

Agenda Item	16
Report No	HC/6/20

HIGHLAND COUNCIL

Committee: Highland Council

Date: 12 March 2020

Report Title: Bus Partnership Fund – Highland Opportunities

Report By: Executive Chief Officer Infrastructure and Environment

1. Purpose/Executive Summary

- 1.1 The paper provides an overview of the current position on the Scottish Government announcement of a capital Bus Partnership Fund (BPF) for local authorities to introduce bus priority infrastructure measures on local roads, working in partnership with local bus operators. Work is underway to ensure that rural local authorities benefit from the Fund as set out in the report and the appendix attached.

2. Recommendations

- 2.1 Members are asked to:
- i. Note the current position and the opportunity that is available with this significant funding commitment;
 - ii. Note the work already underway; and
 - iii. Agree to continued work with COSLA on ensuring that the fund has enough flexibility to support measures more relevant or practical to rural/remote areas.

3. Implications

- 3.1 Resource: the work currently underway is being carried out within the Council using existing budgets, albeit additional support may be required through working with partners such as HITRANS or accessing Change Fund.
- 3.2 Legal: no legal implications at this stage.

- 3.3 Community (Equality, Poverty and Rural): Communities will be positively impacted by the available resource and will be engaged with on ensuring appropriate solutions to public transport challenges.
- 3.4 Climate Change / Carbon Clever: A key component of the fund is to address the challenges of climate change and the need to ensure that public transport is prioritised over other road uses as part of a strategy of modal shift.
- 3.5 Risk: The Council needs to ensure the scheme meets aspirations of the Scottish Government in respect of expenditure.
- 3.6 Gaelic: no Gaelic implications at this time.

4. Background

- 4.1 The attached appendix sets out the recent paper that was considered by the COSLA Leaders Group and provides an overview of the background and current issues associated with the £500m Bus Partnership Fund. As set out in the paper, the fund is expected to be formally launched in the Spring, and it is important that the Council and other largely rural authorities strengthen our position with regard to projects that may be eligible for funding.

5. Current Position

- 5.1 The fund is intended to support the implementation of aspects of the Transport (Scotland) Act 2019, with a focus on leveraging partnership working between local transport authorities and bus operators. The timing of the payments will be weighted towards the end of the 5/6 year funding programme, with funding in 2020/21 focussing on providing support for feasibility work and seeking to understand local opportunities for innovative approaches which fit into the wider integrated sustainable transport plans, including those for active travel infrastructure and broader modal shift policies.
- 5.2 Concerns have been expressed by rural authorities that there is too great a focus on bus priority infrastructure and congestion to the detriment of the wider range of geographic, social and financial barriers faced by local transport operators. Members are asked to agree that the Council's lobbying position on this will be maintained through COSLA.
- 5.3 Irrespective of some of the challenges that the Council may face in accessing the funds, work has already started on developing a strategy around public transport improvements. As set out in the Redesign paper elsewhere on this agenda, a review group has been agreed to investigate the potential for greater Council involvement in public transport provision.
- 5.4 Officer discussions are already taking place on transformative projects around bus priority that may be able to access the funding as it currently stands, with the involvement and support of HITRANS and the local bus operators. These initiatives are currently focussed on key junctions around Inverness, given the current focus on congestion and bus priority. Discussions are also underway in respect of establishing a Bus Service Improvement Partnership which is important in the context of the fund.
- 5.4 Members are asked to note the importance of developing projects that will deliver lasting and sustainable change, and that there will be a focus on ensuring that this work

is prioritised over the next few months to ensure that additional funding can be accessed, in partnership with HITRANS and the local bus operators. These initiatives will not just focus on just on urban areas, but also in the context of the challenges for delivering change within the rural and remote rural areas across Highland. It is important that efforts are made to learn from other authorities and that this work forms part of future reports back to the Council or Infrastructure and Environment Committee.

6. **Conclusions**

- 6.1 Members should note the opportunity provided by the Bus Partnership Fund, whilst recognising the need to lobby Scottish Government for enough flexibility for an authority like Highland to benefit not just within our congested areas, where bus priority may be more deliverable (in terms of road space and length) but also in our more rural areas where different models may need to be deployed.

Designation: Executive Chief Officer – Infrastructure and Environment

Date: 3 March 2020

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Background Papers: