

Scrutiny Report

Bus and Community Transport Provision

December 2018

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Scrutiny Task Group Membership

Officer Support

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Lead Member's Foreword

Growing up in Wythall, in the most northern corner of Worcestershire, public transport was a vital link for me to stay connected to friends, get to work and university. The subsidised bus service from Wythall to Birmingham was a fundamental part of everything I did and was a lifeline for a teenager. Now, as a councillor, the recognition of the importance of a reliable public transport network is at the forefront of my work. I lead this scrutiny task force to ensure that

Bus and Community Transport Provision

Background and Purpose of the Scrutiny

1. At its meeting on **13 September 2018**, the Council unanimously agreed the following Motion:

"The Council is concerned at the unexpected cuts in bus services announced by First and Diamond bus companies in August which take effect on 17 and 3 September respectively.

We welcome the undertaking that the Council will carry out a fundamental review of its entire subsidised services which will involve a public consultation exercise.

We ask that this review is supported by an urgent cross-party scrutiny into current bus and community transport provision which should include the availability of transport at crucial times of the day to get to work, to school or college, to medical appointments and for shopping. The scrutiny exercise should be completed by middle/late November to feed into the 2019/20 budget-setting process."

2. The Overview and Scrutiny Performance Board (OSPB) agreed at its meeting on **26 September 2018** that a Scrutiny Task Group led by Councillor Chris Bloore (Chairman of the OSPB) would be set up to scrutinise this issue. The findings of the scrutiny would feed into the Council's review of subsidised services and also into finalisation of the 2019/20 budget setting process.

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The Task Group's approach

6. Evidence has been gathered from a variety of sources, including Worcestershire County Council (WCC) Passenger Transport Officers, commercial bus operators,

17. The Task Group asked how

21. The Task Group learnt that the Dire

Whilst noting that all single level buses should be 'low floor' to comply with current regulations, feedback has been received to indicate that accessible buses for those with restricted mobility are not always available.

Impact on journeys to work, too restricting for people to rely on them (times and regularity). Concern that when bus services are cut, people have no way of getting to work and may potentially lose their jobs.

The importance of easily accessible bus stops for older people and those with mobility problems, especially near sheltered housing or supported living schemes.

Bus stops often too far for villagers to access or involve crossing a very busy road.

Lack of integrated services cross border. Additional fares required to reach transport hubs to access main destinations.

- Community Transport schemes do play a key role, but we have had feedback that concessionary passes are not able to be used on some schemes. Pre-bookable service is not always convenient for some journeys.

30. Problems identified with current services ±main themes

Lack of consistency, reliability, regularity, cancellations.

Difficulty getting to hospital appointments, fitting around available bus services.

Lack of communication as to why buses are late/cancelled.

Social isolation for older and vulnerable people. Residents being cut off from family and friends due to cuts in services. The bus provides a lifeline. Once bus service is removed, only option is taxis and these are too costly.

People are missing out on social interaction and events that others take for granted.

Buses don't run to schedule, services are randomly withdrawn, especially at non-peak times. No information is provided. Timetables don't fit with school times.

Poor driving techniques, lack of understanding of people with disabilities, not waiting for passengers to be seated. Refusing to lower front of bus to allow mobility access.

Lack of good English skills. Training for drivers required to ensure vulnerable clients feel more secure to use the services.

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31. Groups who would use bus services if they were available/accessible

Older people

Barriers to participation - access to regular and affordable bus services is crucial. From recent Age UK engagement sessions with older people, transport issues/concerns are the main barrier cited as preventing them from playing an active role in their community.

Importance of accessibility of bus stops, taking into account reduced walking abilities and the difficulties of steep sloped areas.

Off peak services have been lost even in areas which have expanding residential areas.

Unreliable services a real problem for older people, causes concern and uncertainty.

Lack of co-ordination between buses, allowing little time to complete activities in town.

If there were more services midday to mid-afternoon particularly back from Worcester and other main towns.

Reduced services lead to a sense of social isolation and also mental and other health problems.

The bus provides a lifeline for elderly residents.

Service reduction impacts on older residents, particularly with access to health care.

Some older residents have encountered problems using their concessionary passes when they cross the border to other areas, even though Transport officers have advised that under the English National Concessionary Travel Scheme (ENCTS), they should be able to use them in all areas after 9.30am and all weekend.

A shuttle service linking to key hubs would be useful.

