

HAMPSHIRE COUNTY COUNCIL

Decision Report

Decision Maker:	Executive Lead Member for Economy, Transport and Environment
Date:	17 June 2021
Title:	Bus Back Better: National Bus Strategy
Report From:	Director of Economy, Transport and Environment

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Purpose of this Report

1. The purpose of this report is to set out Hampshire County Council's proposed approach to Bus Back Better - the Government's National Bus Strategy, launched in Spring 2021.

Recommendations

2. That the Executive Lead Member for Economy, Transport and Environment agrees the proposed approach to Bus Back Better, the national bus strategy, as detailed within this report.
3. That the Executive Lead Member gives approval for Hampshire County Council to initiate work to enter into Enhanced Partnership Schemes (EPS) under the Government's new "Bus Back Better" initiative and in line with DfT guidance and timescales.
4. That authority is delegated to the Director of Economy, Transport, and Environment to make the necessary arrangements, including preparation of a Bus Service Improvement Plan (BSIP), to be reported back to the Executive Lead Member in due course.

Executive Summary

5. This report sets out the details of Hampshire County Council's proposed approach to the Government's National Bus Strategy. The consistent policy themes running through the National Bus Strategy are decarbonisation of transport and levelling up the economy. The Government has committed £3billion towards delivery this strategy.
6. The proposed approach includes:
 - the Council's statement of intent to the DfT to establish an EPS with local bus operators;

- an engagement exercise to better understand the views of local people and businesses with regards to local bus services in Hampshire;
 - continuation and potential enhancement of existing partnership working with neighbouring Local Transport Authorities (LTAs) to achieve the best outcomes for Hampshire's residents;
 - development work towards the implementation of infrastructure projects that could be delivered as part of an EPS; and
 - development work in partnership with Hampshire's local bus operators to look into the potential for a Zero Emissions Bus Regional Area (ZEBRA).
7. This report seeks approval for the above approach. A final decision on the Enhanced Partnership Scheme, and the requisite Bus Service Improvement Plan (BSIP), as outlined below, will be made through the appropriate process at a later date once updated guidance from the DfT is available.

Contextual information

8. On 15 March 2021 the Government published England's first National Bus Strategy. It sets out a vision for the future of bus services outside London and how they will be delivered through either formal partnership arrangements between local transport authorities and bus operators, or through franchising. £3 billion is being made available to deliver the strategy. The strategy aims to contribute significantly to Hampshire County Council's policy objectives of decarbonisation of transport and improving air quality and achieving carbon neutrality will be aided by a shift to greener public transport. A single journey on public transport has approximately half the carbon impact of a car journey. In addition, the Strategy contributes to the Council's policy objectives of levelling up the economy and assisting the economic recovery from the Covid pandemic.
9. The strategy represents an opportunity for the County Council to extend its productive partnership working arrangements with bus operators and neighbouring local transport authorities, in order to expand the commercial bus network. The National Bus Strategy indicates that the level of funding to be received by LTAs will reflect the level of local ambition demonstrated by the LTAs and their bus operators.
10. It is likely that bus patronage will take some time to recover from the pandemic, but Government has committed to providing CBSSG until it is no longer needed where LTAs and operators have signed an EPS. The £3 billion will be targeted at growing the market further and decarbonising buses.
11. Hampshire County Council has a long history of working closely in partnership with bus operators in Hampshire, largely on a voluntary basis, aside from major schemes such as the Eclipse Bus Rapid Transit scheme between Fareham and Gosport. This approach has worked well for Hampshire, with the County bucking the national trend and seeing an increase in the number of passengers travelling on bus services over recent years.
12. This is in part due to the investment the Council has made in terms of quality infrastructure, e.g. Andover Bus Station, use of government funding to provide Contactless Ticket Machines for all major operators in Hampshire, and

extensive Real Time Passenger Information around the County. This investment has levered in private sector funding from bus operators for new fleets of vehicles, wi-fi on buses, and next stop announcements.

13. The mechanisms to deliver the Government's vision, as set out in Bus Back Better: The National Bus Strategy, are through formalised partnership working between LTAs and bus operators, or through bus franchising. LTAs are expected to set out proposals for either an EPS or franchising to deliver better bus services for their residents.
14. It was considered that an EPS, building on the already positive partnership Hampshire County Council has with its bus operators, would result in better outcomes for Hampshire than a franchising approach. In addition, establishing bus franchising requires permission from the Secretary of State and new secondary legislation for all Local Transport Authorities who are not Mayoral Combined Authorities; and above all, the resource implications of this option for the County Council would be significant and prohibitively expensive. For these reasons, the remainder of this report will focus on Enhanced Partnerships Schemes (EPS)
15. EPS's were made available to LTAs as a tool to improve bus services in the 2017 Bus Services Act. Operators are expected to co-operate with the LTA throughout the process of establishing an EPS.
16. LTAs and bus operators need to have confirmed their intent to enter into an EPS covering their entire area by the end of June 2021 in order to receive continued CBSSG funding from 1 July 2021, and to be eligible for other funding opportunities from April 2022 onwards.
17. The DfT expects EPS's to be in place by April 2022. From this date, the new discretionary forms of bus funding from Government will only be available to services operated, or measures taken, under an EPS or franchising. In addition, only services operated under these statutory agreements will be eligible for the reformed BSOG, subject to a future consultation by DfT.
18. Following confirmation of intent to form an EPS, LTAs must produce a 'Bus Service Improvement Plan' (BSIP) by the end of October 2021 incorporating: bus priority plans; targets for reduced bus journey times and improved reliability; plans to make buses zero emission; passenger growth targets; dealing with the under or over supply of buses on the network; plans for fares and multi-operator ticketing; addressing local air quality issues; roadside passenger infrastructure; expansion of BRT networks; Bus Passenger Charter; network development plans e.g. Key Corridors or Superbus networks; more comprehensive 'socially necessary' and new 'economically necessary' services; and seeking the views of local people and businesses.
19. As set out in the Executive Summary, further approval will be sought at the appropriate level at a later date on both the BSIP and entry into an EPS.

Joint Plans with Neighbouring Authorities

20. Neighbouring LTAs are expected to work together to produce joint plans, especially where travel to work areas cross boundaries. This is especially relevant for both the Solent and Blackwater Valley areas where local economies

and travel to work areas overlap significantly with those of Hampshire. It is hoped that joint plans will bring benefits to passengers travelling in and out of Hampshire through measures such as applying a consistent fare structure across the area resulting in the same fare being paid regardless of the administrative boundary.

21. Plans will be regularly monitored and updated, and progress against targets made public. Plans will be fully integrated into Local Transport Plans (LTPs) and Local Cycling and Walking Infrastructure Plans (LCWIPs).
22. A new category of 'economically necessary' bus services will be introduced alongside 'socially necessary'.
23. The National Bus Strategy promotes a 'Green Bus Revolution'. LTAs will be expected to lead on the implementation of local forums which will be established to take forward green bus fleets. Forums will include operators, energy suppliers, and infrastructure owners. Further to this, Government will consult on setting an end date for the sale of new diesel buses.

Links to Local Transport Plan

24. The Council is currently developing a new Local Transport Plan (LTP4) to meet current and future challenges, including those highlighted in the "Hampshire 2050" Vision and the declaration of a Climate Emergency. Through this process, the Council plans to use guiding principles to steer the development of the LTP. The National Bus Strategy is consistent with these guiding principles which are to reduce overall travel and significantly reduce dependency on the private car; reduce the need to travel; and to create a transport system that supports high quality, prosperous places and puts people first.
25. There is a strong economic case for supporting the development of a stronger local bus network. Investment by the public sector in infrastructure measures to improve bus services levers in additional private sector investment from the bus industry. This joint approach to investment has been successful in Hampshire for a number of years.
26. The Strategy provides a key measure to tackle social inequality. This is further explored with the Consultation and Equalities section of this report.

Complementary Measures

27. Running in parallel with the development work for a potential EPS, the Council intends to further explore complementary measures which meet the objectives of the Government's strategy. This will include examining the case for implementing Automatic Number Plate Recognition (ANPR) bus priority enforcement schemes.
28. The Government's Bus Back Better Strategy calls on all LTAs to provide more support to enable bus services to be quicker and more reliable. The strategy states that "Robust enforcement of traffic restrictions can bring benefits for buses through less congestion".
29. The strategy further supports the implementation of complementary bus priority measures stating that any future funding provided by DfT for new road

investment will be expected to include these measures. Government sees implementing these measures as a way to improve bus services by making them quicker, more reliable and cheaper to run.

