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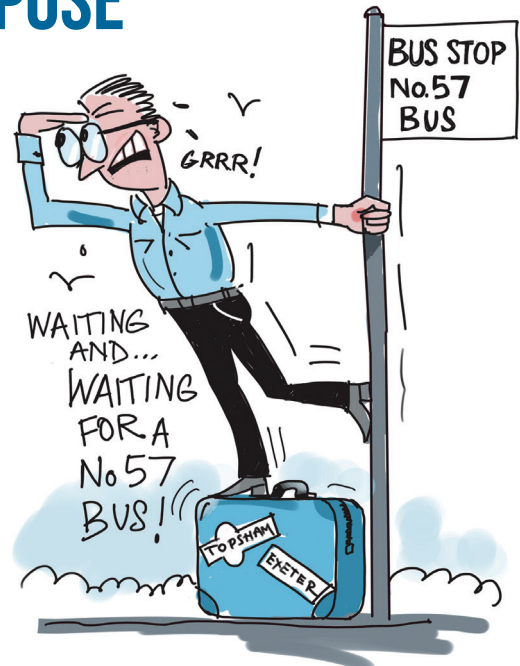
A BUS SERVICE NOT FIT FOR PURPOSE

The residents of Topsham are being consistently let down by the unreliable local bus services run across much of Devon by Stagecoach South West. Large numbers of us rely on the **57 and T buses** amongst others run by the company, and as well as timetable reductions, services frequently do not even run as advertised. Those services that do operate are then crowded and chaotic. It is not good enough, and something needs to be done.

The majority of Stagecoach services, in Exeter, are commercially run – with the exception of the daytime T service, which is paid for and operated through a contract awarded by Devon County Council. Cllr Leadbetter has worked hard to keep this funding in place as without it the service would not operate. In fact, Stagecoach have decided to hand this contract back, and it will in future be operated by Dartline.

Whilst the council can - and does - make deductions from Stagecoach's contract payments when services are cancelled or not run and issue warnings for repeated failures, they have no direct control over commercial services (including what vehicles are operated, when, and how much is charged). The timetable changes implemented by Stagecoach were initially made to avoid complete service cancellations due to driver shortages being suffered up and down the country, but unfortunately there has been little noticeable improvement.

As your councillors, we can assure you that we have been listening and passing on reports to Exeter City Council, Devon County Council and Stagecoach itself. As a result of the significant



numbers of complaints across the city and county, the Traffic Commissioner which licenses and regulates local bus services is now conducting a public inquiry. The Traffic Commissioner can choose to impose financial penalties on Stagecoach and even suspend its license, potentially allowing other operators to take over the service provision. Broader debates around the ability of a local authority to take over networks and operate a franchise model have also been had as this would give the council far greater control of services, though this does of course come with financial obligations.

As the inquiry progresses we are happy to receive and we will be communicating the outcomes in a future issue. Most importantly, we will be working together through Exeter City Council and Devon County Council to make sure we get the best possible outcome for all residents of Topsham.

Councillors:
**Andrew Leadbetter and
Joshua Ellis-Jones**