

Minutes of the meeting of Environment and Sustainability Scrutiny Committee held at Conference Room 2 - Herefordshire Council, Plough Lane Offices, Hereford, HR4 0LE on Monday 21 September 2026 at 10.00 am

Present: Councillor Louis Stark (chairperson)
Councillor Justine Peberdy (vice-chairperson)

Councillors: Liz Harvey (substitute), Nick Mason, Ben Proctor (substitute) and Richard Thomas

In attendance: Councillor Elissa Swinglehurst (Cabinet Member Culture and Environment).

Officers: Gemma Dando (Chief Operating Officer - Resident Services), Danny Douglas (Public Transport Services Manager), John Hobbs (Corporate Director Economy and Environment), David Land (Head of Transport and Access Services).

172. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies had been received from Councillor Elizabeth Foxton and Councillor Robert Owens.

173. NAMED SUBSTITUTES

Councillor Liz Harvey substituted for Councillor Elizabeth Foxton.
Councillor Ben Proctor substituted for Councillor Robert Owens.

174. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

Councillor Proctor declared his involvement in assisting running buses in his capacity as a councillor.

175. MINUTES

The minutes of the previous meeting were received.

Resolved: That the minutes of the meeting held on 17 June 2026 be confirmed as a correct record and be signed by the Chairperson.

176. QUESTIONS FROM MEMBERS OF THE PUBLIC

No questions had been received from members of the public.

177. QUESTIONS FROM MEMBERS OF THE COUNCIL

No questions had been received from members of the council.

178. TRANSFORMATION OF THE ECONOMY AND ENVIRONMENT DIRECTORATE

1. The committee considered the transformation of the Economy and Environment Directorate, with discussion focused on whether the revised structure had strengthened the council's ability to deliver its environmental ambitions and respond to climate-related challenges. Concerns were raised that environmental priorities, including the climate and ecological emergency declaration, did not appear to have been a primary driver of the transformation.
2. Officers explained that environmental responsibility had been embedded across the organisation rather than concentrated within a single service area. They stated that the transformed structure was intended to encourage integrated working across departments and ensure that environmental considerations formed part of all council activities.
3. Members explored whether the new arrangements had improved the council's resilience and responsiveness to issues such as flooding, drought and wildfire risk. Officers highlighted work undertaken with communities, partners and internal services to improve preparedness and strengthen the council's ability to respond to emerging environmental challenges.
4. During discussion of resources and priorities, some members expressed concern that environmental objectives could be overshadowed by economic ambitions. In response, officers and members emphasised that economic growth and environmental sustainability should be viewed as complementary rather than competing objectives, with long-term prosperity dependent upon environmental resilience.
5. Attention then turned to performance management. Members questioned how the success of the transformation could be measured and suggested that clearer key performance indicators were required to demonstrate improvements in responsiveness, collaboration and service delivery. Officers accepted that performance measures could be strengthened and agreed that further work on meaningful KPIs would be beneficial.
6. Further debate focused on the absence of an overarching environmental framework. Members noted that while several individual strategies and plans existed, there was no single document bringing them together to provide a coherent strategic direction. Officers acknowledged that existing plans could be better integrated and presented within an overarching narrative.
7. The committee also considered the role of risk management. Members questioned whether climate change, environmental resilience and wider county-level sustainability risks were sufficiently reflected within current corporate risk arrangements. It was suggested that a broader approach to environmental risk management would assist strategic planning and resource allocation.
8. Discussion subsequently examined working relationships across the directorate. Officers reported that regular cross-service meetings, joint working arrangements and informal collaboration were helping planning, transport and environmental teams to work more closely together, despite responsibilities being contained within separate teams.
9. Members also reviewed specialist environmental capacity. Officers advised that limited core resources were supplemented through grant-funded programmes, enabling the council to access specialist expertise in areas such as ecology, nature recovery, retrofit programmes and river management. Members emphasised the importance of ensuring that specialist environmental expertise remained a key consideration within future budget planning, to meet specific

demands such as conducting habitat impacting assessments timely in planning applications.

