

Response from Councillor Alan Amos, Cabinet Member with Responsibility for Highways to the Scrutiny Task Group Report on Bus and Community Transport Provision.

The Cabinet Member notes the report of the Overview and Scrutiny Task Group on Bus and Community Transport Provision and would like to thank them for their balanced and comprehensive report, and for their interest in this very important subject.

The Committee can be assured that this will be a very useful document in informing the wider Transport Review which is now under way, as we will be looking into the total provision of bus services across the whole County Council.

I have deliberately not responded to each and every point in the Task Group's Report as the whole point of the Transport Review is to look at all of these issues in greater depth and it would be inappropriate of the Cabinet Member to be seen to have pre-empted the outcome of the wider Review by expressing opinions before seeing the research and recommendations that the Transport Review will be making. However, the Task Group's report will be useful and helpful in informing the wider Transport Review on those issues it has looked at.

I have made comments about aspects of the report and these are shown against the paragraph number from the Scrutiny Report.

Bus Services and how the Council supports services

13 The Transport Review is looking at the totality of Transport provided by Worcestershire County Council, currently at a cost of some £22m. This will include Home to School transport and SEND expenditure where we are looking to remove any duplication and see how the same level of service can be provided in a more efficient and logical manner.

20 I welcome the Task Group's discussion in paragraph 22 about the interlinkage between bus services and how interdependent they often are. It is always necessary to consider the knock on consequences of the reduction of one service on other routes and this will certainly be a significant issue for the wider Review to investigate. I welcome the Task Group's comments in paragraph 18 about the relevance and viability of bus subsidy criteria. Clearly, this is a changing situation and the criteria should be regularly reviewed to remain relevant and viable.

29 *Gaps identified in the current provision – main themes from survey feedback*

The Task Group has rightly referred to the need for accessible bus services for older people and this will be something the Review will certainly be considering.

30. *Problems identified with current services – main themes*

I fully concur with the Task Group's comments about the importance of bus reliability and punctuality and it is essential that we work together to considerably reduce the levels of delays and cancellations in services. I strongly support the reference to the issue of social isolation for older and vulnerable people and this will be a significant issue for the

Review to take on board. There is no doubt that there are groups of people who rely disproportionately on buses to maintain a healthy and productive lifestyle.

I welcome the reference to signage and timetables at bus stops, an issue we have been working on for some time,

**Reflect the desire to grow public transport provision to meet future
as well as current need
Address the issue of social isolation across the County**

The practical issues concerning buses, bus stops, partnership working in relation to bus shelters, reliability of drivers, accessibility etc. – these areas were raised through feedback and should be discussed with the bus companies and the County Council and actioned as a matter of priority.

These issues go hand in hand with the underpinning principle, in the Foreword and Recommendation 1, of working differently to grow awareness of the brand and usage.

I totally endorse the Task Group's comments about the need to ensure that timetable information is accurate, reliable and readily available and that there is scope for greater partnership working with bus companies on this issue.

The Task Group's comments a Tmr bus stops and bus shelters and reliability of drivers are all issues that the Bus Review will consider.

Recommendation 4: Working With Bus Operators

That the Council ensures effective liaison with bus providers and appropriate action on the following:

That in the Council's liaison with bus providers, attempts be made to address some of the major concerns with services/routes raised in the feedback

Opportunities be explored for using the school transport buses more effectively in the 10am to 2pm slot, in order to provide a service to meet the needs of socially isolated communities

Ensuring that the permits to contractors are altered to ensure that they are required to notify bus companies of any disruption to bus routes in advance of the work

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.

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My opening comments refer, that it would be inappropriate for the Cabinet Member to be seen to have pre-empted the outcome of the wider Review by expressing opinions before seeing the research and recommendations that the Transport Review will be making.

I look forward to working with the Scrutiny Committee in dealing with the above issues as we go forward, in particular to consider how we address the fundamental issue of encouraging greater use of public transport to ensure that passenger numbers grow rather than get stuck in the spiral of decline. The Transport Review will be a long term strategic analysis of all the factors involved in bus transport throughout the County, with a view to putting our bus services on a more secure and stable foundation. I am pleased to see that that is the principal objective of the Task Group