

CITY OF  
WOLVERHAMPTON  
COUNCIL

# Vibrant and Sustainable City Scrutiny Panel

5 September 2019

**Time** 6.00 pm **Public Meeting?** YES **Type of meeting** Scrutiny

**Venue** Committee Room 3 - Civic Centre

## Membership

**Chair** Cllr Mak Singh (Lab)  
**Vice-chair** Cllr Paul Appleby (Con)

### Labour

Cllr Mary Bateman  
Cllr Philip Bateman MBE  
Cllr Greg Brackenridge  
Cllr Alan Butt  
Cllr Jacqui Coogan  
Cllr Bhupinder Gakhal  
Cllr Keith Inston  
Cllr Beverley Momenabadi  
Cllr Martin Waite

### Conservative

Cllr Christopher Haynes

Quorum for this meeting is three Councillors.

## Information for the Public

If you have any queries about this meeting, please contact the Democratic Services team:

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# Agenda

## Part 1 – items open to the press and public

*Item No.*     *Title*

### MEETING BUSINESS ITEMS

- 1            **Apologies**
- 2            **Declarations of interest**
- 3            **Minutes of the previous meeting** (Pages 5 - 16)  
[To approve the minutes of the previous meeting as a correct record]
- 4            **Matters arising**  
[To consider any matter arising from the minutes]

### DISCUSSION ITEMS

- 5            **Burial Places in Wolverhampton and the Crematorium** (Pages 17 - 20)  
To consider a briefing report on Burial Places in Wolverhampton and the Crematorium.
- 6            **Work Programme** (Pages 21 - 42)  
To consider the Scrutiny Work Programme.

### PRE-DECISION SCRUTINY

- 7            **Housing Strategy** (Pages 43 - 82)  
To consider a report on the draft Housing Strategy (Pre-Decision Scrutiny)
- 8            **Housing Allocation Policy** (Pages 83 - 94)  
To consider a briefing note on the Housing Allocation Policy (Pre-Decision Scrutiny).
- 9            **Empty Homes Policy and Strategy Action Plan** (Pages 95 - 112)  
To consider a report (Pre-Decision Scrutiny) on the draft Empty Homes Policy and Strategy Action Plan that is scheduled to be received by the Cabinet Resources Panel on 1 October 2019.

### DISCUSSION ITEM

- 10          **Exclusion of press and public**  
[That in accordance with Section 100A(4) of the Local Government Act 1972 the press and public be excluded from the meeting for the following items of business as they involve the likely disclosure of exempt information on the grounds shown below].  
  
[Paragraph 7 - Information relating to any action taken or to be taken in connection with the prevention, investigation or prosecution of crime]
- 11          **Keep Your Street Neat Briefing Note** (Pages 113 - 118)  
To consider an exempt briefing note on the “Keep Your Street Neat” campaign.

# Vibrant and Sustainable City Scrutiny Panel

Agenda Item No: 3

## Minutes - 20 June 2019

### Attendance

#### Members of the Vibrant and Sustainable City Scrutiny Panel

Cllr Paul Appleby (Vice-Chair)  
Cllr Mary Bateman  
Cllr Philip Bateman MBE  
Cllr Greg Brackenridge  
Cllr Alan Butt  
Cllr Jacqui Coogan  
Cllr Christopher Haynes  
Cllr Keith Inston  
Cllr Beverley Momenabadi  
Cllr Mak Singh (Chair)

#### In Attendance

Cllr Steve Evans (Portfolio Holder – City Environment)

#### Employees

Martin Stevens (Scrutiny Office) (Minutes)  
Ross Cook (Director for City Environment)  
Kate Martin (Director of City Housing)  
Steve Woodward (Head of Environmental Services)  
Colin Parr (Head of Business Services)  
John Roseblade (Head of City Transport)  
Ravi Phull (Service Manager – Private Sector Housing)

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## Part 1 – items open to the press and public

*Item No.*      *Title*

- 1      **Apologies**  
Apologies for absence were received from Cllr Bhupinder Gakhal and Cllr Martin Waite.
- 2      **Declarations of interest**  
Cllr Gurmukh Singh declared a non-pecuniary interest on item 7 - Draft Private Homes Strategy 2019-2024, as a private landlord.
- 3      **Minutes of the previous meeting**  
The minutes of the previous meeting were confirmed as a correct record subject to the comment by a Member having a concern about development on brownfield sites,

being changed to having a concern about development on greenfield sites on the border with Staffordshire and generally within Wolverhampton.

4

#### **Matters arising**

Cllr Brackenridge asked for an update on fire safety matters in relation to housing, as he had made reference to this subject at the last meeting when the overall housing strategy for the City had been discussed. The online consultation survey did make reference to fire safety in relation to high rise blocks. He had responded to the survey on the housing strategy and raised the point that it was important to address the issue of fire safety in all houses across the City and not just high rise. He was the Chair of the Council's, Fire Safety Scrutiny Group and had been trying to persuade the British Government to pass legislation for England to have the same requirement as in Scotland and Wales, where new build houses were required to have sprinklers fitted. Whilst England did not yet have the legislation, the Council was able to set its own high standards in relation to sprinklers, automatic fire detection systems and general fire safety matters. The Contractors which the Council owned company WV Living used, had actually already fitted sprinklers in new build properties in Milton Keynes. He wanted to make it clear that it was important to factor in the vulnerability of individuals when assessing fire risk. This was because 80% of people who died or were injured in fires were vulnerable people.

The Director for City Housing responded that she was pleased the Councillor had officially responded to the consultation on the Housing Strategy and his response along with all others received would be taken into account. She took the issue of fire safety very seriously and agreed that fire safety was important across all housing and not just within tower blocks. The Council were issuing improvement notices on privately owned high rise blocks and taking enforcement action where appropriate.

The Director for City Housing commented that the Council had already pledged to implement approximately £20 million of sprinkler infrastructure into the public sector owned high rise stock in Wolverhampton. A further £11 million was being invested in electrical works and other critical maintenance into the public sector stock. The Better Homes Board, which included Wolverhampton Homes as a partner, would be addressing how they approached fire safety in their new build programmes. They would report back to the Fire Safety Scrutiny Group with the decisions reached. WV Living would also be considering how they embedded fire safety strategy into their new build programmes and would be reporting back to the Council's Fire Safety Scrutiny Group. The Council were also having conversations as part of the Community Build Programme with the Tenant Management and Co-operative organisations. In addition, they were discussing fire safety with Housing Association partners who managed housing stock. A report had recently been taken to Cabinet on enforcement practices for smoke and carbon monoxide homes in the private rental sector. The Council were working closely with the Fire Service on the issue. They were also making improvements to the Rent with Confidence Scheme.

The Director for City Housing stated that the Council would be submitting a full response to the national consultation on building regulations. A response would be submitted by 31 July 2019. They were also part of the MCHLG pilot on fire door safety. Updates from the Council, Wolverhampton Homes and WV Living on fire safety matters would be provided in depth to the Council's Fire Safety Scrutiny Group which was meeting on the 17 July 2019.

Cllr Brackenridge expressed his thanks to the Director for City Housing for her response and for the work which was ongoing on fire safety at the Council and within Wolverhampton Homes. He felt they were leading the way on fire safety since the Grenfell fire tragedy and the conception of the Council's Fire Safety Scrutiny Panel. The Grenfell fire was a preventable disaster caused by successive governments failing to address the matter of fire safety appropriately. The residents of Grenfell had been warning the authorities for some time about the dangers within the building. He reminded the Panel that legal standards were only minimum standards, authorities could go above and beyond the legal requirements. Dame Hackitt in her review of Building Regulations had described the current building regulations as not fit for purpose. However, two years since the Grenfell tragedy the very laws that were in place at the time of the tragedy were still in force. The Government had just released £200 million of funding to rectify high rise private tower blocks wrapped in Grenfell style cladding. Wolverhampton Homes had undertaken and were continuing to do some outstanding work in relation to fire safety.

Cllr Brackenridge expressed frustration and disappointment with the former Interim Director of Place who had left the Council in March 2019. This was because he had articulated to the Fire Safety Scrutiny Group at their last meeting that he had commissioned an independent report into whether sprinklers should be installed at the Civic Halls, but no report on this subject matter had materialised. The current independently commissioned Fire Strategy for the Civic Halls said that the Council had asked that sprinklers should not be an aspiration for the Civic Halls and therefore the Fire Strategy was based around there being no sprinklers. He found this astounding, given the recommendations the Fire Safety Scrutiny Group had made in the past and the several meetings he had personally had with the former interim Director of Place. He saw this as a failure of the Regeneration Department within the Council, who had responsibility for the refurbishment of the Civic Halls. He wanted to ensure that all departments within the Council took fire safety seriously. An overall strategy on fire safety was needed for the Council which he felt had been encapsulated as part of the previous recommendations from the Fire Safety Scrutiny Group to the Executive.

## 5 **Portfolio Holder for City of Environment - Statement / Questions and Answer Session**

The Portfolio Holder for City Environment gave a statement on his Portfolio. He opened by thanking the Scrutiny Panel for the opportunity to talk about his Portfolio. There were four main sections to his statement, the remit of his Portfolio, some key achievements over the last twelve months, his priorities over the next twelve months and areas which he felt the Scrutiny Panel could assist in ensuring the success of his Portfolio. He identified the main areas that fell within his remit which included: -

- Environmental Services including street cleansing, ground maintenance and country parks
- Waste Collection and Disposal
- Energy (including the energy from waste facilities) and Sustainability
- Fleet Management and Workshop
- Coroner Services
- Public Protection often referred to as Trading Standards
- Consumer Protection / Environmental Health
- Licensing including taxi licensing

- Customer Services
- WV Active

With reference to the taxi licensing service he praised the efficiency of the department. Wolverhampton was one of the first Councils to offer a digital application service. The service still had stringent checks, these checks were more rigorous than many Councils and the processes could be completed more quickly. As the process was less expensive, convenient and quicker than many Councils it was not surprising that many more people now applied for their license in Wolverhampton.

The Portfolio Holder remarked that the Bilston Indoor Market footfall had significantly increased and was a critical part of community life in Bilston. At the outdoor Bilston market, the uptake in people taking a stall had also increased. Last year had seen the successful launch of the City Centre Market. This had involved significant land remediation work which included removing buildings and the re-burial of human remains dating back from the 1850s. He thought that Markets was an area which the Panel might wish to consider as part of its Work Programme in the future.

The Portfolio Holder stated that located at the Council was the UTC (Urban Traffic Control) system. A team of experts ensured that the traffic flowed efficiently across the Backcountry. The Minister of Transport had visited last year and had been very impressed by the work of the team, the Portfolio Holder encouraged Members of the Panel to visit the UTC team. As part of the Highways maintenance function, street lighting and winter gritting were included as part of this function. He believed in Winter, Wolverhampton and Sandwell Council areas were the best gritted roads in the West Midlands. The Highways Capital programme was £14 million based on prudential borrowing and a number of grants that the Council had received following successful bids. This money had to be used in areas across the whole network such as, projects, cycle routes, safety, footways, crossings and resurfacing. Clearly it was not enough money, the Government had calculated that £9 billion of maintenance funding was required to bring the road network in the UK up to a good standard. It would cost £24 million to bring all the roads in Wolverhampton up to a state of good repair. He felt the Government under-invested in the transport network, particularly outside of London.

The Portfolio Holder in reference to car parking, commented that he was often asked to make car parking free in the City. The Council however only controlled about 25% of the total car parks across the City. There was a maintenance cost to car parks. He did not intend to subsidise free car parking for an entire day or week. They were however looking at some offers for some free parking in the evening to help stimulate the City Economy. Turnover of cars in car parks was critical to ensuring a healthy footfall for the local economy. He said that the City Centre had the highest footfall outside of Birmingham.

The Portfolio Holder was pleased to report Customer Services had been added to his Portfolio as many of the call's Customer Services received related to his Portfolio. They were looking to make some changes to the Service and would be undertaking some pilots of different projects. He wanted to trial a dedicated Councillor Case Management System. He expressed a desire to ensure systems involving Customer Services systems were aligned to avoid duplication and confusion. He suggested

that this was an area which the Panel should consider as being part of their Work Programme in the future.

The Portfolio Holder praised the work and improvements of the Council owned company, WV Active. There were three leisure centres managed by the company – Burt Williams in Bilston, Central Baths and Aldersley Leisure Village. A number of high profile events took place at Aldersley Leisure Village, which last year had included a major darts championship, martial arts and the Dwarf Olympic Games. It was also a venue that would be used as part of the Commonwealth Games, with one Country expected to use it as a training facility. There were now 10,000 members of WV Active, whereas nearly four years ago there had been 5000. He was delighted that the membership had doubled in that timeframe. Discounts were offered to people who worked within the City, notwithstanding this WV Active was close to breaking even financially.

The Portfolio Holder remarked that he was pleased how the initial part of the Waste Transformation Programme had gone. A larger general waste bin had been offered to residents, which not many authorities had done when changing to fortnightly collections for general refuse waste. 75% of Councils had already moved to fortnightly general refuse waste collections and some had gone a step further to every three or four weeks. There were 35,000 customers of the Council's newly launched Garden Waste Collection Service. The take up had been much better than they had hoped for, as they had only expected 20,000 initially. The Council had benchmarked the service charge against other authorities, who charged between £50 and £80 per annum. City of Wolverhampton Council charged a very reasonable £35 per annum. Vulnerable people and persons receiving full Council or housing benefits received a 50% discount if they used the service.

The Portfolio Holder stated that the Traveller Injunction which the Council now had legally implemented, did not include all the places suggested by some Members. Legal advice had been given to the Council stipulating that in order to be successful with the injunction, evidence had to be submitted to the Court detailing the vulnerability of sites or sufficient evidence that they had been regularly used by travellers without authorisation. The fact that the Council had successfully obtained the injunction meant they were able to immediately evict travellers, if they illegally used one of the 60 sites named in the injunction. The Council no longer had to appear before two court hearings to evict travellers if they went onto any of the 60 sites. The incursions since the injunction had been implemented had fallen and consequently the Council were no longer having to pay for large clean up bills.

The Portfolio Holder commented that he was delighted the Council had received three Green Flag Awards last year for West Park, East Park and Bantock Park. The Council had seen a 50% reduction in fly tipping since the "Shop a Tipper Campaign". Fly tipping was an illegal act, he did not think opening the tips for longer hours would reduce fly tipping. The Council had no intention of following Walsall Council's policies. Some people had been fined over £2,000 in court. The £100 reward to the person who helped to secure the fly tipping conviction was paid for out of the fine money received, so there was no additional cost to the Council. It was a system that worked well, with over 50 people coming forward as part of the campaign.

The Portfolio Holder expressed his support for the average speed cameras in the City and added that average speed enforcement cameras were not a money-making

initiative for the Council, as the Council did not keep any of the fine money, all of this was kept by the West Midlands Police Force. The only money the Council received was if people opted to take a speed awareness course, of which the Council was able to receive 50% of the total fee. As the Council was responsible for maintaining the average speed cameras, the income from the speed awareness courses meant they were just about able to break even.

The Portfolio Holder remarked that the Trading with Confidence booklet developed by the Council had been published successfully. Over 100 businesses had bought into the scheme. The concept was excellent and was something which the Council was willing to sell to other authorities. On the subject of pot holes he referred to the new Velocity Patcher the Council had been utilising which could fill a pot hole within minutes. He praised the Highways Team for fixing 7,000 pot holes in one year.

The Portfolio Holder stated that electric vehicle charge points were about to be rolled out across the City in the Summer which he saw as the future. Officers had worked hard to obtain the funding to allow the charge points to be used by the public as well as taxis. He was pleased to inform the Panel of the success story that a Primary Authority Partnership had been announced yesterday with Marston's PLC, one of the largest employees in the City, to provide bespoke business support. A Primary Authority Partnership provided businesses with the opportunity to receive assured and tailored advice from a chosen local authority to meet environmental health and trading standards regulations.

The Portfolio Holder commented that the "Running Wolves Sculptures" had recently been unveiled on the A449 to mark the completion of a major transport scheme. The £6.8 million City North Gateway scheme had commenced in October 2017 to support job generation and business growth, ensuring highway capacity to support investment at local companies including i54, Wolverhampton Business Park, and the Junction 2 employment area.

The Portfolio Holder praised the work of Trading Standards and made reference to a recent case where a tattooist had been prosecuted known as "Dr Evil."

A Panel Member stated that a political reporter for the Express and Star had observed the Council taxi licensing test and had not raised any complaints. The test was described in his report as rigorous, the reporter had also written that there was child exploitation and safeguarding training and drivers had an enhanced DBS (Disclosures and Barring Service) check. She had no complaints about the response to fly tipping in her ward. She asked what the Council's current response rate was to fly tipping and how it may have changed within the last twelve months. The Portfolio Holder responded that the failure rate for a taxi license application was around 50%. They did ensure compliance where people had applied for a taxi license within Wolverhampton but were using it out of area. The use of electronic systems had improved the checking processes and was much better than some authorities. He praised the Head of Business Services and the taxi licensing team for their work on the digital taxi licensing platform and believed they had the best system in the UK. The response rate to fly tipping had dramatically improved in the last twelve months. Bringing the waste service inhouse had improved the response rate.



The Head of Business Services commented that a report would be coming to the Scrutiny Panel in September on the success of the “Keep it Street Neat” campaign. Significant learning had been obtained from the campaign. Prior to that campaign there were several systems to which fly tipping could be reported. The response rate had differed depending on the system used to report the incident and there could be multiple reports for the same incident. The service standard used to be 10 working days, the average clearance time during the campaign was two hours. They were working to maintain the clearance time but there were some exceptions, sites on private land were more difficult and required a community protection order / notice. Fly tipping on the Highway they hoped to complete within the revised standard of 72 hours.

A Member of the Panel commented that the time taken to remove bins that the public did no longer want had caused some people to be critical of the Council. The Portfolio Holder responded that the literature had given specific instructions on how bins could be returned. If a member of the public wanted their bin to be removed, they needed to contact the Council via the website. Clearly some more work was needed on the campaign. Some people had believed that merely leaving a bin out with or without a message was good enough and others had left their bin to be returned behind a private gate. There would be a re-launch of the campaign for bins to be returned, which would be clearer. It was important to note that thousands of bins had been returned already. He suggested that he would be happy for the Scrutiny Panel to help shape the re-launch of the campaign.

A Panel Member asked for the Portfolio Holder to, at some stage during the Council year, provide information to the Panel on how well the Council was doing in regard to recycling. The Portfolio Holder responded that the national target was for a 50% recycling rate, the Council was nearing 49% and was doing much better than some of its neighboring authorities.

The Chair asked the Portfolio Holder, Cllr Martin Waite’s question which had been submitted in advance of the meeting. The question was, “What targets for modal shift from private vehicle journeys in the city to active transport does the Council have and how are we going to achieve them?” The Portfolio Holder responded that the Council had completed significant work on cycling lanes and the Bike Share scheme. He wanted cycling rates to go up from 2% to 5% by 2023 and up to 10% by 2033. It was not going to be an easy task, ensuring safety was a key part to encouraging more cycling. He hoped the Council would be a leader across the Black Country for Active Travel. Investment was critical, they were using WMCA funding, £21 million had been allocated from the Transforming Cities Fund. The East Park Gateway project was also about to commence. There was also the West Side Link project.

Cllr Appleby clarified that the advance question he had submitted about car parking was with reference to time limited car parking at weekends, he asked for the Portfolio Holder’s view on this proposal. The Portfolio Holder responded that they always regularly reviewed the Council’s Parking Services in the City. He suggested that there may well be some time limited free car parking in the future across Wolverhampton to help promote the City. It was something which would be considered if it was felt it would be beneficial.

A Panel Member asked for some information on electric charging points for cars in the City. The Head of Business Services responded there would be 15 new charging points in total in Wolverhampton with the first of them being introduced in the City Centre over the Summer. Work was ongoing as to the locations of where the others would be situated across the City.

A Panel Member stated that he felt the Environment Portfolio probably had the biggest impact on the largest amount of people within the City. He paid tribute to the taxi licensing team, which he thought was a safer system than any other authority. There were some parking issues in Wednesfield, which was preventing turnover of cars using the car parks. This was partly due to people being unable to park at Newcross Hospital and having to find an alternative place to park. Bentley Bridge had recently introduced a three-hour time limit to prevent people parking there all day.

Several Members of the Panel expressed support for the proposed Councillor Case Management system for Customer Services and congratulated the Portfolio Holder on the successes over the last year. The Chair thanked the Portfolio Holder on behalf of the Panel for his detailed presentation and for answering the questions raised by Members of the Panel throughout the item. He also thanked Officers for their work supporting the Portfolio Holder. The Portfolio Holder responded that it had been a pleasure to speak to the Panel on his Portfolio.

**6 Scrutiny Work Programme**

The Scrutiny Work Programme was agreed.

**7 Draft Private Homes Strategy 2019- 2024**

The Director for City Housing and the Service Manager for Private Sector Housing gave a presentation on the draft Private Homes Strategy 2019-2024.

