

COUNCIL MEETING – 16 JULY 2025

RECOMMENDATION FROM HIGHWAYS AND TRANSPORT COMMITTEE: BUS SERVICE IMPROVEMENT PLAN - 2025/26 DELIVERY PROGRAMME - APPROVAL OF SUPPLEMENTARY REVENUE AND CAPITAL ESTIMATES

Recommendation:

Full Council is recommended to approve the associated, fully funded Supplementary Revenue and Capital Estimates for the value of revenue funding £2,879,963 and capital funding £2,122,646.

Extract from the minutes of the meeting of the Highways and Transport Committee held on 19 June 2025.

6 BUS SERVICE IMPROVEMENT PLAN - 2025/26 DELIVERY PROGRAMME

The Committee considered a report on the Cheshire East Bus Service Improvement Plan (BSIP) Delivery Plan 2025/26. The plan was submitted to the Department for Transport (DfT) as a draft document on 31 March 2025, in line with DfT requirements. Any amendments required by Committee would be incorporated and a final version submitted to DfT by the end of June 2025.

Cheshire East Council had been allocated £5,444,474 from the DfT as Local Bus Grant 2025/26. A summary of the proposed schemes for delivery using the revenue and/or capital funding was set out at Appendix 2 to the report.

It was noted that most bus routes were now close to the level they were at pre pandemic which was seen as a positive indicator of recovery. The use of available funding, both revenue and capital had supported a range of initiatives aimed at incentivising bus use.

Councillor H Moss addressed the committee as a visiting member and requested an amendment to the proposal for the continuation of the 16-19 Pass scheme in the draft plan. Councillor Moss stated that the incentive would do nothing to assist the younger age group in the community who used public transport to attend school and requested that the lower age restriction be removed from 16 years to include everybody under the age of 19. This would have a positive impact on the environment and every child would be able to benefit from the initiative.

The Committee asked a question in respect of what the logic was for selecting the cohort of 16–19-year-olds over a younger cohort for a £1 flat fare.

In response officers stated that the primary rationale for focusing on the 16 – 19 age group was that this cohort was typically no longer in compulsory education and at this stage in life began to acquire driving licences and access to cars. That made them a key target for interventions aimed at encouraging public transport use. The introduction of the £1 fare for that age group was a trial initiative to assess whether fare incentives could influence travel behaviour before driving became a regular option.

Affordability also remained a significant factor. Extending the £1 fare offer to all under- 16s would require substantial additional funding primarily to compensate transport operators for lost revenue. Officers had conducted an initial estimate of the current position to understand the financial implications of expanding the scheme to younger age groups and that was circa £500k. The reduced fare was likely to increase ridership and generate extra trips which would add to this cost.

In response to a question about whether alternative options could be explored in the absence of current funding – such as negotiating with operators to extend the junior season ticket – officers confirmed that related work was ongoing. They were drawing on insight from the multi-operator ticketing initiative and exploring what types of schemes could be developed for under 16s to enhance accessibility and affordability. Assurance was given that the suggestion regarding junior season tickets would be taken forward for further discussion with the relevant operators.

A question was raised in respect of the cost effectiveness of targeting the 16 – 19-year age group and whether it would be more equitable to consider the cumulative amount paid by young people who began paying full fare from the age of 12 and whether providing equivalent support to that group might be more impactful.

The Chair acknowledged the importance of the issue but noted that any decision on changes to the scheme would need further consideration.

RESOLVED: (Unanimously)

That the Highways & Transport Committee:

1. Approve the Bus Service Improvement Plan (BSIP) Delivery Plan 2025/26 (see Appendix 1) for final submission to the Department for Transport (DfT) by the end of June 2025.
2. **Recommend to Full Council approval of the associated, fully funded Supplementary Revenue and Capital Estimates for the value of revenue funding £2,879,963 and capital funding £2,122,646.**

3. Approve the proposals for spending the Council's allocation of Local Bus Grant funding (value £5,444,474) for the financial year 2025/26 (see Appendix 2) and delegate the authority to spend the funding to the Director of Transport and Infrastructure, in consultation with the Enhanced Partnership Board.
4. Approve the specification (see Appendix 3) for a modernised Demand Responsive Transport (DRT) service as part of the Council's transformation programme and delegate authority to the Director of Transport and Infrastructure to deliver the service in line with the specification.