committee Chairman (where appropriate):

Date informed: 1 October 2021 Date approved:

18.0 Declarations of interest (if applicable):

18.1

19.0 Executive decision:

19.1

20.0 Date of Decision:

20.1

21.0 Reason(s) for decision:

21.1

22.0 Date Decision published:

22.1

23.0 Executive Members in attendance:

23.1

24.0 Call-in:

24.1

25.0 Notes:

25.1