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House of Lords

9 May 2024

The Rt Rev. the Lord Bishop of Lincoln,

Thank you for your contribution to the debate on addressing the root causes of Child Poverty on 29 April. As you were unable to be present during my closing speech, I thought it best to write to you on the questions you raised.

Government believes that the best route out of poverty is through work and is committed to a sustainable, long-term approach to tackling poverty and supporting people into and to progress in work wherever they live in the UK.

To ensure that support meets the needs of people across the country, my Department offers a national programme of welfare and employment support, delivered through the Jobcentre Plus network across Great Britain.

Local jobcentres have the flexibility to work alongside national or local organisations to help meet the needs of their communities. The employer and partnership teams work closely with customers, employers, and partners to help fill vacancies from large scale employers to micro businesses in our rural areas.

For example, our Partnership Manager in the Lincolnshire area has worked closely with local college partners, who support students in rural Lincolnshire, to open up opportunities in the food production sector. In addition, the Local Enterprise Partnership has generated funding to assist with driver shortages, and training will take place until the end of 2024. Further information can be found here: <https://www.greaterlincolnshirelep.co.uk/funding-and-projects/other-funding/labour-market-support-fund/>

My Department has also established a partnership with Boston College which provides a range of services including outreach services in Spalding to deliver support for those with English as a second language, bus transport to facilitate access to their services from rural areas; and advice for people over 50 about getting new jobs and opportunities, provided via Jobcentres.

As I mentioned during the debate, the Supporting Families Programme funds local authorities to help families experiencing multiple disadvantages make sustained improvements with their problems. Our Supporting Families Employment Advisors have worked with local authorities to ensure venues in the region provide access for drop-in centres in Skegness, Alford, Spaulding, Louth and Grantham.

Local Jobcentres can also select the most appropriate channel for engaging with customers including through the use of video appointments for customers living in rural areas. In addition to current work, we continue to consider new ways of supporting our customers who live in rural areas.

However, we understand that poor transport links can be a major barrier to employment. To combat this, my Department has worked closely with local councils and teams to identify and provide local minibuss services to customers living in rural areas, as well as launching outreach services to young people affected by poor transport links.

The Government also recognises the importance of local bus services to ensuring communities can stay connected, including in rural areas. In England (outside London), we have announced investment of over £4.5 billion to improve local bus services since 2020. This includes over £2 billion to help local authorities level up bus services in their local areas, and almost £600 million for capping single bus fares on thousands of routes in England outside London at £2 until the end of this year. The Department for Transport's statistics show that following the introduction of the cap, bus fares in England outside London dropped by 6.2% between December 2022 and December 2023 and by over 11% in rural and non-metropolitan parts of England, mainly due to the £2 fare cap.

The Government also makes over £200 million available to bus operators every year through the Bus Service Operators Grant (BSOG) to help them maintain their network. A further £42 million in BSOG funding is provided directly to local authorities to help subsidise socially necessary bus services that might otherwise be commercially unviable, helping to support rural bus routes. The Government is also providing £20 million through the Rural Mobility Fund in England to trial 16 innovative demand-responsive minibuss services to better understand the challenges associated with introducing bookable bus services in rural and suburban settings.

I will place a copy of this letter in the Library.

With best wishes,  
James

**VISCOUNT YOUNGER OF LECKIE  
PARLIAMENTARY UNDER SECRETARY OF STATE  
(MINISTER FOR LORDS)**