People with mobility problems/physical disabilities or learning disabilities

- Vulnerable people left isolated when commercial services are cut altogether, eg.in rural villages and sometimes in towns, such as recently in the Habberley Estate, Kidderminster. *(In respect of the Habberley estate, the Task Group learned that a CT provider had stepped in to offer a limited service on a trial basis).*
Accessibility issues especially for disabled residents and the blind. Issues for

Commuters including those connecting with railways

Concerns regarding cutbacks and changes in timetables which have led to the last buses arriving too late for starting work and leaving much earlier.

Where there are buses for commuters, they don't allow for flexible working hours.

Reliability regularly affected by unexpected roadworks (where they haven't been notified) and heavy congestion.

Some of the bus services which are currently subsidised, would cease if the subsidies were withdrawn, as they would no longer be commercially viable.

Communication with WCC could be improved, especially when timetable changes are being considered. All options should be considered and timely information provided to the public on any changes agreed.

Bus lanes and other measures to restrict cars would assist with the flow of bus services and encourage more usage. Important to ensure they are enforced.

Concessionary travel reimbursement is important, but routes cannot be sustained just on this basis.

Scholars Travel payment is vital to some bus companies, enabling them to retain other services.

Technology such as real time information at bus stops/Apps to track buses is seen as positive and should be expanded to other areas, although it is important the technology works and people are aware of it.

The types of contract with bus operators vary, with some fixed rates and others subsidized income from fares in fixed contracts, how are bus companies incentivised to increase passenger numbers?

Quality of bus stock and recent investment in this area.

Bad publicity in the County deterred potential users and had a detrimental effect on other operators.

Some capacity for additional services in the 10am to 2pm slot between school runs.

All passengers needed to be able to access clear timetables which were widely publicised.

Community Transport

33. To gain a greater understanding of the current community transport (CT) arrangements, the Task Group met with the Chairman of the Consortium of Community Transport providers, who was representing the majority of CT schemes across the County. At a later meeting, the Task Group also met with the Council's Community Transport Officer.
34. The Task Group learned that Community Transport is very much seen as an integral part of the Council's Passenger Transport function, and is supported by one part-time member of staff. Across 18 schemes (13 of the larger ones come together in the Worcestershire CT Consortium) there are 165,000 journeys a year (provided by voluntary car schemes, Dial-a-Ride minibuses and Community Buses) and around 500 volunteers. Financial support from local authorities is an important

could also pick up members of the public, something which was more effective in urban areas.

36. CT was for anyone who could not travel by other means and was not means tested this could be due to being unable to drive, due to mobility, or just a lack of car or alternative bus, for example, a parent with a young child who needs to make an essential journey but there is no suitable bus or access to a bus. Some users only use CT for activities where help is required e.g. supermarket shop if help is needed to carry bags.

37. Whenever bus services were removed, CT would look at whether a scheme could be set up. Examples of leaflets were circulated e.g. Habberley estate (where a new twice weekly scheme is being trialled) and Malvern Link. Member knowledge of the local area and their input was very valuable, also the use of divisional funds e.g. printing surveys, timetables etc.

38. All the schemes rely heavily on volunteers for their operation, and the CT Officer was struck by the fact that many drivers got as much out of it as they put in, in terms of social connections and fulfilling a role.

39. A few schemes benefit from being awarded contracts for transporting vulnerable persons, and also school routes, and these are crucial to the survival of those schemes. However, the Government is consulting on chaareretr,13.003 (o)4.002 (r)102 (r)-10 (n)14.0drM.1

contribute to the Council's review of subsidised services and also into the 2019/20 budget setting process.

49. **Bus subsidies** - the Task Group is very concerned that criteria used to determine bus subsidies may result in funds being directed towards urban/semi urban areas of deprivation, at the expense of larger villages (*the equivalent of a Category 1 village in SWDP*). They felt that it was important that large villages retain a baseline timetabled service to link them with nearby towns. The feedback had demonstrated the huge impact that bus cuts/reductions were having on residents in rural areas, leading to social isolation of vulnerable and older people and creating difficulties for residents to get to work and college. They wanted to investigate whether the bus subsidies could be used more effectively to enhance rural sustainability.
50. **Potential for services in between school runs** - many of the school buses are under-used when not on school runs while drivers may be employed full-time.

or difficult to access. The Task Group were keen to support the CT providers and felt the following might be ways in which they could do this:

Helping to improve the public's understanding of CT schemes and how to access them with additional publicity

Clarification on the legal requirements for Volunteer drivers in CT schemes to

57. Recommendation 2: Review Bus Subsidy Criteria

60. Recommendation 5: Governance and Tendering

That the Council should, as part of its governance and tendering processes, ensure the transparency and accountability of the allocation of subsidies should be further improved.

