

## Wiltshire Council

### Cabinet

12th October 2021

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**Subject:** Future Bus Strategy – Connected Wiltshire

**Cabinet Member:** Councillor Dr Mark McClelland - Cabinet Member for Transport, Waste, Street Scene and Flooding

**Key Decision:** Key

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#### **Executive Summary**

The National Bus Strategy for England is a central government policy aimed at improving and increasing bus usage. It requires Local Transport Authorities (LTAs) to work in legal partnership with local bus operators to achieve this growth.

In growing passenger numbers on public transport, the local populace and Wiltshire Council will benefit through:

- Supporting the local economy – Improved access to shops and areas of employment to help build back and improve the economy post coronavirus.
- Improved services to support vulnerable and elderly residents to access essential services such as shopping and medical appointments.
- A reduction in carbon output and improvement in air quality by reducing the number of car journeys across Wiltshire.
- Support Local Tourism – Through improved weekend, rail link services and more extended bus services a more connected public transport network can be introduced.

Wiltshire Council has continued to fund public transport through a period of significant financial challenge, realising the tangible benefits it has on the Wiltshire populace. This continued support is paramount to supporting the key objectives of the Councils new business plan and will deliver the aforementioned bullet points.

In a statement to Parliament in February 2019 the Prime Minister announced £5 billion of new funding to overhaul bus and cycle links for every region outside London. He set out a new vision to level up local transport connections

### **Subsidised Bus Service Fund**

Funding for supported bus services in 2020-21 was given to local authorities as revenue support to help provide more bus services in their area as an initial stage of the package. In February 2020 Wiltshire was grant funded £671k from this fund.

### **Rural Mobility Fund (RMF)**

As part of the National Bus Strategy the government is keen to further experiment with Demand Responsive Transport (DRT).

Wiltshire has a good track record of delivering DRT whereby it operates five schemes currently, the largest being that in the Pewsey Vale. Wiltshire is one of 17 local authorities who successfully bid against the £20 million pot and managed to secure £1.2 million to enhance the demand responsive bus network in the Pewsey Vale. A summary outline of what is proposed is outlined further in this report.

### **National Bus Strategy (NBS)**

The centrepiece of the Prime Minister's announcement was revealed in March 2021 with the publication of [Bus Back Better](#) – A National Bus Strategy for England, which sets out an ambitious vision to dramatically improve bus services in England outside London through greater local leadership, to reverse the recent shift in journeys away from public transport and encourage passengers back to bus.

### **Proposals**

It is recommended that Cabinet:

- (i) Agrees to the Subsidised Bus Service Fund being committed as defined in the table in paragraph 22
- (ii) Notes the progress on the Rural Mobility Fund (RMF) project and that a further progress report will be submitted in the future.
- (iii) Agrees that Wiltshire's Bus Service Improvement Plan (BSIP) (**Appendices 1 and 4**), which will form the backbone of our future Bus strategy – Connected Wiltshire, is submitted to the DfT by 31 October 2021.

## **Reason for Proposals**

To ensure that:

1. Access to employment, particularly for lower paid workers is supported in order to grow the economy at what is a critical economic point.
2. Local residents and visitors to the county are suitably connected in order to facilitate essential trips, support the vulnerable and have access to employment.
3. The vision set out by government to grow bus usage nationally can be enacted in Wiltshire.
4. Public transport is supported appropriately, in order to meet Wiltshire Council's carbon neutrality target and contributes towards increased modal shift.

**Terence Herbert**  
**Chief Executive**

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### Purpose of Report

1. The National Bus Strategy for England is a central government policy aimed at improving and increasing bus usage. It requires Local Transport Authorities (LTAs) to work in legal partnership with local bus operators to achieve this growth.
2. In growing passenger numbers on public transport, the local populace and Wiltshire Council will benefit through:
  - Supporting the local economy – Improved access to shops and areas of employment to help build back and improve the economy post coronavirus.
  - Improved services to support vulnerable and elderly residents to access essential services such as shopping and medical appointments.
  - A reduction in carbon output and improvement in air quality by reducing the number of car journeys across Wiltshire.
  - Support Local Tourism – Through improved weekend, rail link services and more extended bus services a more connected public transport network can be introduced.
3. It is recommended that Cabinet:
  - (i) Agrees to the Subsidised Bus Service Fund being committed as defined in the table in paragraph 22
  - (ii) Notes the progress on the Rural Mobility Fund (RMF) project and that a further progress report will be submitted in the future.
  - (iii) Agrees that Wiltshire's Bus Service Improvement Plan (BSIP) (**Appendices 1 and 4**), which will form the backbone of our future Bus strategy – Connected Wiltshire, is submitted to the DfT by 31 October 2021.

