

## **Report of the Cabinet Member for Climate Change, Environment and Transport**

### **Introduction**

I have been asked to report to full Council as follows:

#### **By Councillor Whitton on:**

“...the Council’s plans to support and improve bus services across the county should the current bid for funding under the Bus Improvement Plan be unsuccessful, given the widely reported decision by the Government to reduce the total pot of money available to local authorities from £3bn to £1.4bn.”

### **Response**

#### **Plans to support and improve bus services**

Since we submitted our Bus Services Improvement Plan at the end of October 2021, the Department for Transport has been reviewing the 79 plans received by all Local Transport Authorities in England. This review has now been completed and we have been informed that the Department is now prioritising the proposals for funding.

From this prioritisation we understand that:

1. A number of LTAs will be allocated indicative funding to deliver all or most of the aspirations set out in their Plans
2. A further set of LTAs will be allocated indicative funding which will be less than sought in their Plans
3. A third group will not be allocated funding but will be supported to develop their plans for any future funding or investment streams.

We expect to hear the outcome for Devon by the end of February.

Local bus service patronage has returned to around 70% of pre-pandemic levels and the shortfall is currently supported by a Bus Recovery Grant until the end of March. I am concerned about the impact of this grant coming to an end as recovery in passenger numbers has stalled due to the Omicron variant of COVID-19. Therefore, I have written to both the Secretary of State for Transport and the Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Transport to ask that they consider continuing this funding for at least a further 6 months. This will give time for further recovery in passenger numbers and planning for the outcomes from the National Bus Strategy bid.

While we wait for a response from the Department on both the Recovery Funding and our Improvement Plan, officers from our Transport Coordination Service are working with bus companies on the impact on the current bus networks from the various funding outcomes possible over the next couple of months. Our long-term aim is to still improve our public transport network to provide a sustainable transport solution. But in the short term we need to ensure as much of the existing network is retained if Government funding is not forthcoming.

**Councillor Andrea Davis**

Cabinet Member for Climate Change, Environment and Transport