

Decision Report - Executive Decision

Decision Date – 23rd May 2024

Key Decision – yes



Bus Service Improvement Plan (BSIP) Review 2024

Executive Member(s): Councillor Richard Wilkins, Lead Member for Transport and Digital

Local Member(s) and Division: All

Lead Officer: Mike O'Dowd-Jones – Service Director, Infrastructure and Transport

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Summary / Background

1. The Department for Transport (DfT) require all Local Transport Authorities (LTA) to review their Bus Service Improvement Plan (BSIP) and re-submit to the DfT by 12th June 2024.
2. Submission of the revised BSIP by the June deadline, is a pre-requisite for releasing the 2024/25 tranche of BSIP funding. This is not new or additional funding; it is the final tranche of the three-year funding award confirmed by the DfT in 2022 and is already committed to delivering the existing BSIP schemes.
3. The revised BSIP document is not a funding bid at this stage, as there is no additional grant available. The purpose of the BSIP 2024, is to showcase the work and achievements to date, confirm plans for delivery of the remaining funded schemes up until March 2025 and set out Somerset's ambition for public transport from 2025 and beyond, subject to securing additional funding.
4. There is a requirement to provide approximate costs where possible, in a separate spreadsheet, of future proposals contained within the ambition section of the BSIP. This information will be used to inform government's future budget setting for transport. It is anticipated that there will be a further requirement for another BSIP review in 2025.
5. As part of the 2024 review process key stakeholders including bus passenger representatives and operators were consulted through individual meetings, the

Bus User and Stakeholder Group and the Bus Advisory Board. The ambition within the existing BSIP was reviewed and updated/developed to reflect this feedback, build on best practice/lessons learnt from the first BSIP and to align with the emerging Local Transport Plan (LTP) and the emerging Local Plan.

Recommendations

6. The Transport and Planning Sub Committee:

a) Approves the content of the draft Bus Service Improvement Plan (BSIP) attached at Appendix A and the BSIP Overview Table attached at Appendix B.

b) Delegates authority to the Head of Transportation to:

i. make any minor amendments required to the BSIP and BSIP overview table, following the Transport and Planning Sub Committee, but prior to publication and submission to the DfT providing the principles of the proposals are not changed.

ii. finalise the content and approve the final design of the BSIP and BSIP overview table for submission to the DfT.

c) Agrees to submission of the final BSIP 2024 and BSIP overview table to the DfT by 12th June 2024 and publication of the BSIP on the Somerset Council website.

Reasons for recommendations

7. The recommendations are in response to the DfT request and in-line with their revised BSIP guidance, which requires submission of an updated BSIP and overview table by 12th June 2024. Submission of the revised BSIP and a BSIP overview table is required to release the final tranche of BSIP funding for 2024/25.

Other options considered

8. Not updating and re-submitting the BSIP, was not an option as this would have jeopardised the final funding tranche for the existing BSIP schemes.

Links to Council Plan and Medium-Term Financial Plan

9. The decision links to the Somerset Council Plan as follows:
- A Greener, More Sustainable Somerset – the BSIP contains ambition relating to the wider decarbonisation of the public bus fleet. The BSIP also promotes the use of Public Transport, reducing the number of journeys made via the private car.
 - A Fairer, Ambitious Somerset – the BSIP sets out ambition for improving public transport across the County making it more affordable and accessible.
 - A Flourishing and Resilient Somerset – the BSIP aims to develop strategies for public transport to create a longer-term sustainable delivery model.

Financial and Risk Implications

10. Submission of a revised BSIP is required to release the final tranche of BSIP funding for 2024/25. This funding has already been confirmed as part of the original BSIP allocation and is ring-fenced to specific BSIP schemes already launched or in development.
11. The BSIP is likely to be used by government to determine the future allocation of funding for public transport, at this stage there is no indication of the formula that will be used for this purpose nor the potential level of funding.
12. The BSIP is an aspirational plan, and the BSIP Overview table (Appendix B) includes indicative costs of schemes, where possible. However, there are no additional financial commitments other than the BSIP funding already dedicated to public transport activities. Delivery of the future ambition set out in the plan will be reliant on the government providing significant additional funds for bus services and infrastructure.
13. There is a risk that in the future Somerset is not allocated the level of funding required to deliver the ambitions set out within the BSIP. However, the action set out in the document does not commit Somerset Council to this spend. Whilst the BSIP is aspirational, it is also explicit that any improvement actions can only happen if government funding is subsequently forthcoming.

Likelihood	3	Impact	1	Risk Score	3
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Legal Implications

14. The BSIP is not a statutory document, nor does it deliver anything on the ground – that is the purpose of the EP.
15. At this stage there are no procurement implications nor contract award as this will be dependent on future funding allocation from government, which may lead to some procurement activity. At that point we would consult the Commercial and Procurement team.

HR Implications

16. There are capacity constraints within the Council to be able to deliver the future ambition within the BSIP and additional resource would be required to facilitate this. The cost associated with this additional resource has been factored into the indicative costs set out in Appendix B and would be refined further in any future BSIP funding bids. At the point of any funding award, the correct HR/Recruitment procedures would be followed.

