

# CHARLIE ELPHICKE MP



HOUSE OF COMMONS

LONDON SW1A 0AA

Cllr Paul Carter  
Council Leader  
Kent County Council  
County Hall  
Maidstone, Kent  
ME14 1XQ

1<sup>st</sup> December 2017

*Dear Paul*

We are writing as Kent MPs to request that Kent County Council reconsiders plans to cut subsidies to 78 bus services across the county. These services are vital for elderly people, allowing them to get into towns to go shopping, visit relatives or attend doctor appointments. School children, disabled people and low earners also face being cut off.

While we commend the considerable savings KCC has made in recent years – necessitated by the highest budget deficit in decades left behind by Labour – we urge you to explore other practical options that avoid cutting these vital bus services.

## **Background**

As you know, subsidies for several routes were axed by KCC only last year. Similarly, some commercial operators have scrapped scores of services this year. More public transport cuts so soon after – and within months of a well-publicised 15% pay increase for councillors – is understandably causing concern amongst our constituents. Indeed, more than 9,000 people have already signed a petition calling for KCC to reverse these cuts. Understandably, people are worried about how they will get to work – or how their children will get to school. It is vital KCC listens to these concerns.

KCC's plans also contradict stated environmental aims, as well as the principles of many local quality bus partnerships the local authority has signed up to. These principles are: to create a public transport network acknowledged as an attractive alternative to private car use; to increase bus use to achieve a system capable of meeting the needs of the 21st century; and to attract investment and enhance work and leisure opportunities. KCC's plans to cut subsidies for 78 bus services do not appear to be in line with these principles. The proposed cuts are therefore difficult to defend.

*Member of Parliament for Dover & Deal*

We applaud the work done by KCC to make savings in recent years. Yet KCC's proposed bus services cuts are on a far greater scale than that of other local authorities. In the last fortnight, Norfolk County Council started consulting on proposals to reduce bus subsidies by £500,000. Cheshire East Council has plans to save £1 million. Yet KCC is seeking to save £4 million – a 70% reduction in its current budget. These cuts seem extreme to many residents and we strongly sympathise with their concerns.

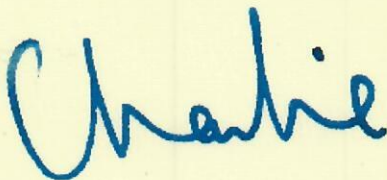
### **Conclusion**

As Kent MPs we are proud of the Government's record so far in tackling the crippling deficit left by Labour. KCC has likewise acted with common sense and competence in finding significant efficiency savings, helping us along the path to recovery and prosperity.

Yet some savings, even with good intentions and genuine justifications, are difficult to defend. In some areas the cuts to subsidized buses will cause significant disruption and place extra pressure on other services that are already crowded at peak times. We have already seen the problems caused by commercial operators' changes to services in some areas. Our constituents tell us that further reductions by KCC create a real risk of people having to give up work, that elderly people will be isolated and children will be unable to travel to school. There are also concerns about the impact withdrawing these services will have in areas experiencing high levels of development now and in the future.

Therefore, we urge KCC to fully explore alternative options – and that serious consideration is given to scrapping these plans, or at least reducing their scale. We would also welcome any assurances you can give for individual services, particularly those affecting schoolchildren.

We would be grateful for your comments on this important matter.



Charlie Elphicke MP

&



Greg Clark MP

Damian Collins MP

Tracey Crouch MP

Sir Michael Fallon MP

Sir Roger Gale MP

Helen Grant MP

Gordon Henderson MP

Craig Mackinlay MP

Gareth Johnson MP

Helen Whately MP