The Service Manager for Private Sector Housing commented that the draft strategy had not yet been received by Cabinet and it was therefore a pre-decision scrutiny item. She wanted the Panel's input to help shape the policy. In Wolverhampton there were 108,000 dwellings, 56% were owner occupied and 27% social rented. In 2001 the Census had shown 7,000 private rented houses which had nearly doubled by 2011. A recent BRE Stock condition survey of the private rented sector had shown the figure was now at 18,000. By 2020, if not before, it was expected that the private rented sector would have more dwellings than in any other rented housing sector. As the private sector was now significantly larger than previously and on an upward trajectory, it was important for it to have its own strategy.

The Service Manager for Private Sector Housing stated that under the new Homeless Reduction Act, the Council was having to discharge its duties by using the private sector, as social housing was depleted. There had been an increase in houses in multiple occupation (HMO). This was down to migration into the City, welfare reform, single person allowance and universal credit. Properly managed and regulated HMOs was crucial. Fire Safety was very important which included ensuring the safety of people in high rise private homes. There was a mandate to improvement safety following Grenfell and guidance was continuing to be issued by the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government (MHCLG). Much of the guidance was regarding the Local Authority ensuing high rises in the private sector

were safe. Fire risk assessments were completed in HMOs when employees from the Council visited, as fire was the biggest risk to the safety of the occupants.

The Service Manager for Private Sector Housing remarked that each year, they brought approximately 200 empty homes back into use in the Wolverhampton area. The £500 incentive scheme which had operated for the last three years had proved very successful in engaging people. Sometimes compulsory purchase orders were undertaken. They targeted houses that had not been in use for over ten years but were also being proactive targeting housing that had not been in use for a short-time to help prevent them falling into long-term disuse. Wolverhampton Homes administered housing assistance for the City, providing disabled facilities grants, affordable warm grants and small works assistance grants. These initiatives helped to keep people living well and independently in their own homes for longer. A scrutiny review on fuel poverty was planned in the future.

The Service Manager for Private Sector Housing said that the Council had to follow national policy. There was nationally mandated HMO licensing and the definition had changed last October. Since October there had been an additional 100 HMO license applications which had all been inspected. There were now 230 licensed HMOs in Wolverhampton. Instead of just completing reactive work, where it had become clear that some people didn't feel able to complain, proactive intelligence based enforcement now took place. On enforcement work they worked closely with the Fire Service, Police and the Safer Wolverhampton Partnership. They operated a zero tolerance approach to criminal landlords. Local Authority Officers could issue civil penalties for certain offences under the Housing Act. They could fine up to £30,000 per offence. It was important to consider the consequences of enforcement action on occupants as they wanted to avoid them being evicted by Landlords. Collaborative working with other council departments and external organisations was key to helping occupants.

The Service Manager for Private Sector Housing stated that the five-year strategy aimed to improve the condition of the private rented sector, which included ensuring tenants knew of the responsibilities of their Landlords, the reduction of category 1 hazards and targeted interventions such as minimum energy efficiency. They were considering introducing additional licensing where there were the highest number of problems, which could include area-based licensing. Engagement was the preferred method before enforcement action was taken.

The Service Manager for Private Sector Housing commented that they were the first local authority to implement a star rated scheme for private rented properties and landlords. This had helped to improve properties and to sustain people living in properties for longer. It was now an integral part of the Private Sector Housing Service and was being updated further. It was pleasing that other Councils had expressed an interest in purchasing the model. Part of the strategy included new private homes growth. An Equalities Impact Assessment and further consultations would take place in the future on the draft strategy.

Members of the Panel raised the subject of HMOs. The Private Sector Housing Manager confirmed that they were looking to introduce additional licensing requirements. These extra requirements would give them more powers to understand where the HMOs were located in the City. A Member commented that he was pleased to see the authority were taking HMOs seriously and that

enforcement action had been taken. He was concerned that the increase in HMOs in the City was more than the Council had the resources to effectively ensure oversight over, particularly as HMOs were on an upward trend. The location of some HMOs caused him concern. They expressed support for the overall direction of the draft Private Sector Housing Strategy. The Director for City Housing commented that it would be easy to be overwhelmed with HMOs. It was therefore critical to have robust data and data insight so resources could be effectively targeted. Intelligence led and robust overarching policies would help manage some of the difficulties with HMOs in the City. It was an area which would have to be kept under review.

A Member of the Panel asked if the figures for HMOs had been impacted on by the increased popularity of Air Bed and Breakfasts, Bookings.com and renting rooms within houses. The Service Manager for Private Sector Housing responded that when the legislation had been written for HMOs, Air Bed and Breakfasts had not been established. The definition of a HMO was that rent or other consideration was payable and it had to be the main or only place of residence. Air Bed and Breakfasts were slipping through the net as they did not fall under current housing legislation. It was a topic that was coming up nationally, regionally and locally, as to how they should be treated, for instance whether they should be classed as hotels.

A Member of the Panel stated that as part of the strategy there was land available for 9,000 homes. He asked if this allocation of land was part of the Black Country Core Strategy. The Director for City Housing confirmed this to be the case and the City Planning Officer could provide more detail about the specifics.

A Member of the Panel asked about whether there was a commercial opportunity for the Rent with Confidence scheme maintenance services to be offered to private landlords. The Service Manager for Private Sector Housing confirmed that there was a commercial opportunity and they were going to launch a Facebook page for the scheme in the near future.

A Panel Member commented that it was important to ensure good links of communication between planning, housing and building control, to ensure that the law was being adhered to. The City Director for Housing agreed that joint working was important, there were some gaps in legislation, which made it all the more critical to work collaboratively.

A Member of the Panel asked for an update about some of the issues and concerns he had with reference to the Core Joint Strategy. He had particular concerns about his ward - Wednesfield North and surrounding areas. The City Director of Housing said she would speak to her colleagues in Planning and ask for them to provide some information to the Panel at an appropriate meeting of the Panel in the future.

A Panel Member stated that it was important that Members of the Public knew how to report issues of concern about housing and that they could be assured confidentiality would be maintained.

A Member of the Panel commented that car parking was a real issue outside some HMOs, citing Ashmore Park in Wednesfield as an example. The Council had to be mindful of this consideration when licensing them.

The meeting closed at 8:40pm.



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# Briefing Note

**Title:** Burial Places in Wolverhampton and the Crematorium

**Date:** 28 August 2019

**Prepared by:** Steve Woodward

**Job Title:** Head of Environmental Services

**Intended Audience:**

Internal ☐

Partner organisation ☐

Public ☒

Confidential ☐

This briefing note was commissioned following a special meeting of the Health Scrutiny Panel which looked at the processes to be followed after a death. They recommended that the Vibrant and Sustainable City Scrutiny Panel should receive a general report on the Burial and Crematorium Services specifically addressing the following.

- The Crematorium booking system, waiting times and delays particularly during the winter season.
- Provision of burial places in Wolverhampton and how much space was left. In addition, what land had been set aside for different religious groups, its suitability and how long it is likely last. Secondly, whether there are any plans for setting land aside in the future for burial purposes.

## 1.0 Purpose

To consider the information relating to Bereavement Services requested by the Vibrant and Sustainable City Scrutiny Panel.

## 2.0 Bereavement Services Overview

- 2.1 Bereavement Services has no statutory requirement however, the City of Wolverhampton Council are committed to the provision of burial and cremation services. Whilst the Public Mortuary is provided under the Public Health Act 1936, in the absence of available suitable facilities at the local hospital.
- 2.2 The City of Wolverhampton Council formally adopted the Charter for the Bereaved in March 2004 and in doing so, committed to measuring the performance of Bereavement Services against the only national standard developed specifically for the funeral industry in the UK and the service has achieved the Gold Award.
- 2.3 The service continues to offer a range of services ensuring that equality issues are met, that service users have a variety of choice available to them and that the structure

of fees and charges applied is fair and favourable compared to other Local Authorities and nationally.

- 2.4 Officers within the service are also involved in establishing and maintaining a programme of work to ensure the safety of memorials in the Council's four designated closed churchyards these are St Marys (Bushbury), St Thomas's (Wednesfield), St Phillips, St Michaels and all Angels (Tettenhall).
- 2.3 The Coroners service is also part of the Bereavement Service function. The Mortuary is situated in Wednesfield town centre adjacent to the Police Station in Alfred Squire Road. The facility currently has 30 refrigeration and 5 freezer spaces. These will shortly change to 25 refrigeration and 10 freezer spaces.

### 3.0 Background and context

- 3.1 Bereavement Services currently offers a cremation facility at Bushbury Crematorium and maintains seven cemeteries where adult burials and cremated remains burials take place on a regular basis.
- 3.2 At present three of the cemeteries, namely Bushbury, Danescourt and Beacon Hill can accommodate new full adult graves for burial, accommodating all the City's cultural needs. Bushbury and Beacon Hill cemeteries have non-denominational new burial spaces where multiple faiths are accommodated within the same area. Danescourt Cemetery is split into four sections, General, Roman Catholic, Church of England and Muslim. New sections are still available on a needs must basis, (see table in 3.5). Jewish burial spaces are available at Merridale cemetery only. The levels of existing space are monitored on a regular basis by the Bereavement team. New cremated remains graves are available at several sites across the City and again the usage of the grave space is reviewed on an on-going basis.
- 3.4 Based on the current uptake of graves namely around **200 new full burials and 160 new cremated remains graves per year**, grave space is reducing year on year and it is essential that due consideration is given to the sustainability of the service to ensure that new burial space is available, at a choice of cemetery, to all service users in the long-term future. In total up to 600 full burials along with 500 cremated remains interments are carried out annually into new and existing graves.



3.5 **The table below provides a summary of the current capacity for new graves and for cremated remains graves provision.**

<b>Cemetery</b>	<b>Full Earth Grave Capacity</b>	<b>Cremated Remains Grave Capacity</b>
Beacon Hill	Approximately 2 years	Approximately 10 years
Bilston	Closed – site full. Small extension being considered and 160 new graves could be made available	Cremated remains and Vaults available, approximately 5 years
Bushbury	Approximately 15 years	Approximately 25 years
Danescourt	Approximately 10 years	Approximately 10 years
Hall Green	<b>Closed – site full</b>	Approximately 20 years
Merridale	<b>Closed – site full</b>	<b>Closed – site full</b>
Penn	<b>Closed – site full</b>	Approximately 1 years

3.6 Bushbury Crematorium continues to be an extremely busy facility, carrying out circa 2,800 cremations per annum, thus making it the 16th busiest individual crematorium out of the 290 crematoria within the UK. It is the busiest individual crematorium in the West Midlands region. All cremations are booked via the funeral directors through Customer Services, who have access to our booking system (Epilogue). This service is available Monday to Friday from 9am to 4pm excluding bank holidays. The crematorium is open Monday to Friday excluding bank holidays, accommodating a maximum of 18 pre-set 45-minute services a day between 9am and 4pm in two chapels. We have service availability on most days. It is generally the Funeral Directors that cannot accommodate the families at those available times. Extreme weather conditions can cause spikes in the death rate, which may cause short delays within the service. There may be delays over bank holiday periods to accommodate services lost.

3.7 It is important that the service continues its efforts to offer a first-class facility and keep up to date with new initiatives and in recent years has introduced a modern media music system (Wesley music system) and continues to offer many forms of memorialisation for families following cremation so that they have a lasting memory of their loved ones.

3.8 The operation of the Crematorium is regulated under the Environmental Protection Act 1990 and it is important that cremation and filtration equipment is maintained to a suitable standard.

#### **4.0 Proposals/Options to Consider**

4.1 Consideration will need to be given to sustaining burial capacity for the future and new potential burial grounds within the City, will need to be identified and developed with appropriate funding being made available. Bereavement Services will need to work with Corporate Landlord to identify future burial space. Consideration could be given to purchasing the small pieces of privately-owned ground adjacent to Penn Cemetery and Danescourt Cemetery giving us continuity of service. Bushbury Cemetery was

extended approximately 10 years ago, however some of the ground is not fit for purpose without installation of extensive drainage, which will have financial implications.

- 4.2 New initiatives and trends in offering families more choice at their cremation funeral service are developing and it is important that facilities at Bushbury Crematorium are kept up to date through “invest to save” projects such as the introduction of screens to display photographs, web casting and DVD recording of services, all of which have a potential additional income stream. Furthermore, we will explore the introduction of pre-paid Cremations.
- 4.3 At present, as well as the Public Mortuary in Wednesfield, Bereavement Services operates an administrative office from the Civic Centre and operationally at the Crematorium itself. Consideration needs to be given to bring the administration and operational teams together, to both be based at the Crematorium. This will instantly ensure that an improved range of service is offered to all our customers from one central location, the site at Bushbury Crematorium being the preferred location. In order to do this, a new purpose-built administrative facility will be required or the adaptation of existing buildings at the Crematorium and also at Northcote Farm, where office space may be an option.

## **5.0 Risk to the Service**

- 5.1 Planning permission is being considered for a new a private Crematorium to be built nearby in between Essington and Bloxwich and commences operating in 2020/21.
- 5.2 This will undoubtedly influence the number of service users that use Bushbury Crematorium and therefore may have a detrimental effect on income from using the facility.
- 5.3 It is vitally important that Bushbury Crematorium remains competitive with any other local cremation providers from the standard of facilities offered, to the range of after care services such as memorialisation, and the charges levied to bereaved families.
- 5.4 Identification of suitable burial ground in the medium term ensuring burial capacity in future years.
- 5.5 Once a churchyard is closed, the Parochial Church Council (PCC) may apply to the LA to take over its maintenance under the Local Govt Act 1972 and Wolverhampton has four sites. Section 215 of the Act states that the LA would be responsible for the maintenance of the churchyard, including the memorials (safety of) and its boundary walls and fences and path surfaces. Trees are also included.
- 5.6 The implications in respect of 5.5 above is that the costs of maintaining the four sites will increase year on year.

## Scrutiny Work Programme

### Scrutiny Board

The Board will have responsibility for scrutiny functions as they relate to:

Combined Authority, Future Customer, Future Performance and Communications

Date of Meeting	Item Description	Lead Report Author	Notes
10 September 2019	Performance Management Annual report  Update of recommendations from the Flood Review  Annual scrutiny report  Update on plans for Brexit	Sarah Campbell  Chelsea Sibley  Julia Cleary  John Denley	
8 October 2019	Recommendations from the Scrutiny Review into Violent Crime  Volunteering in the City (Provisional)  Update from Chairs and Vice-Chairs of Scrutiny Panels  Civic Halls Business Development Plan and Generic Update on Project	Cllr Obaida Ahmed, John Denley and Julia Cleary          Richard Lawrence	Cllr Philip Bateman recommended this as an item at SCE Scrutiny Panel, see minutes 20 Nov 2018 for description          Agenda Item No: 6

10 December 2019	Update from Chairs and Vice-Chairs of Scrutiny Panels		
14 January 2020	Update from Chairs and Vice-Chairs of Scrutiny Panels		
10 March 2020	Update from Chairs and Vice-Chairs of Scrutiny Panels		
21 April 2020	Cyber Security Update  Update from Chairs and Vice-Chairs of Scrutiny Panels		

#### Scrutiny Reviews

1. Fire Safety - Ongoing
2. Reducing Violent Crime – Cllr Ahmed in Chair - Ongoing.
3. Mini Scrutiny Reviews with Youth Council based on Make Your Mark
4. Autism - Review
5. Review into CAMHS
6. Fuel Poverty - Review

#### Scrutiny Board – Terms of Reference

- a. To arrange for the consideration of forthcoming Executive Decisions published in accordance with the Access to Information Procedure Rules with a view to identifying issues for early discussion with the Cabinet and/or scrutiny prior to decisions being made.
- b. The Board will oversee the operation of the [call-in mechanisms](#) with the Panels being responsible for hearing those call-ins related to them terms of reference. When the call-in relates to an overarching policy framework / budget issue or a matter that falls within the remit of more

than one scrutiny panel it will default to the Scrutiny Board. Further, if the issue is considered to be of particular significance, either the Chair or Vice Chair of the Scrutiny Board can ask for it to come to the Board.

- d. The Board will oversee the work programmes of Scrutiny Panels to avoid duplication of work and to ensure coherence of approach to cross-cutting policy themes. The Board may determine that one named Panel shall take lead responsibility for a cross-cutting policy theme or may determine that the work be shared between one or more named Panels.
- e. The Board will ensure coherence between the policy development work of the named Panels and their role in the consideration of reports received from external auditors and external regulatory Inspectors.
- f. The Board will make recommendations to the Cabinet on the allocation of budgetary and employee resources held centrally for the purpose of supporting scrutiny work.
- g. The Board will ensure that good practices and methods of working are shared between Panels and in particular will seek to optimise the inclusion of citizens, partners and stakeholders in the work of Scrutiny.
- h. The Board will review or scrutinise non-Cabinet business and may make reports or recommendations to the Council. The Board will consider policy and due process and will not scrutinise individual decisions made by Regulatory or other Committees particularly those quasi-judicial decisions relating to development control, licensing etc. which have been delegated by the Council. The Board will not act as an appeal body in respect of non-Cabinet functions.
- i. The Board will oversee the work of any Councillors appointed to act as lead members or 'champions' in respect of any specific priority tasks or areas of policy development identified by the Council.
- j. The Board or another relevant scrutiny panel will consider any petition that contains 2,500-4,999 signatures with a view to making recommendations for action by employees or review by the Executive as appropriate.

- k. The Board will undertake the tracking and monitoring of scrutiny review recommendations.
- L. The Board will oversee the coordination of the budget scrutiny process.

## Our Council Scrutiny Panel Work Programme 2019-2020

The Panel has responsibility for Scrutiny functions as they relate to, Strategic Financial Services, Revenues and Benefits, Strategic Procurement, The HUB, Audit, Human Resources, Corporate Administration, Democracy, Corporate Landlord, Transformation and ICT

Date of Meeting	Item Description	Lead Report Author	Notes
4 September 2019	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Briefing on Universal Credit – update on transition</li> </ul>	Heather Clarke, Service Development Manager	Follow up from previous recommendations - update on activities aimed at supporting moving to Universal Credit in Wolverhampton and to mitigate any negative consequences from the rollout
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Treasury Management-Annual Report 2018-2019 and Activity Monitoring Quarter One 2019-2020</li> </ul>	Claire Nye, Director of Finance	Information about the Council's treasury management Activity
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Cabinet Member for Resources - Portfolio Holder Briefing Session – Cllr Louise Miles</li> </ul>		Briefing on priorities and questions from the panel.
20 November 2019	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Chair of Audit and Risk Committee – Progress report - Cllr Alan Butt</li> </ul>		Briefing on progress against performance targets
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Strategic Asset Plan 2018-23 – progress report</li> </ul>	Julia Nock, Head of Assets	The Head of Assets to present report to include details of the progress made by the different workstreams detailed in the Strategic Asset Plan 2018-23 and also give a clear distinction between

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Draft Budget and Medium-Term Financial Strategy 2020 -2021</li> <li>Rapid Development Platform</li> </ul>	<p>Claire Nye, Director of Finance</p> <p>Andy Hoare Digital Transformation Director</p>	<p>land and property ownership when giving an overview of the Council's property estate by asset type –</p> <p>Briefing on the system, current progress and the benefits of the platform and next steps and why.</p>
15 January 2020	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Digital Printing Service – update</li> <li>Treasury Management Activity Monitoring - Mid Year Review 2019-2020</li> </ul>	<p>Gail Rider – Head of ICT</p> <p>Claire Nye, Director of Finance</p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Review the opportunities and competitiveness of providing print services outside of the local authority, operating on a commercial basis</li> <li>Put in place mechanisms to secure all internal printing requirements are provided in-house, removing the opportunity for staff to commission print work outside of the authority</li> <li>Improve the kitchen facilities for DPS in line with the rest of the authority's amenities</li> </ol>
January 2020 (tbc)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Specific Reserves Working Group (date to confirmed)</li> </ul>	Claire Nye, Director of Finance	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>To receive a detailed report on specific reserves.</li> </ol>



			<p>2. To review and scrutinise the balances and movements of the council's specific reserves to ensure that they are appropriately established and required.</p> <p>To make recommendation or comment to Cabinet on matters arising from the review and scrutiny of specific reserves.</p>
11 March 2020	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Treasury Management</li> </ul>	Claire Nye, Director of Finance	

#### Future Items – dates tbc

1. Assessment and evaluation of the Smart Working Policy Denise Pearce, Head of Human Resource. That the Scrutiny Panel undertake an assessment and evaluation of the Smart Working Policy. Information on performance management and data on appraisals should also be included as part of the report – date tbc.
2. Community Asset Transfer: Policy and Strategy Review: Julia Nock, Head of Assets – due to be presented to Cabinet on 16.10.19.
3. Follow up from Enforcement Agents and Council Tax Item – consideration of where multiple debts occur.

**Stronger City Economy Scrutiny Panel Work Programme**

The Panel will have responsibility for Scrutiny functions as they relate to - Enterprise and Skills, City Development, Visitor Economy, Adult and Cultural Learning, Economic Inclusion and Service Development.

