

CITY OF
WOLVERHAMPTON
COUNCIL

Residents, Housing and Communities Scrutiny Panel

16 February 2023

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

Venue Council Chamber - Civic Centre

Membership

Chair Cllr Barbara McGarrity QN (Lab)

Vice-chair Cllr Christopher Haynes (Con)

Labour

Cllr Mary Bateman
Cllr Philip Bateman MBE
Cllr Greg Brackenridge
Cllr Jasbinder Dehar
Cllr Dr Michael Hardacre
Cllr Carol Hyatt
Cllr Zee Russell
Cllr Gillian Wildman

Conservative

Cllr Adam Collinge
Cllr Andrew McNeil

Quorum for this meeting is three Councillors.

Information for the Public

If you have any queries about this meeting, please contact the Scrutiny Team:

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Agenda

Part 1 – items open to the press and public

Item No. *Title*

MEETING BUSINESS ITEMS

- 1 **Apologies**
[To receive any apologies for absence].
- 2 **Declarations of interest**
[To receive any declarations of interest].
- 3 **Minutes of the previous meeting** (Pages 3 - 14)
[To approve the minutes of the previous meeting as a correct record]

DISCUSSION ITEMS

- 4 **Expanded Arboriculture Project Tree Inspections Update** (Pages 15 - 32)
[To consider a presentation on the expanded Arboriculture Tree Inspection Programme].
- 5 **Alcohol Harm in Wolverhampton** (Pages 33 - 36)
[To consider a briefing note outlining alcohol harm in Wolverhampton and what the Council and its partners are doing in response].
- 6 **Gambling Related Harm in Wolverhampton** (Pages 37 - 42)
[To consider a briefing note on gambling related harm in Wolverhampton].

Residents, Housing and Communities Scrutiny Panel

Agenda Item No: 3

Minutes - 17 November 2022

Attendance

Members of the Residents, Housing and Communities Scrutiny Panel

Cllr Mary Bateman
Cllr Philip Bateman MBE
Cllr Greg Brackenridge
Cllr Adam Collinge
Cllr Carol Hyatt
Cllr Barbara McGarrity QN (Chair)
Cllr Andrew McNeil
Cllr Zee Russell
Cllr Ellis Turrell (Substituting for Christopher Haynes)
Cllr Gillian Wildman

In Attendance

Cllr Steve Evans (Cabinet Member for City Environment and Climate Change)

Employees

Martin Stevens DL (Scrutiny Team Leader)
John Roseblade (Temporary Director for City Housing and Environment)
Jenny Lewington (Deputy Director for City Housing)
Michelle Garbett (Service Lead Housing Strategy)
Marianne Page (Service Manager for Transport Strategy)
Tim Philpot (Professional Lead for Transport Strategy City Housing and Environment)
Ruth Taylor (Service Lead for Place Making City Housing and Environment)

Part 1 – items open to the press and public

Item No. *Title*

- 1 **Apologies**
Apologies for absence were received from Cllr Jas Dehar and Cllr Christopher Haynes.

Cllr Ellis Turrell substituted for Cllr Christopher Haynes.

2 Declarations of interest

Cllr Zee Russell declared a non-pecuniary interest as a member of the Wolverhampton Homes board.

3 Minutes of the previous meeting

Resolved : that the minutes of the meeting held on 29 September 2022 be confirmed as a correct record.

4 Performance, Budget Monitoring and MTFS

The Temporary Director for Housing and Environment gave a presentation on Performance, Budget Monitoring and the Medium Term Financial Strategy. He stated that the Council had built up a strong track record over many years of managing its finances despite reductions in funding. The Council's strategic approach to strategic financial planning was to align resources to the Our City, Our Plan which was approved by Full Council on 2 March 2022.

The Temporary Director for Housing and Environment commented that Cabinet received a quarterly report on integrated performance and budget monitoring. The quarter 2 position had been presented to Cabinet on 16 November 2022. Overall a forecast overspend was reported across the Council of £1.5 million, this was in the main as a result of the 2022-2023 pay award. In total there were 56 Key Performance Indicators in the Our City: Our Plan Performance framework. 33 had shown an improvement or seen similar performance, 17 were yet to be updated in the year to date, with 8 of those falling in Healthy Communities. 6 of the 56 performance indicators had shown a decrease in performance.

The Temporary Director for Housing and Environment, talking specifically about the priority area, "Good Homes in Well-Connected Neighbourhoods," commented that of the 10 priorities in this area, 5 had showed improved or similar performance in the year to date and for 5 there had been no update in the year to date. The KPIs that had showed increased or similar performance were as follows: -

- Number of new builds completed in the City - Similar
- Percentage of carriageways in City assessed as high quality – Increased for all road types.
- Percentage of planning application decisions made with 13 weeks or agreed timescales – Increased
- Percentage of fly tipping incidents resolved in five working days - Increased.
- Number of homeless families moved into secure housing - Increased

The performance against the number of new builds completed in the City had remained at 70. This put Wolverhampton slightly lower than the statistical neighbour average which was 111. The increased performance against the number of carriage ways in the City judged as high quality included a large increase in the quality of C roads in the quarter. 100% of major planning applications had been completed within 13 weeks in the quarter. There had been a slight increase in the percentage of fly tipping incidents resolved in 5 days from 76% to 77.5%. More homeless families had been supported into secure accommodation. Homeless applicants made up 30% of the customers on the housing register. The additional support in place for the homeless customers placed in Temporary accommodation would increase the number of homeless applicants that were rehoused.

The Temporary Director for Housing and Environment commented that they were awaiting on data, which was expected to be published in November to update 5 KPIs, these were in the areas of:-

- Net additional dwellings in the City
- Housing affordability ratio
- Percentage of dwelling stock that was vacant in the City
- Energy efficiency of the housing stock

There was a financial pressure on Temporary Housing Accommodation. There was a pressure to the transportation budget of nearly £700,000 which was largely down to demographic growth. 1718 pupils were now transported to School, in 2020/2021 the travel unit were transporting 1147 pupils. The Travel Unit had recently been formed and transformed how the service was delivered. If the work had been given to a private contractor it was expected that costs would be in excess of £3 million per year than they were at the present time. Continued growth was expected to increase the demand further. There was a financial pressure on fleet services due to the increase cost pressures due to the hiring of vehicles. The planned fleet replacement programme would mitigate against the increased costs.

The Temporary Director for Housing and Environment remarked that there had been a reported overall budget deficit of £12.6 million in 2023-2024 rising to £25.8 million over the medium term to 2025-2026. Work had been ongoing to reduce the deficit with an update to Cabinet on 19 October 2022 reporting an updated forecast budget deficit of £7 million for 2023-2024 rising to £31.6 million by 2025-2026. Work would be undertaken to bring forward proposals to set a balanced budget for 2023-2024 and delivered a sustainable medium term financial strategy.

The Temporary Director for Housing and Environment highlighted a number of uncertainties in the budget. There continued to be significant uncertainty about the future funding the Council would receive, inflationary pressures and future pay awards. It was assumed that there would be a 4% increase in pay in 2023-2024 and 2% for future years. Under the remit of the Residents, Housing and Communities Scrutiny Panel the Medium Term Financial Strategy currently had a £250,000 Environmental Services saving target built into the budget. A growth of £142,000 for Waste Services was also built into the budget.

The Temporary Director for Housing and Environment explained that the budget setting process was still under way. The draft budget was subject to changes that were implemented to close the current deficit for 2022-2023. Some growth and saving targets were currently being held in Corporate Accounts and would be transferred to services. The draft budget did not currently reflect any virements between services in 2023-2024. Work was ongoing to review and challenge budget requirements.

The Temporary Director for Housing and Environment presented a slide on strategic risks. The strategic risks had last been reported to Audit and Risk Committee on 26 September 2022. Climate Change was a strategic risk which fell within the remit of the Residents, Housing and Communities Scrutiny Panel. He listed four strategic risks which could have an impact on the Panel these were, Businesses Closing,

Reputation / Loss of Public Trust, Employee Wellbeing and the Medium Term Financial Strategy.

A Panel Member asked for more information on the six key performance indicators which had showed a decrease in performance. He referred to the Markets budget which was forecasting an 80% overspend, Homeless and New Communities a 30% overspend and the Fleet Services budget a 40% overspend. He believed this suggested poor planning. He highlighted the underspend in the street lighting budget, which caused him concern as he had residents that were requesting street lighting, but had been told by Officers that the money was not available. He could not understand why the Council was intending to spend less on Environmental Services in next year's budget compared to the current year. A saving of a quarter of million pounds had been identified. He thought there was a lot of pressure on the service such as the maintenance of trees and did not believe a budget reduction could be justified. He asked if any earmarked reserves were going to be used to fill any gaps in the budget.

The Temporary Director for Housing and Environment responded that since the pandemic there had not been a return to normal levels of activity at the market and this was also applicable to the car parking budget. The underspend in streetlighting was due to the investment in LEDs, which was bringing savings to the operational budget. The LED replacement programme was near completion with over 18,000 units replaced. The £250,000 saving in the Environmental Services budget was an historic saving target that was put into the service some years before. This target could potentially be achieved by delivering efficiencies, without reducing service provision. He would resist any moves to reduce the budget allocated for trees. Some of the earmarked reserves were restricted by legislation in how they could be utilised, he cited the taxi licensing reserve and highways reserve as examples. He was happy to circulate a briefing note on the reserves to provide more detail.

A Member of the Panel was of the view that Environmental Services needed to move to a proactive management approach rather than a reactive management approach. He believed this was particularly applicable to the management of trees in the City. He referred to delays in the highway resurfacing programming projects, this had been partly down to a delay in the signing off of the Black Country wide surface treatment framework document. He wanted to ensure that next year's highway budget included any remaining from the current year. He asked for an update on road sweepers, as the current one's often broke down. It had been promised that they would be replaced in the current year.