Other Implications:

Equalities Implications

17. The BSIP aims to address inequalities in transport provision across the county. In creating the initial BSIP an assessment was undertaken on the transport offer within the county to understand the impact this has on the protected groups and to identify actions required to address these negative impacts and inform the content of the BSIP. This EIA has been reviewed and updated to reflect the assessment against the current transport offer in the county (Equalities Impact Assessment attached at Appendix C).
18. In summary the main issue is the lack of public transport options and the low frequency of the routes that are available which makes it difficult for many people to travel to their required destinations and at a convenient time. Therefore, they end up not travelling and being unable to access essential services or education and employment, which has a detrimental effect on health and well-being, rural isolation and social economic deprivation.

19. The actions listed identify the mitigating action that can be taken to address the negative impact and have helped to inform the content of the BSIP 2024. These actions include introducing a core hourly network across the county, increasing frequency, introducing evening and weekend services, expansion of demand responsive transport to act as feeders into the core network, as well as addressing ticketing options for young people and families and making information more accessible for all. These actions aim to improve and increase the opportunities for people to travel and access essential services.

Community Safety Implications

20. The BSIP aims to improve public transport provision across the County, providing more opportunity to travel and access services. This can help to reduce isolation and the associated health and well-being impacts. It also aims to provide transport that is seen as safe, so passengers feel safe and comfortable using public transport.

Climate Change and Sustainability Implications

21. The BSIP aims to decarbonise the wider public transport fleet in the future, reducing carbon emissions, through the development of a longer-term decarbonisation plan, setting vehicle standards for tendered contracts and seeking funding for introducing zero emission vehicles and the associated infrastructure.
22. The BSIP aims to transform public transport provision, making it more accessible, affordable and easier to use. A more attractive bus offer is intended to encourage more people to use the bus and make the shift away from the private car, reducing carbon emissions from car usage.

Health and Safety Implications

23. There are no Health and Safety implications associated with the review of the BSIP.

Health and Wellbeing Implications

24. The BSIP is intended to improve public transport provision across Somerset, providing more opportunities to travel and making it easier to choose public transport as a travel option. This should help to tackle incidents of social

isolation and reduce loneliness, which will have a positive impact on health and well-being.

Social Value

25. The proposals put forward will particularly support the following priorities within Somerset Council's Social Value policy:
- Improving health and wellbeing, maintaining independence
 - Reducing air pollution, particularly in urban areas

Where any future funding leads to a procurement exercise, the commercial and procurement team will be consulted in relation to the activity and how Social Value is considered and incorporated.

Scrutiny comments / recommendations:

26. The BSIP has not been considered by a Scrutiny Committee but has been shared with the Chair of Scrutiny Policies and Place as part of the governance process.

Background

27. In March 2021, the government announced the new National Bus Strategy – 'Bus Back Better'. The overarching aim of the strategy was to increase bus patronage. Initially to increase patronage during the Covid recovery period and then longer term to increase patronage level beyond pre-covid levels.
28. Under the strategy LTAs were required to commit to an Enhanced Partnership (EP) by the end of June 2021 and then needed to publish a BSIP by the end of October 2021 before entering into an EP by the end of March 2022. Somerset County Council (as it was at the time) formally agreed to commit to an EP at its Cabinet meeting of 21 June 2021 and agreed to formally 'make' the EP at its Cabinet meeting of 16th March 2022.
29. The BSIP was published in October 2021 and reviewed in October 2022. The 2023 review was put on hold by the DfT whilst they reviewed their guidance which was published beginning of 2024.

30. Following submission of the original BSIP, Somerset was awarded approx. £11.9m of BSIP funding split between capital (£8.2m) and revenue (£3.7m). Section 3 of appendix A details the schemes funded by the BSIP award.

Background Papers

31. DfT Guidance – National Bus Strategy: 2024 Bus Service Improvement Plans [bus-service-improvement-plans-guidance-to-local-authorities-and-bus-operators-2024.pdf \(publishing.service.gov.uk\)](#)

Cabinet Decision – 20th October 2021 approving Somerset’s Bus Service Improvement Plan (BSIP)

Somerset’s Bus Service Improvement Plan (BSIP) 2022 [The National Bus Strategy – Bus Back Better \(somerset.gov.uk\)](#)

Appendices

- Appendix A – Draft Bus Service Improvement Plan (BSIP) 2024
- Appendix B – BSIP Overview Table
- Appendix C - Equalities Impact Assessment

Report Sign-Off (if appropriate) (internal use only - not for publication)

	Officer Name	Date Completed
Legal & Governance Implications	David Clark	06/05/24
Communications	Peter Elliott	09/05/24
Finance & Procurement	Nicola Hix	09/05/24
Workforce	Dawn Bettridge	08/05/24
Asset Management	Oliver Woodhams	30/04/24
Executive Director / Senior Manager	Mickey Green	10/05/24
Strategy & Performance	Alyn Jones	01/05/24
Executive Lead Member	Cllr Richard Wilkins	02/05/24
Consulted:	Councillor Name	
Local Division Members	All	On publication of the decision
Opposition Spokesperson	Cllr Diogo Rodrigues	09/05/24
Scrutiny Chair	Cllr Martin Dimery	01/05/24