<b>Date of Meeting</b>	<b>Item Description</b>	<b>Lead Report Author</b>	<b>Notes</b>
2 September 2019	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Branding and Marketing Strategy for the City of Wolverhampton</li> <li>• Westside Link / Public Realm Proposals</li> </ul>	Isobel Woods / Ian Fegan	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• City Centre and wider Wolverhampton branding and marketing strategy. Ian Fegan request to attend. How is Wolverhampton sold to encourage investment.</li> <li>• To respond to questions raised at the Panel meeting in July 2019.</li> </ul>
25 November 2019	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Apprenticeships Update</li> <li>• Skills, Employment, Enterprise</li> <li>• Draft Budget</li> </ul>	Angela McKeever	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Update as resolved at the Panel last year. Particular focus on uptake numbers, effectiveness and overall career pathways. Data analysis.</li> </ul>

January/ February 2020	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Inward Investment</li><li>• City Commission Update</li></ul>		<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• To include communications angle.</li></ul>
March 2020	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Review of recommendations throughout the year.</li></ul>	Heather Clark	

**Potential Future items: -**

- 1. Policy implications from West Midlands Combined Authority/Regional/National or International Sources
- 2. How do we monitor our communications?

### Vibrant and Sustainable City Scrutiny Panel Work Programme

The Panel will have responsibility for Scrutiny functions as they relate to: -

Operational Services, Public Realm, Commercial Services, Regulatory Services (policy), City Housing, Planning (policy), Strategic Transport, Keeping the city clean, Keeping the city moving, Improving the city housing offer and Strategic Asset Management.

Date of Meeting	Item Description	Lead Report Author	Notes
5 September 2019	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Burial Places in Wolverhampton, Crematorium booking system, waiting times and delays particularly during the winter season</li> <li>Housing Strategy – Full Draft</li> <li>Full review of Housing Allocations Policy</li> <li>Empty Homes Policy and Strategy Action Plan</li> <li>Keep the Street Neat Briefing Note</li> </ul>	<p>Steve Woodward</p> <p>Kate Martin</p> <p>Mila Simpson</p> <p>Helen Scullard</p> <p>Colin Parr</p>	(As requested by Health Scrutiny Panel)
7 November 2019	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Processes for obtaining s.106 money including chasing once agreed</li> </ul>		As requested by Cllr Waite at Scrutiny Board

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The Condition of the Roads (Including Potholes) in Wolverhampton</li> <li>• Draft Budget</li> <li>• Response to Transport Questions raised on the Public Realm, Transport and Linking the City at the Stronger City Economy Scrutiny Panel on the 16 July 2019.</li> <li>• Briefing note on Border Development</li> </ul>	<p>John Roseblade</p> <p>John Roseblade / Marianne Page</p> <p>Michele Ross</p>	
30 January 2020	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• WV Living – Briefing Note</li> <li>• Wolverhampton Homes</li> <li>• Walsall Housing Growth Corridor</li> </ul>		
19 March 2020			

**Potential Future Items: -**

1. Impact of Average Speed Cameras
2. Update on plans for the Hickman Avenue Site and potential changes to Willenhall Road
3. Strategy for exploiting the most out of the Canal Network
4. Bike Sharing Scheme Plans
5. Councillor Portal Development (as requested by Portfolio Holder during Q & A Session)
6. Homelessness
7. Royal Hospital Phase 1+ 2

## Health Scrutiny Panel

The Panel will have responsibility for Scrutiny functions as they relate to: -

- All health-related issues, including liaison with NHS Trusts, Clinical Commissioning Groups, Health and Wellbeing Board and Healthwatch.
- All functions of the Council contained in the National Health Service Act 2006, to all regulations and directions made under the Health and Social Care Act 2001, the Local Authority (Overview and Scrutiny Committees Health Scrutiny Functions) Regulations 2002,
- The Health and Social Care Act 2012 and related regulations.
- Reports and recommendations to relevant NHS bodies, relevant health service providers, the Secretary of State or Regulators.
- Initiating the response to any formal consultation undertaken by relevant NHS Trusts and Clinical Commissioning Groups or other health providers or commissioners on any substantial development or variation in services.
- Participating with other relevant neighbouring local authorities in any joint scrutiny arrangements of NHS Trusts providing cross border services.
- Decisions made by or actions of the Health and Wellbeing Board.
- Public Health – Intelligence and Evidence
- Public Health – Health Protection and NHS Facing
- Public Health - Transformation
- Public Health – Commissioning
- Healthier City
- Mental Health
- Commissioning Mental Health and Disability
- HeadStart Programme

Date of Meeting	Item Description	Lead Report Author	Notes
12 September 2019	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Tettenhall Wood GP Surgery Consultation</li> <li>The Royal Wolverhampton NHS Trust - Quality Accounts</li> <li>National Audit of Care at the End of Life</li> <li>Out of Area Sexual Health</li> <li>Verbal Update on Brexit Preparations</li> </ul>	<p>CCG</p> <p>RWT – Alison Dowling</p> <p>RWT</p> <p>Ravi Seehra</p> <p>All present</p>	In the Quality Accounts, the National Audits showed significant non-compliance by RWT in a few areas, the Panel wishes to look at progress in these areas.
7 November 2019	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>GP appointment waiting times – involve Wolverhampton Healthwatch</li> <li>CCG Annual Report</li> <li>Draft Budget</li> <li>Public Health Annual Report</li> </ul>	<p>CCG – Helen Hibbs</p> <p>Steven Marshall</p> <p>Public Health – John Denley</p>	

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Healthwatch Annual Report</li> </ul>	Tracey Cresswell	
16 January 2020	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Reconfiguration of hyper acute and acute stroke services</li> <li>Review of the impact of the new Medical Examiner Role and the Registrar's Office at Newcross Hospital</li> <li>Cancer Screening</li> <li>STP (Sustainability and Transformation Plans)</li> <li>Maternity Services – Quality Assurance</li> <li>Minutes and Report from the Adults and Safer City Scrutiny Panel on Alcohol and Drugs Strategy</li> </ul>	CCG / Royal Wolverhampton NHS Trust  Royal Wolverhampton NHS Trust  Royal Wolverhampton NHS Trust / Public Health  Royal Wolverhampton NHS Trust  Earl Piggott-Smith	
5 March 2020	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Mortality Statistics</li> <li>Patient Participation Groups</li> </ul>	RWT	



	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Pharmaceutical Ordering (Provisional)</li><li>• West Midlands Ambulance</li><li>• Accident and Emergency</li></ul>		To address priorities identified in the Quality accounts and in particularly those on Maternity Care in the pre-hospital environment.
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**Potential Future Items: -**

1. Black Country Partnership NHS Foundation Trust Merger – Possible an informal meeting will be arranged
2. West Park Hospital (Suggested by Chair of Healthwatch) – Will be a site visit
3. June 2020 – Review of the new Patient Experience, Engagement and Public Involvement Strategy.
4. Primary Care – CCG
5. Healthy Child Programme

**Adults and Safer City Scrutiny Panel**

The Panel will have responsibility for scrutiny functions as they relate to: -

Older people assessment and care management, Financial support services, Community Safety, Libraries and community hubs, Independent living centre, Commissioning older people, Carers support and All age disabilities.

<b>Date of Meeting</b>	<b>Item Description</b>	<b>Lead Report Author</b>	<b>Notes</b>
17 September 2019	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Wolverhampton Safeguarding Children Board (WSCB) &amp; Safeguarding Adults Board Annual Report</li> <li>Principal Social Worker Annual Report – update</li> <li>Adult Social Care Workforce Health Check</li> <li>Local Account 2018-2019</li> </ul>	Victoria Bowles, Wolverhampton Safeguarding Children Board Manager  Louise Haughton, Principal Social Worker  Louise Haughton, Principal Social Worker  David Watts	The purpose is to present a draft of the Wolverhampton Safeguarding Adult Board's (WSAB) Annual Report to inform the panel of safeguarding activity and to update on progress made against the priorities for that period.
October 2019 (tbc)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Cllr Linda Leach, Cabinet Member Adult Services and Cllr Jasbir Jaspal, Cabinet Member Health – briefing on priorities</li> </ul>	David Watts, Director of Education and John Denley, Director of Public Health	Briefing on key priorities and questions from the panel.
12 November 2019	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Draft Budget and Medium -Term Financial Strategy 2020 – 2021</li> </ul>	Clair Nye, Director of Finance	

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Safer Wolverhampton Partnership Annual Report 2018-2019 – background, what it does, who is on it etc.</li> <li>• Transforming Care – update on progress</li> <li>• Update on Alcohol and Drugs Strategy</li> </ul>	<p>Mark Taylor Andy Beard Lynsey Kelly John Denley, Director of Public Health</p> <p>David Watts, Director of Adults Services</p> <p>John Denley, Director of Public Health</p>	
28 January 2020	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Joint Dementia Strategy – Update</li> <li>• Adult Education Service</li> <li>• Blue Badge Scheme – update report</li> </ul>	<p>Joanne Keatley, Head of Adult Education</p> <p>Lisa Taylor, Head of Service Improvement (Customer Services)</p>	<p>Update on progress of annual strategy against original aims and performance targets</p> <p>Briefing on service priorities and progress against key performance targets.</p> <p>The Head of Customer Service to present a report to the panel 24 September 2019 detailing progress in responding to the issues highlighted in the report and specifically on changes to the eligibility criteria and delays in the assessment process.</p>
24 March 2020	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Proposed changes to charges for non - residential services (pre-decision scrutiny)</li> </ul>	Helen Winfield, Head of Community Financial Support	The Council has the right to charge for adult social care and support under the Care Act 2014 for people who request

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Better Care Fund - update on publication of national guidance.</li><li>• Emergency Planning Response (exempt)</li></ul>	<p>David Watts, Director of Adults Services</p> <p>John Denley, Director of Public Health</p>	<p>the Council arrange their care and support.</p>
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**Potential Future Items: -**

- Youth Violence Scrutiny Review – Cllr Ahmed to brief panel on key findings and recommendations.
- Invite David Jamieson or representative of Police and Crime Commissioner

**Children, Young People and Families Scrutiny Panel**

The Panel will have responsibility for scrutiny functions as they relate to: -

Children in need/child protection, Looked after children, Early help 0-5, Early help 5-18, Youth offending, Children's commissioning, School planning and resources and Standards and vulnerable pupils.

Date of Meeting	Item Description	Lead Report Author	Notes
19 June 2019	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Youth Justice Plan (pre-decision scrutiny)</li> <li>HeadStart Sustainability Planning Update (pre-decision scrutiny)</li> <li>CYP Strategic Priorities and Improvement Plan</li> <li>Elective Home Education England – CWC response to consultation</li> </ul>	<p>Rachel King, Head of Service Specialist Support</p> <p>Mai Gibbons, HeadStart Contracts Manager</p> <p>Louise Haughton, Senior Social Worker</p> <p>Robert Hart, Head of Service Inclusion Support</p>	<p>The panel to review progress the delivery of the objectives and priorities detailed in the plan and also work done to develop a strategy for April 2019</p> <p>The panel to review progress the delivery of the objectives and priorities detailed in the plan and also work done to develop a strategy for April 2019.</p> <p>2 April 2019 the DfE published a consultation on proposed legislation concerning children not in school. The consultation closes on 24 June 2019. Legislation unlikely to change for 2 – 3 years. CWC response to the o</p> <p>Revised Government guidance issued 2 April 2019. This guidance will be reviewed by December 2020.</p>

25 September 2019	<p>SEND Self – Evaluation</p> <p>Early Years Update – Outcome of Peer Review</p> <p>Children’s Workforce Health Check 2019</p> <p>Cabinet Member Briefing - Cllr John Reynolds</p>	<p>Adrian Leach Head of Special Educational Needs and Disability</p> <p>Amanda Newbold, Senior School Improvement Advisor</p> <p>Louise Haughton, Principal Social Worker</p>	
15 October 2019	<p>Children &amp; Young People Positive Engagement Strategy (pre-decision scrutiny)</p> <p>Transforming Children’s Services Programme</p> <p>Cabinet Member Briefing – Cllr Michael Hardacre</p>	<p>Andrew Wolverson, Head of Service People</p> <p>Andrew Wolverson, Head of Service People</p>	
27 November 2019	<p>Children and Young People’s Social Work Self-Evaluation Refresh 2019/20</p> <p>Draft Budget and Medium-Term Financial Strategy 2020 -2021</p>	<p>Louise Haughton, Principal Social Worker</p> <p>Claire Nye, Director of Finance</p>	

	School Organisation Review - Primary and Secondary School	Bill Hague, Head of School Organisation	
22 January 2020	Culture of Belonging (school exclusions)  Update on alternative education provision and Pupil Referral Units  Unregistered independent schools and out of school settings	Robert Hart, Head of Service Inclusion Support  Adrian Leach Head of Special Educational Needs and Disability  Amanda Newbold, Senior School Improvement Advisor, and Dawn Williams (Head of Safeguarding)Mark Heywood, Headteacher, The Royal – to be invited as a witness	
18 March 2020	Review of Early Intervention and Prevention  School Improvement Report Annual Plan  Wolverhampton Safeguarding Children Board (WSCB) & Safeguarding Adults Board Annual Report	Alison Montgomery, Head of Strengthening Families People  Amanda Newbold, Senior School Improvement Advisor  Victoria Bowles,Wolverhampton Safeguarding Children Board Manager	

**Potential Future Items: -**

1. Apprenticeship and youth unemployment – Angela McKeever
2. Supporting unaccompanied asylum-seeking children briefing paper – Alison Hind

**Work Plan Version: 28/08/19 12:15**





# Vibrant and Sustainable City Scrutiny

Agenda Item No: 7

Meeting 5 September 2019

<b>Report title</b>	City Housing Strategy 2019 - 2024	
<b>Decision designation</b>	AMBER	
<b>Cabinet member with lead responsibility</b>	Councillor Peter Bilson City Assets and Housing	
<b>Corporate Plan priority</b>	Place - Stronger Economy	
<b>Key decision</b>	Y	
<b>In forward plan</b>	Yes	
<b>Wards affected</b>	All	
<b>Accountable Director</b>	Kate Martin, City Assets and Housing	
<b>Originating service</b>		
<b>Accountable employee</b>	Mila Simpson Tel Email	Service Lead Housing Strategy 01902 554841 <a href="mailto:Mila.Simpson@wolverhampton.gov.uk">Mila.Simpson@wolverhampton.gov.uk</a>
<b>Report to be/has been considered by</b>	Housing Leadership Team	7 August 2019

## Recommendation for decision:

The Panel is recommended to:

1. Endorse that the City Housing Strategy 2019 – 2024 is submitted to October 2019 Cabinet for adoption.

## Recommendation for noting:

The Panel is recommended to:

2. Note the contents of the City Housing Strategy 2019 – 2024 and the key themes resulting from the consultation.

## **1.0 Purpose**

- 1.1 A new City Housing Strategy 2019 – 2024 has been developed to reflect on emerging national and local priorities as well as to align the priorities for the delivery of housing and housing services for the next five years to the new Council Plan.
- 1.2 Vibrant and Sustainable City Scrutiny Panel are asked to consider and comment on a final draft of the housing strategy ahead of seeking adoption by Cabinet in October 2019.

## **2.0 Background**

- 2.1 The city's existing Housing Strategy, approved by Cabinet in 2013 achieved a number of successes in 'Improving the City Housing Offer', under the Council's Corporate Plan. A new City Housing Strategy 2019 – 2024, 'Better Homes for All' has been developed to set the framework for how the Council will address the challenges it will face in the coming years, giving direction to our partners and stakeholders involved in housing across all tenures (including residents, registered providers, private developers, government agencies, private landlords and voluntary and community groups), so that housing and housing services can be developed to provide the right homes and support where needed.
- 2.2 Whilst having a housing strategy is not a statutory requirement, having one is considered both best practice and necessary to set out how the Council, with partners, will address the housing challenges and opportunities that are facing the City and its residents.
- 2.3 The Council Plan 2019 – 2024 identifies three priorities for housing; more and better homes, safe and healthier homes and access to a secure home. The City Housing Strategy 2019-2024 sets out how these priorities will be achieved.

## **3.0 Developing the City Housing Strategy**

- 3.1 The Housing Strategy, included at appendix 1 has been developed based on a detailed evidence base, a review of national and regional policy and guidance as well as feedback from stakeholders and members of the public.
- 3.2 Consultation on the strategy was undertaken across June and July 2019 and included detailed discussions with senior officers, presentation at Vibrant and Sustainable City Scrutiny and Council Leadership Teams, attendance at a number of fora, a briefing note shared with all Councillors and an online survey for members of the public (also available in hard copy). In addition, the draft strategy was shared with a wide range of partners (including Registered Housing Provider partners, tenant management organisations and the Wolverhampton Equality and Diversity Partnership), who were encouraged to feedback their views. A summary of the key themes from the consultation is set out at appendix 2, which have been incorporated into the final version of the Strategy.
- 3.3 The final City Housing Strategy is a relatively concise document that clearly sets out the challenges and provides the guiding principles for action over the next five years to drive forward housing growth, investment and improvement. The strategy will be underpinned

by a detailed delivery plan that will be owned by the Better Homes Board. A housing partnership of stakeholders will be established to strengthen the delivery of the strategy, who will monitor its delivery and report this through to the Better Homes Board.

3.4 A summary of the three priorities are set out below:

3.5 **More and better homes**

3.6 This priority focuses on the City's drive to increase the pace and quantum of new homes delivered in the city to meet the needs of our communities and the growing number of households looking to work, study and settle here. This will be boosted by the great opportunity for the City to access resources and support for growth across the Walsall to Wolverhampton Corridor through the West Midlands Combined Authority (WMCA), the establishment of the Councils local housing company, WV Living and the removal of the Housing Revenue Account (HRA) borrowing cap with the Council delivering new affordable homes.

3.7 Ambitions to further grow the local economy will need to be supported by a wide-ranging, cross tenure housing offer, through the provision of affordable housing, good quality private rented accommodation as well as homes to attract higher income households, including a contribution to a revitalised City centre. To achieve this, work will be done to understand housing need to build the right homes in the right places, improve the financial viability of sites to ensure land that needs significant remediation can be brought forward for development and contribute to an improved infrastructure by making use of innovative methods and materials. Development also has a role in inclusive growth using local suppliers and the creation and provision of jobs and training opportunities.

3.8 **Safe and healthier homes**

3.9 Aligned to the Social Housing Green Paper, 'a new deal for social housing', this priority is concerned with achieving high quality management and maintenance of housing, and strengthening the tenant voice, particularly for the growing number of people renting in the City, whether from the Council and managed by Wolverhampton Homes or the tenant management organisations (TMO), from a housing association or those renting in the growing private rented sector. This will include a programme of work to ensure the ongoing safety of the City's high-rise stock under Council and private ownership and ongoing responses to the rolling national programme of building safety.

3.10 The City is committed to a programme of redevelopment to ensure communities across the city live in quality neighbourhoods. Large scale stock investment and remodelling of a small number of estates, including the completion of works at Heath Town will be complimented with a programme of neighbourhood uplift, working with communities to improve the quality of local environments.

3.11 Conditions in the private rented sector continues to be a challenge at the lower end of the market. There remain challenges with the incidence of category one hazards, concentrations of poor quality/managed housing and a growing number of houses in

multiple occupation (HMO), which will be tackled through the Council's landlord and property accreditation scheme 'Rent with Confidence', underpinned by a programme of support, licensing and enforcement.

- 3.12 Rented homes will have access to a new cross tenure Home Improvement Agency, as too will vulnerable owner occupiers, which will bring together a range of support, grants and loans to improve the adaptation, condition and energy efficiency of homes so that people can live independently and improve their health outcomes.
- 3.13 Maximising the use of the City's housing stock with a targeted programme to bring empty properties back into use is also a priority.
- 3.14 **Access to a secure home**
- 3.15 This priority focuses on the City's commitment to those residents that need additional support in accessing and sustaining secure accommodation, with the City supporting residents to maintain their independence within their homes, wherever possible.
- 3.16 Local drivers include an ageing population with growth in the over 65 age group outstripping others, who need the right housing and housing services that enable them to remain independent for as long as possible but appropriate accommodation available when it is required. This not only applies to older people but those residents with additional support needs, which by working with social care will be better understood so that people can access a secure home and sustain living there, including those with a visible or non-visible disability as well as those requiring additional support for example those at risk of or experiencing domestic abuse
- 3.17 Nationally the Homelessness Reduction Act introduced in 2018, increases council's responsibilities to prevent homelessness at an earlier stage than before, whilst Welfare Reforms continue to present challenges for residents and landlords. The City will continue to work innovatively to develop measures across partners at a regional and local level to prevent homelessness and reduce rough sleeping, with the City already having adopted a 'Housing First' approach.

#### **4.0 Evaluation of alternative options**

- 4.1 To recommend the adoption of the City Housing Strategy by Cabinet following any final comments/amendments, enabling the focus to move on to supporting and monitoring delivery.
- 4.2 Not to adopt the City Housing Strategy and to carry on with business as usual operating outside of any overarching strategic framework for housing. This would miss out on opportunities to align work across partners operating within the City to achieve shared aims and maximise resources, which could lead to a duplication of effort or partners working in conflict with each other.