30. Within Hampshire itself, through engagement carried out on the emerging LTP, stakeholders and the public have told the Council that public transport and buses should be a focus of the emerging LTP4, supporting the principle of “reducing dependence on the private car...”
31. In addition to speeding up bus services, bus priority enforcement would maximise the impact of the new bus priority facilities being implemented as part of the Southampton and Portsmouth City Region Transforming Cities Fund projects.
32. In order to achieve this key objective, the Council will begin the development work necessary to identify locations for ANPR bus priority enforcement, review existing bus priority facilities and ensure designs of new schemes include bus priority enforcement.
33. **Covid 19 Recovery** COVID-19 Recovery. Throughout the pandemic, and in particular during the three national lockdowns, bus usage reduced to around 20% of pre COVID-19 levels. The Council recognises that recovery to pre-COVID levels is unlikely in the short term and supports the vision of the Government as a way to improve the speed and permanency of this recovery.
34. 18.9% of households in Hampshire have no access to a car or van. In light of this, there is a need to support the most socially excluded residents who are disproportionately represented as bus passengers.
35. The County Council continues to provide support to the bus industry in Hampshire, assisting the economic recovery. The National Bus Strategy has a particular focus on the economic recovery which is consistent with the County Council’s recent work through the Local Resilience Forum Transport Group, where a Bus Recovery Partnership and associated strategy has been developed in partnership with bus operators and neighbouring LTAs. A focus of the strategy is to reduce the reliance of the bus network on public subsidy. This will be supported through the Government commitment in providing CBSSG until it is no longer needed where LTAs and operators have signed an EPS.

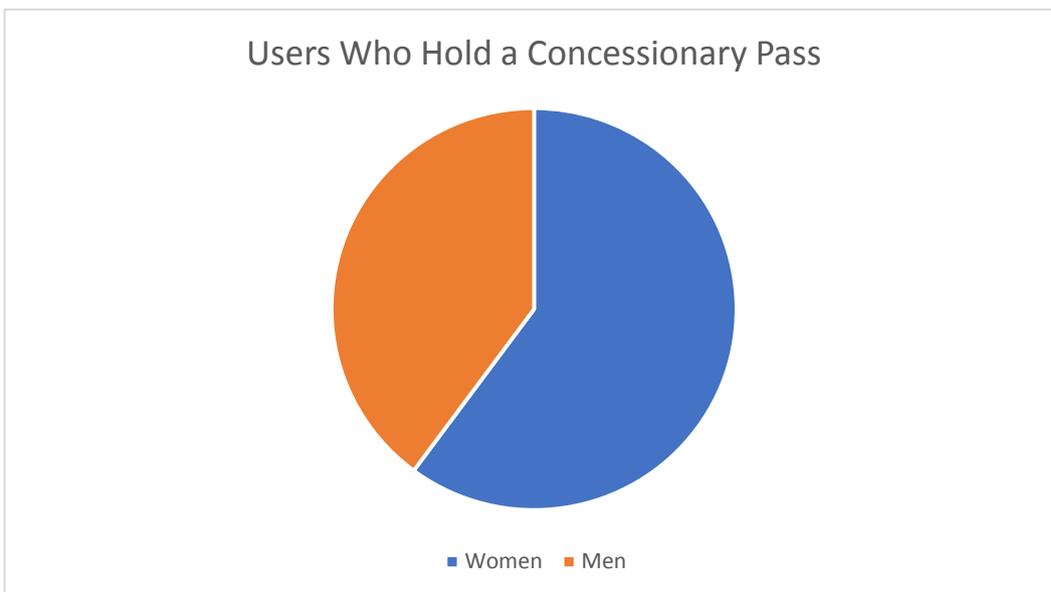
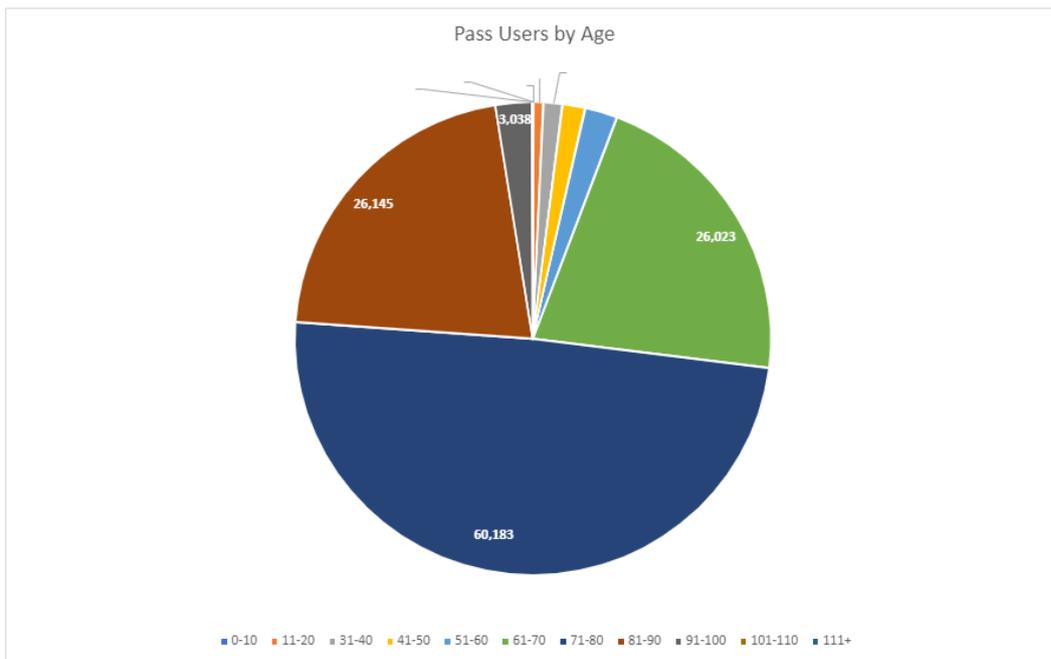
Finance