## Relevance to the Council's Business Plan

4. The Wiltshire future Bus Strategy – Connected Wiltshire is relevant to all of Wiltshire Councils Business Plan's outcomes:

### *A thriving economy:*

- Support the local economy by making it easy and affordable for workers, shoppers and visitors to access local centres and facilitate development growth by helping to facilitate the planned housing and employment growth set out in the Wiltshire Core Strategy. This will likely take the form of a regular internal working group from all areas of the Place Directorate to ensure that public transport is being considered when developing schemes in a more joined up approach.
- Improve journey time reliability for road users by removing some car trips from the highway network and therefore reducing congestion and delays.

### *Empowered People & a Resilient Society:*

- By ensuring improved access to public transport is introduced, social mobility will be improved and elderly and more vulnerable members of our community can live independently for longer reducing pressure on social care services.
- Enable local groups to operate community and voluntary transport schemes particularly to provide local access and safety net transport services to meet needs that cannot be effectively provided by other means, such as the Link schemes.
- Help support Community Rail Partnerships (CRP's) to improve stations and train services, by including Wiltshire's Rail operators and the CRP's in stakeholder discussions when considering public transport.
- Ensure that local communities have a much more significant say in how public transport is shaped and delivered in Wiltshire.
- Communities will have a significant voice when service delivery has not met their expectations.
- Provide access to key services and facilities for Protected Characteristics groups as defined by the Equality Act 2010.

### *Sustainable Environment:*

- Enhance the built and natural environment by reducing greenhouse gas emissions and air quality pollutants from buses.
- By increasing the number of passenger trips made by public transport to 10% more than pre pandemic levels, this will contribute significantly to the Councils overall pledge for Wiltshire to be carbon neutral.

## Background

5. In a statement to Parliament in February 2019 the Prime Minister announced £5 billion of new funding to overhaul bus and cycle links for every region outside London. He set out a new vision to level up local transport connections

throughout the country, making every-day journeys easier, greener and more convenient.

6. [A Better Deal for Bus Users](#), published in February 2020, set out a package of ambitious and innovative actions to meet the needs and demands of the travelling public, which included:

#### **Subsidised Bus Service Fund**

7. Funding for supported bus services in 2020-21 was given to local authorities as revenue support to help provide more bus services in their area as an initial stage of the package. In February 2020 Wiltshire was grant funded £671k from this fund.
8. The Government expects this funding to be used to improve the provision of local bus services in their area in one or more of the following ways:
  - to improve current local bus services - for instance increasing evening or weekend frequencies or supporting additional seasonal services in tourist areas.
  - to restore lost bus routes, where most needed, to ensure people have access to public transport services.
  - to support new bus services, or extensions to current services, to access e.g., new housing, employment opportunities, healthcare facilities etc.
9. The work done on this funding stream commenced this year, as it was not appropriate to seek to build, improve or enhance bus services during the pandemic when the travelling public were being advised to stay at home and avoid personal contact.
10. Following a consultation exercise with Wiltshire Councillors and local town and parish councils, 68 responses were received, along with 29 from members of the public, amounting to nearly 400 individual suggestions.
11. This funding must be committed by 31 March 2022 and should be spent by 31 March 2023.

#### **Rural Mobility Fund (RMF)**

12. As part of the National Bus Strategy the government is keen to further experiment with Demand Responsive Transport (DRT).
13. Wiltshire has a good track record of delivering DRT whereby it operates five schemes currently, the largest being that in the Pewsey Vale. Wiltshire is one of 17 local authorities who successfully bid against the £20 million pot and managed to secure £1.2 million to enhance the demand responsive bus network in the Pewsey Vale. A summary outline of what is proposed is outlined further in this report.

## **National Bus Strategy (NBS)**

14. The centrepiece of the Prime Minister's announcement was revealed in March 2021 with the publication of [Bus Back Better](#) – A National Bus Strategy for England, which sets out an ambitious vision to dramatically improve bus services in England outside London through greater local leadership, to reverse the recent shift in journeys away from public transport and encourage passengers back to bus.
15. LTAs and local bus operators must work at pace with local communities to plan and deliver a fully integrated service.

The key goals of the NBS are making services:

- more frequent, with turn-up-and-go services on major routes and feeder or demand-responsive services to lower-density places.
  - faster and more reliable, with bus priority wherever necessary and where there is room.
  - cheaper, with more low, flat fares in towns and cities, lower point-to-point fares elsewhere, and more daily price capping everywhere.
  - more comprehensive, with overprovision on a few corridors reduced to boost provision elsewhere and better services in the evenings and weekends, not necessarily with conventional buses.
  - easier to understand, with simpler routes, common numbering, coordinated timetable change dates, good publicity, and comprehensive information online.
  - easier to use, with common tickets, passes and daily capping across all operators, simpler fares, contactless payment and protection of bus stations.
  - better integrated with other modes and each other, including more bus-rail interchange and integration and inter-bus transfers.
16. The NBS requires each LTA to produce a BSIP by 31 October 2021.
  17. BSIPs should describe in outline how LTAs and operators in an area can achieve the overarching goal of the NBS - to grow bus patronage: both to build it back after the pandemic and then to increase it and raise buses' mode share.
  18. The BSIP is a high-level document setting out the ambition for bus held by the LTA and the local bus operators.
  19. The BSIP is enacted through, legally binding, Enhanced Partnership (EP) between the LTA and the local bus operators. This will be the subject of on-going discussions between Wiltshire Council and the bus operators and will be brought back to committee in February or March 2022.