The Temporary Director for Housing and Environment responded that they were nearly up to a full complement of staff who worked on the City's trees. There were only two vacancies left to complete. The Council had moved from a five year inspection strategy to every two years. Councillors would have access to a digital system showing data on tree inspections. He hoped Councillors would soon see a difference in how the service was approached. He agreed that it was disappointing about the delays on highway treatment. As soon as the weather permitted they would be looking to carry out maintenance work and he would ensure that finance rolled over any remaining budget into the new financial year. Four road sweepers would be operational for the Council in the next month, which were all electric. As they were so quiet, they were able to work in residential areas overnight.

A Panel Member asked about how the budget for the Coroners service was monitored. He was particularly interested in how the service operated in Wolverhampton and asked whether a full report could be given in the future. The Temporary Director for Housing and Environment responded that it was monitored on a regional basis. The Scrutiny Team Leader responded that there would be room in the Work Programme in the new municipal year for an item on the Coroners Service. He would send the minutes from a Health Scrutiny Panel meeting which had looked at the processes to be followed after death.

5 **New Housing Allocations Policy Impact**

The Chair invited the Deputy Director of City Housing and the Service Lead – Housing Strategy to give their presentation

The Deputy Director of City Housing began the presentation by explaining that Housing Strategy had 650 enquiries a year from Councillors and MPs about housing allocations, in addition to customer enquiries.

The Service Lead – Housing Strategy gave some background information on the Council's Housing Allocations Policy, which was rooted in the Housing Act 1996. The Council's Allocation Policy was managed through a choice based lettings scheme (CBL), called Homes in the City, implemented in 2007 and under yearly review. The aims of the new policy were as follows:

Ensure people in the greatest housing need have the greatest opportunity to access suitable housing that best meets their needs.

- Make use of a range of housing options and tenures to prevent and alleviate homelessness.
- Make best use of the Council's and partner registered providers housing stock.
- 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.
- Ensure that the Council's legal duties and corporate responsibilities are met and that they contribute to delivering the Council's priorities.

The revision of the Council's Allocations Policy had been towards a focus on those in the greatest need of social housing. The current waiting list data showed 4,930 on the list, prior to the changes to the Allocations Policy, the list had over 11,000 applicants. The introduction of a new band, called "Emergency Plus" recognised not only homeless, but people with significant additional needs such as disabilities who needed adapted homes. The Service Lead – Housing Strategy then went on to discuss the supply and demand of Council Housing. They explained that demand was outstripping supply, with less than 900 homes becoming available by the end of the financial year (2022 – 2023). Of highest demand were two and three bedroom houses and bungalows, whereas 67% of the properties that became available across the previous year were flats and maisonettes.

Statistical data showed a yearly rise in applications for social housing as a constant trend. The Lettings Team received the highest number of enquiries from MPs and Councillors through Wolverhampton Homes. Void turnarounds were delayed during

the pandemic during its peak, however this had been improving monthly since. City housing and Lettings team were open and transparent with each other and this collaboration worked well. The Council continued to prioritise the increase of affordable housing supply in the City, with multiple schemes in support of this aim. Between 2021 and 2022 the Council bought 28 former Council Houses back into available stock, as of this financial year six properties had been bought and a further seven were in the process of being bought. Private Sector housing had contributed 20 empty homes back into use in the first two quarters of 2022-2023. New build housing development activity, funded by the Housing Revenue Account (HRA), continued with the first phase of new homes being delivered in Heath Town. There would be 40 new homes - 16 x four bedroom houses and 24 x two bedroom houses. The Small Sites Programme would develop a number of small in-fill sites and bring forward a further 34 units of accommodation. In addition, there were two community led developments within Bushbury and Heath Town estates, that would result in a further 14 new properties. The Council's wholly owned housing company, WV Living, delivered approximately 200 new homes a year and endeavoured to deliver 25% affordable housing where possible. The Marches, Wednesfield development had brought forward a total of 266 homes – 99 for outright sale, 100 Help to Own, 29 Affordable Rent and 28 Shared Ownership. Hampton Park, Bushbury will bring forward 178 homes – 133 Outright Sale, 29 Affordable Rent and 16 Shared Ownership. All affordable units were owned and managed by the Council through its managing agents.

The Deputy Director of City Housing added that she had been to see the new build houses in Heath Town, specifically the 2 to 4 bedroom houses and semi-detached houses. She praised the new houses being built and extended an invite to the Panel to visit the site if interested. She stated that the earliest ones being built would be ready in February 2023.

The Service Lead – Housing Strategy explained that all new builds would have, as part of their Local Lettings Plan, a percentage of housing allocated to people who already live in the area and that this was to ensure communities didn't get broken apart through re-developments to areas.

The Service Lead – Housing Strategy asked the Panel to decide how best Housing Strategy could help Scrutiny further understand Housing and Housing Strategy; this included items such as data gathering and sharing, methods of communication, and supporting Councillors with residents housing enquiries.

The Chair thanked the Deputy Director of City Housing and The Service Lead – Housing Strategy for their presentation and sought further information on the buyback scheme, enquiring if these would be bought at market price.

The Deputy Director of City Housing explained that residents could buy their Council home as part of the Right to Buy Policy. After 2 years, if the house went onto the market for sale, the Council had first rights to consider purchasing. An independent financial assessment would be done on the property and considerations were made about any alterations that would need to be accounted for financially in the event of the purchase. Should the property be deemed strategically relevant to the Council, then Housing Strategy use their allocated budget to buy back and develop the property to bring it back into existing Council housing stock.

A Councillor thanked the team for their presentation and expressed satisfaction with housing developments that had occurred in areas he was responsible for. The Councillor asked for clarification on Housing Policy in regard to resettlements of people in areas they were deemed to have a local connection.

The Service Lead – Housing Strategy answered that the policy applied to new build estates and that when an older estate had been knocked down and re-developed, it could uproot and change community dynamics. To mitigate these impacts and to try maintain community cohesion, the Council attempted to re-house those uprooted during developments back into the new homes that have replaced their former estates.

The Councillor replied praising the team for building on Brownfield sites within the Wolverhampton Local Authority area, rather than relying on the South Staffordshire overflow new build estates. He said that it took the Housing team around 15 days to reply to him on average and asked if it would be possible for replies to become quicker, but was keen to stress a 15 day turn around was not a terrible response time.

A Councillor recounted some of the difficulties her residents had with applying to the housing register and putting bids on houses. After investigation by the Councillor it turned out many residents were doing it wrong. The Councillor requested training to allow her to understand residents housing problems better and potentially avoid sending enquiries to the housing team. The Councillor suggested such training could be included in the induction process for new Councillors. The Councillor then referred to older policy where those moving in to a social housing area often needed to have local contacts, which the councillor felt aided community cohesion. The Councillor believed this piece of policy to be dropped however, now that the newer requirements focused on those most in need. The Councillor asked why this decision had been taken.

The Service Lead – Housing Strategy replied agreeing with the Councillor that training would be beneficial, she said she would enquire into capacity to decide if training could be incorporated more broadly into Councillor induction programs and at occasional community outreach events. The Deputy Director of City Housing stated that the policy requirements changed during the 2020 review to meet the newer objectives, which focused on giving those in the greatest need the greatest opportunity to be housed under the Local Authority. The original aims came into conflict when the local connection policy was still in place, given limited housing stock, it had to be reviewed to meet the needs of the City. There was a legal responsibility to prioritise the homeless, veterans, domestic abuse victims and so on. Housing nationally had become increasingly residualised due to lack of supply and Wolverhampton reflected the trend.

A Councillor made the point that one of the biggest challenges residents faced was getting in contact via phone with managing agent, Wolverhampton Homes. He said residents would wait at length on the phone, with response times being poor. Whilst he agreed additional training for Councillors would help, he argued that the housing experts should remain the housing experts and that the move to digital and website based contact did not help those who were not technologically literate or those with vulnerabilities. The Councillor explained that if the response time and customer

service from Wolverhampton Homes could improve, he believed less inquiries would be sent to Councillors and Members for Parliament and this would reduce pressure on the Council's Housing Strategy Team.

The Service Lead – Housing Strategy replied saying she had taken the Councillors points on board. The Councillor further mentioned that Wolverhampton Homes phone handlers were informing residents to contact their Members for Parliament to escalate their cases quicker, which was not the right way of doing things when the managing agent should be dealing with the enquiry. The Service Lead – Housing Strategy asked if they could contact the Councillor outside of the meeting for further discussion and investigation into this matter.

The Deputy Director of City Housing added that the Housing Strategy team could consider developing a dashboard access application for Councillors so that they could see what social housing stock was available in their wards, this would help them answer residents inquiries quicker and give them more information.

A Councillor raised the local connection policy removal, explaining that whilst he understood the pros and cons with regards to removing the policy, it did reduce community networks and other networks, such as informal caring capacity within a family unit or the local school. The Councillor explained that due to low stock in some areas, there had been displacement for some families, especially if a family grew. The housing size they require would be available in their local area, forcing them to have to move to the other side of the city and causing a multitude of issues. The Councillor asked if it was possible for those residents who refused to move, having things like room separation or a loft conversion to help adapt the house to their needs.

The Service Lead – Housing Strategy understood and agreed with the points the Councillor raised, she answered that she would need to come back to the question at a later date to answer.

The Deputy Director of City Housing said that the banding process for Local Lettings Policies did take into consideration instances of multiple needs. She added that adaptations could not often be done to older stock houses due to health and safety reasons.

A Councillor asked if the number of empty properties managed by Wolverhampton Homes could be provided to the Panel. The Councillor requested if information was available for Councillors on what areas people were moving into their wards from in the event of it being someone formerly external to the ward.

The Service Lead – Housing Strategy confirmed they could obtain the information on the amount of voids, as well as increase the updates. The Deputy Director of City Housing gave examples of reasons for voids, such as those in need of repair to match the Lettings Standards policy. Reasons for voids would need to be given so a fair assessment could be made of void counts.