10. Finally, the committee considered the process for environmental impact assessments. Officers explained that assessments were generally undertaken where required for specific projects and major schemes, often using external specialist consultants. Quality assurance arrangements formed part of the project governance process, with project teams and senior responsible officers retaining overall accountability.
11. At the conclusion of the item, the committee agreed the following recommendations:

That:

- i. **The Executive put together an overarching plan to deliver the council's response to the declared climate and ecological emergency, that brings together the various environmentally focussed plans being delivered across the council, for example LNRS, LTP, Carbon Management Plan, Waste Strategy.**
- ii. **The Executive should draw up a delivery plan that sets out at a lower level the outcomes expected from E&E on the environment.**
- iii. **The Executive should review the current process for drawing up environment impact assessments and report back to Council with an assessment of the efficacy of them and any proposed improvements required.**
- iv. **Current directorate KPIs are reviewed to reflect how the environment and economy team improve performance, particularly about response times, and to understand in particular what processes are failing.**
- v. **To accelerate the delivery of the update of the Local Plan to provide an overarching plan-led view of the environmental and economic objectives for the county and ensure then that the subordinate plans and policies align with and support delivery of that Local Plan.**
- vi. **For the directorate to identify explicitly how the Herefordshire Council Plan transformation objective of "becoming a data and performance rich culture" can promulgate environment and sustainability objectives and capture progress in their delivery for individuals and for service areas.**
- vii. **The relevant Cabinet portfolio holder consider whether the council and directorate risk registers sufficiently reflect environment and sustainability risks to the council and to the county, and report back to the committee on their findings.**

179. BUS AND PASSENGER SERVICES TASK AND FINISH GROUP

1. The committee received the final report of the Bus Provision Task and Finish Group and thanked the group members and officers for their work. Members heard that the review had taken place over the course of a year and had considered a wide range of issues including bus legislation, school transport, SEND transport, community transport, demand responsive transport, network integration, funding arrangements and cross-border services. The report concluded with eight recommendations aimed at improving connectivity, accessibility and the long-term sustainability of bus services across the county.

2. The Chair of the Task and Finish Group explained that the review had been undertaken during a period of significant change within the bus sector, including new legislation, changes to funding arrangements and developments in transport policy. Members recognised that improvements to bus services were already being progressed and that scrutiny had helped support and shape this work.
3. The committee discussed the format of the recommendations and agreed that the full report, including the supporting narrative beneath each recommendation, would be presented to Cabinet. Members considered that the explanatory text provided important context and detail for the recommendations.
4. Members considered proposed amendments to the report. Discussion focused on strengthening wording relating to the Enhanced Partnership and the need to support bus operators to engage with government-funded fare schemes, including the £2 fare cap initiative. Concerns were raised that not all operators appeared willing to participate, which could create inequalities in fare levels across different parts of the county. Officers advised that the council and Enhanced Partnership could encourage and support participation but could not compel operators to take part.
5. The committee also considered amendments to the recommendation on rural mobility innovation. Members agreed it was important that future transport solutions were assessed not only on passenger demand and value for money, but also on their ability to address transport inequalities affecting rural communities.
6. During the debate, members discussed the importance of improved data collection, performance monitoring and evidence gathering to support future decisions on bus provision and subsidy. It was acknowledged that assessing demand in rural areas was challenging and that pilot schemes, community-led initiatives and ongoing monitoring could help inform future service development.

Resolved that:

1. **The committee agreed the eight recommendations contained within the Task and Finish Group report and;**
2. **approved the proposed amendments to the supporting text as set out below:**

“Strengthen the Enhanced Partnership

The Enhanced Partnership should develop a more proactive, co-ordinated and structured approach to performance monitoring, accountability and data sharing, and should include structured engagement with Community Transport Providers as part of partnership discussions and future accessibility planning. Regular reporting and agreed performance measures will help support evidence-led decision-making, collaborative problem solving and continuous improvement across the network. The Enhanced Partnership should work with operators to overcome barriers to adoption of government intervention schemes such as the Summer Bus fare Offer and the £2 bus fare cap.”

“Adopt an Evidence-Led Approach to Rural Mobility Innovation

The Council should explore emerging rural mobility solutions and transport offerings, that overcome existing access inequality as well as where there is clear evidence of passenger demand, value for money and compatibility

with existing transport provision. Any future initiatives should be subject to robust evaluation.”

It was further agreed that the amended report would be forwarded to Cabinet, accompanied by a covering report explaining the changes made by the committee.

180. WORK PROGRAMME

1. The committee reviewed its work programme and agreed that the scheduled December items on carbon management and the rail strategy should remain in place, subject to further planning discussions with officers. Members noted that any amendments arising from those discussions would be circulated ahead of the meeting.
2. Members also discussed the proposed flooding spotlight review, considering its scope, officer capacity, and areas of focus. Views were expressed on flood prevention, riparian responsibilities, emergency response arrangements, support for affected residents, and community resilience. It was agreed that further discussions with officers would take place to develop a clear scope, terms of reference and programme of work, with proposals to be brought forward for agreement by December.

181. DATE OF THE NEXT MEETING

Wednesday 2 December 2026, 10am

The meeting ended at 12:49pm

Chairperson