

Regeneration, Culture and Environment Overview and Scrutiny Committee

BRIEFING NOTE – No. 7/24

Date: 4 November 2024

Briefing paper to: All Members of the Regeneration, Culture and Environment
Overview & Scrutiny Committee

Purpose: To brief Members of the Committee on progress made against the
Council's Bus Service Improvement Plan

1 Background

- 1.1 In 2021 the Government announced a "Bus Back Better" initiative to revolutionise bus services across the country.
- 1.2 As part of this initiative, the Department for Transport (DfT) required all Local Transport Authorities (LTAs) to publish a Bus Service Improvement Plan (BSIP) and form an Enhanced Partnership (EP) with local bus operators and other key stakeholders. Medway Council submitted its first BSIP in 2021, followed by a revised version in 2022.
- 1.3 The BSIP has supported funding bids to the DfT. Whilst Medway did not receive a funding award in 2021, we secured a Bus Capacity Grant of £170,000 in 2022. This funded the appointment of a Public Transport Planner on a fixed term contract, to help support the delivery of the BSIP. The Council also received further BSIP funding of £768,000 in 2023/4 and 2024/5.
- 1.4 An updated BSIP was submitted to the DfT in June 2024 and published on the Council's website. The BSIP includes a clear vision for:

A modern, sustainable public transport network for the residents of Medway that is reliable, accessible, affordable and carbon free, working collaboratively with partners to:

- **Put passengers at the heart of everything we do, supporting equal opportunity of access to employment, education and other key services.**
- **Respond to Climate Change by reducing congestion and allowing buses to move more freely through our communities.**

The BSIP sets out the Council's programme for 2024/25, our ambitions and proposals for 2025 and beyond, and details of targets, performance monitoring and reporting. Officers are currently awaiting assessment of the updated BSIP by the DfT, and funding updates for 2025/26 and beyond. This is expected after the Autumn budget.

2 BSIP achievements and outcomes

2.1 BSIP grant funding has enabled the Council to support and enhance services, upgrade infrastructure and promote bus travel across Medway:

- Over £500,000 of grant funding has been used to support existing services subsidised by the Council, and to uplift frequencies on key corridors:
 - Evening service from Chatham to the Dockside Outlet Centre now operating every 30 minutes until 11.30pm
 - Evening service from Chatham to Hempstead now operating every 30 minutes until midnight, and a Sunday service operating every 20 minutes
 - Evening service from Chatham to Lordswood now operating every 30 minutes until midnight, and a Sunday service operating every 20 minutes
 - Evening service from Chatham to Twydall now operating every 30 minutes until midnight
 - Hourly service introduced between Chatham and Borstal and an evening service to Borstal
 - A new service introduced from Rainham to Maritime Academy
- Three 'Free Bus Travel Weekend' promotions have taken place in Medway. The first included services across Kent and Medway in June 2023. This was followed by Medway-only free bus travel weekends in December 2023 and September 2024. The December weekend saw a passenger uplift of over 50% on the Saturday, and over 30% on the Sunday. Initial figures received for the September free bus travel weekend indicate an uplift of 23% across both days.
- The Council worked with all bus operators across Medway to provide free bus travel for children between 20th July and 1st September 2024. Over 29,000 children travelled free during the summer, equating to approximately 800 per day.
- In the summer of 2024, additional bus services provided travel to leisure destinations in Chatham, Gillingham, and Rainham, including Medway Park, The Strand, Riverside Country Park and Cozenton Park Sports Centre. Over 5,700 passengers used the service during the six-week period of operation.
- Thirty-two bus shelters will have LED solar panel upgrades to improve lighting and security at night. A further forty-three bus shelters are being refurbished, including those at Rochester Community Hub.
- Thirteen new high-definition CCTV cameras have been installed at Chatham Waterfront Bus Station, to help improve safety and security for all users, alongside refurbished facilities for bus drivers using the Whitehouse.

- Two BSIP workshops have been held to support collaboration with local bus operators. Attended by bus company representatives, officers and the Portfolio Holder for Climate Change and Strategic Regeneration, they took place in February and April 2024 and included a visit from DfT representatives. A further workshop will take place in November.

3 Conclusion

- 3.1 The Council's [Bus Service Improvement Plan](#) sets out a clear vision and an ambitious programme for improving bus travel in Medway.
- 3.2 Grant funding provided by the DfT has helped to maintain and develop the bus network in Medway and support recovery from the Covid-19 Pandemic. Bus use has returned to 95% of pre-Covid levels and over 80% of pre-Covid levels for the English National Concessionary Travel Scheme (ENCTS).
- 3.2 The initiatives and promotional activities funded through the BSIP grants support our ambition to increase bus patronage across Medway, which is captured in the One Medway Council Plan.
- 3.3 The DfT has indicated that Local Transport Authorities (LTAs) are likely to receive a three-year BSIP funding settlement, following the Autumn budget. This will allow for medium-term planning and development of the targets, actions and outcomes set out in the plan.

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