

Policy and Resources Committee	
Meeting Date	18 October 2023
Report Title	Kent County Council's Enhanced Partnership, Local Focus Group
EMT Lead	Emma Wiggins, Director of Regeneration and Neighbourhoods
Head of Service	Joanne Johnson, Head of Regeneration, Economic Development and Property and Interim Head of Planning
Lead Officer	Emma Wiggins, Director of Regeneration and Neighbourhoods
Classification	Open
Recommendations	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. To agree the setting up of a Local Focus Group (LFG) as part of KCC's Enhanced Partnership hierarchy 2. To agree that the LFG reports to the Planning and Transportation Working Group (PTWG) with the Chair and Vice Chair of PTPWG attending the LFG, and representatives from each of the four Area Committees.

1 Purpose of Report and Executive Summary

- 1.1 This report sets out details of the KCC Enhanced Partnership (EP) and the ask from KCC to set up a Local Focus Group (LFG) as part of its hierarchy (Appendix I).

2 Background

- 2.1 KCC used to manage and run Quality Bus Partnerships (QBPs) in each district. These consisted of KCC and Swale Borough Council (SBC) members, KCC and SBC officer reps, and the commercial bus operators in Swale. They were used to raise local issues, discuss 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 which was the blueprint nationally to help improve infrastructure, bus travel, air quality and so forth. £3 billion of funding was allocated and each area had to respond very quickly by developing a Bus Service Improvement Plan (BSIP). KCC sought input from districts (Swale did respond) and submitted its plan to Government with an ask of £230 million across the county for various scheme improvements.
- 2.3 In April 2022, KCC received an indicative allocation of £35 million from the Department of Transport (DfT). This was very prescriptive and mainly for capital schemes. There was no revenue funding allowed to keep existing projects going.

The influence that districts can have over the BSIP and any spend of the funding is limited. Projects have already been identified by KCC in the BSIP.

- 2.4 KCC received £19m at the end of March 2023 to deliver a reduced set of initiatives within its BSIP. This included £100k of fare initiatives that were delivered over the summer county wide (e.g. Big Kent Weekend) and also £2.5m of network improvements.
- 2.5 In July 2023, KCC were told they had received a further £16m to deliver BSIP initiatives for 2024/25. At the time of writing DfT had not released the Terms and conditions and as such KCC have not been able to accept the grant.
- 2.6 As part of the funding, Government requires that each area (KCC) set up an Enhanced Partnership (EP). This is a statutory Board, without which KCC will not receive their funding. KCC have established their EP Board which is chaired by the Cabinet Member for Highways and Infrastructure at KCC. It is an officer-led meeting, high level and strategic. There are no representatives from districts. The bus operators do have representatives (including Chalkwell).
- 2.7 There are also EP Scheme Monitoring Groups set up for East Kent, West Kent and Kent Thameside. Swale is part of East Kent and has one place at that meeting. They are still developing and haven't met consistently as yet. KCC run and manage these meetings and it is anticipated these will run twice a year. They will be the group that monitors the schemes in that area linked to the BSIP.
- 2.8 EP Scheme Monitoring Groups will be high level and as such will not cover any local district issues. KCC feel that this will leave a gap. To fill that gap, KCC are suggesting EP Local Focus Group (EP LFGs) meetings be set up in each district. They are happy to send representatives but cannot resource it like they used to for the QBP and so are asking districts to set up and resource them. These are not a statutory requirement of the hierarchy.
- 2.9 KCC envisage that the EP LFGs are a replacement for the previous QBP 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 Swale such as active travel and air quality. Representatives at these meetings will be district councils (leading and chairing the meetings), KCC Public Transport, KCC Planning and Transport Development, Primary Bus Operators, and district council officers from planning, parking, active travel, environmental health. They would be operational, and officer-led.
- 2.10 To date, the set-up of LFGs across districts has been mixed. Maidstone, Canterbury and Tunbridge Wells have set up EP LFGs, whilst others have not.
- 2.11 The work so far to develop the Corporate Plan has included asking Area Committees their priorities. One such issue raised is bus infrastructure in the borough and the need for it to be improved. Should the Administration choose to

include lobbying for infrastructure in its Corporate Plan, the LFGs could be a way to raise issues to KCC, and lobby for investment in Swale.

