

**FULL COUNCIL – WEDNESDAY, 8 JULY 2015**

**Written question from Mr Lee Wilson to Councillor Jonathan Bacon, Leader and Executive Member for Children's Services**

In a response to my written question at the Executive meeting on 23rd June, you indicated that your preferred approach would be for the continuation of the Island Line service within the wider context of a wider train operating franchise for the south which would require the continuation of the current levels of service provision.

I welcome this response, as it indicates that you are moving away from the view you expressed in February in which you spoke of the potential for creating “a unique rail service owned and run by the Island community”.

It should be noted that a service “owned and run by the Island community” – as is being proposed by Andrew Turner MP and his transport adviser Nicholas Finney – would see our local train service taken out of the South Western Franchise (currently operated by Stagecoach Group’s UK Rail division, through South West Trains), with the likely consequence of the current franchise-obligated levels of service provision being removed.

Furthermore, given that the Island’s MP has now claimed that Island Line currently loses around £3m a year (but has failed to substantiate this figure, given that its operation is commercially confidential within SWT’s wider profit-making operations) it is clear that the Isle of Wight benefits significantly from being part of a wider franchise operation which underwrites our service (and that of other rural train services across the south of England), thus securing local jobs, support for local tourism and economic growth.

Therefore in order to help safeguard the future of our train service – and to support your stated preferred approach – will you (Cllr Bacon) now formally disassociate yourself and the Isle of Wight Council from the Turner-Finney plan to remove Island Line from the South Western Franchise and instead make immediate representations to the Government that the scope of any future franchise for train services in our region should include the continuation of Island Line within it, incorporating current levels of service provision, and in doing so also urge our MP to drop his dangerous plans to fundamentally undermine our train service which appear to be without any public support (despite his assertions to the contrary)?

## ***Response***

The decision to include Islandline trains within a new South West Trains franchise is a decision which rests with the Department of Transport.

The Council has not engaged in any activity yet to lobby the Department of Transport to remove the Islandline service from its franchise, or vice versa. My preference of course, as I have said before, is that it remains part of the package.

The council has reacted to the indication that the service may be removed from the package by starting to look at alternative delivery models, should that decision be made by the Department of Transport.

Unless and until we can secure an assurance that Islandline will remain part of the franchise, we must continue to pursue all other options to retain and preserve this important link as part of the Island's infrastructure.

## ***Supplementary question***

In view of it recently being stated that the current franchise will not be extended to 2019, will end in 2017, would the Leader not agree that action now to actually deal with this matter in a positive way is much more urgent?

## ***Response***

Of course I agree. We've had meetings this week about it and will be actively pursuing matters in the way I have just set out.