

Thank you very much for allowing me to speak tonight on the contentious issue of rural community bus services. As Jesus said, 'The last shall be first, and the first shall be last'. He was not talking about *First* buses, but about how the marginalised, the poor and downtrodden and the disabled would take precedence over rich and powerful. Tonight Mrs Harrington has spoken up for those who need a bus service in Westfield – the last ward in B&NES, but where the parish council stands up for all its residents to get them a better deal.

The merits of the 82 bus service, the 768 sublime scenic drive through Clandown, Camerton, Timsbury, Englishcombe and so on, and the 42 hospital service have been debated extensively. We are all aware, after Mental Health Week last week, of the problems of isolation, loneliness, and depression, but there are also too many hilly areas around here where walking with a pram or a wheelchair is simply not practical, even if the pavements were wide enough, and not pothole ridden. We are all, I hope, aware of the Climate Emergency. A modern, reliable bus service, properly marketed, is the antidote. Here's the plan.

Firstly, we need to talk to the CEO of Libre Buses and the other companies delivering community subsidised services to see how they could be made profitable. Surely 140+ passengers *a day* would be. Secondly, myth-busting. The problem is not driver shortage, the drivers tell me. It is the rotas and working conditions, that make them leave.

Thirdly, we need urgent action from the relevant scrutiny panel to set up a working party, and maybe hold a scrutiny 'open day' like the climate change day. A review of transport policy is urgently needed, and now, at the beginning of a four year term, is the right time. We need long term, sustainable policies. My proposal is for an SPD, like the SPD for the provision of *affordable* housing, that will mean that any developer of more than 10 residences has to provide a set percentage of their value, instead of there being ad hoc decisions, and derisory sums.

The other possibility would be to investigate business support. The 82 was originally established with S106 money from Tesco. We believe from informal contact that Tesco, other businesses and health services might contribute. Having people wholly dependant on shopping on line will impact their sales and services.

All this will take time. May I suggest the Leader of the Council look in his 'back pocket', and find enough from the contingency reserves to keep

our buses running for another three months, or even wring some 'levelling up' money out. This might even scotch the NES belief that Bath gets all the goodies under this administration.

Eleanor Jackson (Cllr)

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