

<b>Subject:</b>	Bus Services in RBWM
<b>Reason for briefing note:</b>	To inform the Infrastructure O&S Panel of the current situation with bus routes in the Royal Borough and the implications of the recently published National Bus Strategy.
<b>Responsible officer(s):</b>	Chris Joyce, Head of Infrastructure, Sustainability and Economic Growth
<b>Senior leader sponsor:</b>	Chris Joyce, Head of Infrastructure, Sustainability and Economic Growth
<b>Date:</b>	8 <sup>th</sup> June 2021

www.rbwm.gov.uk



## SUMMARY

Bus services were deregulated through the Transport Act 1985. Therefore, private bus companies are able to operate on a commercial basis, setting routes, timetables and fares. The Council is able through the powers set out in the Act secure provision of any further public transport services it considers necessary through contracts for supported services. These supported services receive funding from the Council.

In March 2021, the Government announced a new national bus strategy 'Bus Back Better'. This was followed by guidance on Bus Service Improvement Plans in May 2021. The strategy and guidance require Local Transport Authorities across the country to commit to a new model for operating bus services by June 2021 and to produce a Bus Service Improvement Plan by October 2021.

## 1 BACKGROUND

- 1.1 The purpose of this paper is to provide a background on the bus industry and how it operates. It describes the bus services that currently operate within the Royal Borough, how they are funded, and the implications of the recent National Bus Strategy published by the Government in March 2021.
- 1.2 Bus services outside of London have been deregulated since the Transport Act 1985 came into force in 1986. This led to private bus companies being able to set routes, timetables and fares for services they wish to operate on a commercial basis. The council is able to contract bus services it believes are necessary to meet public transport need, that would otherwise not be provided on a commercial basis.
- 1.3 Bus use has generally been in decline across England for the last 10 years, with some small pockets of success where figures have been stable or growing. Bus demand within the Royal Borough of Windsor and Maidenhead is one of the lowest of any Local Authority Area in the country. This is in part due to the geography of the Borough with multiple towns and centres of demand, fairly low levels of density and rural areas that are all difficult to serve with traditional bus services.

- 1.4 The pandemic has impacted the bus industry significantly. Demand fell as low as 10% of pre-pandemic levels and it is still at 62% of normal levels. The demand for transport has fallen with the impact of lockdowns and increased working from home, but this has more significantly impacted public transport.
- 1.5 Government guidance was to avoid public transport in the early stages of the pandemic, confidence has been reduced and social distancing was substantially impacting capacity. Government has provided different forms of support to Local Authorities, bus and rail companies during the pandemic, recognising the key roles they play.
- 1.6 The Government has produced a National Bus Strategy, published in March 2021. This sets out ambitions to return bus demand to pre-pandemic demand and beyond. This will be by adopting new approaches to delivery, either enhanced partnerships or through a franchise model. Guidance was released in May 2021, that provides further guidance for local authorities and bus operators to support the delivery of these new models and the development of Bus Service Improvement Plans across the country.
- 1.7 This fits with the wider policy agenda of the Council. Through the Environment and Climate Strategy, there is a commitment to achieve net zero carbon by 2050 at the latest, with rapid decarbonisation over the next ten years. Given that transport represents about a third of carbon emissions within the borough, public transport has a key role in delivering the outcomes of the strategy.

## **2 KEY IMPLICATIONS**

- 2.1 The National Bus Strategy will require the council to commit to either enhanced partnerships or a franchise model, to continue to receive ongoing funding from central Government. We will also need to prepare a Bus Service Improvement Plan by October 2021.
- 2.2 To support this, the council has received £100k of funding support to support its work. This will be used to support additional capacity within the transport team to deliver on the requirements. This will allow funding for technical support to be provided as well as additional resource with the Council transport team to support development of the strategy.