## **5.0 Reasons for decision(s):**

- 5.1 It is recommended that the City Housing Strategy is endorsed for adoption as it has been developed based upon a comprehensive review of evidence and consideration of the national and local context, achievements and progress of the 2013-2018 Housing Strategy and consultation with stakeholders. Adoption of the strategy will allow resources to be spent on strengthening the housing partnership in the City and focussing on delivery.

## **6.0 Financial implications**

- 6.1 This report has no direct financial implications.
- 6.2 The Housing Strategy refers to matters which are already reflected in approved budgets, and where additional resources are required to deliver the housing priorities set out in the Strategy, the financial implications of these will be evaluated and reported once plans have been developed.

[LT/27082019/Z]

## **7.0 Legal implications**

- 7.1 There is no legal requirement to have a Housing Strategy as the Deregulation Act 2015 abolished the statutory requirement for English authorities to produce a housing strategy as previously required by section 87 of the Local Government Act 2003.
- 7.2 It does, however serve as a useful policy document setting out the Council's approach to housing and allows Councillors to scrutinise delivery. There are no other legal implications.
- 7.3 DC/20082019/M

## **8.0 Equalities implications**

- 8.1 An equalities impact assessment has been undertaken based on consultation, with the Housing Strategy addressing issues identified. The equality impact analysis is being reported to the Equality Advisory Group in September.

## **9.0 Environmental implications**

- 9.1 The City Housing Strategy does not have any direct environmental impacts, however the actions it proposes serve to raise the quality of environments across the City through the delivery of new housing, improvement of existing housing and regeneration of estates. The environmental impacts associated with specific projects and work programmes will be identified and addressed in the relevant project documentation and/or reports brought forward for approval.

## **10.0 Human resources implications**

- 10.1 This report has no direct human resource implications with the delivery and monitoring of the City Housing Strategy to be carried out by the Housing Strategy and Policy Team.

## **11.0 Corporate landlord implications**

- 11.1 This report has no direct Corporate Landlord implications. Where implications are identified associated with specific projects and work programmes they will be addressed in the relevant project documentation and/or reports brought forward for approval.

## **12.0 Schedule of background papers**

- 12.1 Report to 11 April 2019 Vibrant and Sustainable City Scrutiny Panel on the Development of a City Housing Strategy.

## **13.0 Appendices**

- 13.1 Appendix 1 – Final Draft City Housing Strategy 2019 - 2024
- 13.2 Appendix 2 – Key themes for City Housing Strategy Consultation



# Better Homes for All 2019 - 2024

A Housing Strategy for Wolverhampton



[wolverhampton.gov.uk](http://wolverhampton.gov.uk)

# BETTER HOMES FOR ALL

2019-2024

## *A Housing Strategy for Wolverhampton*

### INTRODUCTION

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Wolverhampton is a City of opportunity and the City of Wolverhampton Council is ambitious, thinks strategically and continually looks to improve how it delivers services to residents. The Council's Plan has a clear vision that by 2030;

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*Wolverhampton will be a place where people come from far and wide to work, shop, study and enjoy our vibrant City*

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Good quality housing plays a fundamental role in developing Wolverhampton's identity and economic function on the regional, UK and international stage. It is vital we continue to provide enough good quality homes, including new affordable homes, in our City. We understand the importance of providing greater housing choice and demand high-quality housing design and property management standards. This strategy confirms the importance of, and delivery plans to, accelerate housing development that will support inclusive economic growth, but it also focuses on people and our plans to support our residents and create better homes and communities. We are committed to enhancing the health and wellbeing of the people who live and work here.

This is a housing strategy that recognises our achievements, acknowledges our challenges but most importantly looks to the future. It is underpinned by leadership but works in partnership to deliver its objectives and encourages innovative approaches to some complex housing problems. We are flexible in how we tackle issues and we have greater financial flexibility now that the Housing Revenue Account caps have been lifted. We are a committed authority within the Black Country and West Midlands Combined Authority and our strategy clearly sets out how much we value and invest in these partnerships.

Our Vision for housing is to deliver '**Better Homes for All**' which underpins and supports the fourth strategic outcome of the Council's Plan 2019-2024. In doing so we will:

- **Deliver more and better homes** to meet the needs of our economy, communities and the growing number of households looking to work, study and settle in our City
- **Ensure safe and healthy homes** for all by tackling and challenging criminal landlords and setting excellent levels of housing management and



maintenance standards for all our housing management agents. We will make the best use of housing in the city; bringing empty properties back into use, improving the quality and thermal efficiency of homes and reducing fuel poverty across our City.

- **Provide access to secure homes** for those in vulnerable situations. We continue to tackle rough sleeping in partnership. We will work to prevent homelessness and provide support and advice to people who need sustainable accommodation options to meet their housing needs. We will work to provide housing options that enable choice, good health and wellbeing and promote independent living.

### Our Recent Success Stories

Our ambitious plans are underpinned by a track record in innovation and partnership. Since our last strategy, we are proud of what we have achieved to create a better housing offer and service for people living in our City. We have:

- Built the first new council homes in over 30 years with a rolling programme of new build in place across a range of small and large sites throughout the City.
- Established WV Living, the Council's local housing company, which is already delivering homes across the City. From 2017 to 2023, 1072 new homes will be delivered through WV Living. This is set to increase the provision of new housing with an increased housing pipeline over the term of the strategy.
- Brought the Heath Town Regeneration scheme into delivery, demolishing disused commercial assets, and submitting new homes for planning approval.
- Secured funding for further estate redevelopment at New Park Village.
- Delivered and delivering a range of specialist/supported accommodation including ten wheelchair accessible homes, a fourteen-unit mental health scheme, and a seven-unit scheme for people with autism.
- Rolled out the Housing First pilot to provide entrenched rough sleepers with a route off the streets and into housing and support.
- With support from Public Health, established Rent with Confidence to drive up standards within the private rented sector and improve health outcomes for vulnerable residents.
- The Council and Bushbury Hill Estate Management Board, a tenant led management organisation, have signed a Partnership Agreement which provides additional funding, responsibilities and community new build.
- Strengthened our response and support to the private rented sector and tenants and established the Rent with Confidence property and landlord rating system.
- Adopted a range of strategies and policies to support a proactive and targeted enforcement approach. Improved the quality in the sector and continued to bring properties back into use through the empty homes agenda.

## Our Current Working Environment

The policy environment that we operate in nationally, regionally and locally sets the context for this strategy. The strategy recognises:

- The need to deliver more housing and enable greater housing choice by delivering a range of tenure options.
- The new freedoms from government in lifting the housing revenue account borrowing cap, allowing councils to borrow to build new affordable homes and ensure that the housing we already have meets modern standards of decency.
- That we must make the best use of the social housing stock that we own; maintaining a fit for purpose allocations policy, retaining numbers through our replacement right to buy programme and adding to that stock where possible.
- The importance of strategically positioning the city to access government funding opportunities to develop more homes, as both a delivery and a change agent, and focusing the role of the public sector as a catalyst for driving forward better asset management.
- How clear we are of the importance of the role and purpose of social housing, giving residents a stronger voice and making us more accountable. The need for us to support the objectives of the social housing green paper; tackling stigma, promoting tenants' views and rebalancing the tenant – landlord relationship.
- The need to work in partnership to deliver the requirements of the homelessness reduction act.
- That we must understand the housing needs of our most vulnerable residents; promoting independence and providing services which will enable residents to remain in their own home for as long as they are able and want to. The need to work with social care and partners to assess and plan for a range of supported and accessible housing options, meet the needs of residents and offer choice.
- The changing debate and Government policy and standards on improved energy and water efficiency, improved building design and use of renewable and low carbon energy sources, all in order to reduce carbon emissions, adapt to climate change, reduce overheating and reduce fuel poverty

We know there are challenges to be addressed in our housing market. We must work to balance our communities, attracting and retaining younger people, as our older population is growing. We must address the challenges of a growing private rented sector in terms of management and quality standards. The City must pool its collective resources to support those residents experiencing financial pressures from the ongoing roll out of Welfare Reforms.

We face these challenges head on. We have a robust knowledge of our housing market; we monitor how it performs and we understand our demographic profile. We are well connected, can be flexible, have the right delivery partnerships and vehicles in place. We are set up and ready to respond over the lifetime of this strategy to achieve our vision of **'Better Homes for All'**.

The objectives of this strategy are based on an extensive evidence base or qualitative data analysis and interviews with partners, compiled independently on behalf of the Council.

## 1. MORE AND BETTER HOMES

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### 1.1 Building High Quality Homes for Our Future

#### Ambitious plans for growth

Our plans to deliver more homes is aligned with our Economic Growth Strategy, that seeks to retain and attract economically active people to live and work in our City. Getting the right housing offer, which includes affordable housing and a growing city centre living offer, is essential to attracting and retaining a skills base that will encourage inward investment.

The adopted Black County Core Strategy set a target of around 63,000 additional homes (net) to be delivered over the period 2006-26 to accommodate its growing population. The target for Wolverhampton is 13,400 homes or 670 homes each year. Whilst we have enough land to build these homes on, many of our sites are affected by adverse ground conditions, infrastructure constraints and land assembly issues which need to be addressed to make them ready for development. This, coupled with the location of some sites in areas of low demand, adds to the complexity of developing new homes - costs can be higher, and, in many cases, the sales value of homes may not be high enough to make them attractive to developers.

We will tackle these issues directly, innovatively and in partnership with developers, seeking external funding to support the viability of key sites, where necessary.

#### WV Living is Proud to be Serving the City of Wolverhampton and its People

Established in 2016, WV Living is a private company wholly owned by the Council, which is developing new homes for rent and sale to meet the needs of local people.

WV Living is unique; it is an innovative model for delivering a greater number of homes in the City. It balances its profit margin with increasing the added social value we receive, through the creation of local jobs and apprenticeships, use of local suppliers and delivering a range of housing options to improve access to good quality homes.

Whilst it competes with developers, its relationship with the City means that it can borrow money from the Council, buy Council owned sites at market value, provide much needed capital receipts and deliver the type of homes that the City needs to deliver, and it can do so with a much lower profit margin.

It will deliver homes for affordable and market rent that will be managed by Wolverhampton Homes and the City's Tenant Management Organisations (TMOs); this delivery and management model maximises the income for the City allowing us to deliver a regenerative impact upon neighbourhoods which have suffered from the blight of derelict land areas.

WV Living has significant plans to grow and diversify its activities and will be delivering 250 homes per year by 2022.

### The City as an Investor

We believe in the growth of our housing market and, alongside developers, registered providers and other investors, we will invest in the housing market. We will work at the forefront of best practice and create opportunities to maximise new housing delivery and the land available for new housing. We will make the best use of the assets in the City, creating the right infrastructure for growth, working with partners and accessing funding such as One Public Estate and Home England Strategic Partnership funding.

Key to this will be further work to develop a Housing Investment Fund. We will identify sources of funding that might be drawn together to enable us to provide loans and 'gap funding' to support specific sites to make them viable so that we are better placed to achieve the right mix of homes in the right place. We will undertake further research and consultation with developers and Registered Providers to develop a 'toolkit' of interventions and investment opportunities to increase the delivery of new homes.

Over 2019 - 2020 we will set out our plans to bring more 'challenging' sites through to delivery and our planning teams will be given the flexibility to use these tools to work with developers to bring sites forward for housing development.

Tools could include making loans to developers, making direct investment to buy affordable homes from developers, direct site acquisition, developing new partnership arrangements with the private sector and considering the potential to invest in financial products unique to Wolverhampton, to support local people to access homes to rent and buy.

### Who Are We Building For?

Building the right type of home, at the right price, tenure and in locations where people want to live, is just as important as numbers, so we will improve the choice of homes for people to buy and rent to help create mixed and sustainable communities. We know from the Housing Strategy evidence base report that we need more larger homes for growing families and a higher quality offer to retain and attract higher income households to the City. Like many places, we also have a growing older population and we know we must ensure that we have homes that meet the needs and aspirations of people as they age.

We intend to undertake more detailed research to better understand and evidence the need for different types of housing and we will do that through a local housing needs assessment which will help us to deliver our planning policies by allowing us to determine the optimal mix of properties in terms of size, type, tenure and value on each site that we consider.

To help balance the housing market we have identified groups who we want to ensure have a choice of good quality homes in the City, at a price they can afford through rent and sale options. These are:

**First time buyers and second stage movers** who can't afford to purchase a home on the open market and cannot access affordable housing either. These households

underpin our economy and to support them we will develop more intermediate products for sale and rent with greater flexibility to move between the two tenures.

**Households who want to rent** especially among young professionals, who want to live close to work. We want to grow a professionally managed rented sector, partly as a response to the challenges of the cost of buying a home and to improve the economic flexibility for residents that renting brings. We want to increase the proportion of quality homes available in Wolverhampton for private rent including a new focus on the City Centre.

**People who need affordable homes;** we will work to boost the supply of affordable housing in the city, adding to the homes managed by Wolverhampton Homes and the Tenant Management Organisations through new build, private sector leasing, and buying existing properties where it makes strategic sense, ensuring that the City retains a diverse social housing sector. We will continue to secure 25% affordable housing (15% for rent and 10% affordable home ownership) on all sites of 15 homes or more, and 10% affordable home ownership on all major developments, where this is financially viable, in line with our Core Strategy and national policy. The type of affordable homes sought will be determined on a site by site basis, based on the best available information regarding housing need, site surroundings and viability considerations. The Council will make use of the new flexibilities in the Housing Revenue Account to build new affordable housing and we have made provision of £157.3 million up to 2023-2024 for the new build programme.

**Homes for new communities** who choose to make Wolverhampton their home. We recognise the importance of inward migration in growing our population and we positively welcome new households who bring their skills and knowledge to add value to our workforce. We are committed to ensuring that there are a range of housing choices to rent and buy and that support is available to assist new communities to settle in Wolverhampton.

**Homes for people as they get older;** by 2041, the number of people age 65 and over will grow by 11,779. The 75+ population is expected to grow by 27% by 2031. We believe that there should be a range of options to support older households make positive choices that work for them, bringing stability and independence for the long term. We will consult our older residents to find out what sort of accommodation they need and aspire to.

**Housing for graduates.** Wolverhampton values and encourages students to study in the City and we will work with the university to undertake research which identifies the push and pull factors of students remaining in Wolverhampton following completion of their studies. What we learn from that research will establish new policy in how the City can support graduates to remain living and working in the City.

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<sup>1</sup> ONS, 2016-based household projections for local authorities and higher administrative areas in England, Table 414: Household projections by age and district, mid-2016 and mid-2041. © Crown copyright: Adapted data from ONS under the Open Government Licence v.3.0.

## 1.2 A Housing Offer for People that Underpins Economic Growth

Housing has a key role to play in boosting the City's economic wellbeing. Good quality housing is important to attract and retain skilled employees within the City, which in turn will attract businesses to move or set up and grow here. Housing investment can be a powerful driver of local economic activity; new construction and improvements to properties can support local businesses through the supply chain and create jobs for local people. Co-ordinating regeneration and economic development interventions maximises the potential for achieving a virtuous circle that can deliver greater economic inclusion.

Wolverhampton is a member of the West Midlands Combined Authority (WMCA), a strategic authority with powers over transport, economic development and regeneration and now includes housing, skills, and digital technology. Its priority is to accelerate an improvement in productivity and enable the West Midlands to become a net contributor to the UK exchequer - while improving the quality of life for everyone who lives and works in the area.

The City of Wolverhampton can play a strategic role as one of the top ten growing economies in the UK and is currently experiencing record levels of private and public investment, with £3.7 billion being injected into regeneration projects Citywide. New housing development will be concentrated in locations that support urban regeneration, minimise environmental impacts, reduce the need to travel, and are, or can be made, most accessible by public transport, cycling and walking. Where possible, brownfield land will be reused, and urban open spaces protected. Development will be managed to ensure it makes a positive contribution to the quality of places and the wellbeing of people delivering genuinely sustainable neighbourhoods with supporting facilities and services.

### Strategic Growth Corridors

Priority corridors for new jobs and homes have been identified by the WMCA in their Spatial Investment and Delivery Plan (SIDP), reflecting the brownfield focussed regeneration strategy set out in our Core Strategy. These are strategic locations that will transform these areas, bringing new businesses and jobs and new housing developments. In many cases mixed use developments will enhance the retail and leisure offer and strengthen our strategic links across the City and the region. Two corridors have been identified by the WMCA for growth opportunities in Wolverhampton:

The **Wolverhampton Northern Growth Corridor** – covers Wolverhampton City Centre and north Wolverhampton up to South Staffordshire and the i54 major employment site and will also require joint working with South Staffordshire.

The **Wolverhampton - Walsall** corridor connects the two strategic centres of Wolverhampton and Walsall and covers the south-east quadrant of the City including the town centres of Bilston and Wednesfield.

### A Vibrant and Revitalised City and City Centre

Wolverhampton is the only City in the Black Country. It is the focus for economic, social, cultural and community activity serving an extensive catchment area. By 2026



Wolverhampton will be transformed with a wide variety of quality shops and cultural attractions, 21st century offices, urban living and a City-scale public transport interchange.

The **City Centre's** small resident population will be transformed through the provision of over 2,000 new homes, supporting the growth of the City Centre. Raising aspirations by creating a different type of city centre living will help bring residents back into the City, creating high quality homes that support mixed and sustainable communities with sufficient affordable housing to meet local needs. Key strategic locations such as Springfield, Canalside South, the Royal and St George's will anchor the housing offer and, as a landowner, the City will be supporting developers through remediation works, site assembly and the provision of necessary infrastructure.

**The Bilston Corridor;** today, the Bilston Corridor is one of the key regeneration areas in Wolverhampton. The corridor acts as a "gateway"; linking Wolverhampton to the Black Country and Birmingham by rail, Metro, road and canal. By 2026, there will be major new residential areas on surplus industrial land clustered around Wolverhampton City Centre and Bilston Town Centre. New communities will be served by high quality transport networks, residential services and high-quality job opportunities. The positive impact of this regeneration will also benefit neighbouring communities, as housing renewal activity spreads to adjoining deprived communities.

**The Stafford Road Corridor;** by 2026, The Stafford Road Corridor will have fulfilled its potential to become one of the premier high-quality employment locations in the West Midlands, already having secured major employers into the City. i54, a flagship business park, will be supported by other high-quality employment locations. To ensure we can provide the homes needed to support this economic growth, new development sites will provide at least 450 new homes, together with 780 homes on existing housing commitment sites.

### Creating Employment and Social Value through Growth in Construction

We are determined that any investment made in the City secures economic benefits and social added value for the residents living here. The value of investment which is occurring through construction in housing, commercial and transportation over the coming 10 years, is around £1.1 billion, and is estimated to generate 10,000 jobs across the City.

We will maximise the positive benefits for the City and its residents, building on the City of Wolverhampton initiative - 'Wolves@Work'. This will include working at the planning stage to maximise benefits for residents and supporting contractors to identify skills, jobs and supply chain analysis.

So far, the work has contributed to an increase in work experience opportunities, engagement with schools and young people and apprenticeships. Over the lifetime of this strategy we will set ambitious targets for job creation through the City's construction projects.

### Supporting Small and Medium Sized Enterprises (SME) through Our Investment

We will continue to ensure that local businesses understand their corporate social responsibilities. Close working with developers and construction-based businesses has created contract opportunities for SMEs across the City.

We will continue to support and work with local businesses who recognise our commitment to our social responsibility policies by supporting upskilling and recruitment in the supply chain, hosting 'meet the buyer' events, providing specialist business support and developing local packages for business to support the aspirations of young people in education.

### Embracing Innovation in Design and Construction

As part of the WMCA priorities, we are looking at new approaches to house building, exploring ways to exploit its scale and potential to work with the house building industry. Proposals include supporting the capacity locally for off-site construction and supporting local small and medium-sized housebuilders for whom smaller sites will be more viable.

We are taking opportunities to explore new approaches to house-building to deliver homes that are safe by promoting fire safety measures in the design of new homes, are of a higher quality and/or delivered with greater speed and precision. Our first modular homes were delivered in 2018, and further opportunities to explore the off-site manufacture of housing are being explored.

Our housing developments already meet at least 10% of their energy requirements through on-site renewable energy generation – this typically means that at least half of the buildings on each development have roof-mounted solar photovoltaic panels. We also require most housing developments to provide electric vehicle charging points. With a focus upon delivering high performance homes that are energy efficient and highly affordable to heat, we are exploring the development of Passivhaus standard housing, which achieves optimum energy efficiency and produces close to zero carbon emissions. This will address fuel poverty and provide warm homes that are affordable to run and minimise carbon output.

Innovation and skills ambitions are supported by investment into the Springfield Campus in Wolverhampton and the creation of Europe's largest specialist construction and built environment campus. This will explore new avenues of technology, including batteries to store solar energy for household use, and other innovations to improve the delivery of housing and support our residents to live affordably.



## 2. ENSURE SAFE AND HEALTHY HOMES FOR ALL

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We are committed to providing an excellent level of landlord service to tenants across our City. We work innovatively and in partnership with all landlords and managing agents, to ensure that the levels of service offered are outstanding in the stock that we own, is owned by our housing association partners and meet the Rent with Confidence standards in the private sector.