## **Main Considerations for the Council**

### **Subsidised Bus Service Funding**

20. Following analysis of the consultation responses a number of suggestions did not meet the requirements of the grant terms and conditions for this particular funding stream. However, all responses provided valuable insight, ideas and requests, which will help define Wiltshire's BSIP, and the subsequent EP's.
21. The schemes that have been considered below all meet the key criteria for Wiltshire's supported bus network as defined in the Executive summary.
22. The scale of the response means that the funding is insufficient to proceed with all the in-scope suggestions. But all scheme suggestions that cannot be progressed at this stage will be rolled over into the BSIP, and this grant should be seen as merely the first round of improvements. Some schemes will be funded through Section 106 monies and have been included in the final list seeking Cabinet approval to proceed, as they dovetail with other schemes suggested, or with procurement that is required in that particular area.

The list of chosen schemes is described in the table below:

### Northern Wiltshire

Area	Improvement proposal
<b>Chippenham</b>	Additional journeys on Chippenham town services, including early/late trips.
<b>Chippenham</b>	New Public Transport service to Birds Marsh Estate ( <i>s106 funding</i> ).
<b>Calne</b>	Complete Review of services 40, 42 and 43 in the Calne area to include Abberd Way and link to Kingsbury Green School ( <i>using s106 funding</i> ).
<b>Cricklade, Purton</b>	Re-instatement of hourly timetable on service 53 (Swindon - Purton - Cricklade) and introduction of evening journeys.
<b>Royal Wootton Bassett, Calne, Chippenham</b>	Review of evening timetable on service 55 (Swindon – Royal Wootton Bassett - Calne-Chippenham) with extra journey and better train connections.
<b>Royal Wootton Bassett, Purton</b>	Introduction of experimental shoppers bus service from Purton and Lydiard Millicent to Wootton Bassett.
<b>Malmesbury</b>	Introduction of Evening/Sunday journeys from Malmesbury to Swindon and Chippenham ( <i>may not be possible until from August 2021</i> ).

### Western Wiltshire

Area	Improvement proposal
<b>Trowbridge, Melksham, Chippenham</b>	Re-instatement of evening Trowbridge - Melksham - Chippenham service
<b>Trowbridge, Melksham, Chippenham</b>	Introduction of Sunday Trowbridge - Melksham – Chippenham service.



<b>Trowbridge</b>	Improved service for Studley Green and other estates in Trowbridge.
<b>Bradford, Trowbridge, Westbury, Warminster</b>	Re-instatement of half-hourly service between Warminster and Trowbridge on service D1 and extra journeys via Winsley to Bath.
<b>Bradford, Trowbridge, Melksham, Corsham</b>	Additional journeys on service 69 Trowbridge – Bradford-on-Avon - Holt - Melksham – Corsham.
<b>Warminster</b>	Re-instatement of half-hourly morning timetable on town service 50.
<b>Warminster</b>	Re-instatement of lunchtime journeys on Warminster-Frome service 53.
<b>Warminster</b>	New shoppers service from Chapmanslade to Warminster ( <i>possibly in conjunction with 53 change</i> ).
<b>Seend</b>	Extension of Friday shoppers service X84 to Bath to include Seend.

### **Eastern Wiltshire**

<b>Area</b>	<b>Improvement proposal</b>
<b>Marlborough</b>	Improved daytime timetable on service through Great Bedwyn (possibly in conjunction with school bus 620).
<b>Marlborough</b>	Additional capacity on peak hour journeys from Aldbourne/Ramsbury to Marlborough.
<b>Marlborough, Tidworth</b>	Additional journey on service 80 from Swindon to Tidworth at about 1620.
<b>Marlborough, Devizes</b>	New service linking Marlborough and Devizes ( <i>using RMF funding</i> ).
<b>Pewsey, Upavon, Devizes</b>	Improved timetable between Devizes and Upavon/Pewsey with better train connections at Pewsey ( <i>RMF funded</i> ).
<b>Devizes</b>	Improved timetable on service 49 including later trips between Swindon and Devizes.
<b>Devizes, Chippenham</b>	Re-instatement of early morning journey from Devizes to Chippenham.
<b>Devizes, Salisbury</b>	Introduction of faster journeys between Devizes and Salisbury ( <i>may have to be delayed until major A360 road closure is over</i> ).
<b>Devizes</b>	Extension of Devizes town serviced to Lay Wood ( <i>using s106 funding</i> ).
<b>Devizes</b>	Earlier morning journeys on Devizes Town services ( <i>using s106 funding</i> ).

