

**WRITTEN QUESTION TO THE MINISTER FOR INFRASTRUCTURE
BY DEPUTY R.J. WARD OF ST. HELIER
ANSWER TO BE TABLED ON TUESDAY 12th MAY 2020**

Question

“Will the Minister advise whether the subsidy paid by the Government of Jersey to Liberty Bus to provide a school bus service has continued since the closure of schools on 20th March 2020; and if so, will he advise whether the subsidy is being used to pay the wages of employees of this service?”

Original Answer

I can advise that the contract payments for the bus service under the 2013 Bus Operators Contract have continued.

The payments are being used to support continued provision of an essential service, including the cost of staff wages.

Revised answer

Under the contract LibertyBus is paid a monthly sum (12 equal subsidy payments) which covers both the public bus service and the school bus service. This payment has continued since 20th March. In addition to this sum, LibertyBus retains the income from ticket sales. Obviously, this income has been devastated due to dramatically reduced passenger numbers.

There are considerable fixed costs of the whole operation that relate to school buses (and the public service). A large proportion of the bus fleet is owned, maintained, and operated solely on school services. The income from school bus fares goes towards offsetting the variable costs of school buses (drivers' wages, fuel, lubricants, tyres etc).

LibertyBus have been paying drivers from their income. Ordinarily some of the school bus services form part of the duties of permanent, full-time drivers, who remain employed by LibertyBus. The remainder, who are part-time and for whom driving school buses is not their main job or primary source of income, are not working for LibertyBus at this time.

We obviously want and need our public transport operator to be in a reasonably healthy state following the easing of emergency restrictions, and to start rebuilding the bus service from the solid foundations of a rationalised but continuously-operated route network and timetable. LibertyBus is obviously currently operating at a loss and this is not sustainable.

It is not unreasonable for us to support our bus service. To ensure business continuity, UK local authorities have been urged to continue paying bus and coach operators for tendered services and home to school transport at the levels before any downturn in service provision or patronage, for at least the period of the outbreak, even if service delivery is disrupted/temporarily stopped.