

## **Regeneration, Culture and Environment Overview and Scrutiny Committee**

**11 June 2026**

### **Member's Item: Bus Services in Medway**

Report from: Bhupinder Gill, Assistant Director - Legal and Governance

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#### Summary

This report sets out a response to a Member's item raised by Councillor Field, in relation to Bus Services in Medway.

#### 1. Recommendation

- 1.1. The Committee is asked to note the comments from officers and bus service providers in response to the Member's item.

#### 2. Budget and policy framework

- 2.1. Under Medway Constitution Overview and Scrutiny rules (Chapter 4, Part 5, Paragraph 9.1) Councillor Field has requested that an item on this matter is included on the agenda for this meeting.

#### 3. The Issue

- 3.1. Councillor Field has requested that an item be placed on the agenda and the reasons are set out in Appendix 1.

The session objectives are set out below:

- Understand the current role of Bus Services in Medway and what potential there is for growth. This includes opportunities for supporting new housing, social and economic regeneration, public health and air quality improvements.
- To understand the challenges and opportunities to address the issue of low market growth in Medway and how services could be supported to stimulate economic growth and social cohesion across Medway.

- To understand the key needs and challenges for Medway Bus Users.
- To note the progress of the Bus Services Improvement Plan in achieving its aims.
- To understand the challenges that Bus Operators have in operating service in Medway.

The session would also seek to influence the development of the updated Local Transport Plan. Members of the committee will also seek to address the issues and concerns of Medway residents, and the council will seek to encourage public participation through its communication and social media channels ahead of the session.

- 3.2. At the request of Councillor Field, representatives from Arriva Buses, Nu-Venture, ASD, Chalkwell, Save our Buses, Bus Users UK and the Confederation of Passenger Transport have been invited to the meeting.
- 3.3 The Committee can use any of its powers in dealing with this Member's item, including making recommendations to officers or the Cabinet.

#### 4. Background Information from Officers

##### 4.1 Current Bus Network and Operators in Medway

Bus services in Medway operate within a deregulated market, with the majority of services provided commercially by private operators. Medway Council provides financial support for socially necessary services where provision would not otherwise be viable, particularly during evenings and Sundays.

The network provides connectivity across the Medway towns—Rochester, Chatham, Gillingham, Rainham and Strood—as well as links to surrounding areas in Kent. The principal operator is Arriva Kent & Surrey, which operates the majority of services and provides the core network, including high-frequency routes linking key town centres, residential areas and key destinations such as hospitals, retail centres and railway stations. Other operators, including ASD, Nu-Venture and Chalkwell, provide additional services, typically focused on supported routes and lower-demand areas.

The network is characterised by a largely radial structure focused on Chatham as the main interchange, with higher-frequency services on core corridors and more limited provision in suburban and rural areas. Service levels are influenced by commercial viability and wider operating conditions.

Bus service performance is affected by a range of factors, including congestion on key corridors, operational pressures, and changes in travel demand. Recent data indicates that approximately 83% of services operate within the Traffic Commissioner's "on-time" window.

Bus services play an important role in supporting access to employment, education and healthcare, as well as wider objectives including regeneration, housing growth, and improved public health and air quality.

#### 4.2 Bus Service Improvement Plan (BSIP)

Medway Council's Bus Service Improvement Plan (BSIP), updated in 2024, sets out a partnership approach with local bus operators to deliver a more reliable, frequent and attractive bus network, in line with the Government's National Bus Strategy.

#### 4.3 Funding Overview

Medway has secured a mix of government funding streams to support delivery of the BSIP, although this is at a lower level than originally bid for.

- Initial BSIP funding (2023–2025) provided approximately £1.4 million of revenue funding, used to support service enhancements, maintain at-risk routes and deliver promotional initiatives
- Ongoing funding is provided through Bus Service Improvement Plan Plus (BSIP+) and wider Local Transport Fund allocations, providing a multi-year funding settlement
- Current allocations (2025/26) are approximately £1.4 million revenue funding and £2.6 million capital funding, with similar levels anticipated annually to 2029/30

In addition to BSIP funding, Medway Council provides significant ongoing support for local bus services, including:

- Approximately £4.1 million per year for concessionary travel (ENCTS) reimbursement
- Around £1.7 million per year for supported bus services
- Additional BSIP-funded service uplifts and capital investment

Given the level of funding available, the Council has prioritised a focused programme of high-impact, value-for-money interventions, particularly on key corridors and at major interchanges.

#### 4.4 Key Areas of Delivery

The BSIP programme focuses on:

- Supporting and enhancing bus services, including evenings and weekends
- Improving reliability through targeted bus priority measures on key corridors
- Upgrading bus stops, shelters and passenger information
- Promoting fares initiatives and improved ticketing
- Supporting the longer-term transition to low-emission bus fleets

This work is supported by the Medway Local Bus Infrastructure Plan (LBIP), which identifies priority corridors and targeted interventions to improve journey times and reliability.

#### 4.5 Delivery and Objectives

The BSIP is delivered through an Enhanced Partnership between Medway Council and local bus operators, providing a formal framework for joint working, investment decisions and performance monitoring.

The overall aim of this approach is to:

- Increase bus patronage
- Improve journey time reliability
- Enhance accessibility and inclusion
- Support wider environmental, economic and regeneration objectives

While current funding has enabled a programme of improvements, it is recognised that the level of investment remains below that originally identified as required to deliver transformational change to the bus network.

### 5. Risk Management

5.1. There are no significant risks to the Council arising from this report.

### 6. Legal and Financial Implications

6.1. There are no legal or financial implications for the Council arising from this report.

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#### Appendices

Appendix 1 – Members Item request from Councillor Field

#### Background papers

None