36. The work required to meet the objectives of the Government’s Bus Back Better Strategy presents a clear pressure on the Council’s available staff resource. As such, the County Council has been successful in requesting at least £100,000 Local Transport Authority Bus Capacity Funding allocation from DfT.
37. The DfT anticipates that this funding will be used for:
 - recruitment of additional LTA staff to undertake the work required;
 - procurement of consultants to support the work required;

- training of new and existing staff to boost their capabilities on relevant bus policy and delivery; and
 - other activities to support the development of LTA bus plans.
38. The DfT has stated its desire to see the development of longer term in-house capabilities on bus issues across all LTAs and has stated that where consultants are used, the LTA should endeavour to include knowledge exchange as part of the consultancy process.
39. The DfT has stated that it intends to offer further capacity support for LTAs that have committed to follow a statutory route (EPS or franchising).
40. The opportunities presented by Bus Back Better must be considered against the financial pressure on the County Council's revenue budget, which requires review of all areas of revenue spend, including local bus and community transport.

Consultation and Equalities

41. Initial engagement on the emerging LTP4 was undertaken which aimed to start a conversation with a wide a group of interested parties to help formulate a new transport strategy and plan for Hampshire.
42. Thoughts, expertise and local knowledge were sought to help clarify the preferred priorities, vision and principles prior to further development and formal consultation.
43. The engagement period ran from 7 January to 28 February 2021 and a total of 805 responses were received at the time of analysis.
44. Of those who specified, 694 were responding as individuals, 44 were providing the official response of a group, organisation or business, and 46 were democratically elected representatives.
45. Stakeholders and members of the public were clear that public transport and buses should be a focus of the emerging LTP4, supporting the principle of "reducing dependence on the private car".
46. There is a higher reliance on buses for commuting amongst particular sectors of the population: females, younger age groups (16-19 year olds), part-time workers, those in manual occupations, and those on low incomes.
47. Measures which improve bus services, whether that be making them more reliable, quicker and safer, will have a positive impact on these sectors of the population.
48. The bus network provides access for young people to education and training opportunities. An improved reliable bus network offers a long term alternative sustainable travel option for these people from their time as a student and beyond.
49. Around one in three bus journeys in Hampshire are made by concessionary pass holders. The graphs below show how these journeys are split in terms of age range and gender.



50. As the graphs illustrate, a high proportion of bus users are female and aged between 71-80 with a significant proportion falling in the 81-90 age range.
51. The Strategy aim of a network of “more frequent, more reliable, easier to understand and use, and better co-ordinated” bus services would enable these people to access essential services and lead independent lives for longer within their own communities.