The Council should ensure that the skills of negotiators are sufficient to ascertain the degree of profit the provider is achieving due to Council subsidies.

61.

Appendix 1 Schedule of Activity

Date	Event
10 October 2018	Meeting with Paul Smith, WCC Transport Operations Manager
24 October 2018 (AM)	Meeting with

Appendix 3 Bus Subsidy Criteria

Category	Category Information	Score	Weighting	Revised Weighting
Cost Per Passenger	Cost	5 4 3 2 1		4 2
Passengers per Job			1	2
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Index of Multiple D				
15-2144 90 2				

Appendix 4 Summary of issues referred to in feedback where there are particular concerns about the removal, reduction or lack of bus services.

For ease the comments have been grouped into District Council geographical areas.

Bromsgrove

S3 service serving rural areas including Hillcrest Caravan Park in Portway, St Mary's and other park home sites where there is a concentration of older people. Concerns

Birmingham.

Timetables mean that clusters of buses arrive together in Bromsgrove e.g. 145/202 145/318 42/43 and the 93/99.

Evening services linked to trains arriving at Barnt Green would be useful.

Lickey and Blackwell no evening service to Blackwell from Bromsgrove after 7pm.

Young people and the elderly particularly disadvantaged by limitation of current services.

DRM buses have unilaterally ceased operating Worcester bound services via Little Green Broadwas.

Bus service Broadwas to Worcester every 2 hours concern for the future Earls Croome only 1 bus a day too big a gap in Worcester for return journey. No return from Upton late afternoon.

Buses needed in to Worcester from Earls Croome area for students to access education options.

Problems caused by significant reduction in services on the Upton to Worcester route and no services at all from Upton to Malvern or Upton to Tewkesbury routes. A limited pre-bookable Dial a Ride service to Malvern is available.

Upton concerns if people can't get to work that they will move away to areas with better services, taking younger people out of the town or not being able to work at all. Students also find difficulty accessing education opportunities in Worcester.

Lack of regular bus services to Upton, difficult to fit with working hours in Worcester. No buses on evenings and one bus a day at the weekend. Real concerns for the future.

Upton low income families hardest hit with lower level of car ownership and less ability to help their children with the high cost of driving lessons/car ownership.

Elderly people have their freedom restricted with fewer services increasing social isolation. Those living in the sheltered housing units at the Graftons and Thomas Morris House want more services including an increase of buses into the centre of Upton.

Feels like Upton is becoming a forgotten town that only caters for car owners and festival goers.

Encouraged to use buses to cut congestion and improve environment, yet very limited services available.

The bus times in Upton offer no consideration to the commuter, restrict you visiting neighbouring towns, offer no connections to other services, trains etc. and are based on timetables they know will fail, so they can then withdraw the service.

Bus from Upton to Malvern Retail Park would be useful.

Standing room only by the time the Upton bus reaches Worcester yet they say services not being used!

More regular service from Tenbury to Hereford and other towns on a weekend would be helpful.

Reduced services restrict choice for post -16 options and employment. Also for recreational activities for this age group. Local petition regarding a request for a service bus from Teme valley to Hereford.

Severn Stoke just one bus a day, does not fit with work or college hours. An extra bus with timings adjusted would cover needs of more people.

Longdon there has been no commercial bus services for a long time and community transport no longer runs through the village; residents therefore have to make their own arrangements.

Kenswick and Wichenford buses are not regular enough, last buses back too early. No evening service.

Redditch

The 70 bus to Redditch doesn't run after 7pm. No Sunday service for Astwood bank. Infrequent bus service 350 to Worcester from Astwood bank

Service from Astwood Bank often doesn't run to timetable or bus fails to appear.

Feckenham only 2 services a week- totally inadequate. The Redditch to Astwood Bank service could be extended to Feckenham at hourly frequency.

through rural villages are compensated by profitable routes.
Lack of buses from Charlton area to Worcester/Evesham/Pershore. The existing X50 bus could divert through Cropthorne and Charlton before returning to the B4084.
Cropthorne no bus stop provided at New Inn, Cropthorne on X50 route.
Fladbury, Charlton and Cropthorne -