### **Salisbury area**

<b>Area</b>	<b>Improvement proposal</b>
<b>Salisbury</b>	New Service from Longhedge to Salisbury, possibly via Five

	Rivers Leisure Centre ( <i>part s106 funded</i> ).
<b>Salisbury</b>	New Service from Netherhampton to Salisbury.
<b>Salisbury</b>	Extension of service R5 to serve new estates in West Harnham ( <i>s106 funded when roads open</i> ).
<b>Salisbury</b>	Improvement to bus service between Longhedge and Laverstock schools.
<b>Salisbury</b>	Re-instatement of service 37 to Grimsteads, Farley and East Dean and Lockerley on Saturdays.
<b>Salisbury, Amesbury, Tidworth, Ludgershall</b>	Improved evening service on Activ8 service to Bulford, Tidworth and Ludgershall from Salisbury and Andover.
<b>Amesbury</b>	Extension of Amesbury Hopper to serve more of Archers Gate estate ( <i>s106 funded</i> .)
<b>Amesbury</b>	Re-instatement of Shrewton – Amesbury bus link.

23. The methodology in selecting these schemes was generally based upon:

- Meeting the terms of the grant conditions
- The greatest number of additional passenger journeys
- Affordability
- Sustainability, post the £671k funding
- The existing bus operator being able to provide the service

24. The selection of these schemes means that there is an equal distribution of the fund across Wiltshire and aligns well with the overall vision and ambition to connect more people across Wiltshire with essential services, grow the economy and improve our carbon footprint.

### **Rural Mobility Fund**

25. Wiltshire Council successfully bid for £1.2 million to enhance the DRT bus service in the Pewsey Vale. The design and development of the additional services, and how they interact with the existing bus services in the area, will be strongly influenced by the local community, within the overall constraints of the DfT funding. We will be seeking opinions and suggestion from all age-groups, residents, employers, traders, and leisure / tourism venues. It will be essential that the scheme attracts new users to the buses but must also retain its existing passengers.
26. The benefit of enhancing the existing service will see an improvement in connectivity between small villages and hamlets to the larger local market towns, and support access to essential services, help support the emerging economy and contribute to modal shift.
27. The successful bid submitted included the following:
- Changes to existing service
    - Pewsey to Devizes - Revised timetable to create rail links, with buses operating across the same fixed and demand type timetable

- Pewsey and Bedwyn to connect with trains at Bedwyn and improve the timetable to what people want, with extra journey capacity
  - Improvements to the number of journeys between Upavon and Devizes
- New Provision
    - Evening and Sundays introduced. Will be subject to consultation on the timetable.
    - Pewsey / Upavon / Tidworth Link – Will be a DRT arrangement and subject to consultation
    - Marlborough to Devizes – Will be partly DRT and serve some villages and DRT in Marlborough Town
    - The Introduction of App and online booking capability
28. Running alongside the enhanced bus service we will introduce an app-based booking system, supported by back-office routing software. It is essential that everyone has access to the booking system, so some form of “call-centre” will be included for people who are unable to use the app.
  29. It is anticipated that the additional service will go live in Summer 2022, although it may be possible to introduce some elements sooner if they can be achieved within the existing resource and contract terms.
  30. Our term consultants, Atkins, have been appointed to manage the initial stages of this project and a permanent DRT Officer will be appointed as a Wiltshire Council employee during the winter to manage and develop this and our other DRT schemes. We will also be heavily reliant on our Community Engagement Team as they have connections which we have yet to make.
  31. There were 17 successful RMF bidders and the DfT are now holding 6-weekly meetings for all to share best practise, knowledge, experience, problems and updates, remembering that this is an experimental fund to determine the overall effectiveness of DRT schemes.
  32. Further progress on the project will be reported to committee as it occurs.

### **National Bus Strategy**

33. Wiltshire Council is leading on this piece of work, to ensure that vision and overall Council policy are being considered. However, there is an inordinate amount of work involved and therefore we are being supported by our consultants, Atkins.
34. Weekly progress meetings take place between Atkins and Wiltshire Council technical staff, as well as weekly Delivery Group meetings, chaired by the Director of Communities & Neighbourhood and include a cross section of Wiltshire Council staff who have a significant influence in shaping public transport.
35. Wiltshire Council published its intent to form an EP with our bus operators at the end of June via a Cabinet Member for Transport, Waste, Street Scene and

Flooding decision report (see background papers at the end of this report). That report sets out the process and why the EP route was taken.

36. We have had initial engagement with:

- Bus operators
- Public and businesses (via an on-line survey)
- Our neighbouring LTAs
- Internal partners (via weekly meetings with Heads of Service and more detailed discussions when appropriate with departmental officers)

37. Discussion with bus operators has been very positive and builds upon the good working relationship Wiltshire has with them. Submissions for ambitious changes have been received and they generally align with emerging thinking and ambition put forward at discussions.