A Panel member said a lot of pensioners in social housing were living in 4 to 5 bedroom houses and asked if the Council was able to relocate them to smaller homes to free up larger houses for families.

The Service Lead – Housing Strategy replied stating that if the Council could build a lot of two bedroom bungalows, the problem would be solved. Bungalows were in high demand for residents who were downsizing. The Deputy Director of City Housing further stressed this point and said they were trying where they could to get properties built. The Housing Strategy department use their budget allocation every year to try to buy back and build as many homes as possible every year and where they can build the housing stock residents required. They also encouraged people to downsize where appropriate.

A Panel Member expressed their view that the Right To Buy policy had caused major problems for all Councils in the country. They stated that they felt that Wolverhampton Homes and the Council were doing their very best with the difficult situation they were in. The Councillor discussed proposals for an accreditation scheme of private landlords or multiple home owners in the City. He explained these property owners had around 4 to 5 thousand houses in the city which were lying empty. The scheme, which would cost them yearly to be apart of, would enable the managing agent to work with private landlords to allocate people into privately rented housing, which the Council had been able to verify as being up to Lettings Standard. The Councillor asked if this scheme has been further developed.

The Service Lead – Housing Strategy explained that the policy was launched a few years ago, but had some issues and went on hiatus for a few years whilst it was being reviewed. The Scheme was now back and fully operational and sat with the Homeless Services team. She offered to find out more information from the relevant team for the Councillor.

The Councillor praised the teams work and explained he understood the difficult circumstances they were under. He said his concern was those who were hidden homeless and said that the answer to the problem was that Councils need to be able to build more Council houses.

The Chair thanked the Housing Strategy Team for their presentation and answers. The Chair then confirmed the Panel would want to visit the new build houses.

Resolved: That the proposed interactive housing dashboard for housing information be proved to Councillors.

6 **Active Travel**

The Service Manager for Transport Strategy opened the presentation explaining National Government policy for the implementation of cycling lanes throughout cities. They then addressed how the City of Wolverhampton Council was delivering on the policy. A Copy of the presentation is attached to the signed minutes. The Service Manager for Transport Strategy explained that cycling transport was accessible and, affordable for people; because of this the Council was keen to promote the uptake of cycling.

The Professional Lead for Transport Strategy City Housing & Environment began by explaining where main priority development roads were, in co-ordination with the other Black Country Network Local Authorities, for cycle lanes. Professional Lead for Transport Strategy City Housing & Environment informed the Panel that these developments were subject to national policy, with specific standards expected to

meet the criteria for national funding. All major road developments required cycle lanes to be implemented alongside them and this needed to follow the set standards.

The Professional Lead for Transport Strategy City Housing & Environment set out that the Council was utilising the Active Travel fund money to build cycle lanes across the City and provided updates on completed as well as on going works across the City. The Cycle Hire Scheme had been taken up by residents since the scheme was launched, statistics show the useage. The Professional Lead for Transport Strategy City Housing & Environment noted the electric bikes were out performing the pedal bikes in hire uptake. Docks for bikes were currently located at the City centre end of the Wednesfield Road, at Springfield Campus and at New Cross Hospital, with an additional one in Heath Town planned.

Future oversight of cycling development aims were:

- Proposal to make standing report to Climate Change Advisory Group
- Look to convene an officer led forum to embed Active Travel discussions across service areas
- Maintain the existing and well attended public Cycle Forum to encourage stakeholder input and encourage collaborative working.
- Continue promotion through public champions in the form of Hugh Porter as Cycling Ambassador and Adam Tranter as the West Midlands Cycling and Walking Commissioner

A Panel Member enquired if data was available on how many loaned cycles accrued damages or were written off.

The Professional Lead for Transport Strategy City Housing & Environment answered that the company who managed the bikes who had that information which could be provided if required. He added that the company have advertised the fact that the bikes were particularly difficult to damage however.

A Councillor asked for more information on the Future oversight of cycling development, in particular the Officer led forum and the Cycle led forum, citing concerns about how the cycle paths may impact residential areas. He felt having that early engagement with the public was crucial to getting them on board.

The Professional Lead for Transport Strategy City Housing & Environment agreed with the Councillors point and explained that the Council would be using multiple methods to promote its consultation on the matter including social media, letters, and other communication methods to inform the public.

A Councillor stated they agreed cyclists should be encouraged, although he would prefer if they were kept away from the main roads. He said that recent data had shown that car usage had increased in the West Midlands and the City of Wolverhampton and did not want these developments to be at the expense of road users. He finished by asking if usage of the cycle lanes could be monitored so that the Council could be sure these schemes were beneficial to the public.

The Professional Lead for Transport Strategy City Housing & Environment replied that the Department for Transport required Councils to measure usage of the cycle lanes to be able to access the funding. He confirmed they were monitoring and would continue to monitor usage.

The Councillor on the Board for Active Travel stated that rather than implement congestion charges on the City, they made the bold decision to choose to introduce the cycling lane network to help encourage the reduction in carbon emissions around the City. He explained the national policy setting strict criteria to gain funding for the project and added that it was done on a competitive basis, alongside hundreds of other local authorities. He stated he didn't want people who want to take up cycling to work to compete with lorries on the road and by building these networks it meant they hadn't had to ban buses and cars from areas. The Cabinet Member for City & Environment, Steve Evans, continued to praise the works being done and asked it to be recorded his thanks to the Officers for their work. He was supportive of equality of respect and access to all types of transport users.

7 **Public Realm**

The Service Lead for Place Making City Housing and Environment summarised the Public Realm Improvement Programme background information which began as the Connected Places Strategy in 2017. It went through multiple consultation periods and phases, and suffered from a delay due to Covid-19. Main works on the site started in November 2021.

The Head of Network Management for City Housing and Environment gave an overview of the City Centre Destination plan, a copy of the presentation is attached to the signed minutes. The presentation set out road traffic management changes, pedestrianised area, events and more. Cycling routes and bus routes were displayed on a map for the Panel to view. Disabled parking, new and current, as well as taxi ranks and bays were also shown.

The Service Lead for Place Making City Housing and Environment explained the purpose of the development was to improve links between the City centre and future developments, improve cycling and pedestrian access in and around the city, create green spaces and improve the cities appearance. It also aimed to reduce pollution and traffic, as well as support local businesses with the creation of new event spaces. Phase 1, Victoria Street and Phase 3, Civic Halls developments were currently active and ongoing, their original dates of estimated completion were February 2023 and October 2022; however they were now both set to finish in April 2023. The later completion dates were caused by a variety of issues, the Service Lead for Place Making City Housing and Environment explained some of these to the Panel, which included material delays, adjacent works and poor ground conditions.

The Service Lead for Place Making City Housing and Environment then took the Panel through conceptual photos of what the events areas would look like. She added that the raised section in the modelling photo was no longer being implemented as it was not friendly to vehicular movement. Photos were then displayed showing the Panel the progress of all on-going works. The Service Lead for Place Making City Housing and Environment informed the Councillors about the Council's contractor, Eurovia, and listed numerous Social Value related projects they

had previously assisted with.

A Councillor asked if the Council had planned to make sure the Victoria Street phase 1 event area materials would be suitable for long term usage by heavy vehicles for events and would not wear down quickly. The Councillor also believed more development should be done in Queen's street and asked if this could be done.

The Director of City Housing & Environment stated that he believed the construction techniques and materials being used in the phase 1 area were future proofed, and that a degree of back up materials has been stocked in case of repairs and maintenance. He agreed with the Councillors comments about Queen's Street but stated that Phase 2 had not yet begun and was subject to budgetary restrictions which limit what can and cannot be done with this project.

A Councillor welcomed all the information provided to the Panel but said he was concerned to see only one cycle lane in each concept photo and asked if cyclists could be given more consideration.

A Panel Member praised everything that had been show and gave his full support to it.

The Chair thanked the Officers for their presentation and praised their efforts.

8

Date of Next Meeting

The date of the next, Residents, Housing and Communities Scrutiny Panel was confirmed as 16 February 2023 at 6pm.

The meeting closed at 8.58pm.

Expanded Arboriculture Project Tree Inspections Update

Residents, Housing and Communities Scrutiny Panel

16 February 2023

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Agenda Item No: 4

Presenter:

Steve Woodward
Head of City Environment

Claire Walters
Environmental Place Based
Development Manager

Craig Watkins
Arbor and Direct Works Service
Lead

wolverhampton.gov.uk

Arboriculture Service Redesign

Project Update – 19 January 2023

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- **387,078 trees have now been identified and logged in Confirm, identified in over 25,500 inspections.**
- This includes the city's highway trees and those in our parks, cemeteries and open spaces with pose the highest risk. The next phase of inspections will begin to focus on bilateral roads not currently in the highway program and our corporate sites - offices, community centres etc currently being managed by facilities.
- Trees in areas of low risk, such as wooded areas with low levels of footfall, have been inspected under polygon surveys, whereby the group of trees are inspected as a whole – with individual assets only being added for those trees identified with a defect or posing a significant risk e.g. in falling distance of a footpath. This ensures the most effective use of the inspectors time and an accurate representation of the area.
- Trees in higher risk areas, such as our highways, public spaces and parks have been inspected tree by tree.

Arboriculture Service Redesign

Project Update – 19 January 2023

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		RAG
Number of trees inspected since January 2022	387,078	Completed ahead of target – 68% complete
Number of trees to be inspected before January 2024	162,922	Ahead of target New inspector due to start in Feb 2023 following delays in recruitment due to industry staff shortages (Contractor still in use)
Trees requiring urgent works (high risk)	6	Remedial works in progress, those of the highest risk identified are already completed in high risk zones
Trees requiring priority works (moderate risk)	260	Defects identified have been risk assessed and scheduled in for remedial works based on the given risk rating

Scope of The Service

- This update is for the trees that CWC has responsible for
- The Service will only carry out works on trees that are dead, diseased, damaged or dangerous
- Our Inspection programme identifies work that needs to be done for the health of the tree, nothing more, and the service does not carry out 'routine maintenance' all work is purely inspection or reporting lead.
- Street trees such as lime species will require regular removal of epicormic basal growth particularly where they impede highway visibility.