Climate Change Impact Assessments

52. Hampshire County Council utilises two decision-making tools to assess the carbon emissions and resilience of its projects and decisions. These tools provide a clear, robust, and transparent way of assessing how projects, policies and initiatives contribute towards the County Council’s climate change targets of being carbon neutral and resilient to the impacts of a 2°C temperature rise by

2050. This process ensures that climate change considerations are built into everything the Authority does.

53. The tools to assess specific impacts on climate change adaptation and mitigation were utilised and found not to be applicable for this report.
54. Research carried out on the evidence base for the emerging LTP4 has demonstrated that increased public transport use is a major policy tool to achieve decarbonisation. This is based on the modal shift from private car to public transport where each journey made by bus was found to generate a 50% reduction in carbon emissions over a journey made by private car.

Conclusions

55. The approach set out within this report would contribute significantly to Hampshire County Council's policy objectives of decarbonisation of transport, levelling up the economy, and assisting the economic recovery from the Covid pandemic.
56. The approach would enable the Council to begin the work needed to meet the objectives set out within the Government's Bus Back Better Strategy. This work would build upon the already positive working relationship the Council has with its bus operators and enable the best outcomes for bus users in Hampshire.

REQUIRED CORPORATE AND LEGAL INFORMATION:

Links to the Strategic Plan

Hampshire maintains strong and sustainable economic growth and prosperity:	yes
People in Hampshire live safe, healthy and independent lives:	yes
People in Hampshire enjoy a rich and diverse environment:	no
People in Hampshire enjoy being part of strong, inclusive communities:	yes

Section 100 D - Local Government Act 1972 - background documents

The following documents discuss facts or matters on which this report, or an important part of it, is based and have been relied upon to a material extent in the preparation of this report. (NB: the list excludes published works and any documents which disclose exempt or confidential information as defined in the Act.)

Document

Location

None

EQUALITIES IMPACT ASSESSMENT:

1. Equality Duty

The County Council has a duty under Section 149 of the Equality Act 2010 ('the Act') to have due regard in the exercise of its functions to the need to:

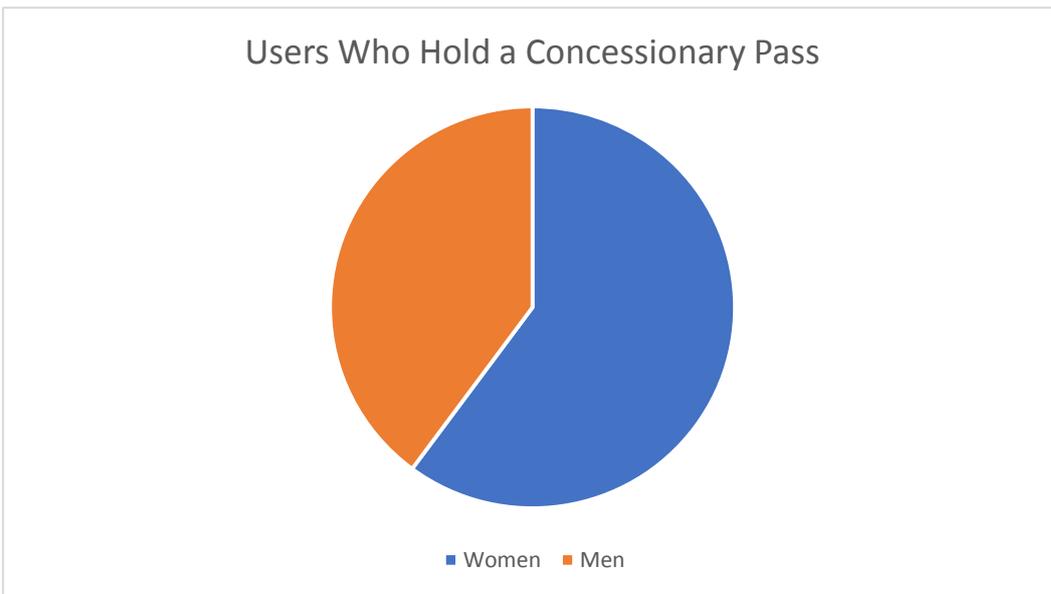
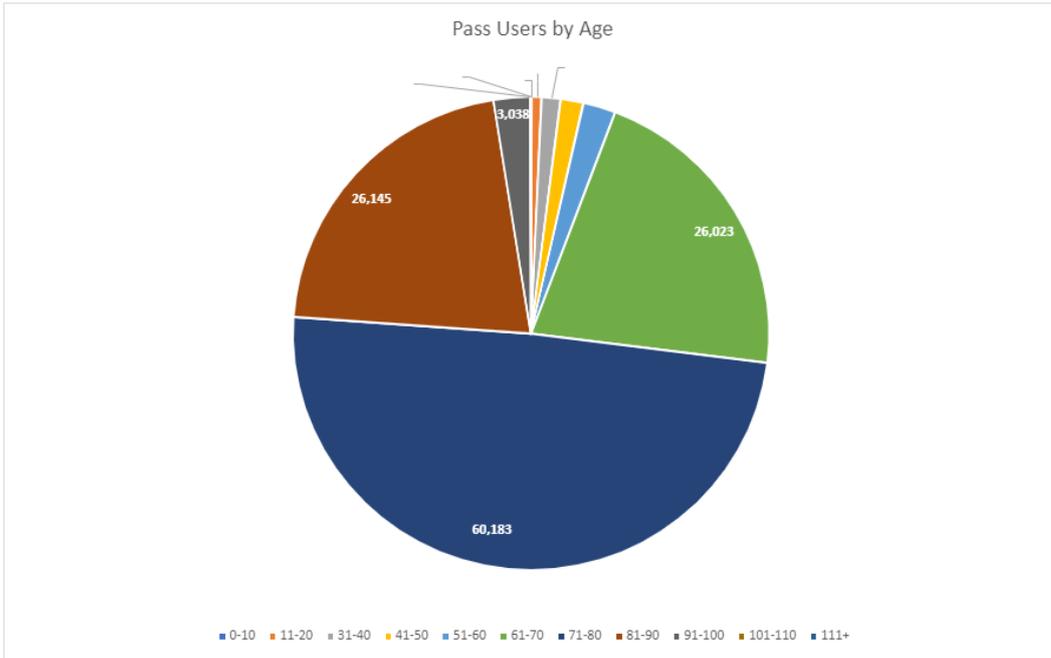
- Eliminate discrimination, harassment and victimisation and any other conduct prohibited by or under the Act with regard to the protected characteristics as set out in section 4 of the Act (age, disability, gender reassignment, marriage and civil partnership, pregnancy and maternity, race, religion or belief, sex and sexual orientation);
- Advance equality of opportunity between persons who share a relevant protected characteristic within section 149(7) of the Act (age, disability, gender reassignment, pregnancy and maternity, race, religion or belief, sex and sexual orientation) and those who do not share it;
- Foster good relations between persons who share a relevant protected characteristic within section 149(7) of the Act (see above) and persons who do not share it.

Due regard in this context involves having due regard in particular to:

- The need to remove or minimise disadvantages suffered by persons sharing a relevant characteristic connected to that characteristic;
- Take steps to meet the needs of persons sharing a relevant protected characteristic different from the needs of persons who do not share it;
- Encourage persons sharing a relevant protected characteristic to participate in public life or in any other activity which participation by such persons is disproportionately low.

2. Equalities Impact Assessment:

- 2.1 There is a higher reliance on buses for commuting amongst particular sectors of the population: females, younger age groups (16-19 year-olds), part-time workers, those in manual occupations, and those on low incomes.
- 2.2 Measures which improve bus services, whether that be making them more reliable, quicker and safer, will have a positive impact on these sectors of the population.
- 2.3 The bus network provides access for young people to education and training opportunities. An improved reliable bus network offers a long term alternative sustainable travel option for these people from their time as a student and beyond.
- 2.4 Around one in three bus journeys in Hampshire are made by concessionary pass holders. The graphs below show how these journeys are split in terms of age range and gender.



2.5 As the graphs illustrate, a high proportion of bus users are female and aged between 71-80 with a significant proportion falling in the 81-90 age range.

2.6 The Strategy aim of a network of “more frequent, more reliable, easier to understand and use, and better co-ordinated” bus services would enable these people to access essential services and lead independent lives for longer within their own communities.