38. Whilst there was no requirement for a public consultation at this stage, it was felt important to establish, at a high level, what the general feeling is for the current public transport offering and try and target non bus users to understand the barriers for change. The closing date for the consultation was 27 August, a technical note produced by Atkins of the responses can be found at **(Appendix 2)** along with the questions asked as an Appendix to that note.

39. The main outcomes from the survey are:

- Most survey persons had a Wiltshire postcode.
- 8% of persons use the bus five or more times a week.

#### Bus affordability

- 43% of persons under 65 stated that better value fares would encourage bus usage.
- 40% of persons under 65 disagreed or strongly disagreed that they take the bus because it is affordable.
- 64% of persons under 20 stated that better value fares would encourage bus usage.
- 15% of persons agreed or strongly agreed that they take the bus because it is affordable.

#### Current positives

- 89% of persons said they expect to use the bus more or the same post-COVID, 25% of which said they expect to use the bus more post-COVID.
- 58% of persons under 20 outlined that the bus takes them where they want to go with just a short walk either side of their journey.

#### Future improvements

- Persons most frequently selected that more frequent buses, real time bus information at bus stops, a direct bus on journeys and buses on Sunday would encourage them to use the bus.
- When ranking the bus service, the highest proportion of survey persons disagreed that they felt safe when travelling on the bus and that the bus takes them where they want to go.

#### Businesses

- 65% of employees and 68% customers travel to site by car or motorcycle.
  - Business persons highlighted that more frequent buses (74%) and later buses (68%) would encourage employees to use the bus.
- Whilst 68% of business persons said that more frequent and more direct buses to their site would encourage customers to use the bus.

40. The NBS requires Wiltshire Council to publish a BSIP by 31 October. It is a high-level document, for which the DfT has provided a template. The initial BSIP will contain baseline data against which progress will be measured at 6-monthly intervals. Whilst DfT obviously expects to see improvement each 6-months, it accepts that this will not always be possible, for example if funding is unable to be made available, or if a major scheme of roadworks adversely affects bus punctuality on a certain corridor.
41. The BSIP is enacted through legally binding EP's. Therefore, the BSIP is very broad brush, under general headings of ambition, but without the granular detail of what individual schemes will achieve. Even so, the BSIP is expected to be iterative, so the initial plan presented here will develop and change over time.
42. The BSIP will eventually replace the current public transport strategy, which is part of the overall Local Transport Plan. This will happen at a time when the BSIP is appropriately developed, and the EP agreed with bus operators.
43. The DfT has stated that it requires BSIPs to be ambitious, and one of the main funding criteria is real ambition. This can be confirmed in Baroness Vere's letter of 6 September and attached as **(Appendix 3)**.
44. The ambition of the BSIP not only affects the level of funding Wiltshire might receive but will also influence government funding decisions for other local transport projects, such as road funding for example. Overall, the NBS is combined with the Government's cycling and walking policies and funding, so the BSIP needs to reflect this. Indeed, combining the benefits of walking, cycling and the bus has the potential to considerably increase the journey options available. In combination these modes can provide a significant proportion of local transport journeys, while providing exercise for the participants and reducing congestion and pollution for all along the route.
45. However, active travel is not the only area where the BSIP needs to be a cross service document. Transport is essential for users to access a wide range of council services, and this needs to be recognised in the BSIP. This must read across not only to other transport services, such as highway design and parking,

but the bus needs to be embedded into the thinking of every service, such as the local plan, planning, economy and regeneration etc, etc.

46. The BSIP will be an iterative document, flexing, dependent upon funding, the longer-term travelling habits of the public, post coronavirus and its overall success. Therefore, it is essential that our local communities have a say in how public transport is developed. It is therefore proposed that local, community-based focus groups are established to help support and influence. This will be further developed in conjunction with Community Engagement Managers during the autumn. Initial discussions have been had with a group called 24/7, who have long had an interest in public transport across Wiltshire. They were originally a group of volunteers, who had an opinion on how the public transport network across Wiltshire should operate, but more recently have recognised the importance of community engagement to help shape future public transport provision and strategy through the BSIP and are moving towards a more community-based model. Work will continue with 24/7 to ensure an impartial community focus feedback can be achieved to improve bus service provision across Wiltshire.
47. The BSIP is published as **(Appendix 1)** and It is this document that this paper is seeking Cabinet's permission to agree for submission to government by 31 October.

### **Overview and Scrutiny Engagement**

48. The Environment Select Committee was presented with a paper outlining the contents of this paper at its 7 September meeting. The committee expressed much interest in the paper and its positive outcomes for the people of Wiltshire. At the time the committee was only able to review the high-level interventions of the BSIP, as it was incomplete at that time. The committee agreed the proposals outlined in the paper which were:

It is recommended that the committee:

- (i) Notes the intention for Cabinet to agree the Subsidised Bus Service Fund be committed as defined in the table in paragraph 21.
- (ii) Notes the progress on the Rural Mobility Fund (RMF) project and that a further progress report will be submitted in the future.
- (iii) Notes and comments upon the emerging ambitions outlined in the Wiltshire Bus Service Improvement Plan (BSIP) which will form the backbone of our future Bus strategy – Connected Wiltshire and is to be submitted to the DfT by 31 October.

