

**Title:** Bus Service Improvement Plan – Additional Staff  
**Report of:** Heather Jones, Head of Enhanced Partnerships  
**Portfolio:** Transport

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## Report Summary

The purpose of this report is to request a delegated decision to enable the Chief Executive to approve and sign Grant Funding Agreements (GFAs) with a total value of £499,950 for interventions funded by the Bus Service Improvement Plan (BSIP).

The total value requested is for additional staff 'Bus Champions', 'Bus Ambassadors' and Bus Contract Compliance Officers to be employed by Northumberland County Council and Durham County Council.

## Recommendations

The Chief Executive is recommended to:

- I. Approve a total of £499,950 BSIP spend for additional staff 'Bus Champions', 'Bus Ambassadors' and Bus Contract Compliance Officers to be employed by Northumberland County Council and Durham County Council until 31 March 2026.
- II. Approve entry into appropriate Grant Funding Agreements.

## A. Context

### 1. Background

- 1.1 In April 2022, following a bid for BSIP funding, a total of £163.5 million was allocated to the North East region by the Department for Transport (DfT).
- 1.2 The BSIP sets out a wide range of significant proposed improvements to every aspect of bus services, which we are delivering through the North East Enhanced Partnership, a formal partnership of the North East Combined Authority, bus operators, local authorities and Nexus.
- 1.3 The total allocation was made up of interventions covering 'Customer Experience', 'Fares and Ticketing', 'Highways and Infrastructure', and 'Network Improvements'. A variety of projects have been created under each of these headline interventions.
- 1.4 The BSIP Programme fund allocations were approved by the Joint Transport Committee in June 2022.
- 1.5 In March 2024, JTC Members approved and allocated the remaining unallocated BSIP revenue funding to several sub-programmes which align to the refreshed BSIP and the Enhanced Partnership Plan and Scheme. This included an indicative allocation for the Community Bus Partnerships and Additional Staffing sub-programmes of £2.86m of which these roles form part.
- 1.6 On 30 July 2024, the unspent BSIP budget of £60.811 million revenue and £40.468 million capital, was approved at the North East Combined Authority Cabinet and delegated authority was granted to the Chief Executive to enter into the required grant funding agreements to facilitate these interventions.
- 1.7 Each role is essential to delivering the aims and objectives of the BSIP and therefore the wider objectives of the combined authority.

- 1.8 Bus Champions will provide community engagement activities to encourage more people to use the bus; Bus Ambassadors will provide additional customer service and information for bus passengers and the Bus Contract Compliance Officer will ensure that tendered bus services are meeting their contractual obligations.
- 1.9 Breakdown of positions being funded:
- Bus Champions: 1 FTE Northumberland County Council, 2 FTE Durham County Council
  - Bus Ambassadors: 1 FTE Northumberland County Council, 2 FTE Durham County Council
  - Bus Contract Compliance Officer: 1 FTE Northumberland County Council
- 1.10 Grant Funding Agreements (GFA) are being developed, prepared, and will be approved by Newcastle City Council Legal for onwards agreement with scheme promoters. It has been determined that in respect of subsidy control, the use of BSIP funds for the purposes stated above is not a subsidy as the Grant to be provided to the Recipient relates to payment for a role to support delivery of the BSIP. This is funding provided from a public body (North East CA) to another public body (Durham County Council and Northumberland County Council). As such, the Grant is considered to fall outside the scope of the Subsidy Control Act 2022 and is therefore made on the basis that there is no element of Subsidy.

## **B. Impact on North East Combined Authority Objectives**

BSIP and its programme of activity supports the strategic aspirations of the North East CA, as detailed in the North East Devolution Deal signed in December 2022 and the Deeper Devolution Deal agreed at the June meeting of the North East CA Cabinet.

The roles recruited through this project will support us in delivering our BSIP and will impact the following objectives of the North East Combined Authority:

Improving wellbeing – the roles will help to increase modal shift from private to public transport. The impact of this will be a reduction in air pollution, thereby improving wellbeing across the region.

## **C. Key risks**

The main risk of this work is that the roles do not deliver what is expected and required. This would have an impact on the aims and expected benefits of the BSIP.

In order to mitigate this risk, the GFAs will reference the objectives of the roles and the Enhanced Partnership will require Northumberland and Durham County Councils to submit written reports with their quarterly claims, detailing the activities being conducted by each employee and its impact towards BSIP objectives and outputs.

In addition, there will be a regular meeting cycle between North East CA officers and the Bus Champion roles to discuss planned projects and interventions that arise from the community engagement activities and to share best practice.

To retain maximum flexibility, Northumberland County Council may adopt a multi-skilled approach rather than having specific individual roles, however the core tasks and functions of the three defined BSIP roles are specified within the Grant Funding Agreements and must still be met.

If we have concerns that the employees are not being used for the purpose outlined in the job description, we will withhold funding and work with the partner organisation to rectify the issue.

## **D. Financial and other resources implications**

The funding for these staffing interventions is being drawn from the BSIP grant funding, which has already been received by the North East Combined Authority and held for the purpose of delivering

the aims and expected benefits of the BSIP. Approval for allocation of the funding has been given by the North East Joint Transport Committee and the North East CA Cabinet, and the Grant Funding Agreements are in line with these decisions. There are no other financial implications for the North East Combined Authority.

The financial profile for the programme is outlined below:

<b>Funding source- BSIP Revenue</b>	<b>2024/25</b>	<b>2025/26</b>	<b>Total</b>
Durham County Council	£92,000.00	£187,950.00	<b>£279,950.00</b>
Northumberland County Council	£59,350.00	£160,650.00	<b>£220,000.00</b>
<b>Total (£)</b>	<b>£151,350.00</b>	<b>£348,600.00</b>	<b>£499,950.00</b>

These posts are funded until 31 March 2026 and will be recruited on fixed term contracts. If these roles are successful in meeting objectives of the programmes then North East CA and its partners will seek to secure additional funding to continue these roles in 2026-27.

#### **E. Legal implications**

The comments of the Monitoring Officer are included in this report.

#### **F. Equalities implications**

The North East CA follows the Public Sector Equality duty and this report has due regard to the need to achieve the objectives set out under s149 of the Equality Act 2010. In June 2024 the North East CA adopted equality objectives to reflect the different roles of the Combined Authority as an employer, a commissioner and deliverer of services, and a civic leader.

In relation to this project, the hiring processes for each role are in line with the Public Sector Equality Duty.

#### **G. Consultation and engagement**

No specific consultation was undertaken for these roles however they are aligned with requirements for delivering the BSIP which were reaffirmed by members of the Enhanced Partnership during the BSIP refresh in June 2024.

#### **H. Appendices**

None

#### **I. Background papers**

The BSIP is available on the North East Combined Authority website [Bus Service Improvement Plan Schemes \(northeast-ca.gov.uk\)](https://www.northeast-ca.gov.uk/bus-service-improvement-plan-schemes)

National Bus Strategy [bus-service-improvement-plans-guidance-to-local-authorities-and-bus-operators-2024.pdf \(publishing.service.gov.uk\)](https://www.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/123456/bus-service-improvement-plans-guidance-to-local-authorities-and-bus-operators-2024.pdf)

#### **J. Contact officers**

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#### **K. Glossary**

BSIP – Bus Service Improvement Plan  
GFA – Grant Funding Agreement

LTA – Local Transport Authority  
UTMC – Urban Traffic Management Centre

**L. Sign-off**

1) Cabinet Member: Yes	2) Director/Head of Service: Yes	3) Director of Finance and Investment: Yes	4) Monitoring Officer: Yes
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