Page 18

- We will not carry out works for

Loss of natural light

Poor Satellite/TV reception

Tree debris

Honey dew

Bird fouling

Tree pollen/BT Cables

Solar Panels

- Unfortunately the majority of the requests the service gets no arboriculture operation will stop the issue from happening, (e.g. bird fouling, leaf shedding), and could in fact affect the stability of the tree.
- **All the above is covered in the Draft Tree Risk Management Policy which at time of writing is with Leadership Team and Cabinet Member for comment before wider circulation**
- Wolverhampton Homes and some schools have their own arrangements in place for the inspections of trees

Arboriculture Service Redesign

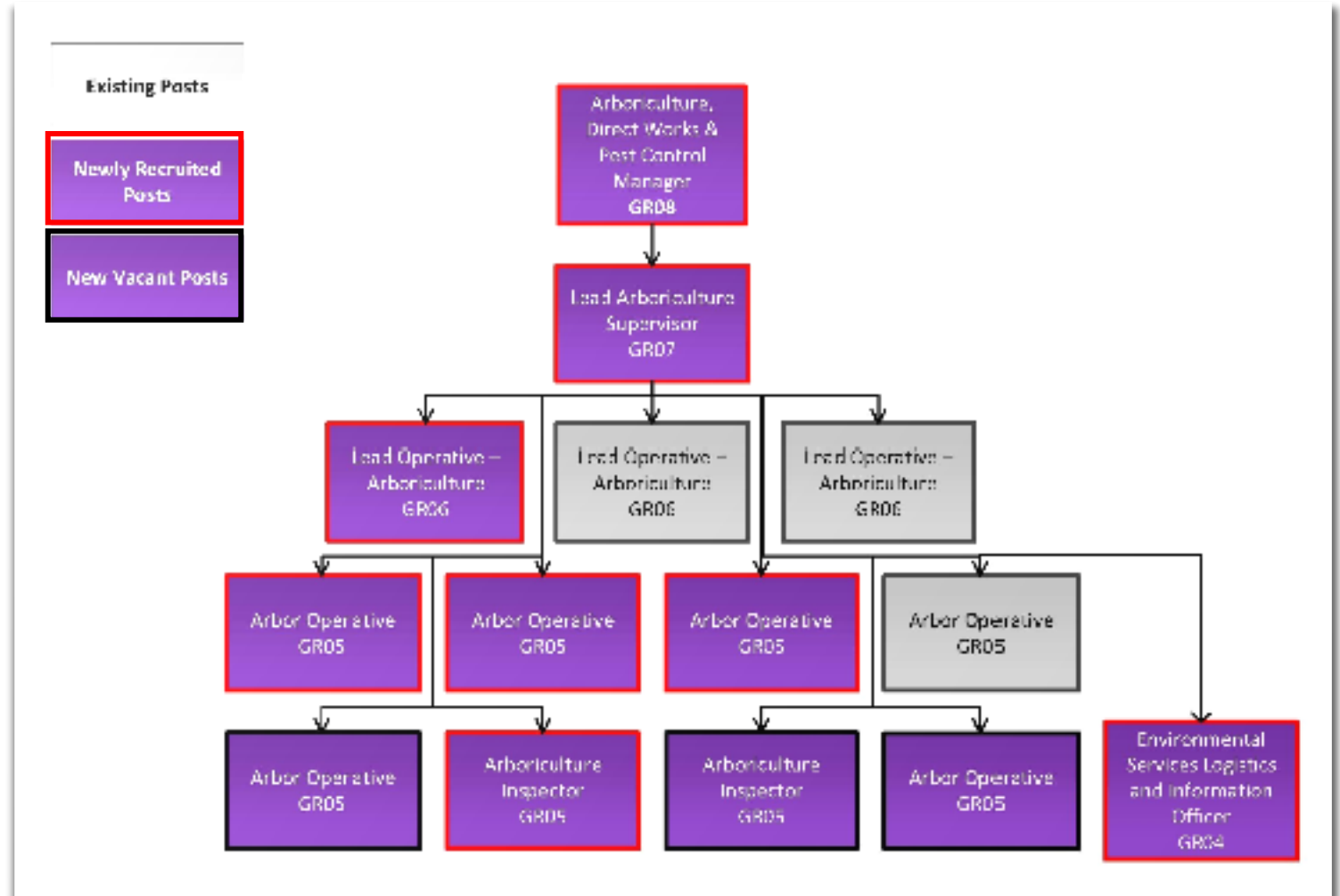
Team Update

We have successfully recruited 8 of the required 11 members of staff to complete the initial restructure of the Arbor Team, with the final 3 roles currently being advertised.

Page 19

This has included,

- A new Arboriculture Manager
- A new Arbor Supervisor
- A new Arbor Inspector with another position also current being advertised
- An additional operational arbor team, to enable the team to react to the uplift in required maintenance following the inspection program.
- A new Logistics officer to give day to day logistical support with emphasis on case triage



Arboriculture Service Redesign

Identifying Defects

- Any defect found on a Council Tree as part of the inspection programme is documented, photographed and stored in Confirm.
- The inspection, defect, remedial works as well as any enquires relating to the tree in question will remain on record
- Defects are easily monitored by the arboriculture department by utilising dashboards and maps.
- The severity of a defect and the risk it poses is assessed utilising the Quantified Tree Risk Assessment (QTRA) system. Which moves away from labelling trees as either 'safe' or 'unsafe' and instead QTRA quantifies the risk of significant harm from tree failure based on location, size of tree and potential damage.

Confirm®
Defect - 301352 (Supersedes 634317; Action Required) Create Job

Details

Defect Type: A-F Fungal decay specify (AF08) | Observation Type: --
Site: WEST PARK (PARK ROAD WEST) (44837890D1)
Feature: G:Tree (Leisure) (90489)
Description: Small (5x10cm March 2017) Granoderma fungal bracket between buttresses to east. Stem sounds good in all but immediate vicinity of bracket.
Location: Left of centre walkway
Notes: Imported Defect via Connector
Raised By: Arbor Team 3 (ARB3) | Raised Date: 13 Oct 2022 09:10
Priority: A:Arboriculture Monitor Defect (AM) | Target Date: 13 Apr 2023
Customer Reference: -- | Estimated Cost: 0.00
Organisation: --

Attributes
No Attributes exist.

Linked Defects (1)

#	Type	Created	Status
634317	A-F Fungal decay specify	08 Mar 2017 10:13	Superseded by current Defect

Documents (2)

Drag and drop your files here or [click here](#) to choose files or [click here](#) to enter URL.

- Photo added by ARB3 on 13 Oct 2022 at 09:10
Created 13 Oct 2022 09:10
- Photo added by GMC1 on 08 Mar 2017 at 10:13
Created 08 Mar 2017 10:17

Defect - 301352 (Supersedes 634317; Action Required)

Create Job

Details

Defect Type: A:F Fungal decay specify (AF08)

Observation Type: -

Site: WEST PARK (PARK ROAD WEST) (44837890D1)

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Priority: A:Arbiculture Monitor Defect (AM)

Customer Reference: -

Estimated Cost: 0.00

Organisation: -

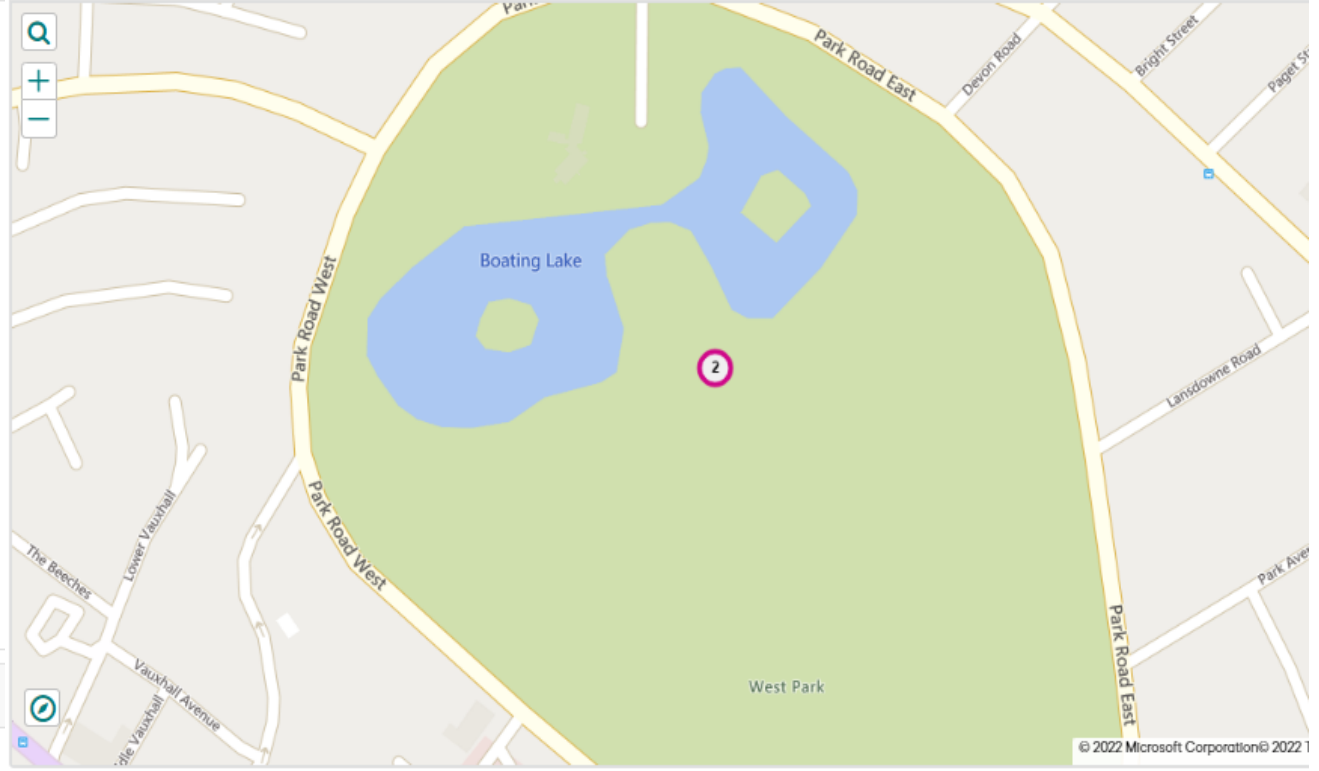
Attributes

No Attributes exist.