### 2.1 Management: Offering a Better Landlord Offer

#### Creating the Best Service Delivery Arrangements

Wolverhampton Homes has a successful track record of delivering housing management services across the City. An arm's length management organisation of the Council, it is one of our trusted partners, providing a range of services that extend beyond those to Council tenants. We will be reviewing our landlord services delivery model to ensure that the services delivered to our tenants are high quality, cost effective and add significant value to their lives. The Council will ensure that the model for delivery of housing management services to its 20,000+ homes continues to be of a high quality, fit for purpose and contributes to the wider strategic objectives.

The Council has four tenant management organisations (TMOs) who manage over 2,000 properties on our behalf with varying levels of management and repair responsibilities. The Council is supportive of tenant led housing management and the benefit this brings to communities, working closely with the TMOs to ensure all our tenants receive excellent housing management services, monitor service delivery. Offering all performing TMOs new and additional opportunities to enhance their local offer to tenants.

As the major landlord in Wolverhampton, we will strengthen our partnerships with Registered Providers operating in the City. We will work to ensure all tenants in the City receive an excellent service and we will create new opportunities for development, stock rationalisation, alternative and better use of stock and support for growth with Registered Providers who share our high standards ethos. We will explore whether partnership working across the sector, with our housing association partners, will also allow the sharing of resources and other efficiencies.

#### Private Sector Leasing

Our private sector leasing service is now in its tenth year. Managed by Wolverhampton Homes, properties are leased from landlords to enable us to extend the number of homes available for people in housing need. It supports professional management arrangements in the City and all properties that are accepted onto the private sector leasing programme score at least 3 stars on our Rent with Confidence scheme, thereby also supporting improvements in the quality of homes.

Wolverhampton Homes currently manage around 80-90 properties through the private sector leasing scheme and increasing the number of properties in management is a priority. They will target landlords and developers who own a portfolio of properties as well as taking on the management of WV Living's market rent properties.

## Strengthening Partnerships with Private Landlords

The Rent with Confidence (RwC) star rating system came into effect in April 2016. It was and remains a pioneering system to support tenants to find good quality rented property with quality management services and hold landlords to account.

Rent with Confidence will drive up the quality of homes for example making sure homes are safe with all legal requirements being met, that rented properties reach minimum EPC standards, and that tenants are issued with Government approved tenancy agreements. More detail set out in the Private Homes Strategy.

It visibly shows that the City has zero tolerance on 'criminal landlords' and fully supports compliant landlords who share our values. Between 2016 and 2018, 1000 properties belonging to 500 landlords were star rated through Rent with Confidence.

We plan to build on the success of Rent with Confidence and we aim to grow the scheme by 100 landlords each year.

Rent with Confidence will also support us to underpin our homeless prevention commitments. We will ensure that any tenant who is served with a Section 21 notice, which brings their tenancy to an end, receives a visit from the Rent with Confidence team to try and identify the reason that the notice has been served. Research suggests that we can save £25k every time we prevent 10 cases of homelessness this way.

## Involving Tenants to have a Greater Influence in Service Delivery

We are responding pro-actively to the 2018 Green Paper 'A New Deal for Social Housing'. We fully support its call for tenants and residents to have a greater voice with their landlords, which will form the foundation of the City's approach to gaining customer insight from all our residents, to respond to their needs and enhance our City's housing offer.

The City's housing management agents will have an important role to play working directly with tenants and residents to increase their engagement and involvement to scrutinise performance and help improve service delivery. It will be a priority to ensure numbers increase and the engaged tenant base becomes more representative.

## 2.2 Maintenance: Offering a Safer Landlord Offer

### Safer Homes

The Social Housing Green Paper made a commitment to delivering homes that are safe and decent and the Council are committed to this being the case whether renting from a social or private landlord.

Wolverhampton Homes provide exemplar compliance services across all Council's homes and continually work to enhance this offer. There is a robust approach in place to monitor and manage the safety of tenants in their homes working in close partnership with the West Midlands Fire Service. Wolverhampton Homes publish the full fire risk assessment process and individual block assessments be accessed on the Wolverhampton Homes website. High rise housing blocks are checked daily by concierge staff and plans are in place for the retrofit of sprinklers across all Council owned high rise blocks.

As part of the City's Safer Homes programme, a multi-agency approach has been put in place to address any fire risk and safety issues identified in high rise homes that are not in the Council's ownership and our enforcement team will continue to challenge poor practice by residential landlords to protect our residents from unacceptable living conditions and overcrowding; prioritising the safety of all tenants in the city including fire safety, no matter what their tenure, will always be our focus.

### Developing healthy homes through our Home Improvement Agency

The Wolverhampton Better Care Fund seeks to 'provide individuals and families in Wolverhampton with the services and knowledge to help them to live longer, healthier and more independent lives no matter where they live in the City.

The Plan recognises the role that housing plays in people's health and welfare, and the contribution that can be made by helping people to maintain and adapt their homes, in reducing hospital discharge times, preventing admission/re-admission (particularly from falls), and helping to reduce/delay expensive care packages.

The launch of a new Home Improvement Agency managed by Wolverhampton Homes will provide a tenure neutral service encompassing Disabled Facilities Grant (DFG), Housing Assistance, Telecare and Affordable Warmth teams, providing customers with the most appropriate services for their needs to assist them to live healthier lives for longer. Wolverhampton Homes are tasked with radically increasing service take up and maximising the use of available grant.

### Improving our Homes

As a landlord we are committed to providing high quality services and homes. Over the past five years we have invested £206.5m in our housing stock and have significant additional investment plans. This includes:

- Delivering approximately 30 new homes a year as part of the redevelopment of infill sites across the city.
- One of the key objectives is to keep the existing homes in a decent condition through the replacement of kitchens, bathrooms, heating etc. And where identified, the completion of structural repairs and £42.3 million has been set-aside to achieve this.
- We adapt homes to help people with disabilities to continue to live independently and £5.5m will be spent over the next five years on a variety of adaptations.
- There is a rolling programme of lift refurbishments to ensure that they continue to operate optimally and £4 million will be spent over the next five years.
- There is a rolling programme to install or upgrade security to blocks of flats through the installation of door entry and CCTV systems (£2.2 million over the next five years).
- We deliver work to improve the sustainability of estates and will be spending £12.45 million over the next five years enhancing the communal space in and around blocks of flats.
- Improving energy efficiency thereby reducing fuel poverty and tackling climate change by reducing carbon emissions.

- Improving water efficiency thereby adapting to the effects of climate change

### Creating Healthy and Vibrant Neighbourhoods

The quality of the environment around homes is as important as the homes themselves. We work to create safe, healthy neighbourhoods with the right infrastructure, parking, transport, green spaces, leisure facilities and amenities, achieved through joint working for example across Highways, Planning, Transportation and Public Health. Good design is a priority for helping to build resilient communities; developing connected spaces that encourage social interaction, reduce isolation and build those connections that enable residents to support each other.

Our neighbourhood uplift area programme focuses on building resilient communities by seeking out new models of working with voluntary sector groups to 'uplift' areas using smaller but critical funding to get ideas and initiatives off the ground. Linking in to the latest 5G test bed programme, we will create opportunities for volunteering and local engagement.

We have embraced the Black Country Garden City programme to accelerate house building and develop attractive places where people want to live, while also transforming the reality and perception of the region. Sweet Briary for example, will see WV Living build a total of 34 properties for market sale and rent, with the development comfortably achieving the strict criteria set by the Black Country Local Enterprise Partnership (LEP) by offering residents beautifully designed homes which are energy efficient, close to public transport, schools, healthcare and green spaces.

Our three community Hubs keep the local community up to date with local information, providing events, volunteering opportunities, job prospects, education and more. The hubs offer a wide range of events, classes, and activities for residents as well as support and advice. Low Hill has now achieved the status as a healthy living hub which formally trains community members to enable a social prescribing role; a system where healthcare professionals are able to refer people to local, non-clinical services to meet their wellbeing needs. With formal links to GPs, and pharmacies, the Hub is actively promoting and supporting residents to create and live in healthy neighbourhoods

### Supporting Tenants into Work

We support all residents into work through our Wolves@work programme. There is also a specific programme to assist council tenants into training and employment, with Wolverhampton Homes employing three employment coaches to support young people, adults and people who are coming from homeless backgrounds and are new council tenants.

Through the Wolverhampton Homes Employability Team, we have supported over 60 residents into employment. We aim to support 500 residents into employment over the lifetime of this strategy.

Where the City invests in its housing stock it seeks to maximise the social value achieved; for example, the apprenticeship opportunities provided by the City's Strategic Construction Partners and the training programme provided by Wolverhampton Homes teaching local people building skills. The aim of these programmes is to up-skill residents to access employment opportunities.

## Improving Existing Homes and Raising Quality Standards

Good quality housing is the cornerstone to what makes a place good to live in and economically competitive; it keeps and makes people feel safe. Well-targeted spending on existing housing can provide significant value for money. It can reduce the cost of health services, increase tenancy success, reduce carbon emissions and improve fuel poverty.

While the quality of both rented and owner-occupied homes is improving, standards remain below the national average and we are committed to focusing our resources on making improvements.

Development of the private rented and home ownership sectors in the City are a priority area for improvement. Our plans are set out in more detail in the Private Homes Strategy 2019-23 and the Empty Homes Strategy 2019-23.

## An Improved Private Rented Sector

Evidence tells us that the private rented sector is growing in Wolverhampton; and whilst we are encouraging growth of a higher quality offer in the City, Wolverhampton is also home to a range of existing, older privately rented properties which are often of very poor condition and are held in small portfolios, often by single property landlords.

A stock condition survey of Wolverhampton carried out by the Building Research Establishment in 2016 reported that approximately 5,018 category 1 hazards exist within our private rented sector. The estimated total cost of mitigating these hazards is £9.3 million.

We have made inroads; with the establishment of our Rent with Confidence Scheme, the introduction of an Enforcement Policy and the adoption of a proactive service led by Environmental Health Officers.

## Selective Licensing

We have previously introduced selective licensing in the All Saints area of the City. We believe that Selective licensing can be a very positive mechanism for driving up standards of management where concentrations of private landlords are failing to do so. The case for selective licensing will be supported where robust evidence demonstrates it will help to manage and drive up standards in these areas. [Houses in Multiple Occupation \(HMO\)](#)

We will manage the growth of HMOs in the City by implementing Mandatory, Additional and Selective Licensing of Houses in Multiple Occupation as required, to ensure occupants in HMOs live in safe housing with good quality environments. An Article 4 Direction is now in place which removes permitted development rights to convert houses into small HMOs, allowing more control over the quality of small HMOs.

To support this, we will closely monitor any growth in the number of HMOs by working closely with planners and develop best management practice through our cross organisational working group.



## Supporting Owners

A high number of vulnerable households live in privately-owned homes, which means that although home owners are responsible for the maintenance of their homes, the need for support, signposting and advice is significant.

We will undertake research to better understand the condition of private housing across the City, where the biggest problems are and the nature of the problems. We will use the information we gain to take an increasingly targeted approach to how we invest to tackle poor conditions in existing private housing.

We still maintain an active private sector assistance policy and offer grants and loans to households who meet our qualifying criteria. Our Home Improvement Agency will be responsible for ensuring the maximum take up of loans and grants and that the improvements made, are focused on improving homes to create better health outcomes for people.

## Bringing Empty Homes Back into Use

Empty homes are a wasted resource and when empty for long periods can deteriorate, attract anti-social behaviour and have an overall negative impact on a street; devaluing nearby properties and being the cause of nuisance to neighbours. Wherever possible the City works cooperatively with owners but will employ the full range of legal actions available including compulsory purchase orders to ensure empty properties are brought back into use for rent or sale, to be lived in as homes.

Wolverhampton has an excellent track record of responding to the challenges associated with long term and problematic empty homes. Since 2010, the City has acted to bring over 1,650 empty homes back into use and the City's Empty Homes Strategy 2019-2024 will set out the range of mechanisms to be deployed by the Council to do more to address empty homes for example over the next 5 year we will introduce both grants and loans to home owners to support them in bringing empty homes back into use.

## Delivering Affordable Warmth

The City recognises the importance of tackling fuel poverty and is currently developing a new strategy focusing on improving the health and wellbeing of vulnerable members of the community, reducing excess winter deaths and as a means of reducing carbon emissions. Tackling affordable warmth will be a priority of the Home Improvement agency.

Over the next five years we will be exploring using external funding to improve and support our existing schemes aimed at providing affordable warmth. This will include introducing Energy Company Obligation (ECO) government energy efficiency scheme which helps reduce carbon emissions and tackle fuel poverty. This will provide support to both owners, private tenants or those with a social housing tenancy to improve heating in their home.

We continue to work hard to maximize the number of households that qualify for these schemes to improve the health and well-being of those most in need. We have also identified places in the City that exhibit deprivation, and we will be targeting funding to reduce the effects of fuel poverty in these areas.

### Delivering Energy Efficiency and Climate Change Priorities

We are committed to improved energy and water efficiency, improved building design and use of renewable and low carbon energy sources, all in order to reduce carbon emissions, adapt to climate change, reduce overheating and reduce fuel poverty.

The Council publishes its energy conservation measures in the Home Energy Conservation Act 1995 (HECA) report, this sets out the measures that the authority considers practicable, cost-effective and likely to result in significant improvement in the energy efficiency of residential accommodation in its area.

Further improvements in this area will be driven by the development of a new fuel poverty strategy – an Affordable Warmth Plan for the City. The City Council will lead on this, in consultation with partners including Wolverhampton Homes, Public Health and community groups.”

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### 3. ACCESS TO A SECURE HOME

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#### 3.1 Improve People's Health and Lives by Delivering Better Housing and Support

Good quality, suitable housing is central to our health and well-being and our ability to positively contribute and take part in all aspects of community life. Our vision for people with social care needs as with the whole population as a whole, is that they have access to a range of housing able to meet their needs and enable choice, allowing them to remain as independent as possible, for as long as possible.

Recent policy both locally and nationally has seen a deliberate move away from traditional residential care and hospital care towards people living independently in their own homes, with their own front door.

Our priorities are to:

- Maintain up-to-date assessments of the housing and support needs of people with social care needs to better inform commissioning and development decisions. This will help ensure that there is a range of housing available and crisis/safe place housing on a temporary basis.
- Continue the development of a full range of housing options in the City that enable choice and good health and well-being, including level access/adapted properties.
- Ensure residents with social care needs can access, secure and adapt housing across all tenures, with the Council ensuring their policies as landlord to most of the social housing in the City recognises and gives priority to those with social care needs.

#### Support for Older People

Wolverhampton has a growing older population. Many households want to remain living in their own home and that should be their choice.

We understand the need for suitable accommodation for older people and the likely demand for support given the growth projections. Our Council plan 2019-2024 supports residents to remain in their homes as it brings the best outcomes for our people and communities. Where this is not the case or where older households require more intensive support, we will consult our older residents to find out what sort of accommodation they would find attractive and where. We are a dementia friendly city, nationally recognised as such, working to improve the lives of people with dementia, as well as their carers.

Working with partners we will develop services with frailty in mind reducing accidents and hospital admissions and that people remain connected and not socially isolated, supporting people to age well and remain living independently for longer. This will be done by ensuring homes are free from hazards, receive necessary adaptations in a timely manner and that we are tackling isolation in the development of services and new housing for example by planning, designing and developing high quality places that promote physical activity, foster social connections and inspire healthy eating.



We will develop a range of options which will ensure that there are choices for older households to access high quality accommodation as they age with quality support services.

We will be undertaking further research in investment to:

- Ensure that the supply of extra care accommodation meets the demand.
- Research the potential of introducing a right sizing scheme.
- Develop scheme development standards for creating homes that older people will find popular.
- Consider what support could be made available to older households in lower value locations who face a financial gap to make the move to a more suitable home.
- Identify new models for older households such as co-housing, where older people choose to live 'independently together'.
- Prioritise adaptation, potentially funded through loans, enabling people to stay living in their current home for longer.

### Supporting People with Disabilities

We expect the number of people with disabilities and long-term conditions, for example,

Dementia and autism, to grow and people are likely to live for longer with these health conditions. We support the work of social care in supporting those residents with a physical disability, learning disability or mental health condition to retain their independence and will work with partners to develop advice services, support services and housing options that meet a broad spectrum of need.

Services are being streamlined to improve access to the range of support available to assist people in retaining their independence through the Home Improvement Agency, which will improve access and speed up the delivery of a range of services including disabled facilities grants. We will also review the Council's housing Allocations Policy improving access and making the best use of adapted homes. We will work with the Autism Partnership Board and Experts by Experience Panel to ensure managing agents make reasonable adjustments to support residents to access advice, housing and support and ensuring that housing can be adapted to help meet their needs.

The Council is committed to maximising the opportunities provided through advancements in technology, building on the use of Telecare to embrace the City as a 5G pilot area, exploring Smart City opportunities, using artificial intelligence to improve the services we offer the work Social Care are doing to understand how smart home technology, telecare and the internet of things can make a real difference to people's lives and support them to manage their health care.

The Council will support the development of specialist housing in the City where there is a need, having already led on the development of an autism housing scheme in the Springfield area of the city and a mental health housing scheme in Low Hill.

## Supporting Children in Care and Care Leavers

As corporate parent the Council has a responsibility to children in care and care leavers to ensure the Council and its partners work to provide them with the best possible support and care, enabling them to feel in control of their lives and are able to overcome the barriers they face. The City will work in partnership to support and develop services that ensure children and young people are safe, and have stability in their home lives, for example the Council's housing Allocations Policy will prioritise the housing needs of children in care and care leavers. The Council has an internal housing support service that provides high level housing related support to young people who are leaving care or are on the edge of care, which responds to the complex needs of vulnerable young people enabling them to move on to independent living through the Wolverhampton Young Person's Accommodation Forum. The Council is delivering the House Project, which will expand the range of offer available to our young people in care and care leavers who will work together to refurbish properties that become their homes, developing a long-term community of support.

## Working in Partnership to Prevent Homelessness

Changes resulting from the economic downturn, and in particular welfare reform, are impacting detrimentally on many low-income groups and those susceptible to homelessness. Since our last housing strategy, we have seen dramatic changes to the environment in which homelessness services are delivered requiring much earlier intervention and tailored advisory services from the City. This is at a time when funding cuts are 'biting' and as a result, our current approach is delivered in a context of shrinking resources and increasing demand for services.

We are a partner with other West Midlands authorities to tackle homelessness. The priorities of our work focus on finding long-term affordable housing solutions for people and increase employment opportunities for those who are homeless or at risk of homelessness.

In Wolverhampton, our homelessness service is provided on our behalf by Wolverhampton Homes, who are focusing on why people are becoming homeless in the first place, so that we can increase the resilience of households and communities, equip them with the necessary skills to prevent crises, such as homelessness, before they occur.

We will extend the use of private sector leasing to bring additional housing options to those using the homelessness services and refer a specialist Health Visitor for all households placed in temporary accommodation where children under 5 are present and where an intentionally homeless decision has been made.

Whilst we are working on measures to prevent homelessness, the need to provide temporary accommodation continues to be an expensive one for the City and we are acting to reduce this cost and increase the availability Council owned temporary accommodation where it is required.

## Supporting Rough Sleepers

The problem of rough sleeping is by no means unique to Wolverhampton and tackling rough sleeping is a corporate priority requiring a holistic and cross-cutting approach. The City has established a multi-stakeholder task team and is working with the West

Midlands Combined Authority to tackle rough sleeping as part of a coordinated regional response.

We are part of the Housing First pilot, which offers a unique opportunity to tackle rough sleeping by moving people on the streets into a permanent home with the support to help them keep it.

The City has a plan on reducing rough sleeping to as close to zero by 2022 and we are developing a multi-agency approach that will develop a No First Night Out Model, provide accommodation to react quickly to those who are 'rough sleeping' and need a safe place to sleep that evening and work to find former rough sleepers employment. This will be coordinated through our City-wide rough sleeper plan.

### Supporting People Experiencing Domestic Abuse

Significant steps have been taken to strengthen our response to domestic abuse and housing has played an important role. Victims of domestic abuse will be supported to remain in their homes if they wish to do so for example, the Safe Homes Scheme supports people to feel secure in their own home following incidents of domestic abuse. The scheme consists of multi-agency support, with the priority being on making the property secure within 24 hours. The priority is to enable people to feel safe and remain living in their homes.

Where households are in danger of being made homeless due to domestic abuse, the City will provide intense support including rent bonds, cash deposits, paying rent in advance and help towards fees for moving and the City is planning closer working with landlords to encourage landlords to take in domestic violence victims.

### Supporting New Communities

Wolverhampton is a diverse City and provides a welcoming place to live for all. We are a recipient City of those seeking asylum. Before households are given leave to remain, we believe that we should still have a duty of care and we have worked hard to provide a range of services and support. We have successfully gained and utilised MiFriendly City funding to provide initiatives to integrate new households into our communities.

We will continue our work with the Refugee and Migrant Centre providing specialist support and tenancy training and look to grow the number of properties we can make available for use by Children's Social Care for No Recourse to Public Funds families and therefore limit any placement in Bed & Breakfast accommodation.

