

**Statement by Robbie Bentley to Bath & North East Somerset Council Cabinet Meeting**

The recent announcement of planned closures of several railway station ticket offices threatens the development of an effective and strategic Public Transport Service. I welcome Metro Mayor Dan Norris stating that this policy is a step backwards which at this time is both unwelcome and unnecessary.

In addition, this policy is being carried out without reference in the form of an equality impact assessment. This endangers people's ability and freedom to travel as well as risking deterioration of the standards we expect when travelling by rail. As a regular user of the railways, I often find it uncomfortable on unstaffed or part-time staffed stations which reduces my ability to get about our region. I would ask that a letter be formally written to the Secretary of State for Transport requesting a formal rationale and explanation and to request that a formal equalities assessment be carried out. As a local authority BANES has a statutory duty under Section 17 of the Railways Act 1993 to ensure the ability to travel is maintained.

It is fair to say that this will affect Bath directly as it means fewer people will be able to travel into this wonderful city by Rail. Bath is an extremely popular city for tourism and hospitality, and this could damage the excellent National and International standing it has rightly earned. I would dread to imagine what that could mean for our regional economy.

In conclusion, I would ask you to consider:

Equality might be ensuring every region and every local authority area has a Rail Station and adequate local provision as part of that, but equity would be ensuring that we can have a ticket office to each of them. I would ask you to ensure we retain ALL our ticket offices. This country is run in a too centralised fashion already and we need to stop this policy.

Were all the cuts we have seen recently proposed implemented, we would not only be leaving people without rail station ticket offices but also unable to even get to them when they wanted to travel outside our region. And this will still be the case for the large number of communities that have been cut off from buses due to recent policy which has been reversed.