Linked Defects 1

#	Type	Created	Status
634317	A:F Fungal decay specify	08 Mar 2017 10:13	Superseded by current Defect

Map



Documents 2

Drag and drop your files here or [click here](#) to choose files or [click here](#) to enter URL

- Photo added by ARB3 on 13 Oct 2022 at 09:10
 Created 13 Oct 2022 09:10
- Photo added by GMC1 on 08 Mar 2017 at 10:13
 Created 08 Mar 2017 10:17

QTRA

Quantified Tree Risk Assessment

- Though tragic for anyone involved, in reality very few people are killed by trees. In the UK, only six people a year are killed by falling trees or branches.
- In a population of 60 million, this means a one in 10 million chance of dying from a falling tree, or a one in 20 million chance of being killed by a tree in a public open space. In other words, there is more chance of being killed by lightning (1:19 million) or of winning the National Lottery (1:14 million) than being killed by a tree on public land.

Page 22

The Health and Safety Executive (HSE) recognises that the risk of “being struck and killed by a tree falling” is “extremely low“, and is firmly in its “broadly acceptable“ category of risks.

Thresholds	Description	Action
1/1 000	Unacceptable Risks will not ordinarily be tolerated	Control the risk
	Unacceptable (where imposed on others) Risks will not ordinarily be tolerated	Control the risk Review the risk
1/10 000	Tolerable (by agreement) Risks may be tolerated if those exposed to the risk accept it, or the tree has exceptional value	Control the risk unless there is broad stakeholder agreement to tolerate it, or the tree has exceptional value Review the risk
	Tolerable (where imposed on others) Risks are tolerable if ALARP	Assess costs and benefits of risk control Control the risk only where a significant benefit might be achieved at a reasonable cost Review the risk
1/1 000 000	Broadly Acceptable Risk is already ALARP	No action currently required Review the risk

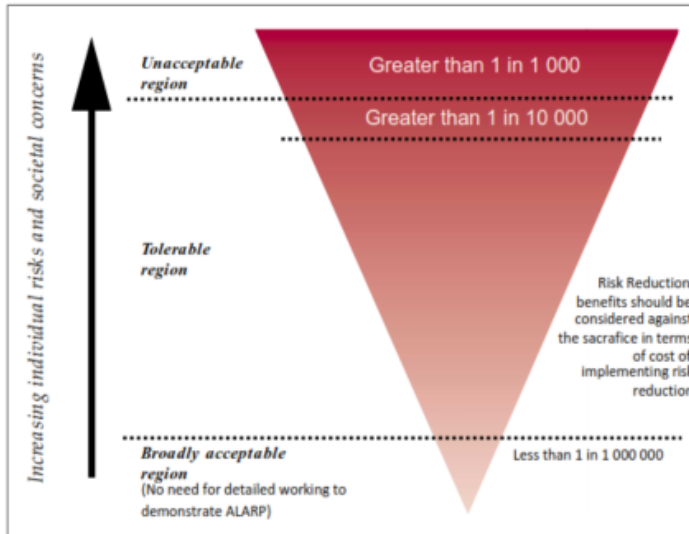


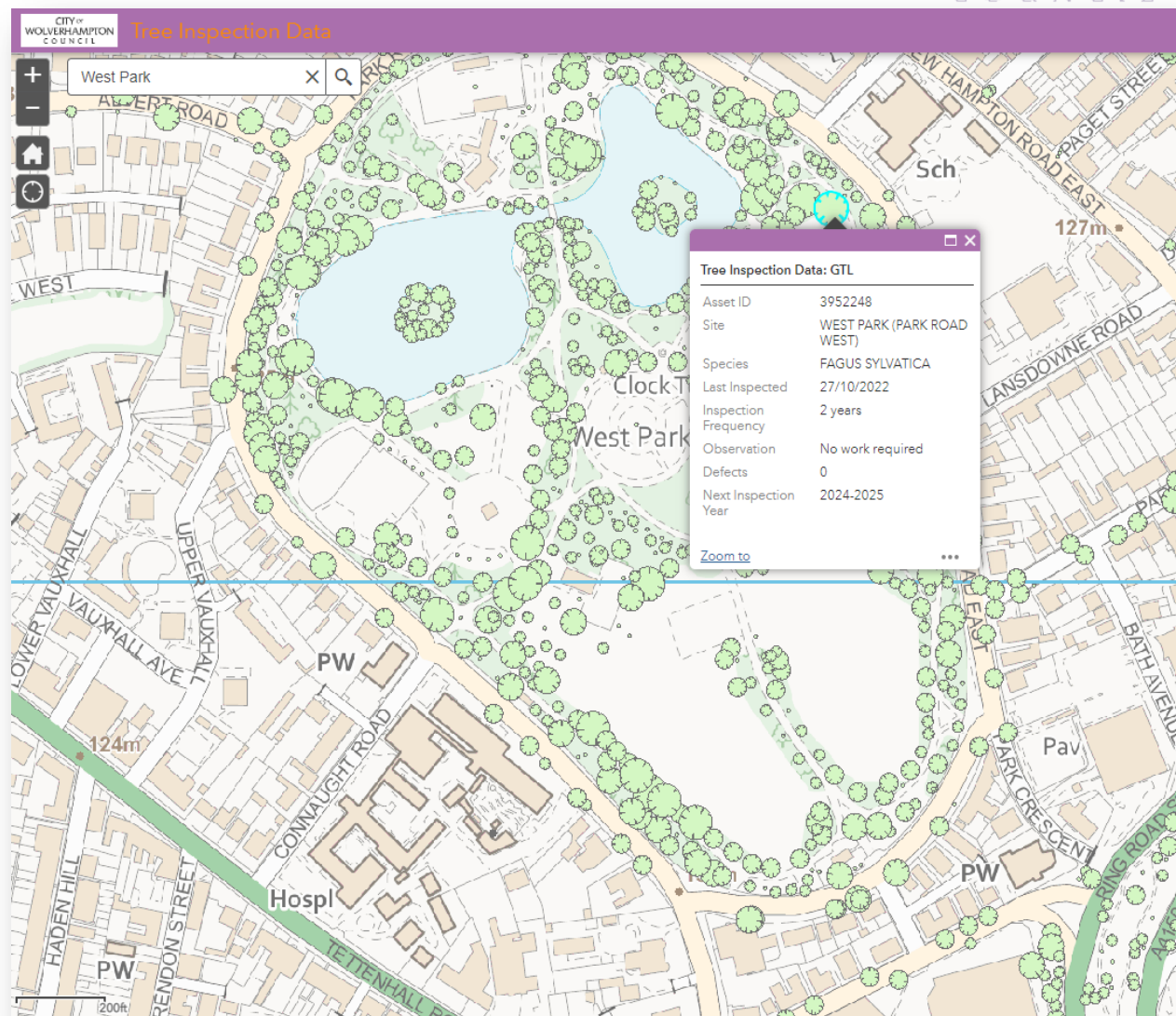
Fig.1 HSE Risk Framework

Probability of Failure Score (RoH)	Priority
1/1 – 1/1K	Emergency/Very High (Priority Works).
1/1K – 1/5K	High (Unacceptable risk where imposed on others).
1/5k – 1/10K	High Moderate (Control/review the Risk)
1/10K - 1/1M	Low (Control the risk/review the risk.
1/1M	Negligible. (No work Required).

Arboriculture Service Redesign

Tree Map

- All trees inspected as part of the project can now be seen on the Tree Map shared with Councillors earlier this year.
- [CWC TREE MAP](#)
- This allows Councillors and Council staff to easily identify a tree and check it's most recent inspection date, next inspection date and if any defects identified require additional work.



Arboriculture Service Redesign

Enquiries – Reported Defects

- All enquires into the Arbor department now come through the Confirm database by system integration with Customer Services (CEP), with an automated update taking place every 15 minutes.
- Enquiries from LoveCleanStreets are also automatically imported
- We are working closely with customer services to develop the current triage process, including expanding the use of enquiry types and streamlining business rules

The screenshot displays the Confirm Customer Services interface. At the top, it shows the user's name, Liz Grimshaw, and a search bar. The main content area is divided into three sections:

- Enquiry List:** A list of recent enquiries. The selected enquiry is 244946, dated 22 Nov 2022, for 'A Arboricultural Works - Arboriculture' at 'WINDSOR AVENUE, WOLVERHAMPTON, WO...'. The contact is Mr Dharam Vir.
- Enquiry Details:**
 - Subject:** A Arboricultural Works (AR01) - Arboriculture
 - Site:** WINDSOR AVENUE, WOLVERHAMPTON, WOLVERHAMPTON (44856230)
 - Location:** WINDSOR AVENUE PLAYING FIELDS, WINDSOR AVENUE, WOLVERHAMPTON
 - Description:** CWC-1388367 ---Submitted on Tue, 22/11/2022 - 13:28 Submitted by: Anonymous Submitted values are: Enquiry Type What is your enquiry? Other Your details Name Customer name Mr Dharam Vir
 - System Reference:** --
 - Classification:** Enquiry
- Current Status:**
 - Status:** Inspected - Defect Raised (0810)
 - Assigned To:** Craig Watkins (CWAT)
 - Notes:** the property on the open space area. Works - fell deadw elms (Ulmus glabra) QTRA TR4, Pof2
 - Effective Date:** 28 Nov 2022 08:09
 - Follow up Date:** --

On the right side, there is a map showing the location of the enquiry at Windsor Avenue, with a search bar and zoom controls. Below the map are sections for 'Commitments' and 'Documents'.

