

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:	7 November 2022

ENHANCED BUS PARTNERSHIP AND REVISED BUS SERVICE IMPROVEMENT PLAN

1.0 Purpose of the report:

1.1 To establish the Enhanced Bus Partnership and approve the revised Bus Service Improvement Plan, as required under the Government's National Bus Strategy (2021).

2.0 Recommendations:

2.1 To establish the Enhanced Partnership (EP) in accordance with Government guidance and the Bus Services Act 2017 as set out in the Enhanced Partnership Plan at Appendix 3a together with the Enhanced Partnership Scheme at Appendix 3b.

2.2 To approve the revised Bus Service Improvement Plan (BSIP). (Appendix 3c).

2.3 To grant authority to the Director of Communications and Regeneration to consider any representations made during the statutory consultation period after the service of notice pursuant to section 138 F(1)(d) and to consider whether any modifications to the draft Enhanced Partnership Plan or draft Enhanced Partnership Scheme are required as a result of the representations, and to make any necessary minor amendments to the Bus Service Improvement Plan before notifying the Department for Transport the Bus Service Improvement Plan is final by the end of November 2022.

2.4 To grant authority to the Director of Communications and Regeneration to serve notice of making the Enhanced Partnership Scheme pursuant to section 138 G (5) and publish on the Council's website as required.

3.0 Reasons for recommendation(s):

3.1 The Government's National Bus Strategy (2021) required the Council to publish a Bus Service Improvement Plan and 'make' an Enhanced Partnership. Blackpool's original Bus Service

Improvement Plan was published in October 2021 following Executive approval (EX49/2021). The Enhanced Partnership was originally to have been established by April 2022, but Government changed this requirement to an indeterminate time.

Following the required objection and consultation periods, a final Enhanced Partnership needs to be established and the documents attached (both Plan and Scheme) published on the Council's website, as specified under Government guidance and the requirements of the Bus Services Act 2017.

The Council is required to update the Bus Service Improvement Plan on an annual basis. Following the initial plan's first anniversary, this exercise has now been completed and the revised Bus Service Improvement Plan is attached for approval.

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| 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 as the Council is required to establish an Enhanced Partnership and a Bus Service Improvement Plan under the terms of the Bus Services Act 2017

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 Government published its National Bus Strategy in early 2021, titled 'Bus Back Better', addressing the potential of buses to provide affordable and sustainable transport and so reduce traffic congestion and pollution. The document makes a strong case to support bus travel and encourage its uptake.
- 6.2 It required each Local Transport Authority (LTA) prepare a Bus Service Improvement Plan (BSIP) setting out how bus use can be encouraged to grow in the local area. The document has to be revised annually. The first revision (draft attached) has been prepared as an update to the original October 2021 publication and has the aim of improving local bus services for passengers and increasing bus patronage.

- 6.3 Initially, Central Government made £3bn available to fund Bus Service Improvement Plan proposals, but a portion of this was deployed to fund electric buses and other priorities, reducing the available sum considerably. Blackpool's Bus Service Improvement Plan was unsuccessful in gaining funding. The revised document will likely be appraised by Government if it makes any additional funding available.
- 6.4 The Enhanced Partnership (EP) takes the Bus Service Improvement Plan forward to an implementation phase. Government has made a Relationship Manager available to support the development and implementation of the Enhanced Partnership. It has also provided revenue funding for bus policy support and it is proposed to use this to employ a public transport specialist officer, this post is currently out for recruitment.
- 6.5 Following its drafting process, the Enhanced Partnership has been submitted to affected local operators for a statutory objection period of 28 days, following which no objections were received. The Council's Bus Operators' Forum has enabled operators to follow the document's progress. Subsequent to this, the document has been submitted to organisations defined within the Government's guidance, including the Transport Commissioner and Transport Focus, for a consultation period of a further 28 days. Comments have been received from Transport Focus, which have been considered for the revised Bus Service Improvement Plan and will be taken further account of in any future revisions to the Bus Service Improvement Plan and Enhanced Partnership documents.
- 6.6 Although there is no additional investment money available, a strong Bus Service Improvement Plan and Enhanced Partnership place the Council in a good position should additional funding become available. In a place that has very little potential to create road space to address traffic congestion, achieving modal shift from car to bus travel would be extremely beneficial and together with the deployment of electric buses, would also achieve considerable environmental benefits.
- 6.7 Does the information submitted include any exempt information? No

7.0 List of Appendices:

- 7.1 The following are attached as appendices:
Appendix 3a: Blackpool Borough Council Enhanced Bus Partnership Plan
Appendix 3b: Part 2 - Enhanced Partnership Scheme
Appendix 3c: Bus Service Improvement Plan

8.0 Financial considerations:

- 8.1 From April 2022, the discretionary forms of bus funding from Government based on the quality of the original Bus Service Improvement Plan will only be available to services operated, or measures taken, under an Enhanced Partnership.

8.2 As the Council did not receive Government funding based on its original Bus Service Improvement Plan, there are no immediate financial consequences. Any future discretionary funding decisions by Government are likely to be based on the quality of the Council's revised Bus Service Improvement Plan.

9.0 Legal considerations:

9.1 The process has been conducted under the terms and requirements of the Bus Services Act 2017. This 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. Improving bus services to complement the excellent vehicles now operating in Blackpool, would be overwhelmingly beneficial to equalities. This is a high quality and affordable transport option that is available to all.

12.0 Sustainability, climate change and environmental considerations:

12.1 In comparison with other road transport, bus travel is extremely energy efficient and generates less particles. A substantial modal shift to bus travel would assist the council in achieving its net zero targets.

12.2 Greater bus patronage in Blackpool would 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 The Enhanced Partnership has been through a 28 day objection period and a 28 day consultation period. The documents were previously presented to the Blackpool Bus Operators' Forum.

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: 29/2022

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:

17.0 Scrutiny Committee Chairman (where appropriate):

Date informed: 28 October 2022 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