



Department
for Transport

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Dear Mr Willingham,

Thank you for your letter of 20 July regarding the proposed withdrawal of school bus services by Kent County Council.

I was sorry to read about the proposed withdrawal of a bus services in Kent used by children and young people and the impact this will have on the local community. As you will know, we have provided nearly £2bn of support since March 2020 through emergency and recovery grants to mitigate the impacts of the pandemic on the bus sector. This includes an additional £150m to extend recovery support for bus operators and Local Transport Authorities until October. In this latest round of funding, Kent County Council will receive £1,540,259. This is in addition to the £1,087,788 Kent County Council receives through the Bus Service Operators Grant annually, which aims to keep fares down and maintain an extensive network.

Whilst this funding will help avoid an immediate drop in services, we recognise there will be a period of transition as local authorities and operators adapt to new travel patterns and create, sustainable networks for the future. That is why a key condition of this funding is that local authorities and operators work together to conduct network reviews that help to ensure networks are implemented which both cater for the needs of the local public and are sustainable for operators. Kent County Council have completed this process and it is currently being reviewed by officials.

The Government is, committed to ensuring that everyone, everywhere has access to great bus services, and the National Bus Strategy sets out a bold vision for bus services across the country. It addresses, in no uncertain terms, how the Government plans to deliver better bus services for passengers, through ambitious and far-reaching reform of how services are planned and delivered.

That is why the Department has asked all local transport authorities to commit to establishing an Enhanced Partnership (EP) or consider franchising arrangements. Indeed, EPs have now been introduced in some areas with many more expected to follow during the course of this year. These allow for operators to have a greater role, working with local transport authorities, to develop and deliver improvements for passengers.

You mention in your letter that Kent County Council should be fulfilling their transport obligations under the Education Act. I should explain that the law requires all local authorities in England to provide free home to school transport for eligible children of compulsory school age who attend their nearest school and are unable to walk there because it is beyond the statutory walking distance, because of their special educational needs or disability or because the route is unsafe. There are additional rights to free transport targeted at low-income families which are intended to help them exercise school choice. Further information is available in the statutory home to school transport guidance [here](#).

As part of their statutory duty to promote the use of sustainable travel and transport, local authorities should have a strategy to develop the transport infrastructure so that, as far as possible, it meets the travel and transport needs of children and young people, including those not eligible for free transport. If you have not already done so, you may wish to speak to Kent County Council about what travel options might be available.

Yours,
Charlotte

BARONESS VERE OF NORBITON