Search for Enquiry



Updated in: Last 3 Months

Actions

Create

Edit

242927 20 Sep 2022

G Shrub Bed Maintenance - Grounds Mainte...

BILSTON STREET, WOLVERHAMPTON, WOL...

James Shaw

238666 10 Jun 2022

A Arboricultural Works - Arboriculture

PROBERT ROAD, WOLVERHAMPTON, WOLV...

Cllr Adam Collinge

244946 22 Nov 2022

A Arboricultural Works - Arboriculture

WINDSOR AVENUE, WOLVERHAMPTON, WO...

Mr Dharam Vir

244569 10 Nov 2022

A Arboricultural Works - Arboriculture

BRADEN ROAD, WOLVERHAMPTON, WOLVE...

Mrs Caroline Kovacs-Atkinson

243218 28 Sep 2022

A Arboricultural Works - Arboriculture

Enquiry - 244946

Subject*

A Arboricultural Works (AR01) - Arboriculture

Site*

WINDSOR AVENUE, WOLVERHAMPTON, WOLVERHAMPTON (44856230)

Location

WINDSOR AVENUE PLAYING FIELDS, WINDSOR AVENUE, WOLVERHAMPTON

Description

CWC-1388367 —Submitted on Tue, 22/11/2022 - 13:28 Submitted by: Anonymous Submitted values are: Enquiry Type What is your enquiry? Other Your details Name Customer name Mr Dharam Vir

System Reference

--

Classification*

Enquiry

Current Status

Status

Inspected - Defect Raised (0810)

Assigned To

Craig Watkins (CWAT)

Notes

the property on the open space area. Works - fell deadw elms (Ulmus glabra) QTRA TR4, Pof2

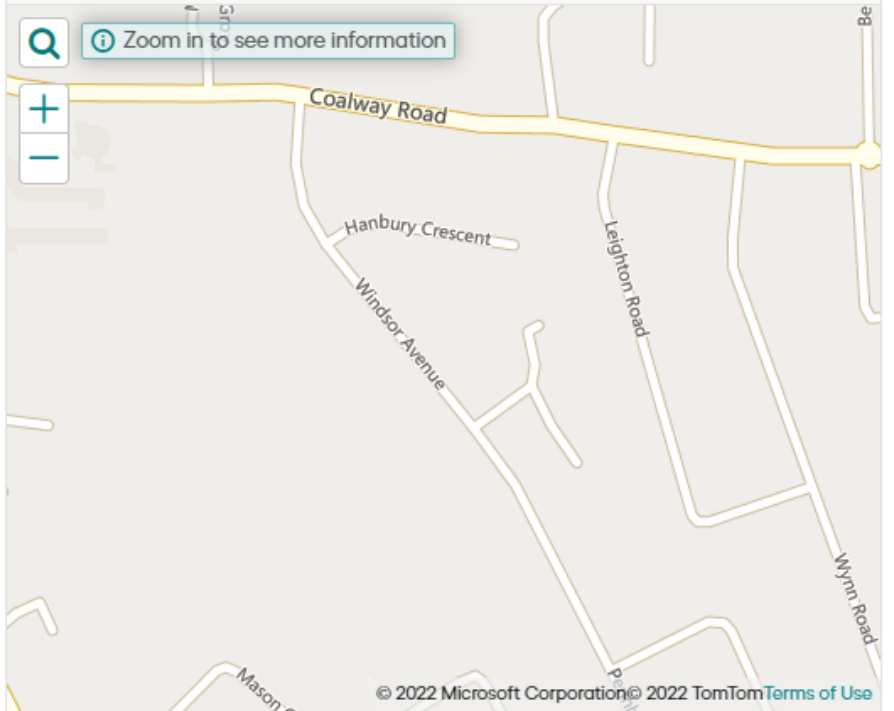
Effective Date*

28 Nov 2022 08:09

Follow up Date

--

Map



Commitments

Documents

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Developing Relationship with CEU

- ACTIVITY

- Over a 51 week period the team has dealt with 1,111 enquires; 131 came via councillor support (79 Cllr report/52 on behalf of a resident). Efficiency in dealing with CEU enquiries has increased following appointment of new officer's monitoring and responding to incoming enquiries, process improvements, proactive tree inspections and appropriate work prioritisation.

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KEY MESSAGES

- Resents understanding that we will carry out works to trees, only where necessary and appropriate management timing for those species involved.
- We complete routine inspections, not routine maintenance
- The balance between protecting our trees and responding to residents' requests for pruning is not always well received.
- Complaints coming in around issues that will not be resolved with pruning of the tree.
- Reoccurring requests that have been previously answered.
- Enquires can be left 'open' for weeks beyond our 4-week SLA to respond to queries when our service response is challenged and escalated for a reviewed response
- BT cables are the responsibility of BT and we do not cut back to clear them we only inspect the tree.
- Tree planting requests where we respond with no new planting due to location issues and cannot fulfil the enquiry needs

CEU – Managing Challenges

Whilst it is not always well received, it is our position that we will only prioritise work for dangerous and defective trees identified during our proactive inspection regime or in response to a reactive enquiry for a dangerous tree. Using Quantified Tree Risk Assessment (QTRA) methodology all identified work will be prioritised accordingly and completed to maintain a level of safety and in line with good arboricultural management.

Page 27 Whilst we will only work on dangerous and defective trees, we do of course look at individual cases balancing a variety of different considerations around pruning and removal, but we must be clear, that this work does not take priority, resources or financial allocation over risk related defect trees and, reactive inspections for these sorts of issues are low priority.

Unfortunately, there can be unrealistic expectations of what tree maintenance is, with resident concerns regarding height, shading, leaf and detritus issues not being a consideration when identifying work. This can often lead to an enquiry reoccurring and becoming repetitive, even in situations where the service has already advised why certain work is not being completed.

CEU – Service Lead Solutions

We have worked closely with CEU around the above, improving the information on the FAQs section of the CEU so Councillors have more detailed information to pass to residents when they approach them with tree enquiries

Whilst the expanded Arb programme will not resolve all queries, by providing more information and transparency about the service it will reduce some of the CEU requests we get through.

Page 28

The Arb team are specialists with qualifications and experience which provide them with the expertise to respond professionally with clear advice on tree management issues.

Our proactive inspections offer residents/Cllr's more confidence about the safety of our trees. It is an accessible inventory on our database with clear inspection information identified.

CEU – Increased Transparency

BENEFITS

- An accessible database inventory that can be queried for information allowing transparency of the service on enquiries.
- Prioritisation of risk related work for defect trees and better budget management.
- Reduce reactive inspections and response times as asset data is accessible for each tree.
- Prioritisation of reactive inspections, information collated at CEU e.g leaf, light general detritus is low priority and will not result in an inspection but dead/dangerous trees as high priority for inspection.
- Clear guidance for what works we will/will not prioritise.
- Increased focused response to residents directly where requested and/or necessary to avoid poor communication, misinterpretation and repeat enquiries.
- New locations for tree planting plotted on our database system, along with suitability for new planting requests. With a response to residents and Cllr's being data led.

Arboriculture Service Redesign

Update – Duty to Consult

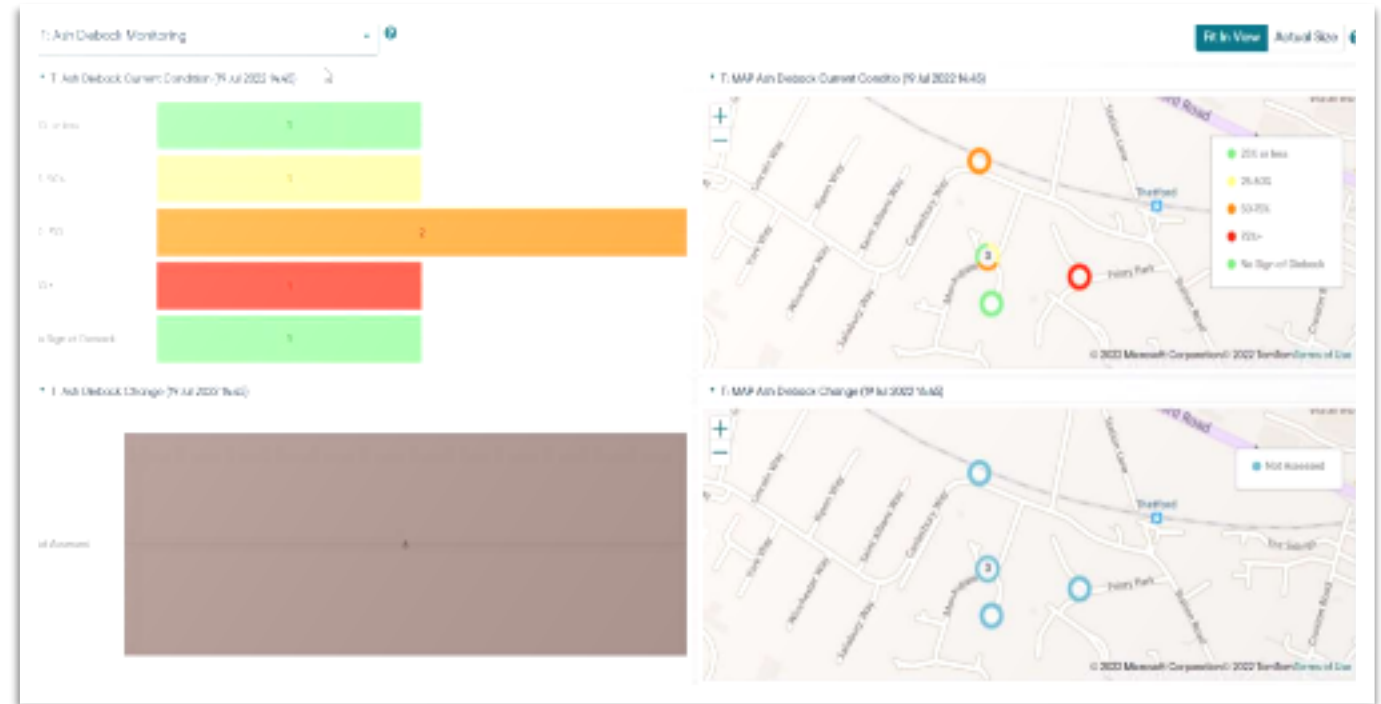
- New section 96A Duty of local highway means authorities in England must consult the public before felling street trees
- Local highway authorities must consult on all street trees they are considering felling, unless the tree is exempt as per below;
 - The tree size is consistent with the standard tree size definitions used by the British Tree Nursery sector.
 - The tree is required to be felled under the Plant Health Act 1967.
 - The tree is required to be felled under any enactment on the basis that the tree is dangerous. This covers trees that need to be felled urgently because they present an immediate danger to life or property.
 - The tree is required to be felled in order to comply with section 20 or 29 of the Equality Act 2010 because the tree is causing an obstruction.
 - The tree is required to be felled as part of development authorised either by a granted planning permission or by an outlining planning permission as defined by the Town and Country Planning Act 1990.

