

Briefing Note

Title: Bus Services Improvement Plan and Enhanced Bus Quality Partnership Plan and Scheme – Update

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Status: Open

Background Information - This briefing note provides an update relating to North East Lincolnshire's Bus Service Improvement Plan (BSIP) and Enhanced Bus Quality Partnership Plan and Scheme.

On the 15 March 2021 the Government launched a new, long-term National Bus Strategy for England. The 'Bus Back Better', strategy sets out the vision and opportunity to deliver better bus services for passengers. The strategy aims to improve the quality of local bus services and increase bus passenger numbers.

The COVID-19 pandemic has had a significant impact on buses, as with all transport. Bus services in North East Lincolnshire will be important to support the reopening of society, as communities start to return to town centres for work and leisure purposes.

On 20 October 2021, Cabinet approved the BSIP which was submitted to the Department for Transport (DfT) on 29 October 2021. In order to deliver the BSIP this required the conversion of the BSIP into the Enhanced Bus Quality Partnership Plan and Scheme document. The Enhanced Bus Quality Partnership Plan (EP) and Scheme is a high-level document which largely replicates what is already in the Cabinet approved BSIP. The BSIP must be translated into the Enhanced Bus Quality Partnership Plan and Scheme in order to secure any BSIP grant allocation from the DfT. The Enhanced Bus Quality Partnership Plan and Scheme document was approved by Cabinet on 9 March 2022 and this document acts as a shell agreement document which can be varied in the future to deliver any awarded BSIP funding allocation.

The Cabinet approved BSIP was budgeted at £39 million. On 4 April 2022, the DfT announced an indicative funding allocation for North East Lincolnshire Council of up to £4,684,754 (of which £3,236,512 is capital funding and £1,448,242 is revenue funding). This is total indicative funding from 2022/23 to 2024/25.

There were 79 BSIP's submitted to DfT, of which, only 31 were allocated indicative funding and North East Lincolnshire Council were the only Local Transport Authority in the Lincolnshire and Humber Region to be awarded an indicative funding allocation.

In order for the Council to secure the indicative BSIP funding allocation from the DfT, the Council were required by DfT to consider three key Government priorities when reprioritising:

- Bus Priority Measures.
- Ambitious and eye-catching initiatives that reduce and/or simplify fares, at pace.
- Increased bus service frequencies and new/expanded routes.

By Monday 2 May 2022, NELC were required to submit a summary table to DfT (See Appendix A), setting out how the council intends to use the indicative funding allocation. The summary table demonstrated prioritised interventions, estimated delivery timelines and estimated costs.

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By 30 June 2022, the Council were required to resubmit a summary table (See Appendix A) incorporating initial feedback from DfT. The Council were also required to submit a draft Enhanced Bus Quality Partnership document (See Appendix B), confirmation the Council's Section 151 officer considers that the funding represents value for money, a letter of support from local bus operators and a further document with supporting evidence (See Appendix C).

On 8 August 2022, the DfT wrote to North East Lincolnshire Council to confirm the Council's 2022/2023 BSIP funding allocation (2023/2024 & 2024/2025 financial years are subject to further DfT approval).

Risks and Opportunities - It is expected once the BSIP funding ends (it is unclear at this stage how long funding will be provided for), all measures will need to be commercially viable and operate without any local authority funding. It is envisaged the BSIP and Enhanced Bus Quality Partnership Plan and Scheme performance will be taken into account by DfT when considering future external funding bids. In the event of the BSIP and the Enhanced Bus Quality Partnership Plan and Scheme not delivering the anticipated outcomes, this may negatively influence future DfT funding decisions. The BSIP and Enhanced Bus Quality Partnership Plan and Scheme provides the Council with an opportunity to be seen as a best practice authority in future years. Also, the project provides the opportunity to make a significant contribution towards carbon reduction.

Financial Considerations - The confirmed 2022/2023 (2023/2024 & 2024/2025 financial years are subject to further DfT approval) NELC BSIP funding allocation is;

Financial Year	RDEL (£)	CDEL (£)	Total (£)
2022-23	495,570	341,500	837,070
2023-24	520,526	669,756	1,190,282
2024-25	432,147	2,225,255	2,657,402
Total	1,448,243	3,236,511	4,684,754

(Note: RDEL – Revenue Delivery / CDEL – Capital Delivery)

Next steps – The DfT will confirm with the Council when the Enhanced Bus Quality Partnership scheme can be “made” using the Cabinet approved Enhanced Bus Quality Partnership Plan and Scheme document from 9 March 2022. Once the EP is formally “made” the Council will be able to start delivery using the BSIP funding allocation.

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