### Armed Forces Personnel

As part of the City's Armed Forces covenant, we are committed to ensuring the armed forces community and their families get help and support when needed. Through our Allocations Policy and Wolverhampton Homes' Housing Options team we actively provide support and assistance to ex service personnel presenting as requiring housing, homeless or at risk of being homeless. We can offer emergency accommodation, rent guarantee bonds and are working to engage with private landlords who will be keen in taking veterans without bonds

## Site and Pitch Provision for Gypsy and Travellers

The Gypsy and Traveller accommodation requirements for Wolverhampton are small. There are currently 46 pitches available for Gypsies and Travellers in the City. We have a target to provide 10 additional pitches by 2036 and there is a site allocated to meet this need.

## Reducing Reoffending

As part of our community safety partnership, the City is proud to be a partner in delivering the Black Country Reoffending Strategy. We work with our partners across statutory, business sector, and the voluntary and community sector, to unblock barriers and to reduce reoffending, which by consequence, will reduce the associated harm to victims, the economy and contribute to the ambitious regeneration of the Black Country.

Housing has a significant role to play. Central to reduce reoffending are the issues of vulnerability and risk. Being homeless, significantly increases the propensity for offenders to re-offend. Stable accommodation can reduce the likelihood of re-offending by more than a fifth and it provides the building blocks for individuals to gain employment and access support services.

We will be developing targeted pre-release support for offenders to access appropriate housing and sustain tenancies in partnership with Wolverhampton Homes, the National Probation Service and Community Rehabilitation Company.

## ACTION PLAN AND MONITORING

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This strategy will be supported by a **Delivery Plan** which will identify the areas of work and specific tasks needed to deliver the Council Plan's priorities for housing.

The delivery of this strategy will be monitored by the Better Homes Board, a group led by the City Housing Section. The Board has responsibility for ensuring the objectives and priorities for City Housing, as identified in the City's Housing Strategy – Better Homes for All, are delivered through effective partnership working and operational delivery.

Wider strategic links will be made to related strategies, for example the Private Homes Strategy and the Empty Homes Strategy, as well as strengthening links to partners, stakeholders and residents.

Key Performance Indicators for Housing are identified in the Council Plan:

### More and Better Homes

1. Net additional homes
2. Net additional affordable homes
3. Net number of empty properties across the city

### Safe and Healthy Homes

4. Number of approved Rent with Confidence' private landlords in our City
5. No. of households helped through AWG/ECO schemes

## Access to a Secure Home

6. Households in priority need per 1,000 households
7. Number of households in temporary accommodation
8. Average number of people rough sleeping in our City

These KPIs will be built upon and a clear vision for *what success will look like* will form part of the Delivery Plan.

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## **Appendix 2**

### **City Housing Strategy 2019 – 2024**

#### **Better Homes for All**

#### **Summary of consultation findings**

##### **Introduction**

This report summarises feedback from the internal and external consultation on the draft City Housing Strategy 2019 – 2024, which ran across June and July 2019 (including public consultation 10 June 2019 – 10 July 2019).

The first draft of the strategy was developed based on consultation with officers and partners, which has been further refined based on internal, stakeholder and public consultation including:

Presenting the draft strategy at Council leadership meetings and a range of fora, providing the opportunity for face to face discussion and feedback including:

Housing, Adults, Children's, Public Health, City Environment, Regeneration, Education Council Leadership Teams. Vibrant and Sustainable City Panel, Wolverhampton Homes Board, Wolverhampton Federation Tenants Association, Deaf Café, Autism Partnership Board, Corporate Parenting, Youth Council and Care Leavers Forum.

Emails sent to internal and external stakeholders including all councillors, Registered Providers, service providers and voluntary sector organisations offering the opportunity for them to feedback directly to the Housing Strategy team including face to face if preferred.

An online survey was made available to stakeholders and members of the public, and was promoted through various means, with hard copies available on request. 156 responses were received from the online consultation of which 88% identified themselves as residents.

The key messages resulting from the consultation are summarised below, having been incorporated into a revised City Housing Strategy document.

## Consultation Feedback

Theme	Summary of feedback	Response
<b>More and better homes</b> - <i>Increasing the speed and number of new homes delivered to meet the needs of our communities and the growing number of households looking to work, study and settle here.</i>		
<b>Infrastructure demands</b>	<p>Should the required level of new housing be developed there will be clear demands on infrastructure to support that growth in terms of schools, GP services, public transport etc.</p> <p>Ensure the linkages between the Housing Strategy and the Transport strategy are made to ensure that where we are developing new housing there is appropriate infrastructure so that people can access services, employment e.t.c.</p> <p>Similarly, new housing developments need to have access to parks and open space as well as sufficient car parking.</p>	<p>The strategy recognises the need for the right infrastructure, transport, green spaces, leisure facilities and amenities to support communities.</p> <p>Wording in the strategy has been strengthened to demonstrate how this is achieved for example housing engage with Education when developing new homes to ensure there is/will be sufficient capacity within schools to support population growth.</p>
<b>Design standards</b>	<p>Emphasise design standards that support independence and enable people to live in their homes for longer for example space standards and the ability to adapt properties.</p> <p>Improve the quality of the environment developed around new build housing, better outdoor space size standards.</p> <p>Important to consult with local people to feed into designs of new developments, particular those with a disability.</p> <p>There was much support for modular constructed homes.</p>	<p>Whilst Lifetime Homes Standards have been superseded in England by inserts into Building Regulations the Strategy supports good design of new build housing that will enable an ageing population to live in their homes for longer, retaining their independence. The Delivery Plan commits to developing scheme development standards for homes that older people will find popular and build these into new homes developed.</p> <p>The Strategy acknowledges that the quality of the environment around homes and the importance of local environments as spaces help build resilient communities and this has been more explicitly expressed.</p> <p>The Strategy highlights the Council's use of modern methods of house building and supports ongoing investigation and the use of off-site manufacture.</p>
<b>Reducing carbon emissions</b>	<p>Promote the commitment to improved energy and water efficiency, improved building design and use of renewable and low carbon energy sources, all in order to reduce carbon emissions, adapt to climate change, reduce overheating and reduce fuel poverty.</p>	<p>The Strategy has been strengthened to reflect on the Council's commitment and highlight the progress that has been made, for example our housing developments already meet at least 10% of their energy requirements through on-site renewable energy generation – this typically means that at least half of the buildings on each development have roof-mounted solar photovoltaic</p>



		panels. We also require most housing developments to provide electric vehicle charging points. We are exploring the development of Passivhaus standard housing, which achieves optimum energy efficiency and produces close to zero carbon emissions. We take enforcement action to ensure that rented properties reach minimum EPC standards. All of which will address fuel poverty and provide warm homes that are affordable to run and minimise carbon output.
<b>A revitalised city centre</b>	<p>Need to ensure the quality of city centre developments, with specific quality standards to ensure safe and healthy homes are developed, that encourage sustainable communities into the city centre.</p> <p>Housing growth within the city centre needs to be combined with an appropriate cultural offer to ensure people can be attracted into and will stay in homes created.</p> <p>Suggested a study of empty shops and properties above shops that could create single person accommodation.</p>	<p>The Strategy sets out the ambition that by 2026 Wolverhampton city centre will be transformed with a wide variety of quality shops and cultural attractions, 21st century offices, urban living and a City-scale public transport interchange.</p> <p>Wording has been added to emphasise the importance of the quality of these homes, with an action added into the Delivery Plan to investigate and develop quality standards for commercial conversions.</p> <p>An action has also been added to the Delivery Plan regarding research into the conversion of empty shops and accommodation above into use as housing (across the city).</p>
<b>Development land</b>	<p>Focus of development to be on brownfield land with a considered response to be developed on the potential for border development.</p> <p>Also make best use of empty properties, commercial and residential that could be converted and brought back into use to meet need.</p>	<p>The Housing Strategy is underpinned by the Council's Core Strategy which adopts a brownfield focussed regeneration strategy and is further supported by the WMCA in their Spatial Investment and Delivery Plan (SIDP) as is reflected in the Housing Strategy.</p> <p>The City Housing Strategy commits to bring new housing development forward in locations that support urban regeneration, minimise environmental impacts, reduce the need to travel, and are, or can be made, most accessible by public transport, cycling and walking, with brownfield land being reused where possible, and urban open spaces protected.</p> <p>The City Housing Strategy includes a sub section, 'Bringing Empty Homes Back into Use', which sets out the Council's commitment to reducing the number of empty properties in the City, having already brought back over 1,650 properties back into use since 2010. This is done by offering support to owners but</p>

		also making use of legal powers when necessary. New and innovative ways of addressing empty properties including commercial conversions will be set out in the Empty Homes Strategy which is being developed as a sub-strategy to the Housing Strategy, with the wording of the Housing Strategy being reviewed and strengthened.
<b>Mixed communities</b>	A continued commitment to creating mixed communities, when developing new housing estates.	Whilst the City is committed to creating mixed communities the strategy only mentioned this in relation to the city centre, and so this has been strengthened in the strategy.
<b>Resilient communities</b>	The role new housing development plays in developing connected spaces that encourage social interaction, reduce isolation and build those connections that enable residents to support each other.	The neighbourhood uplift programme partners with the voluntary sector to uplift areas, building capacity and increasing the resilience of communities and the importance of building resilient communities in terms of reducing isolation has been added into the Strategy and Delivery Plan.
<b>Housing need</b>	Need for larger family housing including accommodation for intergenerational living so that families can care for those with social care needs. Need for family accommodation that is or can be adapted. Need for smaller homes, including bungalows to encourage downsizing, across tenures. Housing for older people, enabling them to stay within their local communities. Demand for affordable housing that reflects local incomes both to rent and buy.	The Strategy makes reference to the Housing Strategy evidence base report establishing the need for more larger homes for growing families. The Strategy and delivery plan commits to enabling the development of homes that include level access/adapted properties as well as £5.5m investment into adapting existing stock over the next five years. The Strategy and delivery plan recognises the specific need for Homes for people as they get older, both in their existing homes, in extra care housing as well as exploring other models. The Strategy makes clear its commitment to increasing the range of affordable housing in the city to buy and rent including the potential to invest in financial products that address local conditions and support local people to access homes to rent and buy. Further work to develop these options for the City is captured in the Delivery Plan.
<b>Joint working with local authority neighbours</b>	In addition to working with our West Midlands Combined Authority (WMCA) neighbours, the strategy should recognise the need for joint working with our neighbours that are not part of WMCA, specifically South Staffordshire.	The need for ongoing joint working with South Staffordshire has been added to the Strategy and Delivery Plan.

<b>Improving schools</b>	Rising standards and improvements in the educational performance of schools is having a positive impact on communities, confidence in the neighbourhood and contribute to the regeneration and desirability of neighbourhoods. Improving education in schools around housing options available to people when they enter adulthood and the responsibilities they will encounter.	The Strategy recognises the link between housing and schools and commits to the ongoing engagement particularly around the development of new housing as well as the contribution to schools and education in terms of the added social value housing investment can bring.
<b>Safer and healthier homes</b> - <i>Achieving high quality management and maintenance of housing, particularly for those renting in the City, whether that be a from a private or social landlord.</i>		
<b>Fire safety</b>	The Council's commitment to improving fires safety in/of homes, particularly to vulnerable people and older people's homes for example construction materials, hard wiring of smoke and carbon monoxide alarms and sprinkler systems and work above minimum standards set by government. Promote fire safety measures in the design of new homes. Promote fire safety checks and measures in all rented homes.	Commitments are made within the Strategy to driving safety and its wider promotion. The Council's first focus had been the high-rise blocks, with a robust approach in place to monitor and manage the safety of tenants in their homes working in close partnership with the West Midlands Fire Service. Wolverhampton Homes publish the full fire risk assessment process and individual block assessments can be accessed on their website. Council high rise housing blocks are checked daily by concierge staff and plans are in place for the retrofit of sprinklers across Council owned high rise blocks. Work has been undertaken to identify the needs of vulnerable people in high rise homes and this will continue across the wider stock. Action has also been undertaken to inspect and assess the safety of private high-rise blocks in the City, and the Council continue to respond to any national changes arising from the Hackitt and Grenfell Inquiries. Wording has been added committing the promotion of fire safety measures in the design of new homes and the private rented sector.
<b>Decent Homes</b>	Need to review and revisit homes upgraded through the Decent Homes programme as more investment may now be needed.	The City Housing Strategy highlights the £206.5m we have invested in our housing stock since the end of the Decent Homes programme and the significant additional investment plans including the ongoing commitment to keeping the Council's existing homes in a decent condition through the replacement of

		kitchens, bathrooms, heating in addition to other investment priorities such as adaptations to help people with disabilities to continue to live independently and completion of structural repairs
<b>Monitoring of managing agents</b>	Need robust arrangements for ensuring the ALMO and TMOs operate in a compliant and efficient way, including tenant feedback.	<p>The strategy commits the Council to reviewing its landlord services delivery model to ensure that the services delivered to tenants are high quality, cost effective and add significant value to their lives.</p> <p>The strategy also commits the Council and its managing agents to improve tenant engagement in improving service delivery, with the strategy being further strengthened in terms of the role of tenant scrutiny as is reflected in the Delivery Plan.</p>
<b>Private rented sector</b>	Emphasis on a well-managed private rented sector with improvements to choice, quality and security. Work to be done with landlords to house those in receipt of housing benefit/Universal Credit, with more done to support potential tenants to access this housing.	<p>The strategy is committed to driving up standards in the private rented sector, with a separate sub-strategy to the Housing Strategy, the Private Homes Strategy being developed to set out in greater detail how this will be achieved.</p> <p>The Rent with Confidence programme and Private Sector Leasing scheme are working to ensure a wide range of property types are made available to meet the varied needs of residents in the city. Added to the delivery plan is the need for further research into the impact of Universal Credit and access to private rented housing and security of tenure, with resulting actions to be developed.</p>
<b>Regulation</b>	Local regulation and enforcement to manage and control rogue landlords and Houses in Multiple Occupation (HMOs), whilst providing support to good landlords.	<p>The Strategy and Delivery Plan highlights the potential use of selective and additional licensing in the private rented sector, which will be further supported and explored in the Private Homes Strategy.</p> <p>Support to explore selective and additional licensing where need can be demonstrated through robust evidence will be made more explicit in the strategy.</p>
<b>Affordability</b>	Support those who want to move from private renting into homeownership as often private rents can be more expensive than servicing a mortgage.	The Strategy makes clear its commitment to increasing the range of affordable housing in the city to buy and rent including the potential to invest in financial products as a local offer, that supports local people to access homes to rent and buy. Further work to develop these options for the City is captured in the Delivery Plan.

<b>Quality of environments</b>	Particularly refuse collection in areas with high numbers of HMOs	The Strategy asserts the importance of the quality of the environment for both existing and new housing developments. Selective and additional licensing are being considered for areas with high concentrations of private rented properties. Where this is detrimental to the local neighbourhoods, cases will be brought forward for the adoption of licensing schemes. A neighbourhood uplift programme partners with the voluntary sector to uplift areas. Commitments have been made to Heath Town and New Park Village in terms of investment and redevelopment.
<b>Access to a secure home</b> <i>A focus on the City's commitment to those residents that need additional support in accessing and sustaining secure accommodation.</i>		
<b>Young people in care and care leavers</b>  Page 77	Make clear the Council's commitment to supporting the housing needs of Children and Young People in Care and to Care Leavers in making successful and sustainable transitions out of care and into adulthood.	The Strategy has been updated reflecting upon its commitment to Children and Young People in Care and to Care Leavers. The Council has an internal housing support service that provides high level housing related support to young people who are leaving care or are on the edge of care, which responds to the complex needs of vulnerable young people enabling them to move on to independent living through the Wolverhampton Young Person's Accommodation Forum. The Council is also committed to delivering the House Project, which will expand the range of offers available to our young people in care and care leavers and is based on cooperative principles through which adults and young people in and leaving care, work together to refurbish properties that become their homes, developing a long-term community of support.
<b>Domestic Violence</b>	Continued support for the Sanctuary Scheme, which provides support to households at risk of violence to remain safely in their own homes by installing a 'Sanctuary' in the home as well as other support that supports victims to stay in their home or local area.	Wording in the strategy has been strengthened to reflect the Council's commitment to supporting victims of domestic abuse to remain in their own homes where they choose to do so, making use of/developing schemes that enable people to feel secure in their own home with support in the Delivery Plan for the Safe Homes Scheme.
<b>Older people</b>	Link to the NHS' Frailty agenda, by enhancing/developing housing and housing support services that support people to age well and remain living independently for longer. Frailty is	The Strategy and Delivery Plan has been updated to reflect its support for a cross tenure approach to ensuring homes are free from hazards, receive necessary adaptations and that we are

	where someone is less able to cope and recover from accidents, physical illness or other stressful events.	tackling isolation in the development of services and new housing, that is aligned to the NHS' Healthy New Towns principles by planning, designing and developing higher quality places that promote physical activity, foster social connections and inspire healthy eating.
<b>Autism</b>	A commitment to ensuring the needs of those residents with a hidden disability such as autism are met, making reasonable adjustments to support residents to access advice, housing and support and ensuring that housing can be adapted to help meet their needs. A cross tenure approach, with links to Rent with Confidence for those tenants living in the private rented sector.	The strategy highlights Disabled Facilities Grants in terms of improving the ability for people with a disability to remain living independently, but this can appear to have a focus on physical disabilities. The Strategy has been strengthened to set out the support for meeting the housing needs of people with all forms of disability.
<b>Prevention</b>	The role housing/housing services plays in promoting wellbeing and supporting those residents with low level health and wellbeing needs, who perhaps are not in contact with social care services, and could help to prevent an escalation of needs and potential admissions to hospital.	The Strategy reflects on the Wolverhampton Better Care Fund and the links to Housing to provide individuals and families in Wolverhampton with the services and knowledge to help them to live longer, healthier and more independent lives and the contribution that housing can make by helping people to maintain and adapt their homes, in reducing hospital discharge times, preventing admission/re-admission (particularly from falls), and helping to reduce/delay expensive care packages.
<b>Home Improvement Agency</b>	Emphasise the work being done to create a holistic, joined up approach to services which support people to remain living at home. This includes the streamlining of Telecare services, making it available to a wider client group.	The Strategy highlights work being done to streamline services through the development of the Home Improvement Agency in the section Developing healthy homes through our Home Improvement Agency. This has been strengthened, added to the Delivery Plan with the inclusion of Telecare.
<b>Assistive technology</b>	Emphasising the value that technology will play now and in the future and the work the City is doing to embrace this for example the City as a 5G pilot area, exploring Smart City opportunities, using artificial intelligence to improve the services we offer the work Social Care are doing to understand how smart home technology, telecare and the internet of things can make a real difference to people's lives and support them to manage their health care.	The Strategy and Delivery Plan has been updated to reflect on the growing importance of new and innovative technologies, particularly in support of social care aims.

<b>Specialist housing</b>	Develop specialist housing where there is a need	The Strategy and Delivery Plan has been updated to demonstrate its support for the development of specialist housing where needed and highlights the Council led delivery of an autism housing scheme and mental health housing scheme in the city.
<b>Rightsizing</b>	Where possible make best use of current stock for example larger or adapted properties by supporting people to right size into homes that better meet their needs.	The Strategy supports the development of a range of housing types to allow people to right-size into homes that best meet their needs. The Strategy supports the development of housing products that will enable people to do this in terms of housing to buy as well as a review of the Council's housing Allocations Policy to assist those living in/accessing social homes in the city.

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# Briefing Note

**Title: Housing Allocations Policy**

**Date: 14 August 2019**

**Prepared by: Mila Simpson**

**Job Title: Service Lead Housing Strategy**

**Intended Audience:**

Internal ☐

Partner organisation ☐

Public ☒

Confidential ☐

## 1.0 Purpose

- 1.1 Following a review of the Council's housing Allocations Policy, the purpose of this briefing note is to summarise the key proposals being recommended for consultation as part of the development and adoption of a new housing Allocations Policy for the City.

## 2.0 Background and context

- 2.1 Local Authorities are required by the Housing Act 1996 to have a scheme for determining priorities, and the procedure to be followed, in allocating housing accommodation both to first time applicants and transferring tenants including nominations to Registered Providers (Housing Associations) – The Allocations Policy. The Council's Allocations Policy as a choice based letting (CBL) scheme was adopted in 2007 and has been subject to periodic updates to ensure it keeps abreast of changing legislation and external challenges. It was last amended in April 2018 to account for new duties introduced through the Homelessness Reduction Act.
- 2.2 The first wholesale review of the current Allocations Policy was initiated in January 2019. This has involved the establishment of a Steering Group consisting of Housing Strategy officers, Wolverhampton Homes representatives, Tenant Management Organisations and Legal colleagues who have met regularly to consider a range of data and evidence to assess how best the Allocations Policy should be updated. This has resulted in a series of recommendations that are proposed for consultation.

## 3.0 Proposals

- 3.1 The revised objectives for the Allocations Policy are recommended below and reflect the need for the Council to make best use of a limited resource that is of high demand, whilst meeting its statutory responsibilities. To do this the Council will provide advice and information to enable applicants to make informed and realistic choices, making use of a range of housing options and tenures to alleviate housing needs.

