

## *October 2017 – Stagecoach*

Following complaints received by many members of the Eythorne, Elvington Community and other communities further afield, including, Ringwould, Aylesham, Northbourne and other nearby villages, I allowed a period of four weeks to collate as many complaints as possible, covering the bus routes and timetables in the Dover West and North Wards.

I requested all complaints be emailed to me and those who had not access to any form of IT I arranged for their complaints to be collated by the Elvington Community Warden, who emailed me a list of complainants details with their complaints.

Even though I had allowed a month to collate evidence, for without such, I might have had little chance of an audience with one of the directors of Stagecoach for the Dover to Canterbury area, Matthew Arnold.

A meeting was arranged with Matthew Arnold at the offices of Dover District Council.

At that meeting I outlined the nature of the community's complaints, separating all of the emails received, into the various villages covering the bus routes serving those villages.

I outlined the main complaints of residents were as follows, difficulty travelling to and from the local hospital or surgery, where the bus service had either been removed or had taken on additional routes, thus increasing journey times considerably, bus timetables or routes that had been altered preventing people from travelling to and from work, or from being able to leave the confines of their village for a social evening or shift working, school busses that were overcrowded to an unacceptable level were an example of the numerous complaints I was able to present to Mr Arnold.

One bus service in particular, which drew a numerous amount of complaints is the service number 89.

Mr Arnold explained that Stagecoach, whilst aiming to serve the larger community of the rural Dover area, could not afford to operate their busses continually at a loss, there would be no incentive to operate on certain routes due to poor passenger numbers.

A way to try to prevent more bus routes from being severed, due to those routes proving to be uneconomical to operate, often because the bus service was in competition from the local railway service, meant that wherever possible, rather than cut one service, they have amalgamated two bus service routes into one, thereby operating one bus on a service that had previously used two, meant that now the bus route was no longer operated at a loss.

Mr Arnold was presented with the full amount of emails of complaint and was requested to review all of the changes made to the various bus routes on the Dover West and Dover North area, in accordance with the numerous complaints received in particular route 89.

Mr Arnold stated he will read through all of the emails to see how he can address the complaints received. I was reminded that Stagecoach is operated as a business that must cover its overheads on the various routes and routes that operate at a loss can not be allowed to continue without intervention.

Mr Arnold stated it would not be possible to change things overnight, but has assured me he will try to do his best over the next few weeks to try to improve some of the routes, but re iterated that if a route has continued to prove to be uneconomic, due principally to poor passenger numbers, which he was able to evidence at the meeting, then the chances of that service being re-instated would probably be slim.

As a result of the many complaints received, a bus select committee is going to be convened at Kent County Council, with a view to meeting and negotiating with the directors of the various bus companies to find ways of improving their service with the community.

I am maintaining a regular contact with Matthew Arnold in an attempt to improve the rural bus service in the Dover West and North Wards and whilst I believe we will have to accept where a bus service may only ever have served a handful of passengers and would have operated at a serious loss then the only option would be to terminate that service, but, hopefully I will be able to get the bus director to revise some of the timetabling and some of the popular routes in line with those complaints received.

Geoffrey Lymer  
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Dover West Ward