

Reduction of Local Bus Service Subsidies – response from Ludlow’s unitary councillors

From Councillors Andy Boddington, Tracey Huffer and Vivienne Parry. 6 May 2019.

We have grave concerns about the proposed cuts to bus services across the county and in Ludlow.

The cuts are being driven by budget cuts. They are being proposed in the absence of a strategy for the future of public transport in the county. The council has not conducted an equalities impact assessment (EqIA). We are concerned that Shropshire Council has not made it clear that its subsidy for concessionary passes will drop as passenger numbers drop and that is part of its financial equation.

The bus cuts will disproportionately disadvantage older and vulnerable people, along with those of limited mobility. Buses are a social service. By providing access to medical, retail and social facilities, they promote health and wellbeing. That lowers costs elsewhere in public sector, including the care sector and the NHS.

The 701 and 722 services can be described as community centres on wheels. Passengers exchange news. If someone is not seen, enquiries are made. They are part of the social fabric of our community. Few routes in the south of the county can be run on a commercial basis. But the social and wellbeing gain from buses means that they more than pay their way.

Turning specifically to the 701. The proposal is to reduce the service to a 45-minute frequency. We oppose this. The timing is tight but the service is often full on trips before midday. We are concerned that a reduction in frequency will lead to a reduction in use. We think the proposed timing will confuse residents. The savings would not be large as the cost for the driver and relief driver will remain the same. There will be a saving on fuel but fare income would also drop.

We do not believe that any cuts or changes to Ludlow town services are needed at this point. We recognise that we will need to reroute services to serve residents once new housing developments are built. We have been working with developers on this but it will be a few years before we need to make these changes. We also need an upgrade to the park and ride and that will increase passenger numbers. The future of public transport could look very different in Ludlow. We are unable to plan for this while the message from Shropshire Council is that buses are unaffordable and not essential to the future of market towns and communities.

We are disappointed that Shropshire Council should propose these cuts without a coherent strategy for the future of public transport across the county, especially the rural districts. The future of transport in our county is not just roads. Buses have a vital role in supporting rural communities and vulnerable people.