Herefordshire Council

Title of report: Bus and community transport task and finish group terms of reference

Meeting: Environment and Sustainability Scrutiny Committee

Meeting date: 16 December 2025

Report by: Statutory Scrutiny Officer

Classification

Open

Decision type

This is not an executive decision

Wards affected

(All Wards);

Purpose

To agree a terms of reference and work programme for a task and finish group to review the bus and community transport services that operate within, to, from and through Herefordshire.

Recommendation(s)

That:

a) **The committee agree to the creation of the task and finish group and**

b) **Recommend any additions to the task and finish group work programme**

Alternative options

1. The committee could agree to not continue with the task and finish group and to reject the proposed programme of work. This is not recommended, as the committee have already informally agreed to the creation of the task and finish group, and the group has already carried out some work.

Further information on the subject of this report is available from
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Key considerations

2. A review of the scrutiny function in May 2025 highlighted a relative lack of scrutiny carried out through task and finish group. The review noted that this meant that Herefordshire Council was missing the opportunity for scrutiny to contribute more proactively to the development of policy and practice within the council. Council agreed that scrutiny committees should review their work programmes accordingly.

3. The Herefordshire Council Plan 2024-28 recognises poor transport connectivity - and its impact on inward investment, travel and economic growth - as one of the main challenges facing the council. It sets out as one of its objectives *to expand and maintain the transport infrastructure in a sustainable way and improve connectivity across the county*.

4. The committee have recognised this council priority and noted the impact of poor connectivity on those with the greatest deprivation. The primary aim of the group therefore is to examine how the Herefordshire is responding to the above objective in relation to county-wide bus provision. A secondary aim will be to look at how bus provision can be improved using the provisions of the current Bus Services Bill; in particularly with our five adjacent neighbouring authorities to contribute to addressing the Herefordshire Council Plan's challenge on inward investment, travel and growth.

5. The proposed terms of reference are attached as appendix 1 of this report. The proposed work programme is contained in appendix 1 of the work programme report for this meeting.

Community impact

9. The scrutiny function supports community development through robust scrutiny of the council's policy framework, including the Local Plan, Health and Wellbeing Strategy, County Plan and the Medium-Term Financial Strategy.

10. Scrutiny also supports community issues more directly through the work of the Connected Communities Herefordshire Council provides and purchases a wide range of services for the people of Herefordshire. Together with partner organisations in the private, public and voluntary sectors we share a strong commitment to improving our environmental sustainability, achieving carbon neutrality and to protect and enhance Herefordshire's outstanding natural environment.

11. All reports to scrutiny committees, as with all council committees, include appraisals of the impact of the report content on climate change. Scrutiny committee work programmes directly link to the County Plan priorities, including the key priority to "Protect and enhance our environment and keep Herefordshire a great place to live.

12. Climate change and carbon reduction related issues are directly identified in the remit and therefore focus of the Environment and Sustainability scrutiny committee.

13. Whilst this is a decision on back office functions and will have minimal environmental impacts, consideration has been made to minimise waste and resource use in line with the Council's Environmental Policy. Examples include:

    a. Online meetings, eliminating the need to travel to Hereford for a single meeting.

    b. Paper-free briefings and informal meetings, eliminating the need for printed paper.

Equality duty

6. Under section 149 of the Equality Act 2010, a public authority must, in the exercise of its functions, have due regard to the need to:

   c. eliminate discrimination, harassment, victimisation and any other conduct that is prohibited by or under this Act;

   d. advance equality of opportunity between persons who share a relevant protected characteristic and persons who do not share it;

   e. foster good relations between persons who share a relevant protected characteristic and persons who do not share it.

7. The public sector equality duty (specific duty) requires us to consider how we can positively contribute to the advancement of equality and good relations, and demonstrate that we are paying 'due regard' in our decision making in the design of policies and in the delivery of services. As this report is primarily for information, we do not believe that accepting (or rejecting) this report will have an impact on our equality duty.

Resource implications

8. Effective scrutiny produces evidence-based recommendations. These can be informed by learning from best practice and an understanding of 'what works' at other similar local authorities, as well as developing a robust picture of what the situation is locally based on data, intelligence and insights. Where adopted recommendations can help with the efficiency and effectiveness of services that can be delivered differently, as well as informing the development of current and new policies.

9. As this report is primarily for information, there are no direct resource implications arising from this report. However, the function may require some funding in order to carry out its work effectively. Requirements may include purchasing training or expert advice. However it is anticipated that much of the training and development required during the year can be met using existing council resources.

Risk management

10. Effective scrutiny is a feature of the council's governance arrangements, where the council is operating executive arrangements. There are a range factors that could result in risks to council of not doing scrutiny effectively. These include the failure to:

    a. challenge and hold decision makers to account
    b. link scrutiny work to the delivery of the council's priorities and risk management
    c. carry out thorough and appropriate research to make evidence-base recommendations
    d. engage partners and providers
    e. ensure that structures and models of operation are fit for purpose and match ambition and available resources
    f. ensure that scrutiny can operate as the voice of communities and
    g. draw on member knowledge and experience to inform policy development.

11. To mitigate, tolerate or eradicate these risks, enablers for effective scrutiny include:

    a. operating in an apolitical manner

b. clarity of vision and purpose
c. scrutiny support availability, capability and capacity
d. effective engagement and commitment by members and officers at all levels, including cabinet, opposition leaders, scrutiny chairs and senior officers who play a central role in setting the tone and direction
e. robust work programming and prioritisation of topics with clear objectives and expected impacts
f. ensuring that scrutiny work will add value to the council and communities e.g. through strong links between work programme topics and the integrated strategic plans that set out the actions and timescales to deliver the priorities in the County Plan
g. access to and availability of robust data and intelligence and
h. good relationships with partners and providers.

Appendices

Appendix 1 – Bus and Passenger Services Task and Finish Group – terms of reference.

Background papers

None identified

Glossary of terms, abbreviations and acronyms used in this report

No abbreviations or acronyms used.