### **Safeguarding Implications**

49. There are no safeguarding implications as a direct result of this proposal.

### **Public Health Implications**

50. There are no public health issues arising directly from this report.

## **Procurement Implications**

### **Subsidised Bus Service Funding**

51. Additional services will need to be procured as part of this process. The exact nature of the procurement process will depend on which element is being considered.
52. It will be possible in some cases to amend an existing contract under the de minimis guidelines of the Transport Act 1985. This would be used for small scale amendments to contracts.
53. In other cases, the bus service being amended is run on a commercial basis, and the present operator has the necessary resource in the right places and at the right times to commit to the additional service. Again, this extra provision can be procured on a de minimis or direct award basis.
54. In some cases, it may be necessary to go out to tender for the additional provision. This would occur where new provision is required which is not an adjustment of, or addition to existing journeys.
55. All procurement will be undertaken within the scope of our existing Dynamic Purchasing System.

### **Rural Mobility Fund**

56. There are a number of distinct procurement phases within this project:
  - Consultancy Support has been procured through our framework agreement with Atkins.
  - Booking App and associated back office and routing software – will be procured on a competitive basis, but the route to market is yet to be defined.
  - Bus service provision will be procured via the usual Dynamic Purchasing System used for public transport procurement in Wiltshire. It is currently considered necessary to terminate the present two bus, 6-days a week, day-time only contract in the area and replace it with a four-bus contract with some journeys running in the evenings and on Sundays.

Additional information will be provided to Cabinet as the project progresses.

### **National Bus Strategy**

57. The BSIP has no procurement implications as it is a high-level aspirational document.
58. The EP and EP Schemes, which will be developed from the BSIP, will involve procurement activity and will follow the appropriate procurement processes.

## **Equalities Impact of the Proposals**

59. The following protected characteristics have been identified in an Equality Evidence Analysis:

- Age
- Disability
- Low Incomes
- Rurality
- People with no access to private transport
- Military status
- Pregnancy and Maternity
- Race
- Religion and Belief
- Sex
- Shift / Part-time workers
- Carers

60. The first six characteristics are likely to be impacted greater than the rest and the following is a short summary for each of these six protected characteristics:

- *Age* - Younger and older people are more reliant on bus services and less likely to have access to a car. Also, fewer young people now hold driving licences and we live in an increasingly 'ageing society'. Younger people need affordable bus services to enable them to take up opportunities in education and work, and to increase their independence. Research has shown that many older people place particular value on 'local' and 'daytime' travel and predominantly travel for shopping, to access key services (notably healthcare) or to visit family and friends. Both groups also benefit from the health benefits of using public transport through encouraging outside activity and mobility.
- *Disability* - People with disabilities are less likely to drive and therefore could become marginalized from the wider community and more reliant on support services without independent travel options, such as supported bus services to provide them access to employment opportunities and essential services or, to visit friends and family. Disabled people are also likely to need more trips to GPs and hospitals for regular medical appointments.
- *Low incomes* - People on low incomes are particularly reliant upon local public transport services and a lack of available and adequate services can be a significant barrier to accessing employment opportunities and essential services. Public transport can also provide health benefits (as people walk more and drive less) which can be particularly beneficial for people from socio-economically deprived areas which typically have lower levels of health.
- *Rurality* - In rural areas, settlements are dispersed, and homes, jobs and services are scattered – access to everyday opportunities and services can therefore be challenging. Rural bus services can help combat social exclusion by enabling non-drivers to access shops, education, training,



and essential services. They are also important for the local economy; small businesses in rural areas need good accessibility for their employees and rural buses can encourage visitors and tourists.

- *People with no access to private transport* - are particularly reliant upon local public transport services and a lack of available and adequate bus services can be a significant barrier to accessing employment opportunities and essential services.
- *Military Status* - Military personnel and their families are often located in camps in (semi) rural locations. Therefore, withdrawn or reduced supported bus services will reduce travel options to access essential services or visit friends and family. There is also an increased risk of social isolation.

### **Environmental and Climate Change Considerations**

61. Wiltshire Council has declared a climate emergency and it will be imperative for the BSIP to reflect the objectives of the Council's new climate strategy. Public transport, along with cycling and walking, plays a pivotal role in the reduction of carbon emissions through reduced car use and in turn improved air quality. Without an effective and ambitious active travel and public transport strategy it will not be possible to achieve the objectives set out in Wiltshire's climate strategy, and the government's Transport Decarbonisation Strategy
62. The five largest bus companies in the UK have all pledged that they will only purchase zero emission vehicles as set by the government timetable. This will likely take some time to filter down to bus services operated in Wiltshire, favouring the more city and urban set ups, but nevertheless a real step change for the industry. Future iterations of the BSIP and or the EP will need to consider zero emission and air quality issues further and until zero emission vehicles are readily available for Wiltshire operators perhaps Euro 6 engine types could be considered as they are the cleanest diesel engine available.
63. By having more buses carrying more passengers will see an increase in modal shift and therefore remove car journeys across Wiltshire. A fully laden double deck bus for example can eliminate 70 car journeys.