## **Revised Allocations Policy Objectives**

- i) Ensure people in the greatest housing need have the greatest opportunity to access suitable housing that best meets their needs.
- ii) Make use of a range of housing options and tenures to prevent and relieve homelessness.
- iii) Make best use of the Council's and partner registered providers' housing stock.
- iv) Manage applicants' expectations by being realistic about stock availability, to support them in making informed choices about their housing options, and the extent to which they are able to express reasonable preference.
- v) Ensure that the Council's legal duties and corporate responsibilities are met and that they contribute to delivering the Council's priorities.

3.2 The proposals being put forward for consideration have been recommended based on their alignment with these objectives.

3.3 A number of proposals are recommended that support the Council in meeting its Legal and Corporate responsibilities. This includes the addition of a new band, 'Emergency Plus', that will give additional priority to applicants with a full homelessness duty who are also care leavers, members of the armed forces, require a substantially adapted property, are significantly overcrowded or anyone who requires immediate rehousing due to a significant threat to life, to ensure those with the highest level of need are given the most priority. There are further proposals to support those residents committed to adopting and fostering access appropriately sized homes to enable them to do this and increasing the priority given to Care Leavers on the housing register to assist them in securing settled accommodation.

3.4 A more consistent and fair approach is being proposed for households that are overcrowded. For example, it is recommended that the largest overcrowded families can improve their housing situation by moving to a property where they may still over-occupy but to a lesser extent than before to help reduce the time they are severely overcrowded for, that the priority of overcrowded families living in one-bedroom properties is increased and that any household that is overcrowded has a greater priority than households that do not access to a private garden, which is not the case currently.

3.5 There are a number of changes being put forward for consideration that will make best use of the affordable homes there are in the City, helping to reduce waiting times for some of the most needed property types. For example, due to the limited number of level access properties becoming available it is recommended that ground floor flats are given priority to those with a mobility requirement, rather than the current approach of giving priority to those aged 55 or over. It is also recommended that those applicants assessed as having no housing need no longer sit on the housing register, freeing up 10% of all properties let in a year for those in housing need. This would mean that the 98% of over 5,000 households in Band 4 that are not successful in accessing a Council home will be better served by understanding and accessing their available housing options such as quality private

rental properties through Rent with Confidence or home ownership, including the packages of assistance that can make it more affordable.

- 3.6 So that people in the greatest housing need have the greatest opportunity to access suitable housing, it is recommended that the local connection allowance of a quarter of all properties being prioritised based on the need to live in a particular area, rather than the need to be housed in suitable accommodation is removed. As the Council operates a choice based lettings allocation scheme, applicants retain the choice as to the location of properties on which they bid. Furthermore, the allocations policy gives priority to applicants that need to move to a particular location to be in close proximity to provide essential care to someone. This change will also reduce potential equality implications that could arise as the number and type of social housing is spread disproportionately across the city. It is also proposed that the right will be retained to temporarily prevent applicants from bidding on properties in particular areas or of particular types where there is evidence of a threat to the safety of themselves and/or others. This will assist in applicants accessing housing suitable for their needs and will be applied on a case by case basis, be regularly reviewed and open to review should the applicant request it.
- 3.7 As a further piece of work, it is proposed to undertake a feasibility study of establishing an Accessible Housing register to improve accessibility to adapted properties for those applicants that require them, by improving the information held across the housing stock of the appropriateness of each property for the type and scale of adaptation.
- 3.8 The full list of proposals is set out at Appendix 1, with the rationale provided for each of the recommended changes to the Allocations Policy resulting from the review.

#### **4.0 Consultation**

- 4.1 A six-week public consultation will take place to test the proposals and also identify other emerging issues that need further consideration and incorporation into the recommendations.
- 4.2 The operational and resource implications of the proposals will be understood to establish a cost and timeline for implementation.
- 4.3 The final proposals will be taken through the Council's governance processes including pre-decision scrutiny at Vibrant and Sustainable City Scrutiny Panel before final recommendations are put to Cabinet in January 2020.

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## Allocations Policy Review – 2019

### Recommendations

Recommendation	Current Situation	Rationale
<p>1) Update Policy Objectives</p>	<p>The focus of the current policy's objectives is on reducing void times and helping people choose where they would like to live. Whilst this remains important, going forward there is a need for applicants to make choices based on a growing demand for a smaller number of homes that become available every year in the city.</p> <p>The new objectives focus on helping those in greatest housing need, whilst setting realistic expectations for people, by exploring a range of housing options and in doing so making the best use of housing across the city and ensuring the needs of vulnerable people are met.</p>	<p>Updating the Allocations Policy's objectives helps to ensure all the recommendations put forward as part of this review are consistent in what they are trying to achieve based on what we know the current housing needs are in the City for social housing.</p>
<p>2) A new banding priority for foster carers and those approved to adopt who require a larger property</p>	<p>There is no current priority for foster carers and those approved to adopt in the policy.</p>	<p>This supports the achievement of key corporate priorities; assisting children and young people to get the best possible start in life by being able to secure housing that meets their needs more quickly, and also helps to encourage families in the City become foster carers or adopters providing more settled homes to children and young people in care.</p>
<p>3) Increase the priority given to Wolverhampton Care Leavers and exempt them from any residency requirements up to the age of 25.</p>	<p>Care Leavers are given priority at a lesser level proposed in the revised policy and they are not exempt from the residency rule, which requires them to have lived in the city for at least 2 years.</p>	<p>Supports the Council's commitment to support Care Leavers in having stability in their home lives allowing them to return to the City for example if they move away to attend university.</p>
<p>4) A new band of need called the 'Emergency +' Band.</p>	<p>Currently, the highest Band of need is the Emergency Band, this new band would see a level of need above</p>	<p>This new banding is being introduced to ensure those with absolute highest level of need are given the most</p>

Recommendation	Current Situation	Rationale
	the current highest priority for applicants with a full homelessness duty who are also care leavers, members of the armed forces, require a substantially adapted property, are significantly overcrowded or anyone who requires immediate rehousing due to a significant threat to life.	priority, supporting the Council in meeting its Legal and Corporate responsibilities.
<p>5) Ensure the limited number of Council housing that becomes available to let is allocated to those most in housing need.</p>	<p>As the policy operates an 'open' housing register, more than half of those registered for housing, having had their circumstances assessed are found to be adequately housed and have no housing need as determined by the policy. Despite this, nearly 10% of housing that became available to let in 2018 were allocated to applicants deemed as having no housing need; Band 4 applicants.</p> <p>Whilst Band 4 applicants were successful in bids for just over 100 properties last year, this only represents 2% of applicants in Band 4. As the vast majority of applicants in Band 4 are unlikely to be housed through the housing register and are better served by looking at other housing options.</p>	<p>Maintaining a housing register only for those applicants in housing need will ensure best use is made of the limited homes that become available and where there are homes that in low demand we will look review what can be done to them so that they meet the needs of some of the 5,000 households in housing need on the housing register. This change will also helps to manage expectations of those 5,000 applicants seeking social housing, but assessed as having no housing need are highly unlikely to be successful in their bid for a house and so will be better served by the Council through better advice and support in accessing other good quality housing options in the City.</p>
<p>6) Remove the priority attached to a quarter of all properties that become available to let to someone with a local connection to an area over those with the greatest housing need.</p>	<p>Currently a quarter of all lettings are prioritised to applicants that have a local connection to the area in which the property is located. Applicants can choose one area in which they claim a local connection, providing they can provide evidence to show that they meet the local connection criteria.</p> <p>Properties are randomly selected to be prioritised in this way by an automated process and will be of any property type in any area.</p>	<p>This policy is not consistent with the new objectives of the Allocations Policy in terms of assisting those households in greatest need and by doing so making the best use of Council homes as in the first instance in prioritises local connection above housing need.</p> <p>This policy is also problematic as the number and types of Council homes are not spread evenly across the City, which could have equality implications for those protected groups in need of specific property types that are in short supply.</p>

Recommendation	Current Situation	Rationale
		<p>For those with a need to live in a certain area of the City, this is accommodated as the Allocations Policy is a choice based letting system, and those with the greatest housing need will have the greatest priority including those households that need to move to be able to provide essential care for someone.</p>
<p>7) The policy recognises that people living in good quality houses of multiple occupation, are adequately housed and have no housing need on this basis alone.</p>	<p>The current policy currently gives priority on the housing register to people living in HMOs who are adequately housed with no other housing needs.</p>	<p>HMOs that are well maintained and well managed form part of the wider housing offer in the City. For single people and couples, it can provide an affordable form of accommodation, especially for people in receipt of financial support with their housing costs who are only eligible for the shared room rate, typically single people under the age of 35.</p> <p>The Council with partners are working to ensure all HMOs are of a satisfactory standard and are using its licensing powers to do so, improving standards across the private rented sector as it provides an important housing offer in the City.</p> <p>The policy will maintain priority for families and people of pensionable age living in HMOs.</p>
<p>8) Allowing applicants to bid and accept an offer of housing if in arrears up to £400.</p>	<p>Currently applicants who owe debts of more than £60 to a Council or Registered Provider, will be placed in Band 4, giving the lowest priority for housing (with a small number of exceptions).</p>	<p>This amount has been increased from £60 to £400 to bring it up to date and in line with the average monthly rent of a Council property, particularly in response to the impact that Universal Credit is having on households</p>
<p>9) Allowing a maximum of two refusals of offers of housing in a 12-month period before</p>	<p>Whilst the Council operate a choice-based lettings system for allocating housing, meaning that the majority of applicants are able to bid on properties and in areas that they choose, there is still a high</p>	<p>Despite Wolverhampton Homes and the tenant management organisations providing as much information on the property in the advert, applicants are bidding on properties that they are not willing to accept</p>

Recommendation	Current Situation	Rationale
suspending a housing application for six months.	<p>proportion of applicants that then refuse an offer of housing, for reasons such as location or property type.</p> <p>Applicants (excluding those owed a homeless duty), currently can refuse three offers of suitable accommodation in a 12-month period before their application is suspended for a period of three months.</p>	<p>offers of housing on. This is a waste of resources and can increase the length of time a property remains empty, meaning higher void costs.</p> <p>Reducing the number of refusals that can be made and increasing the amount of time an applicant cannot bid, should encourage applicants to fully consider if they are willing to live in the property they are bidding on, their housing options and have realistic expectations about where and what homes are likely to become available to let. It should also make the best use of housing by reducing the time a property remains empty.</p>
10) Improve access to ground floor flats for those applicants with mobility restrictions.	Ground floor flats are currently prioritised for applicants who are over 55 years old and applicants requiring single level accommodation.	There is limited single level accommodation across the City that is accessible to people with mobility restrictions. In line with making the best use of homes available and meeting peoples housing needs, this change aims to improve accessibility to homes and potentially reduce the waiting times of those people of all ages, including older people, with limited choice on where they can live because of mobility restrictions.
11) Allow children of the same sex to share a bedroom post the age of 15.	When children of the same sex reach the age of 15 they require separate bedrooms, in terms of their housing application.	Increasing the size of property that a family needs, when two same sex siblings would be happy to continue to share, can restrict the household's eligibility to larger homes that are in short supply and can significantly increase the amount of time they may be waiting on the housing register.
12) Improve the powers of Multi-Agency Panels to award a	Currently multi-agency panels which could for example include Social Care, the Police, Probation	Some applicants who receive support from various organisations may benefit from an increased level of



Recommendation	Current Situation	Rationale
wider range of housing priority when assessing the needs of individual cases	and the NHS can only provide an Emergency banding to an applicant's housing application, when their circumstances have been considered as part of a case conference style discussion in terms of the support required to address the individual needs of the applicant/household.	priority as part of a package of support, but do not require an urgent need to move, equivalent to an Emergency Band award.
13) Applicants owed a housing duty that are refusing to cooperate with Housing Options will be placed in Band 3.	Housing options can only award banding for homelessness duties, there is no repercussion for refusing to engage with support services.	Encourages applicants to cooperate with housing options, however a policy statement providing a definition of refusing to cooperate will be required.
14) Improve the Council's ability to protect applicants or other residents by restricting the property type or location where an applicant can bid if they would otherwise pose a risk to themselves or others.	Currently applicants can only be excluded from the housing register as a whole but there are circumstances where it is in the best interest of the applicant or other residents if the applicant is limited to where they can bid for housing based upon location or property type.	For example, this approach could provide further protection to victims of Domestic Violence by excluding the perpetrator from bidding on properties close to the victim. It could also prevent some vulnerable people from bidding on the higher floors of high rise flats where for example it may be difficult for them to escape in the case of a fire. Decisions to make these exclusions would be taken on a case by case basis, with the provision of supporting evidence from partners.
15) Increasing the priority of overcrowded families living in one-bedroom properties.	Currently over occupied families in one-bedroom properties have no additional priority when compared to families over occupied in a two-bedroom property.	This improves the priority for parents that are sharing with children, above priority for those parents and children that have separate bedroom.
16) Households that are overcrowded will receive higher priority than families that are not overcrowded but no access to a private garden.	Currently applicants that are a tenant of the Council or registered provider (housing association) who has children under 12 years of age but does not have access to a private garden is awarded Band 2 priority, greater than the Band 3 priority received by overcrowded households short of one bedroom.	Whilst recognising the benefits of a private garden for families with children under the age of 12, this has been balanced with addressing the housing needs of those families living in overcrowded conditions.

Recommendation	Current Situation	Rationale
17) Recommendation to undertake further research into the development of an Accessible Housing Register for the City.	Applicants who require an adapted property are encouraged to bid on any property they are eligible for with an Occupational Therapist assessment done if the applicant is successful in their bid, which can result in the property not being suitable for the type of adaptation required. Not enough information is known about the stock in terms of adaptability for a number of needs.	The experience for applicants requiring an adapted property could be improved if we have better information across the stock in terms of how it can be adapted. This would allow us to make best use of Council homes and better meet housing need of those applicants that require an adapted property.
18) Allow the largest families that are overcrowded to improve their housing situation by moving to property where they may still over-occupy but to a lesser extent than before. This would be on a case by basis with the of a senior Council housing officer.	Currently families who require 6- or 7-bedroom properties are unable to bid on 4 5-bedroom properties despite the lack of 6 or 7 bed properties in the City as they would still be classed as overcrowded.	This will help to alleviate the situation for households that are extremely overcrowded, reducing the amount of time they will have to wait for a property to become available, if at all due to the shortage of larger homes in the City.
19) Ensure the Allocations policy meets current needs by removing those criteria that are not used i.e. "the two tenancies for one rule"	The "two tenancies for one rule" gives additional preference when two Council or Registered Provider (housing association) tenants are each giving up a property type that is in demand (determined by analysis of the number of bids and availability of type of property) to move into one property.	This additional priority has been in the policy for a number of years, however has very rarely been used and so has been considered as not meeting current housing needs.
20) Allow households in the Emergency band, to bid and accept offers of housing despite factors that would otherwise reduce their priority to the lowest Band in the policy.	Applicants that have been assessed as in the greatest housing need (Emergency Band) are currently placed in Band 4 (lowest priority for housing) due to factors such as having £60 rent arrears unless there is a statutory duty to house them.	As applicants awarded the Emergency band have been assessed as having an urgent need to move. This priority should be honoured with additional support or agreements put in place to overcome the reasons for being placed in Band 4, for example a payment plan for those applicants in arrears.

Recommendation	Current Situation	Rationale
21) Amend the 'residency rule', which requires applicants to have lived in the City for 2 or more years before their housing needs can be fully assessed, to exclude refugees and travellers.	Applicants who have not lived in the City for at least two years are awarded the lowest priority of housing need, Band 4 with a small number of exceptions for example there is an emergency or band 1 need to move on medical or social grounds or the applicant or a member of the household has a firm offer of employment in the City.	This change takes into account recent case law, which assessed the inclusion of refugees and Gypsy and Travellers in residency requirements as equal to indirect discrimination, as it would be more difficult for refugees and Gypsy and Travellers to meet this requirement than others.
22) Reserve the right of the Council to allocate available properties outside of the Allocations in the case of a large-scale City emergency	There is currently no mechanism with the policy that allows a flexible response from the Council in terms of the use of available housing in the case of large-scale emergency.	This adds to the City's resilience plans should a large number of households in the City require urgent rehousing due to an emergency situation.
23) Remove option of automated telephone bidding.	Currently bids for available properties can be made via the website, by text, via automated phone line, in person at a Housing Office or by phone	The automated telephone bidding service is a rarely used service accounting for 0.5% bids.

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<b>CITY OF WOLVERHAMPTON COUNCIL</b>	<b>Cabinet Resources Panel</b> <b>1 October 2019</b>
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<b>Report title</b>	Empty Homes Policy and Strategy Action Plan	
<b>Decision designation</b>	AMBER	
<b>Cabinet member with lead responsibility</b>	Councillor Bilson Housing and Assets	
<b>Key decision</b>	Yes	
<b>In forward plan</b>	Yes	
<b>Wards affected</b>	All	
<b>Accountable Director</b>	Kate Martin	
<b>Originating service</b>	Housing	
<b>Accountable employee</b>	Helen Scullard Tel Email	Service Support Manager 01902 550963 helen.scullard@wolverhampton.gov.uk
<b>Report to be/has been considered by</b>	Directorate Leadership Team Strategic Executive Board Vibrant and Sustainable City Scrutiny Panel	7 August 2019

**Recommendation for decision:**

**Recommendation for decision:**

The Cabinet is recommended to:

1. Approve the Empty Homes Policy and Strategy Action Plan 2019-2024

## **1.0 Purpose**

- 1.1 This report outlines the new Empty Homes Policy and Strategy Action Plan 2019-2024. The Council's previous Empty Homes Strategy has expired. The Empty Homes Policy and Strategy Action Plan complements the Private Sector Housing Strategy, which in turn flows from the new Housing Strategy and Corporate Plan.
- 1.2 Prior to going to Cabinet, this report is being presented to the Vibrant and Sustainable City Scrutiny Panel so that their comments can be incorporated in the final draft.

## **2.0 Background**

- 2.1 Most local authorities have an Empty Homes Strategy, setting out how they intend to minimise the number of long-term empty homes in their area. With a national housing shortage, leaving homes empty for long periods wastes a valuable resource. Empty properties can attract antisocial behaviour and negatively affect neighbourhoods.
- 2.2 A healthy housing market will always include a proportion of empty homes, as houses are bought, sold and refurbished and tenants move in the private rental market. The Council concentrates its efforts on empty homes which are eyesores and/or causing problems to neighbours but will also help owners of non-problematic empty homes to use, let or sell them. This includes efforts to bring homes back into use before they reach the definition of long-term empty (i.e. six months or more).
- 2.3 Wolverhampton has a higher proportion of long-term empty homes than the national and regional average. This may be partly due to the need to update Council Tax records, which are used to calculate the number of empty homes. As well as introducing new initiatives to improve performance in reducing long-term empty homes, this strategy proposes working with Council Tax colleagues to ensure that records are up to date and that Wolverhampton is not over-estimating the number of empty homes in the city.

## **3.0 Strategic Context**

- 3.1 This strategy contributes primarily to the strategic objective four, quality and secure housing for all. By improving housing conditions, it also contributes to building strong, resilient and healthy communities. Proposals in this strategy to explore initiatives to provide training opportunities when homes are refurbished, contribute to the strategic objective of more good jobs and investment in our city, and well skilled people working in an inclusive economy.
- 3.2 The more proactive approach in the new Empty Homes Strategy complements the new Private Sector Housing strategy, to be submitted to Cabinet in September 2019, which also shifts the emphasis from a largely reactive to a more dynamic and proactive way of working. This in turn is supported by the revised Housing Enforcement and Charging Policy, approved by Cabinet on 17 October 2018.

#### **4.0 Changes in the New Strategy**

- 4.1 The new Strategy builds on the work and successes of the previous one and broadens the range of options both to provide advice and assistance to the owners of empty homes, and to work with partners to reduce the number of long-term empty homes in the City.
- 4.2 Ensuring that the Council's records of empty homes are accurate is important. We propose to work with Council Tax colleagues to ensure that empty homes are up to date. Owners may forget to inform Council Tax of empty homes or may omit doing so to avoid higher charges for long-term empty homes.
- 4.3 The new Strategy proposes increasing the options of financial assistance for owners of empty homes who may have low incomes and be unable to bring a dilapidated property up to the standard where it can be occupied or sold. Options for a loan which could be repaid through rent if the Council nominates the tenant, or through a charge on the property when it is sold, may be offered.
- 4.4 There is increased emphasis on partnership working in the new Strategy. Examples of this include: working with Wolverhampton Homes and/or community groups to involve local people in refurbishing empty homes, offering skills training and increasing local residents' employment chances; working with reputable Property Guardian companies to use empty homes which are due for future major works or redevelopment; and exploring partnerships with companies offering to purchase empty homes and offer nomination rights to the Council.

