

Full Council – 28 February 2024

Written question from Councillor Geoff Brodie to Leader (with responsibility Transport and Infrastructure, Highways PFI and Transport Strategy, Strategic Oversight and External Partnerships)

How do you justify the expenditure (by largely-ignored delegated decision) of Bus Service Improvement Funding of £300,000 over 2 years on increasing the regularity of an existing frequent bus service between Newport and East Cowes, when there are rural areas like Havenstreet that have no bus service at all. Particularly when the decision was based on describing the Newport-East Cowes route as 'rural'?

Response

It should be noted that the proposals set out for local use of the Department for Transport's Bus Service Improvement Plan Plus (BSIP+) funding, serve wider areas of the Island than just the service 5 between Newport and East Cowes. Specifically, these proposals include funding support for the local bus services 6 and 12, serving many rural communities within the south and west of the Island.

Though, the reason to focus most of the funding towards enhancing the service 5 between Newport and East Cowes, is that the proposal aligns with the main purpose of the funding. This is to primarily fund enhancements to local bus services where beyond the initial period there is a high likelihood that they will become commercially sustainable. From the information and advice provided by Southern Vectis, as our local commercial bus operator, this very much the case. It will boost public transport usage on one of the principal commuter and leisure corridors on the Island, which aligns with our corporate priorities.

Whilst it might seem that £300,000 is quite a substantial amount of funding for this specific enhancement, this does cover the costs for an additional vehicle and drivers being allocated, which are required for an extra journey per hour for the full two years.

We are just about to revise the local Bus Service Improvement Plan (BSIP) for the Island as a whole, including rural communities such as Havenstreet and what can be done to improve provision within these areas. Current consideration is being given towards 'Demand Responsive Transport' (DRT) similar to services that operated in past where residents would phone in advance to make a booking on a local community bus service, though of course this is subject to an operator coming forwards and relevant funding being available. Unfortunately, commercial operations through small communities, especially in rural locations which are not on commuter routes, do not perform particularly well without ongoing subsidy, which is why at this time it is not within scope at present given the level of funding that would be required to set up new services.