

Public involvement in housing development Task and Finish Group

Terms of Reference

Background

Getting local people involved in housing planning and development is important for making the process fair, trusted, and effective. Research shows there is often a gap between the aim of giving communities a real say and the reality of how engagement works.

Neighbourhood planning was brought in to give residents more influence, but studies show that it tends to attract certain groups while many others are left out.

Government reviews suggest that when communities do get involved, they can help deliver more homes and better design, but the process is not equal everywhere. Public surveys also find that most people want more say in local housing decisions, yet many do not know how planning works or feel that their input will make a difference.

The Herefordshire Council Plan 2024 – 2028 sets out key priorities for the council around housing, including a commitment to “support the right housing in the right place – emphasising the importance of ensuring housing aligns with local needs and preserves the county’s character and environment” and “creating the conditions to deliver sustainable growth across the county ... enabling housing development and providing the right infrastructure.” Central to this will be producing a new Local Plan, containing the spatial development strategy and strategic proposals for the county over the period 2025-2045.

How can Herefordshire Council ensure that its involvement and engagement with residents around housing development and planning give communities a real say in the process, and in turn deliver a more effective planning process that meets the priorities of the Herefordshire Council Plan?

Objectives

- To look at good practice in public involvement in housing development and planning, including examples from other local authorities.

- To understand the points of a housing development when people in Herefordshire can and should be involved in housing development.
 - Local Plan, and its ancillary planning documents and statements
 - Local Transport Plan
 - Planning application process
- To scrutinise current practice and explore opportunities to apply learning from other local authorities to Herefordshire.

Resources and governance

- The chair will appoint 5-7 elected members of Council to the task and finish group. Councillors appointed to Cabinet cannot be members of this group. The group will determine its own chair.
- The group can appoint up to two co-opted members to its group, either as expert witnesses or residents of Herefordshire.
- The group will be supported by staff from Democratic Services and elsewhere within Herefordshire Council.
- The Scrutiny Management Board will be invited to input into the review and will be kept informed of the group's progress.
- Other committees and boards of Herefordshire Council may be invited to input into the review
- The Task and Finish Group will determine which external organisations will be invited to give evidence to the Group

Indicative timetable

Terms of reference agreed and members appointed	July 2025
Scope and agree an indicative work programme	September 2025
Desk research Initial evidence gathering	September to December 2025
External witnesses Gathering evidence from external organisations	September-March 2025
Final report and recommendations	May 2026

The task and finish group will agree its timetable in consultation with relevant officers, representatives of external organisations and its own assessment of the time needed at

each step. This indicative timetable is an estimate before detailed information gathering has commenced.