

COUNCIL MEETING 20TH JULY 2023

**STATEMENTS FROM
COUNCILLORS**

Councillors

1. Cllr Onkar Saini - Train ticket offices (*statement provided*)
2. Cllr Ruth Malloy - Single use vapes (*statement provided*)

QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS - COUNCILLORS

M	01	Question from:	Cllr Jackson
<p>What is the administration going to do about restoring bus services which have left both elderly and young marooned in their housing estates, and in some cases unable to get to school or to work? The need to get the 82 back in September to get 40+ children to Norton Hill and Somervale Schools is particularly acute?</p>			
Answer: Cllr Warren			
<p><i>I share many of the concerns that you have raised - residents in North East Somerset have been left with a public transport service which simply isn't working, some communities with frequent bus services and others with none. This is a deeply unsatisfactory situation and residents of all ages are impacted. The West of England Combined Authority is the regional transport authority responsible for planning bus services in cooperation with local bus operators. The combined authority has a budget of many tens of millions dedicated solely to transport and to economic development.</i></p> <p><i>Bath and North East Somerset Council pays an annual contribution towards the provision of supported services – those that are not deemed financially viable - through the regional Transport Levy. In this financial year we have increased our contribution by 30% to £1m, recognising the significant increases in costs to provide bus services. Unfortunately, however, the prices of our bus services increased by some 200%.</i></p> <p><i>Like other councils, B&NES has no significant funding for buses over and above that which is already transferred annually to WECA as our transport levy. The remainder of our budget is fully committed to other purposes (including statutory services that we cannot choose to withdraw), such as social care, children's services (which together consume the vast majority of our budgets), housing, parks, waste management, libraries and so on, so there is very little remaining for discretionary expenditure such as on buses.</i></p> <p><i>We are lobbying the Mayor to spend a portion of the £57m of bus service improvement grant that he received from government specifically and solely for bus services, on our lost and at risk services, as the Secretary of State has indicated he should.</i></p>			

My team and I have spent the last few months talking to B&NES and parish councillors from across North East Somerset, Cabinet leads from neighbouring councils, bus experts, campaigners and residents, as well as to the Metro Mayor and his staff. We have developed a proposal that provides a cost-effective solution to improve local services.

Key elements of the proposal are:

- *Targeted new bus routes to help re-connect towns and villages that have been abandoned by the Metro Mayor*
- *Additional Westlink services along fixed routes at key commute and school times - to build trust in the new service, and to support other services.*
- *Funding solutions: including working with neighbouring councils on cross-boundary routes.*

These proposals will safeguard threatened buses, and fill gaps where services have been lost – connecting communities with Bath and Bristol and between larger towns and villages in B&NES. We are very keen to work with the MetroMayor to find a solution. Cllr Guy has written to the Mayor to put our innovative ideas forward, and we hope he will respond positively to our constructive proposals. It is essential that, in the interim, the Mayor instruct his officers to protect existing services, whilst these new services are commissioned.

We encourage members of the public who are concerned about bus services to write to the Metro Mayor to ask for his support.