

STATEMENT TO CABINET MEETING – 10 NOVEMBER 2022

CLLR ANDREW FURSE

1. Jiangxi Province friendship agreement

In view of today's (01/09/2022) OHCHR Report on Human Rights concerns with Xinjiang Uyghur region in China, is it time we ceased with our Friendship agreement with Jiangxi Province?

The creation of such a Friendship agreement with Jiangxi Province (a province of approximately 45million people) several years ago was at a time when the PRC was considered to be respecting the freedoms of its people, respecting the international agreements in Hong Kong and not showing any aggression in the region.

However, over the time we have had our agreement in place there has been: political suppression and the breaking of international agreements in Hong Kong, expansionism in the South China Sea, serious military threats to democratic Taiwan, and now the United Nations report on human rights abuses on the Uyghur population specifically in Xinjiang region.

Furthermore, there has been no news of this friendship agreement for a long time and no known of economic benefit to B&NES; so it would appear to be defunct anyway.

I call on Cabinet to cease this Council's friendship agreement for these clear reasons. Having such an agreement gives tacit support to Jiangxi province, and therefore the Chinese communist party and its human rights abuses of Uyghurs, oppression of Hong Kong and threats to democratic Taiwan.

2. Save our railway ticket offices

Earlier this year the Government amended its guidance to Train Operators regarding ticket offices. Therefore, all of England's 980 staffed rail ticket offices could be under threat of closure following comments from both Transport Minister Grant Schnapps and the Rail Delivery Group that represents train operators.

12% of all rail tickets in England are still purchased at staffed ticket offices. Ticket office closure will disproportionately affect elderly and disabled residents alongside those who may not know how to select the most appropriate journey options to keep fares down. Even the elderly who do use the internet many are not confident about making payments online.

AGE UK estimate that 3 million elderly people in the UK do not have access to the internet, and many more do not have a mobile device.

Ticket office staff at Bath are employed by GWR Trains and the very existence of this ticket office is under threat.

I therefore ask Cabinet to raise the following concerns with the secretary of state for Transport and our local MPs:

- Not all residents are able to use station ticket machines or have the means to book a ticket in advance.
- Complicated journeys involving connections are likely to require human assistance to ensure customers purchase the most appropriate and cheapest tickets, and do not incur penalties from mis-booked tickets.
- Closure of Bath ticket office will disproportionately affect elderly and disabled residents, including any person with poor literacy and IT skills.
- Bath railway station with approximately over 6 million passengers in a normal year, serves not only its residents but a vast number of foreign visitors – and this is one of their primary interfaces with the UK public transport system.