

Local Bus Retendering – 2026

Member Briefing Note

Overview

As part of the 2026 retendering programme, Shropshire Council has completed a countywide review of supported local bus services. The review covered 21 services due for retender in 2026, including contracts reaching the end of their current five-year term and UK Government-funded services reaching the end of their two-year funding period. There are roughly 60 subsidised local bus services in Shropshire, as such, this review represents roughly one third of Shropshire Council's network.

This review has considered:

- passenger demand
- cost per service
- value for money
- the role each route plays in connecting communities

Officers and Cabinet Members have reviewed all services in this programme, with decisions focused on protecting essential connectivity while keeping the network affordable and sustainable.

Financial context

Supported bus services rely on a combination of Council base budget funding, which has remained protected and Department for Transport (DfT) grant funding (provided annually).

- Total current programme cost: **£3.14M** per year.
- Like-for-like renewal would increase costs by **£521k annually**
- DfT revenue funding has reduced by **£200k** per year

This creates a combined funding pressure of over **£700k+**, meaning it is not possible to retain all services in their current form.

What this means

The retendering programme for 2026 focuses on:

- protecting core bus routes used most by residents, particularly rural residents.
- improving services where possible
- removing services with very low usage or poor value
- reinvesting funding into stronger, more sustainable connections

These changes are needed to give the Council flexibility to manage future risks, including:

- commercial service withdrawals
- operator contract cancellations
- rising fuel and staffing costs



Key changes across the network

- **Inter-Urban routes**
 - Key connections between towns protected
 - 437 (Broseley – Shrewsbury) retained – **August 2026**
 - 501 (Ellesmere – Shrewsbury) retained – **September 2026**
 - 553 (Bishop’s Castle to Plox Green (onwards to Shrewsbury) retained – **September 2026**
 - 558 (Montgomery to Shrewsbury) retained with improved timetable – **September 2026**
 - 64 (Market Drayton to Shrewsbury) Arriva cancelling this commercial service from September, Council taking over the route in full to protect vital service, which is additional pressure (£) to budgets – **September 2026**
- **Wem & Ellesmere – September 2026**
 - Existing low-frequency town services replaced (201 & 208)
 - New 508 service introduced, connecting both towns
 - Improved access for rail at Wem, banking, tourism, education and healthcare
- **Ludlow – September 2026**
 - Core services 701 and 702 retained
 - New low-floor accessible buses introduced
 - Ludlow Park & Ride withdrawn following trial with low usage
 - 702 service will operate to Ludlow Park & Ride site instead
- **Shrewsbury town network – September 2026**
 - Low-use services withdrawn – 2, 3A, 37 & 12
 - Core routes retained and improved, including: 20, 23 & 26
 - New buses and improved value for money
- **Shrewsbury Park & Ride – November 2026**
 - Investment focused on Oxon and Harlescott sites
 - Meole Brace Park & Ride withdrawn due to reduced usage
 - New evening service introduced (6:30pm–10:00pm)
 - New shelters and real-time information being installed

Encouraging use of local bus services

Small changes in how we travel can make a big difference to maintaining local services.



Use your bus where you can

The more people who use bus services, the stronger and more sustainable they become.



Check if you're eligible for free travel

Many residents qualify for a concessionary bus pass, providing free travel across the network. [Concessionary travel information](#)



Next steps

1. Engagement with local members, town and parish councils – **Completed (June 2026)**
2. Public announcement – **18th June at midday**
3. Contracts finalized – **June/July 2026**
4. **August 2026**
 - a. Citymapper launched countywide
 - b. Arriva Midlands to operate - 437
5. **September 2026**
 - a. D&G Buses to operate – 64, 558, 301, 20, 23 & 26
 - b. Lakeside Coaches to operate – 501 & 508
 - c. Minsterley Motors to continue to operate – 553
 - d. Diamond Buses to operate – 701 & 702
 - e. Services 2, 3A, 37, 12, 201, 208 & 722 will end *31st August 2026*
6. **November 2026**
 - a. Meole Brace Park & Ride will close
 - b. New evening service (6.30pm to 10pm) launched on retained services Oxon & Harlescott
 - c. Oxon Hospital Shuttle retained, funded by Royal Shrewsbury Hospital

END.