### **Risks that may arise if the proposed decision and related work is not taken**

64. Whilst no specifics have been identified by the DfT, it has made it very clear that any LTA failing to engage with the NBS will receive no funding from the Government. Therefore, from April 2022, only LTAs with an EP will be able to access the new discretionary streams of Government bus funding. In addition, only services operated under these statutory agreements will be eligible for the reformed Bus Service Operators Grant (BSOG), subject to consultation. The DfT will also consider an LTA's performance with respect to the policies set out in its BSIP when considering funding allocations for wider, non-bus local transport schemes.
65. Already allocated funding would need to be returned to government, which would not only be reputationally damaging, but would be a retrograde step in the

development of public transport and its contribution to the Council's wider objectives.

**Risks that may arise if the proposed decision is taken and actions that will be taken to manage these risks**

Risk	Mitigation
<p>Available skills and resources to deliver all areas of the NBS</p> <p>Uncertainty over long term funding post the current parliament</p> <p>A shortage of bus drivers to cater for additional demand</p>	<p>Additional capacity money has been allocated by government to address this. This allocation is ringfenced.</p> <p>A funding risk assessment will need to be compiled by both Wiltshire Council and the bus operators to ensure that schemes put forward as part of the EP process do not adversely affect both parties on a long term basis.</p> <p>A close working relationship with Wiltshire's bus operators will be maintained to understand any shortfall and consideration in the BSIP to help grow employment in this sector will be made</p>

**Financial Implications**

**Subsidised Bus Service Funding**

66. The DfT awarded Wiltshire Council £671k on a formula basis. This money must be committed by 31 March 2022 and should be spent by 31 March 2023. The expectation from DfT is that these schemes will be commercial once funding has expired (fares taken on the bus will cover the operating costs incurred); however, in a rural environment such as Wiltshire, this is unlikely to be the case. However, we believe that there is scope to include the continuation of those schemes which show promise to be included in our wider BSIP improvement Plan, which will be funded by central government.

## Rural Mobility Fund

67. Wiltshire Council bid for and was successful in receiving a £1.2 million grant to expand upon the existing Demand Responsive Bus Service in the Pewsey Vale. The following table is an indicative breakdown of the costs of the project.

		Year 1	Year 2	Year 3	Year 4	Total
		21/22	22/23	23/24	24/25	
Costs	Project Manager	£29,167	£35,000	£35,000	£35,000	<b>£134,167</b>
	Vehicles & drivers weekday / Sat daytime	£0	£241,770	£290,124	£290,124	<b>£822,018</b>
	Immediate service enhancements	£30,000	£0	£0	£0	<b>£30,000</b>
	Software set up	£30,000	£0	£0	£0	<b>£30,000</b>
	Ongoing Software Costs	£0	£37,833	£45,400	£45,400	<b>£128,633</b>
	Summer Sunday Driver	£0	£0	£7,500	£7,500	<b>£15,000</b>
	Evening drivers	£0	£38,375	£46,050	£46,050	<b>£130,475</b>
	Marketing	£0	£20,000	£10,000	£10,000	<b>£40,000</b>
	Other	£10,000	£20,000	£10,000	£10,000	<b>£50,000</b>
	<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>£99,167</b>	<b>£392,978</b>	<b>£434,074</b>	<b>£444,074</b>	<b>£1,370,293</b>
Funded by	Income - cash fares + concessions	£0	-£10,128	-£30,000	-£44,000	<b>-£84,128</b>
	H2S transport contribution	£0	-£25,000	-£30,000	-£30,000	<b>-£85,000</b>
	RMF funding	-£89,167	-	-	-	<b>-</b>
	<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>-£89,167</b>	<b>-</b>	<b>-</b>	<b>-</b>	<b>-</b>
<b>Funding difference</b>		<b>£10,000</b>	<b>-£12,816</b>	<b>£3,408</b>	<b>-£592</b>	<b>£0</b>

As part of the bid submission S151 Officer approval was required.

## BSIP

68. The BSIP must be submitted to government by the 31<sup>st</sup> October 2021. It is not expected to be vastly detailed nor granular, running to hundreds of pages. Nor will it be taken as definitive or immutable commitments or statements of intent on Wiltshire's part. Its main purpose is to get everyone thinking about what questions need to be addressed in the area, to explore possible answers, and to provide an early basis for Government funding decisions in the autumn and winter in preparation for the financial year 2022/23 when transformational funding begins.

