



Environment and Sustainability Scrutiny Committee Bus and community transport task and finish group

Terms of reference

Background

As one of the most rural unitary authorities in England, with the fourth lowest population density, Herefordshire faces real challenges in providing bus services that serve all our residents. This is not just about convenience, but can affect residents' ability to access physical services, restrict education, training and employment opportunities and militate against our aim to achieve net zero by 2030.

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*.

Aim

The primary aim 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 particular with our five adjacent neighbouring authorities to contribute to addressing the Herefordshire Council Plan's challenge on inward investment, travel and growth.

Objectives

1. Review how Herefordshire Council uses its existing powers and responsibilities to shape bus provision across the county.
 - a. Review how other local authorities use their existing powers and responsibilities to provide passenger transport services, particularly those in rural areas.
2. Examine how it ensures best use of existing funding on bus services.
3. Look at how Herefordshire plans to spend the £3.2m allocated for the Bus Services Improvement Programme.
 - a. Were we able to maximise our allocation?
 - b. Has the enhanced partnership worked as expected?
4. Consider the options available to Herefordshire Council from the Bus Services (No. 2) Bill going through parliament, including opportunities for franchising.
5. Consider how to expand cross county and cross border public transport to make it more accessible and flexible.
 - a. Explore the current role of the Marches Forward Partnership in terms of scaling up bus provision regionally.
6. Analyse the outcomes from the council's proposed bus summits and consider adopting any of them.

7. Examine the opportunities to support and develop community-led transport
8. Scrutinise opportunities to reconfigure bus services to serve a sparsely populated county such as Herefordshire.
 - a. How would Herefordshire Council fund these opportunities and make the best use of the resources required?
9. Make recommendations to the Environment and Sustainability Scrutiny Committee.

Make-up of group

The group will consist of between 4 to 7 members and chaired by a member of the Environment and Sustainability Scrutiny Committee. The membership will be open to all councillors, other than Cabinet members. The group will determine its chair.

We will seek to recruit a representative from a bus users' group, such as Buses4Us, as a co-opted member to the group.

The group will be administered by the Statutory Scrutiny Officer and the committee's Democratic Services Officer.

Timing and report back

This is a major and critical study, which could feed into the operation of LTP5. The group will report back to the December Environment and Sustainability Scrutiny Committee on progress so far, with a view to bringing the final report to the committee in June 2026. We will bring the terms of reference and a programme of work to the committee's meeting in September for formal approval.