Arboriculture Service Redesign

Future Developments

- Publication of tree risk management strategy
- Moving forward, all data for the management of our trees will be stored in Confirm providing a fully auditable record of tree maintenance and management
- The ability to identify risk zones and inspection planning
- Future scheduled inspection plan
- Proactive tree maintenance regime
- Pest and Disease Monitoring
- Integrated duty to consult

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Disease Management Example: Ash Die Back Monitoring

wolverhampton.gov.uk

Briefing Note

Title: Alcohol harm in Wolverhampton **Date:** 08.02.2023

Prepared by: Michelle Smith **Job Title:** Principal Public Health Specialist

Intended Audience: Internal Partner organisation Public Confidential

Purpose

To provide the Residents, Housing and Communities Scrutiny Panel with a brief outline of alcohol harm in Wolverhampton and what the Council and its partners are doing in response.

Background

Alcohol is a legal, socially acceptable substance which is seen as an integral part of daily life and is used to celebrate, commiserate, and socialise. Its ready availability from supermarkets and off licences to sports events, cinemas, coffee shops and bars/pubs, creates the impression that alcohol is a normal part of everyday life. In reality, alcohol can be a toxic substance that creates dependence and can cause serious health and social problems.

On a national level, alcohol-specific deaths have risen sharply since the onset of the coronavirus pandemic. In 2021, there were 9,641 deaths (14.8 per 100,000 people) from alcohol-specific causes registered in the UK, the highest number on record and 7.4% higher than 2020 and 27.4% higher than in 2019¹.

Alcohol-specific deaths only include those health conditions where each death is a direct consequence of alcohol (that is, wholly attributable causes such as alcoholic liver disease). It does not include all deaths that can be attributed to alcohol.

What does the data tell us?

In Wolverhampton, data shows us residents are drinking at harmful levels as outlined below:

- During 2020 Wolverhampton had the worst alcohol-specific mortality rate in the UK with a rate of 29.3 per 100,000 population (equating to 70 deaths).
- More recently, indicative alcohol-specific mortality data for 2021 shows 54 deaths have been registered. At this stage, the data remains unverified and therefore, we are unable to provide a ranking against other local authorities, until the full ONS (Office for National Statistics) alcohol-specific dataset is released.

¹

<https://www.ons.gov.uk/peoplepopulationandcommunity/birthsdeathsandmarriages/deaths/bulletins/alcohol-specificdeathsintheuk/2021registrations>

- Wolverhampton's hospital admissions rate for alcohol-specific conditions is 621 per 100,000 population which is considerably higher than England's rate at 587 per 100,000 population.
- Based on estimated prevalence in Wolverhampton, only 1 in 5 people who experience alcohol harm are engaged with alcohol treatment support services. This means there is an unmet need of 82% in the population (nearly 2950 individuals), which equates to approximately 650 individuals in treatment for alcohol dependency.
- For those who are engaged in treatment and support, their recovery outcomes are positive, nearly 45% exit treatment successfully and do not represent (successful completions of alcohol treatment).
- Since 2015, the Wolverhampton treatment completions rate has been consistently higher than the national average. Currently, Wolverhampton are in the top quarter of performance for successful completion of alcohol treatment in the UK and the 2nd in the West Midlands region (behind Dudley).
- A matter of concern relates to the investigation of alcohol-specific mortality data (2018-2020) which shows a significant over representation of deaths in White males (69.4%) and Asian males (26.3%) compared to the local population (male and female) of 60.6% and 21.2% respectively (2021).
- Looking at data for those in substance misuse treatment shows us there is minimal disproportionality amongst the White British population, however, amongst Black and Minority Ethnic groups there is an under-representation in treatment compared to the local population and is particularly evident in the South Asian population.

What are the Council and its partners doing in response to rising alcohol harm?

- In July 2022 the local Drug and Alcohol Strategic Partnership was developed to form a consortium of multi-agency partners working towards the mutual aim of reducing drug and alcohol harm across Wolverhampton. The partnership aligned to the publication of the national drug strategy '*From Harm to Hope: a 10-year plan to cut crime and save lives*'².
- The partnership is currently facilitating the production of a joint strategic needs assessment for drugs and alcohol which in turn informs a local delivery plan (interim draft plan on a page attached at Appendix 1) and equally, is intended to deliver the strategic priorities identified in *From Harm to Hope*.
- In response to the ambitions outlined in *From Harm to hope*, additional government funding has been committed to local authorities during 2022-2025 to reduce substance related crime and death. This additional funding is aimed at increasing the capacity and capability of the specialist substance misuse workforce to ultimately identify and work with an increasing number of individuals at risk of and/or experiencing harm.
- Appendix 1 below details the initial alcohol harm reduction priorities for the drug and alcohol partnership. The plan in its entirety does not encapsulate the whole of the substance misuse work programme, moreover it summarises some of our immediate objectives. The plan outlines some key actions which are all aimed at preventing harm from developing, earlier identification of harm and engagement into treatment and recovery and include:

² [From harm to hope: A 10-year drugs plan to cut crime and save lives - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](https://www.gov.uk/government/consultations/from-harm-to-hope-a-10-year-drugs-plan-to-cut-crime-and-save-lives)

- Improving increased access to high-quality treatment interventions including the development of specialist alcohol clinics in community settings and the expansion of the specialist alcohol team in secondary care.
- Rolling out a citywide extensive programme of Identification and Brief Advice (IBA) training for those working with communities most at risk.
- Improving the quality of screening activity in high-risk groups via frontline services, targeted support services and NHS Health Checks and general patient appointments in GP practices.
- A newly created supported employment programme launching in April 2023 specifically aimed at supporting clients engaged in drug and alcohol treatment into sustainable paid employment. This programme will build on the excellent work already being undertaken to facilitate clients into employment.
- Conducting a bespoke piece of work specifically exploring research insights in relation to high-risk communities including the South Asian population.

Further areas of consideration for the Council and partners

- Consideration of workplace approaches to identification of alcohol harm and subsequent support.
- Ensuring treatment and recovery services are inclusive and representative of all communities.
- Removing barriers to support for individuals with co-existing substance misuse and mental health problems (also known as dual diagnosis). Initial research project is underway.
- Understanding aftercare support offer from wider organisations across the city following exit from treatment services.

Appendix 1 – Reducing Alcohol Harm (plan on a page in draft)



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Briefing Note

Title: Gambling Related Harm in Wolverhampton **Date:** 08.02.2023

Prepared by: Ryan Hollings **Job Title:** Health Improvement Officer

Intended Audience: Internal Partner organisation Public Confidential

Purpose

To provide the Residents, Housing and Communities Scrutiny Panel with an overview of gambling related harm (GRH) in Wolverhampton.

Background

Gambling is a legal activity for anyone aged 18+. The Gambling Act 2005 sets out how gambling is regulated, gambling defined as playing a game of chance for a prize, betting and participating in a lottery. In recent years concerns about the harms associated with gambling have increased and in October 2019, Public Health England (as formerly known) produced its 'Gambling Related Harms – Evidence Review' ¹report.

The report identified that 24.5 million people in England gambled (54% of the adult population, or 40% excluding the National Lottery). The National Lottery is the most common type of gambling across all age groups, except among younger people where scratch cards are more common. Furthermore, the review estimated that 0.5% of the adult population has a problem with gambling, 3.8% are gambling at at-risk levels, and 7% are affected negatively by another person's gambling.

There is a stark difference between those affected by problem gambling, who are generally from higher levels of education, employment and low levels of deprivation, compared to those affected by gambling harm who are generally from higher levels of deprivation, un-employed or lower levels of education. Gambling-related harms (GRH) are identified as the adverse impacts from gambling on the health and wellbeing of individuals, families, communities and society. These harms impact people's resources, relationships and health.

Subsequently a Midlands GRH – Rapid Needs Assessment was published in June 2021 to understand the scale of the issue across the Midlands. The report reflected on insights outlined in the Evidence Review as well as incorporating a regional focus. Following the regional needs assessment, a recommendation that all local authorities undertake a needs assessment was made to better understand the scale of gambling harm prevalence within their respective area

Detail

¹ Gambling-related harms: evidence review - GOV.UK (www.gov.uk)

While gambling harm is increasingly recognised as a public health issue, it is not an explicit public health responsibility for local authorities. However, all councils have a duty to promote the health and wellbeing of the population, and councils that are licensing authorities have a statutory role, under the Gambling Act 2005, in the licensing and regulation of gambling premises (non-remote gambling).

