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<b>Subject:</b>	<b>CREATION OF LOCAL BUS FOCUS GROUP</b>
<b>Meeting and Date:</b>	<b>Cabinet – 3 February 2025</b>
<b>Report of:</b>	<b>Helen Lamb, Head of Finance and Investment</b>
<b>Portfolio Holder:</b>	<b>Councillor Jamie Pout, Portfolio Holder for Transport, Licensing and Environmental Services</b>
<b>Decision Type:</b>	<b>Executive Non-Key Decision</b>
<b>Classification:</b>	<b>Unrestricted</b>

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**Purpose of the report:** To create a Local Bus Focus Group for Dover District.

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**Recommendation:** To agree to the proposal to create a Local Bus Focus Group for Dover District and to approve the terms of reference and membership of it as set out in Appendix 1 to this report.

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## 1. Summary

The report seeks approval to create a Local Bus Focus Group administered by the District Council to replace the terminated district Quality Bus Partnerships which were administered by Kent County Council.

## 2. Introduction and Background

- 2.1 Kent County Council (KCC) previously managed and ran Quality Bus Partnerships in each district. These consisted of KCC and Dover District Council (DDC) members, KCC and DDC Officer representatives, and the commercial bus operators in Dover district. They were used to raise local issues, discussing planning applications that may have impact and any highway and/or parking related items. Whilst it was not a statutory requirement, it was resourced and administered by KCC. These meetings ceased to exist when Government started development of its National Bus Strategy.
- 2.2 In March 2021, Government launched its National Bus Strategy, the national blueprint to help improve infrastructure, bus travel and air quality. Each area (KCC) had to respond by developing a Bus Service Improvement Plan. In April 2022, KCC received an indicative allocation of £35 million from the Department of Transport. This was very prescriptive and primarily for capital schemes.
- 2.3 As part of the funding, Government required that each area (KCC) set up an Enhanced Partnership. This is a statutory board, without which KCC will not receive their funding. KCC have established their Enhanced Partnership board which is chaired by the Cabinet Member for Highways and Infrastructure at KCC. It is an officer-led meeting, high level and strategic. Bus operators are represented, however there are no representatives from districts.
- 2.4 There are also Enhanced Partnership Scheme Monitoring Groups set up for East Kent, West Kent and Kent Thameside. DDC is part of East Kent and has one place at that meeting, attended by the Transport and Parking Services Manager. KCC run and manage these meetings and it is anticipated that these will run twice a year. They will be the group that monitors the schemes in that area linked to the Bus Service Improvement Plan.

- 2.5 Enhanced Partnership Scheme Monitoring Groups are high level and as such will not cover any local district issues. KCC feel that this will leave a gap and are suggesting Enhanced Partnership Local Focus Group meetings be set up in each district to fill this gap. They are happy to send representatives but cannot resource them as they did for the Quality Bus Partnerships and so are asking districts to set up and resource them. These are not a statutory requirement of the hierarchy.
  - 2.6 KCC envisage that the Enhanced Partnership Local Focus Groups are a replacement for the previous Quality Bus Partnerships meetings in that they are a way of local issues from the bus companies being raised. The idea would be that they are held every six months and be informal. A standard agenda would include local bus network issues and aspirations, planning and development updates, parking enforcement issues and any other items for DDC. Representatives at these meetings will be district councillors (leading and chairing the meetings), KCC Public Transport, KCC Planning and Transport Development, Primary Bus Operators and district council officers from planning and parking. The Terms of Reference of the meetings are attached at Appendix 1.
  - 2.7 The Local Bus Group recognises the important contribution that the views of local bus users and community groups can make to discussions on local bus services. The Chairman of the Local Bus Group will therefore, where they consider appropriate, agree the attendance of representatives of such groups. Attendance shall only be by invitation and attendees may only attend and speak at a meeting with the permission of the Chairman of the Local Bus Group but may not vote nor propose a motion or an amendment.
3. **Identification of Options**
    - 3.1 Option 1: The creation of a Local Bus Focus Group managed by Dover District Council
    - 3.2 Option 2: Not to set up a new group.
4. **Evaluation of Options**
    - 4.1 **Option 1 is recommended.** Such a group would allow for DDC to have strategic and operational level input on Dover district specific issues within the current bus regulations structure.
    - 4.2 Option 2 is not recommended as DDC will not be able to have input into district specific issues within the current bus regulations structure.
5. **Resource Implications**
    - 5.1 None.
6. **Climate Change and Environmental Implications**
    - 6.1 Bus services help to decarbonise local transport, creating a focus group will support these services.
7. **Corporate Implications**
    - 7.1 Comment from the Director of Finance (linked to the MTFP): Accountancy has been consulted and has no further comments (MR)
    - 7.2 Comment from the Solicitor to the Council: The Solicitor to the Council has been consulted in the preparation of this report and has no further comments to make.
    - 7.3 Comment from the Equalities Officer: This report seeking agreement of the proposal to create a Local Bus Focus Group for Dover District does not specifically highlight any equality implications, however in discharging their duties members are required to

comply with the public sector equality duty as set out in Section 149 of the Equality Act 2010 <http://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/2010/15/section/149>

8. **Appendices**

Appendix 1 – Terms of Reference

9. **Background Papers**

KCC Bus Service Improvement Plan

National Bus Strategy

Contact Officer: Clare Connellan, Transport & Parking Services Manager