#### **5.0 Evaluation of alternative options**

- 5.1 One alternative option is to continue with the previous strategy, with little or no change to the initiatives offered to owners of empty homes or to the range of potential partnerships to tackle the problem. The previous Empty Property Strategy emphasised advice and assistance to the owners of long-term empty homes, with enforcement as a last resort. While Housing Services will always seek to work co-operatively with the owners of long-term empty homes, a more proactive approach is required if we are to improve performance. The new strategy suggests a greater range of options to assist owners and an ongoing publicity campaign to encourage communities to report empty homes. However, when owners are unwilling to engage with offers of assistance, enforcement action may be required. Often preliminary steps to take enforcement action result in owners letting or selling their property, so full enforcement action is seldom required.
- 5.2 Another option is to cease work on returning long-term empty homes to use, and re-direct the resources for this work to general private sector housing work. If no action is taken to encourage the use of long-term empty homes, it is likely that the number of these wasted homes will increase. Large numbers of empty and deteriorating homes blight neighbourhoods, attracting anti-social behaviour. This would undermine work being done to improve the quality and availability of homes for rent and sale in the City.

- 5.3 The new strategy includes options intended to increase the supply of affordable privately rented accommodation. This will help to relieve and prevent homelessness, reducing the need for expensive emergency temporary accommodation for homeless households.
- 5.4 Empty homes staff attend regional events focussing on empty homes, and research best practice in tackling long-term empty homes. The new strategy extends the range of options we will explore to encourage and assist owners of wasted homes to use, let or sell them. We will continue to learn from national and regional best practice

## **6.0 Reasons for decision(s)**

- 6.1 The Empty Homes Policy and Strategy Action Plan 2019-2024 will reduce the number of long-term empty homes, providing more homes for sale and rent in Wolverhampton. The strategy outlines a range of options to help owners of long-term empty homes to use, let or sell their property. In cases where owners refuse to engage with offers of advice and assistance, and where the property is dilapidated and/or causing a nuisance to neighbours, enforcement action will ensure that homes are not wasted and do not blight neighbourhoods.

## **7.0 Financial implications**

- 7.1 There is a budget for incentives for owners of long-term empty homes to let or sell them, and for capital expenditure such as compulsory purchase. This strategy suggests extending the eligibility criteria for incentive payments, within existing budgets. Housing Services will be applying for additional central government funding to bring empty homes back into use for preventing and relieving homelessness. If additional funds are needed for new partnership initiatives, these will be requested.

## **8.0 Legal implications**

- 8.1 In cases where enforcement action is required, advice and input from Legal Services is always sought. If Housing Services wishes to progress partnership arrangements with private sector agencies or other potential partners, this will be referred for legal advice.

## **9.0 Equalities implications**

- 9.1 There are no direct equalities implications arising from this report.

## **10.0 Environmental implications**

- 10.1 Bringing empty homes back into use reduces unoccupied properties, improving neighbourhoods. Improvement works to bring long-term empty properties up to a standard where they can be occupied often includes improvements to home energy efficiency, reducing carbon emissions.

## **11.0 Human resources implications**

- 11.1 The Empty Homes Policy and Strategy Action Plan will be delivered with existing staffing resources Housing Services.



## **12.0 Corporate landlord implications**

12.1 There are no corporate landlord implications arising from this report.

## **13.0 Health and Wellbeing Implications**

12.1 Poor quality housing has an adverse impact on people's health and wellbeing. By improving the quality of the housing stock in Wolverhampton, and pursuing initiatives to prevent and relieve homelessness, this strategy will contribute to improving health and wellbeing. In addition, proposals to offer training opportunities in building skills when empty homes are refurbished will improve residents' skills and employment prospects.

## **14.0 Schedule of background papers**

14.1 Empty Property Strategy 2010-2015

## **15.0 Appendices**

Appendix 1 – Empty Homes Policy and Strategy Action Plan 2019-2024

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## CITY OF WOLVERHAMPTON COUNCIL

### DRAFT EMPTY HOMES POLICY AND STRATEGY ACTION PLAN 2019-2024

#### 1. Introduction

- 1.1 There is a national shortage of housing, and particularly of good quality homes affordable for people on low incomes. Empty homes are a wasted resource, and homes which are empty for long periods can deteriorate and attract anti-social behaviour. If properties are neglected, they can devalue nearby homes and cause nuisance to neighbourhoods.
- 1.2 It is normal for there to be a turnover of empty homes. People buy, sell, inherit and rent homes, and need to move for reasons related to housing costs, size, family and work needs. A healthy housing market needs a regular turnover of homes for sale and for rent. The City of Wolverhampton Council (CWC) only needs to focus on preventing homes from remaining empty for long periods, or advising and encouraging the owners of long-term empty homes to use or sell them. Homes are defined as long-term empty if they have been unoccupied for 6 months or more.
- 1.3 CWC has a higher number of long-term empty homes (1.2%) than the regional average of 0.84%. There is no one area where long-term empty homes are concentrated; empty homes are found throughout the City and in all price brackets.
- 1.4 In line with our new Housing Strategy, we want the new Empty Homes Policy and Strategy Action Plan to make a real difference in Wolverhampton. By the end of the strategy period, we aim to have brought at least 1,100 long-term empty homes back into use, with a stretch target of 1,250. This will help residents to find a home to rent or buy and will contribute to raising the quality of our neighbourhoods. We will explore new partnerships and will continue to learn from and implement best practice in minimising wasted homes.

#### 2.0 Previous Strategy

- 2.1 Our previous strategy covered the period 2010-2015 and has continued until now. Since 2010 CWC has taken action to bring over 1,650 empty homes back into use. This action has included advice and assistance to owners, offering a £500 payment to contribute to the costs of sellers' fees, and taking enforcement action such as serving a Notice under Section 215 of the Town and Country Planning Act 1990. As a last resort, where owners are unwilling to co-operate with the Council and use or sell their home, the Council may use compulsory purchase powers. Homes bought through compulsory purchase are then sold at auction.

- 2.2 Wherever possible CWC works in partnership with the owners of empty homes, and offering advice and assistance is always the first option. Only if an owner cannot be traced, or the owner is unwilling to take action to sell or use a home which is causing problems for its neighbours, is enforcement action taken. In more than half of cases where CWC starts compulsory purchase proceedings, which is an action of last resort where all other efforts have failed, the owner of the empty home takes action themselves to sell or let their home and avoid compulsory purchase.

### 3.0 Supporting Corporate Priorities

- 3.1 Housing contributes to CWC's corporate priorities identified in *Our Council Plan 2019-2024*, in particular:

- better homes for all;
- a vibrant, green city we can be proud of;
- strong, resilient and healthy communities

Bringing empty homes back into use nearly always involves improving the homes to a standard for their new owners or renters. Using empty homes contributes to reinvigorating neighbourhoods and improving the quality of housing has a positive effect on residents' health.

- 3.2 The City's Housing Strategy, Better Homes for all, continues the priorities of the Council's Corporate Plan and identifies three key objectives:

- more and better homes;
- safe and healthy homes;
- access to a secure home.

Work to reduce empty homes contributes positively to all three of these objectives; it increases options for residents to find a secure home, increases the supply of available homes, and increases the quality of homes as landlords bring them up to letting standard or new owners make improvements to their home.

- 3.3 We intend to explore partnerships to increase the range of options for bringing long-term empty homes up to standard where work is required. This will increase investment in our city and support more jobs, especially in skilled building trades. Poor quality housing impacts on residents' health and improving conditions in privately rented and owner-occupied homes is a key priority for CWC. Improving the supply of good quality homes for rent and for sale will offer residents increased opportunities to move from unsatisfactory housing, offering a stable and healthy environment for our residents.

### 4.0 Developing our Empty Homes Strategy

- 4.1 While much good work has been achieved since 2010, Wolverhampton continues to have more long-term empty homes than our neighbouring local

authorities. CWC therefore wishes to move from a predominately reactive approach to a more proactive strategy. CWC will continue to work co-operatively with the owners of empty homes wherever possible. However, when owners of empty homes which are causing nuisance either cannot be identified or refuse to engage with CWC, we will take action to ensure that empty homes are brought back into use.

4.2 There are four main elements to CWC's new Empty Homes Strategy. These are:

- improving the accuracy of data/records to ensure the reported number of empty properties is a true reflection of the position;
- continuing to learn from other Local Authorities' empty homes work, identifying successful initiatives which might be effective in Wolverhampton;
- introducing new options to encourage and help the owners of empty homes to let or sell them, and exploring partnerships to bring empty homes back into use;
- taking a more proactive approach to step up performance in tackling empty homes;
- supporting ongoing publicity to raise public awareness and promote a range of options to minimise long-term empty homes in Wolverhampton.

These elements are covered in more detail below.

## 5.0 Identifying Empty Homes and Their Owners

5.1 The main sources of information about the owners of residential properties are Council Tax records and the Land Registry. From April 2019 CWC introduced increased charges for Council Tax on empty dwellings. Those which have been empty for two years or more will pay 100% Council Tax, rising to 200% if a home has been empty for five years and 300% for those empty for ten years or more. Members of the public can report empty homes via the Council's website, and staff may also identify empty homes when out in the community.

5.2 It is now compulsory in almost all circumstances to register ownership of homes at the Land Registry when a property is bought or sold and these records are publicly available. However, a few homes cannot be traced to a current owner, either because they have never been registered or because they are owned via a complex system of companies and/or trusts, obscuring the identity of their owners.

5.3 In the great majority of cases, identifying the owner of an empty home is straightforward. Finding the owner's current address and contact details may be more difficult.

5.4 Council Tax records are often very useful for finding out who owns a particular home, and large Council Tax arrears may indicate that a property is empty.

However, these records are not always up to date. People may believe that if a property is unoccupied it does not attract Council Tax liability, or they may be busy with other personal and administrative issues and forget to advise Council Tax staff when they buy or move into a new home. The Empty Homes staff work with Council Tax colleagues to share information and update Council Tax records, which benefits the Council by maximising Council Tax income as well as by tackling empty homes.

## 6.0 Researching and Implementing Best Practice

- 6.1 CWC staff attend the West Midlands Empty Property Officers Group and are members of the national practitioners' forum, the Empty Homes Network. CWC will continue to be an active member of these groups and work to identify effective initiatives to bring empty homes back into use which are not currently in place in Wolverhampton and consider whether they would be successful in our City.
- 6.2 Housing Services will seek to work with regional neighbours and partners to ensure that there is a consistent, relevant and effective suite of options to help owners of empty homes to let or sell them, and to progress enforcement where this is necessary. Partners may include Wolverhampton Homes, local Housing Associations, community groups and private companies. Work with Council Tax colleagues will be key to update their systems and ensure that we have an accurate record of empty homes in Wolverhampton.

## 7. A More Proactive Approach

- 7.1 In order to reduce the number of long-term empty homes in Wolverhampton, a more proactive approach will be required. Housing Services already works with Council Tax to contact owners of properties empty for three months, to prevent them becoming long-term empty homes. Sometimes Council Tax records do not show the full picture, as owners may have other priorities than updating the Council. By proactively contacting those on our records, we can discover that the home has been sold or used. We hope to work with Council Tax colleagues to undertake a thorough review of their records. While updating these records is likely to result in a more accurate, and lower, figure for long-term empty homes in the City, new initiatives will also be explored to minimise the number of wasted homes in Wolverhampton.
- 7.2 For the previous Empty Homes Strategy, the target was to bring 200 long-term empty homes back into use each year. In line with our more ambitious and proactive new Strategy, the target will be increased to 220 homes each year, with a stretch target of 250.
- 7.3 In some other areas, private companies are working in partnership with local authorities, with the company buying homes which are then leased to the Council. These schemes may include Council grants or loans to refurbish

long-term empty homes. There are companies interested in such a partnership in Wolverhampton, and Housing Services will explore opportunities for innovative partnerships which will increase the supply of good quality, affordable homes for rent.

- 7.4 There are a number of companies which offer Property Guardian services. This is the use of empty properties, which may be commercial or residential, for temporary shared accommodation for licensees. The licensees provide security against squatting and vandalism, in return for a lower than market rent. This is a legally grey area. Some property guardians live in comfortable conditions, with a responsible company as their landlord. Others are put at risk by dangerous and illegal conditions. CWC will monitor the use of property guardians in the City, and if appropriate will work with reputable companies where this would be mutually beneficial.
- 7.5 Wolverhampton Homes has suggested exploring a new initiative to offer training to local people to learn building skills by improving homes which can then be used in their leasing scheme. They have had interest from potential landlords whose properties need improvement before they meet the leasing criteria. We will work with Wolverhampton Homes to see whether this would be a viable option. There are obvious attractions in combining skills training to improve employment prospects with a project to refurbish homes which will then be brought back into use.
- 7.6 Similarly, we wish to encourage community groups to become involved in bringing empty homes back into use. This might include identifying empty homes, talking to their owners, and practical work to refurbish dilapidated homes. This could be done in partnership with Wolverhampton Homes, or as an independent community initiative; we will support any viable, safe and effective methods of tackling empty homes and improving neighbourhoods.
- 7.7 At present, CWC has no scheme to support key workers to buy a home in Wolverhampton. We will work with colleagues and partner agencies to establish if it would be useful to develop such a scheme, what model of support and assistance would be most effective and how we could focus this to bring empty homes back into use.
- 7.8 In a small number of cases, the Council has purchased empty homes where these would be useful as social housing stock. We will continue to consider individual and strategic purchases of empty properties, to meet needs for social housing, temporary accommodation for homeless households or other local housing needs. These purchases may through willing sale, or through Compulsory Purchase Order (see 8.5 below).
- 7.9 In all cases, Housing Services' preference is to work positively with the owners of empty homes and advise and support them to let or sell an unused home. However, when either the owner of an empty home cannot be identified, or when the owner of a property refuses to engage with the Council, enforcement will be used. This may involve a Section 215 notice, requiring the owner to

remedy disrepair, an Empty Dwelling Management Order or compulsory purchase. Enforcement will primarily be used where properties are in poor repair and/or causing nuisance in their neighbourhood.

- 7.10 To date, while much work has been done to encourage the re-use of empty homes, this has not been consistently and thoroughly recorded. We will set up a procedure to record actions on each empty home, as well as the outcome. This will highlight the work of the Empty Homes officers, enable detailed and accurate reporting and provide evidence to inform decisions about which interventions are most effective.

## 8. Enforcement

- 8.1 Local authorities have a range of enforcement options to take action where empty homes are causing a nuisance, or where owners either cannot be traced or are unwilling to engage with advice and assistance to use a wasted property. While CWC always prefers to work co-operatively with owners of empty homes, if it is not possible to trace the owner of an abandoned empty home, or if the owner refuses to engage with offers of advice and assistance, then enforcement will be pursued. Often when staff start enforcement action, owners act themselves to avoid this, which Housing Services regards as a positive result.
- 8.2 Legislation which can be used to tackle empty and/or abandoned homes includes: the Law of Property Act 1925; Prevention of Damage by Pests Act 1949; Miscellaneous Provisions Act 1982; Building Act 1984; Housing Act 1985; Town and Country Planning Act 1990; Environmental Protection Act 1990 and the Housing Act 2004. The Council will use whatever legal powers are available to help bring empty homes back into use, and to stop neglected and abandoned properties from blighting neighbourhoods, if owners of empty homes can either not be traced or are unwilling to co-operate with advice and assistance to tackle long-term empty homes.
- 8.3 Local authorities have powers to enter and inspect properties where there is a risk that poor housing conditions are affecting either the occupants or neighbouring properties. Empty homes which are dilapidated, infested with vermin or with badly overgrown gardens can negatively affect neighbours, and local authorities can require owners to repair defective premises and remove rubbish. Local authorities can also carry out works in default if owners refuse to do so, and recharge the costs.
- 8.4 The Housing Act 2004 introduced Empty Dwelling Management Orders (EDMOs). These allow local authorities to apply to a Property Tribunal to take over management of a long-term empty home, refurbishing it if necessary and letting and managing it for up to seven years. Rent from the letting is used to pay any refurbishment and management costs, and any monies over this are paid to the owner.



- 8.5 If an abandoned property has charging order debts to the Council, the local authority can apply for a forced sale to repay these debts. The procedure varies, with one for Council Tax debts and another for other liabilities.
- 8.6 Compulsory Purchase Orders (CPOs) are another form of forced sale. They may be used either if an owner of an abandoned property cannot be traced, or if the owner of a property causing nuisance to neighbours has persistently refused to engage with the Council to remedy the problems. In most cases the Council will sell the property at auction, but as indicated above at 7.8 a property which could be particularly useful in the social housing stock may be retained.

## 9. Finance

- 9.1 Currently there is a capital budget for work to bring empty homes back into use. This has been mostly used to fund compulsory purchases of long-term empty homes, which are then sold at auction. In addition, there is revenue funding of a £500 incentive to contribute to the administrative costs of selling an empty home and/or apply for probate.
- 9.2 With our more ambitious new strategy, additional funding to support incentives, enforcement and partnerships will be required. A business case for this will be prepared. We propose to extend the £500 incentive to first-time buyers who purchase a long-term empty home, and to explore whether we can also introduce assistance for key workers.
- 9.3 Successful re-use of long-term empty homes attracts New Homes Bonus funding. This results in the Government match-funding the Council Tax income for new homes and for homes brought back into use, for six years. This benefits the Council, providing funds to improve community facilities or to re-invest in work to minimise long-term empty homes.
- 9.4 Wherever possible, work on empty homes will be co-ordinated with other initiatives to maximise value for money and contribute to strategic and corporate targets and priorities. For example, repairs and improvements to an empty home are likely to include increased to home energy efficiency, contributing to improvement in residents' health. Grants for home energy efficiency are available, if homes are occupied by people who meet the criteria for them. We will work to co-ordinate different opportunities for bringing empty homes back into use and improving the quality of homes in Wolverhampton.

## 10.0 Publicity

- 10.1 There are national and regional Empty Homes Week opportunities to highlight the issue of long-term empty homes and publicise what the Council can do to help. The Council's website has a page on empty homes providing information and links to resources such as WH's leasing scheme and Rent with Confidence. Empty Homes staff are working with the Communications team to

further develop the Council's website and to promote an ongoing campaign to highlight the assistance available to bring empty homes back into use, examples of successful collaboration with owners of empty homes, enforcement action where owners have refused to engage and encouragement for the public to engage with our work to minimise the number of long-term empty homes in the City.

- 10.2 When it is possible to identify the owner of an empty home, staff write to them offering information and support to let or sell their disused property. In addition to emphasising the financial benefits of letting or selling an empty home, these letters will also highlight the benefit to the local community of bringing it back into use, and the additional Council Tax and other costs of long-term empty homes.
- 10.3 CWC will continue to work with local communities to raise awareness of empty homes and to promote action to encourage their re-use. Housing Services will work with the Communications team to develop a rolling programme of publicity about empty homes. This will include raising awareness with partner agencies, such as health and social care, so that colleagues can refer patients or clients for advice and information about letting or selling an empty home. Where appropriate, Housing Services will attend community events to gather information about local empty homes and advise residents about how CWC can help to prevent homes from remaining empty for long periods.

## 11. Action Plan

- 11.1 Below is the action plan which will cover the next five years. This plan will be reviewed and revised at least annually and will be amended as required to ensure that it remains up to date and effective.

Empty Homes Strategy 2019-2024 – Action Plan

	Action	Lead Officer(s)
1	Increase our target for bringing empty homes back into use, to 220 a year with a stretch target of 250	Empty Homes Officer
2	Continue to proactively review and update Council Tax records	Empty Homes Officer, Council Tax staff
3	Continue to offer £500 to owners who need to apply for Probate and/or meet our criteria and sell their long-term empty home or lease it to tenants nominated by the Council and/or Wolverhampton Homes	Empty Homes Officer
4	Prepare a specification to tender for one or more partners to purchase empty homes and make them available for letting to Council nominees	Service Manager
5	Work with Wolverhampton Homes to develop a repair and refurbish service to enhance their Leasing Scheme	Empty Homes Officer, Wolverhampton Homes
6	Work with Wolverhampton Homes and/or community groups to involve local communities in identifying empty homes and bringing them back into use. This will include offering apprenticeships/work experience for local people to learn building, decorating and gardening skills by supervised work on empty homes	Empty Homes Officer, Wolverhampton Homes

7	Develop a business case for increased funding to support new initiatives to bring empty homes back into use	Service Manager
8	Develop criteria for grants/loans to improve empty homes for sale or letting	Empty Homes Officer
9	Develop a communications and publicity programme to raise public awareness of empty homes and how CWC can help owners to sell or use them	Empty Homes Officer, Communications Team
10	Identify any long-term empty homes which would meet strategic and/or specific needs and purchase them for use or development	Empty Homes Officer, Development Team
11	Identify opportunities to work with particular neighbourhoods to target work to tackle empty homes as part of other community initiatives	Empty Homes Officer
12	Explore options to assist first time buyers and/or key workers to purchase and occupy long-term empty homes	Empty Homes Officer
13	Explore the option of a Real Estate Investment Trust to own properties bought through willing sale or compulsory purchase	Service Manager
14	Monitor the use of Property Guardians in Wolverhampton and develop a protocol for working with any responsible companies	Empty Homes Officer

15	Set up a recording procedure to capture actions on empty homes and provide performance monitoring information	Service Manager
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