All councils have opportunities to prevent gambling harm and support people harmed by gambling across a broad spectrum of local services. Because of the wide range of risk factors, preventing gambling harm involves councils working with relevant partners, such as the NHS, the voluntary sector, mental health services, homelessness and housing services.

In order to aid oversight of gambling harm and subsequent responses, information will be presented below using the '10 questions' framework outlined by the Centre for Governance and Scrutiny (CfGS) in partnership with the Gambling Commission.

1. How well does the council understand the scale of gambling harm locally and the impact on communities and council spend?

Public Health have recently undertaken a Gambling Related Harms – Rapid Needs Assessment (RNA) to understand the scale of the problem within and across Wolverhampton. The local prevalence of GRH is unknown due to a lack of data available through many support services. In most cases, GRH or any type of gambling activity is not routinely identified and where data is available, it is insignificant in number.

Is there a problem? A lack of information and data further contributes to an already unclear picture. There are fundamental gaps in data, education, awareness and governance in relation to understanding the prevalence and impact of gambling harm, which call for further exploration.

2. How does the council recognise gambling harm as a public health issue and take a whole system approach to tackling it?

City of Wolverhampton Council recognised GRH as a public health issue having undertaken the RNA. As part of the council's 'Financial Wellbeing Strategy' the council recognises factors such as the economic downturn, cost of living crisis and the impact of Covid-19, alongside historically high levels of deprivation, must steer a renewed focus on debt, poverty and promoting financial wellbeing in Wolverhampton.

Furthermore, as part of the subsequent recommendations from the RNA Public Health recommend a local multi-disciplinary Gambling Harm Strategic Partnership Group (GHP) is developed to deliver and implement effective system wide responses to gambling related harms.

3. How does the council and its partners identify and engage with those that are most risk of gambling harms and what is being done to assist the most vulnerable?

The most widely used measure of problem gambling in the population comes from the combined health surveys of England, Scotland and Wales. The screening tools used in these surveys are the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders (DSM-IV) and the Problem Gambling Severity Index (PGSI) (Appendix 1). The PGSI consists of nine items and each item is assessed on a four-point scale: never = zero, sometimes = one, most of the time = two, almost always =

three. Responses are given scores: When scores to each item are summed, a total score ranging from 0 to 27 is possible. A PGSI score of eight or more represents a problem gambler.

Where people are identified as living with gambling harm, targeted services can offer treatment and recovery support across Wolverhampton. One of which is Aquarius Gambling Support who provide Tier 2 (Extended Brief Intervention - EBI) & Tier 3 (structured) treatment to clients. Between 2019-2022 a total of 70 people accessed a form of Tier 2 and/or Tier 3 treatment, with 74% of those accessing treatment identified as male. This service is directly linked into the drug and alcohol treatment and recovery service (Recovery Near You) with Aquarius being one of the key providers.

Comparing Wolverhampton to those that accessed treatment nationally 26,411 (99.8%), Wolverhampton residents make up between 0.2 - 0.3% of people accessing treatment during 2019-2022.

There are other services available to Wolverhampton residents Gamblers Anonymous meetings at the Good Shepherd and rehabilitation services can be accessed through national support networks. Citizen's advice also offers support through debt management and advice to stop gambling.

4. How does the council and it's partners raise awareness of gambling harms in the community?

The council provide information to individuals and organisations wishing to open a gambling premises in the city as well as the use of Fixed Odds Betting Terminals (FOTB) as part of its licensing agreement. Aquarius Gambling Services promote their services via their website and within Recovery Near You. Information is available via NHS platforms for support and self-aid tips related to gambling activities for both individuals and affected others, all currently promoted via their own websites and social media platforms as well as designated settings in which support is delivered locally.

Furthermore, as part of the RNA recommendations we aim to develop a systematic gambling strategy with partners to prevent harm from arising in the first place, and equally, where it does ensure individuals, families, and communities have access to the right treatment and support at the right time. A key priority will be to increase awareness of available support and pathways to access.

5. How does the council tackle gambling harm through its licensing policy?

The City of Wolverhampton Council is a designated Licensing Authority under the Gambling Act 2005. The Licensing Authority is responsible for considering and determining applications for premises licences which offer gambling facilities within Wolverhampton.

The Licensing Authority regulates gambling by ensuring compliance with the Act. The Act contains three licensing objectives which guide the way that the Licensing Authority performs its functions and the way that gambling operators carry on their activities. They are:

- (a) preventing gambling from being a source of crime or disorder, being associated with crime or disorder, or being used to support crime

(b) ensuring that gambling is conducted in a fair and open way

(c) protecting children and other vulnerable persons from being harmed or exploited by gambling

The Gambling Commission is responsible for issuing operating licences to gambling operators who are deemed suitable and competent to provide facilities for gambling. As a requirement of these operating licences, gambling operators must ensure that they comply with and meet the requirements of the License Conditions and Codes of Practice (LCCP).

6. How does the council tackle gambling harm through its planning policy?

A dedicated Planning role is linked to the Public Health team and focuses on the wider determinants of health and the use of planning.

Wolverhampton led on the development of the first Black Country-wide planning policies for the Black Country Plan and ensured gambling harm was recognised. Following joint working on the Black Country Plan, Wolverhampton are exploring how planning policies in the new Local Plan can support a whole systems approach by restricting gambling outlets. Given the recent decision to produce a Wolverhampton Local Plan, this review is in progress.

7. How has the council reviewed its own actions in promoting or normalising potentially harmful gambling activities and products?

As part of the council approach to normalising potentially harmful gambling activities and products for staff within the council, there is a designated Occupational Health support package delivered by TP Health. TP Health focuses on protecting the physical and mental wellbeing of all staff with available support including:

- Access to early intervention advice and support from qualified Occupational Health, Mental Health Practitioners and Rehabilitation Specialists
- A new and improved online web portal for managers who wish to refer staff to Occupational Health
- An online web portal for all staff that will allow them to view their own Occupational Health case history and reports
- Staff pre-placement screening and Fitness to Work Medical.

8. How is the council supporting and working with relevant public, private and civic actors in the area towards integrating gambling harm treatment services?

To support and develop connections and working relationships with partners, the development of a GRH steering group is key. Working together will improve understanding of prevalence of GRH and aid the development of robust data collection processes across community settings. Additionally, the prevalence of GRH has been explored through the City Lifestyle Survey and Children and Young People through the Health-Related Behaviour Survey (HRBS).

9. How is gambling harm recognised in the councils wider commitment to reducing health inequalities and an equitable post covid recovery?

The council has developed a 'Financial Wellbeing Strategy' which outlines its aims for supporting the cost-of-living crisis as well as our understanding of the impact of Covid 19, with further learning, emerging over the coming weeks and months helping to shape and develop the implementation of this strategy.

There is an increasing number of residents presenting increased requests for financial support. Work is being undertaken to review income and expenditure which indicates there is evidence to suggest an increased level of low-level online gambling on websites such as Paddy Power, BET365 and lottery/competition sites, subsequently having a significant impact on household income and the ability to meet basic needs, hence requiring crisis support from the council and its partners.

10. How can the council learn lessons from the actions taken by other authorities on tackling harms or from tackling other public health issues?

Screening council housing tenants for gambling related harm

Birmingham City Council are leading a two-year project (commenced December 2021) to identify how tenants of council housing with GRH can be better supported and offered treatment. The project will involve characterising what harmful gambling looks like in Birmingham and how individuals with GRH harm are currently identified and referred for treatment. The second part of the project will involve a survey of approximately 60,000 tenants in Birmingham, and finally a sub sample of those identified as having GRH will be followed up for 12-18 months to see how they are supported with GRH, and the impact of those interventions.

The hypothesis is that if tenants of council housing with GRH, (or significant others who have been affected) are identified early on and provided with appropriate support and treatment, then this could prevent tenancy loss and avoid people losing their homes. The results will lead to the development of a suitable toolkit for Birmingham City Council, which could potentially be rolled out in other cities.

Derbyshire Gambling Support service

The Gambling Support Service, which was a project funded by GambleAware and based at a local Citizens Advice office in South Derbyshire. The service delivered county-wide training to frontline staff and the Public Health team at Derbyshire County Council (DCC). As part of the training, the GambleAware Screening Tool (GAST) was explored, alongside brief interventions and pathways for local and national support.

This included: a direct referral to a specialist partner, which at the time was Aquarius, or signposting to the National Gambling Helpline operated by Gamcare. Teams at DCC who received the training included locality workers, Adult Social Care workers, Live Life Better Derbyshire Health Improvement Advisers, and assessors for the Derbyshire Discretionary Fund. Unfortunately, this project ceased in May 2021 due to funding issues.

Appendix 1: Problem Gambling Severity Index

Figure 1 – Items of the Problem Gambling Severity Index

1	Have you ever bet more than you can afford to lose?
2	Have you needed to gamble with larger amounts of money to get the same feeling of excitement?
3	Have you gone back another day to try to win back the money you lost?
4	Have you borrowed money or sold anything to get money to gamble?
5	Have you felt that you might have a problem with gambling?
6	Have people criticised you're betting or told you that you had a gambling problem, whether or not you thoughts it was true?
7	Have you felt guilty about the way you gamble or what happens when you gamble?
8	Has your gambling caused you any health problems, including stress or anxiety?
9	Has gambling caused financial problems for you or your household?

Figure 2 – Scoring system - PGSI

Score	Description
0 – Non problem gambler	
1-2 Low risk gambler	Gamblers who experience a low level of problems with few or no identified negative consequences
3-7 Moderate risk gambler	Gamblers who experience a moderate level of problems leading to some negative consequences
8+ Problem gambler	Gamblers who gamble with negative consequences and a possible loss of control

Appendix 2: Gambling Related Harm – Plan on a page

Addressing and identifying Gambling Related Harm (GRH)