69. The DfT expects Wiltshire's Enhanced Partnership Scheme/Plan to be funded by a combination of formula and our level of ambition as set out in the Bus Service Improvement Plan.
70. There may, however, be cases where the Council may wish to "match-fund" and the DfT has indicated that it will look favourably on such arrangements as it demonstrates commitment, but any such plans would be subject to separate submission(s) to Cabinet.
71. Recognising the scale of work involved in enacting the NBS the DfT has provided, on a formula basis, £306k to fund additional resources. So far £55k has been spent with our consultants, Atkins, to conduct data analysis beyond our usual remit in preparation of our BSIP. Going forward we will use the remaining funds on a blend of newly appointed in-house staff and additional specialist consultancy help when that is most appropriate.
72. Whilst no specifics have been identified by the DfT, it has made it very clear that any LTA failing to engage with the NBS will receive no funding from the Government. Therefore, from April 2022, only LTAs with an Enhanced Partnership will be able to access the new discretionary streams of Government bus funding. In addition, only services operated under these statutory agreements will be eligible for the reformed Bus Service Operators Grant (BSOG), subject to consultation. The DfT will also consider an LTA's performance with respect to the policies set out in its BSIP when considering funding allocations for wider, non-bus local transport schemes.

**(Appendix 4)** is a table setting out the indicative costs of some of the schemes in priority order. This table is designed to help government understand the appetite for transformational investments which support the bus sector in the short, medium, and long term. It in no way means either Wiltshire Council, or the bus operator are committed to anything financially. Schemes that can attract part, or match funding will be considered more favourably. The only scheme where this is possible in Wiltshire currently is the replacement of the road side Real Time Passenger Information (RTPI), whereby £220,000 has been set aside to replace signs in and around the Salisbury city region funded through Section 106 monies. The remaining sign replacement across the county will hopefully come from the BSIP.

### **Legal Implications**

73. There are no legal implications for the Subsidised Bus Service Funding Rural Mobility Fund or Bus Service Improvement Plan which will be provided under the terms of the Transport Act 1985 the Transport Act 2000 and the Bus Services Act 2017.
74. The Enhanced Partnership stage of the National Bus Strategy will have legal implications, and a further paper will be brought before committee at the appropriate time.

## Workforce Implications

75. The NBS will place significant additional demands upon our staff resource. The DfT has so far awarded Wiltshire Council £306,000 of additional capacity funding, as it recognises that years of austerity have eroded much of the capacity and skills within LTAs to deliver on such initiatives. Some of this funding will be spent by employing the services of Atkins as consultants, but there will be a need to employ additional staff, as whilst consultants give us the ability to meet tight deadlines in the short term, it is important that we have the internal staff resource to meet the on-going requirements of the NBS.
76. We intend to appoint to a:
- National Bus Strategy Officer to oversee the implementation and on-going development of the strategy in Wiltshire.
  - National Bus Strategy Support and Marketing Officer to support the above and fill the marketing and public awareness gap that Atkins have highlighted.
  - Demand Responsive Transport Manager to oversee all DRT projects, including the Rural Mobility Fund Pewsey Vale scheme.
77. The DfT has established a Bus Centre of Excellence, which will provide courses and accreditation for officers, as well as a repository for essential information and best practice. Whilst details are awaited, we anticipate that making use of this resource, possibly as part of Wiltshire's apprenticeship programme, would be advantageous.
78. Whilst the costs of this extra staff resources will be funded from the NBS and the RMF initially, there will be a need for these posts beyond the current funding. It is unclear what funding may be available from the DfT in the longer term, but it is likely that these posts will need to be funded internally from the 24/25 financial year.
79. The NBS aims to increase ridership and in doing so more buses and bus drivers will be required. Whilst the recruitment of drivers will be the responsibility of the bus companies, there are concerns about the number of additional bus drivers it will be possible to employ. Not only are there signs of over employment in some sectors, but there are also currently incentives for bus drivers to re-train as lorry drivers, or to switch to parcel delivery. How these trends play out in the medium term remains to be seen, but they do cause concern.

## Conclusions

It is recommended that Cabinet:

- Agrees to the Subsidised Bus Service Fund being committed as defined in the table in paragraph 22
- Notes the progress on the Rural Mobility Fund (RMF) project and that a further progress report will be submitted in the future.

- Agrees that Wiltshire's Bus Service Improvement Plan (BSIP) (**Appendices 1 and 4**), which will form the backbone of our future Bus strategy – Connected Wiltshire, is submitted to the DfT by 31 October 2021.

**Report Author:**

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**Appendices**

Appendix 1 – Bus Service Improvement Plan (BSIP)

Appendix 2 – Summary of consultation responses

Appendix 3 – Letter from Baroness Vere

Appendix 4 – BSIP Outline Funding Table

**Background Papers**

HTW – 21 – 21 – Cabinet Member Decision Report, National Bus Strategy  
Environment Select Committee of 7 September