- 2.12 Having an LFG also allows the bus operators the opportunity to raise local issues, particularly with regard to planning applications and improving infrastructure in the borough.
- 2.13 As it stands, Swale Borough Council (SBC) does not have an obvious resource that has 'buses' in its remit, so agreeing to set up the EP LFG would need to be considered in that context. A recent example was the bus consultation the Eastern Area Committee requested and an officer in the ED team has been tasked to do this as a 'one off'. This report is being discussed at the September meeting.
- 2.14 Should the setup of LFG be agreed, it is proposed that this is kept high level, twice a year and managed by the Director of Regeneration and Neighbourhoods chairing and coordinating the group. KCC would lead on the updates on the BSIP at the forum. SBC would be a conduit, or enabler bringing partners together as opposed to leading or delivering any work directly. Then the resource pressure it is believed would be manageable. All attendees would be actively made aware, and reminded, of SBC's restricted role.
- 2.15 Given the interest locally in bus infrastructure, it is proposed that issues to be raised are requested from each Area Committee prior to the LFG, with feedback at each Area Committee after the LFG has met (twice-yearly).
- 2.16 Given the focus on infrastructure in the BSIP, it is proposed that the PTWG is the conduit for any feedback into the council. It is proposed that the Chair and Vice Chair of the PTWG attend the LFG as member representation, as well as representatives from each Area Committee who can provide local voice.
- 2.17 It should be recognised that there may be other links into other committees given the wider agenda e.g. environmental improvements, community bus schemes etc. these issues will be monitored and linked in accordingly.

3 Proposals

- 3.1 To agree the setting up of a Local Focus Group (LFG) as part of KCC's Enhanced Partnership hierarchy.
- 3.2 To agree that the LFG reports to the Planning and Transportation Working Group (PTWG) with the Chair and Vice Chair of PTWG attending the LFG, and representatives from each of the four Area Committees.

4 Alternative Options

- 4.1 Not to set up an EP LFG. This is not recommended as whilst this is an addition to current workload, given it is a meeting twice a year it is felt that this can be

accommodated. Having a local group in the hierarchy will show our willingness to work with KCC and the BSIP, even if this is limited.

5 Consultation Undertaken or Proposed

- 5.1 Discussions have taken place with KCC about these proposals.
- 5.2 A conversation has taken place with the CEX of Chalkwell who is keen that a LFG is established in Swale. He sits on the EP Board.
- 5.3 Planning and Transportation Policy Working Group members reviewed an earlier version of this report on 19th September 2023 and supported the recommendations.

6 Implications

Issue	Implications
Corporate Plan	Links to Priority Two, investing in our environment and responding positively to global challenges by encourage active travel and reduced car use, including through the permeability of new developments, and work with partners to address air quality issues.
Financial, Resource and Property	KCC have £35m for their BSIP across the county. It is not clear how much of that will benefit scheme in Swale specifically as funding is high level eg new EV fleet across the county. Officer resource/ time every 6 months to manage and attend meetings.
Legal, Statutory and Procurement	There is not statutory requirement to set up EP LFGs, but the EP at KCC level is a statutory requirement No other implications identified at this stage.
Crime and Disorder	None identified at this stage
Environment and Climate/Ecological Emergency	Environmental improvements from electric fleet introductions will help with reducing carbon emissions. This would be county wide. Improving air quality seen as a requirement in the BSIP.
Health and Wellbeing	The knock on effects from improved air quality impacts on health and wellbeing.
Safeguarding of Children, Young People and Vulnerable Adults	None identified at this stage

Risk Management and Health and Safety	None identified at this stage
Equality and Diversity	None identified at this stage
Privacy and Data Protection	None identified at this stage

7 Appendices

7.1 The following documents are to be published with this report and form part of the report:

- Appendix I: EP Structure

8 Background Papers

None