## **3 DETAILS**

### **Existing routes in the borough**

- 3.1 There are currently 25 bus routes operating within the Borough, of which 11 are commercial and 14 are supported services. These are provided by seven different operators and are summarised in Table 1 below:

**Table 1 – Bus services in RBWM**

<b>Operator</b>	<b>Route</b>	<b>Basis</b>	<b>Area served</b>
Arriva	37	Commercial	High Wycombe - Maidenhead
Bear Buses	305	Supported	Staines - Colnbrook
First	8	Commercial	Slough - Heathrow T5
	4	Commercial	Maidenhead - Heathrow T5
Reading	702	Commercial	Legoland - London
	703	Commercial	Bracknell - Heathrow T5
Red Eagle	63/68	Commercial	Slough - Maidenhead
Thames Valley	3	Supported	Maidenhead
	2	Commercial	Slough to Dedworth
	7	Commercial	Maidenhead
	8	Supported	Maidenhead
	5	Commercial	Slough
	9	Supported	Maidenhead
	15	Supported	Maidenhead - Windsor – Slough
	16	Supported	Maidenhead - Windsor
	53	Supported	Bracknell - Maidenhead - Wexham Park
	127	Commercial	Maidenhead – Reading
	234/5	Commercial	Maidenhead
	238	Supported	Maidenhead
	239	Supported	Maidenhead
White Bus	P1	Supported	Windsor park and ride
	W1	Supported	Windsor – Dedworth
	1	Supported	Windsor – Ascot

3.2 The supported services are funded through 10 contracts with different operators. The Council partly or wholly funds these services, equating to a total annual cost to the Council of approximately £870,000 in subsidies.

**National Bus Strategy: ‘Bus back better’**

- 3.3 The Government has set out ambitious plans for bus services across the country. The ambition is to return demand to pre-pandemic levels and beyond through lower and simpler fares, ‘turn up and go’ services, more evening and weekend services and better integration between routes and different forms of travel.
- 3.4 Local Authorities and operators will be required to enter into statutory enhanced partnerships or franchising agreements if they wish to receive new funding to deliver improvements. This presents an opportunity for the Council to work with bus operators on ticketing, fares, timetables, routes and infrastructure. At this stage, no further detail has been provided on what funding will be provided other than top-level funding figures. A copy of the strategy document is included as Appendix A.

### ***Enhanced partnerships***

- 3.5 By the end of June 2021, government expects all Local Transport Authorities to commit to establishing Enhanced Partnerships across their entire areas under the Bus Services Act, and all operators to co-operate with the LTA throughout the process. An Enhanced Partnership is a statutory arrangement under the 2017 Bus Services Act which can specify, for example, timetables and multi-operator ticketing, and allows the LTA to take over the role of registering bus services from the Traffic Commissioners.
- 3.6 From July 2021, only LTAs who meet these requirements will continue to receive the COVID-19 Bus Services Support Grant (CBSSG) or any new sources of bus funding from the Government's £3bn budget
- 3.7 Actual delivery of these partnerships expected by April 2022. From then, the new discretionary forms of bus funding from Government will only be available to services operated, or measures taken, under an enhanced partnership. Also, only services operated under these statutory agreements will be eligible for the reformed Bus Service Operators Grant.

### ***Bus service improvement plans***

- 3.8 By the end of October 2021, Government expects all LTAs to publish a local Bus Service Improvement Plan. Guidance has been recently been released by Government on the preparation of BSIP for both local authorities and operators. The guidance is currently being reviewed to make sure that the Council is able to meet its obligations to develop the plan. A copy of the guidance is included as Appendix B.

## **4 NEXT STEPS**

- 4.1 An urgent paper will be taken to Cabinet to formally sign off the commitment to enter into enhanced partnerships with operators. Initial meetings are currently being held with all of the operators in the Borough to discuss the potential for enhanced partnerships.
- 4.2 A programme for the preparation of the Bus Service Improvement Plan is being developed. This will form part of the wider review of the Council's Transport Strategy, as set out in the Borough's Environment and Climate Strategy, adopted in December 2020.