

First Impressions of the City Scrutiny Review

Final Draft Report

Date edited 01/09/14

Preface

"A wise person once said ' You never get a second chance to make a first impression'..."

What people think about Wolverhampton as a place to shop, visit, do business and study matters – it matters because the City's future prosperity will depend on its ability to improve its 'offer'

An improved 'offer' will allow Wolverhampton to compete more readily with neighbouring areas to attract visitors, developers, new businesses and shoppers, as part of wider efforts to regenerate the City.

For the purpose of this review the 'offer' has been broadly separated into the following areas - "visit offer", "business offer" and "shopping offer".

It is clear from the evidence presented that Wolverhampton has got some things right in terms of its 'offer' in these areas, but improvements are needed.

The Review Group are reassured by witness evidence that there is a determination by employees and local partners to make the necessary changes to improve the current 'offer'.

The publication of the Wolverhampton City Centre Prospectus (2013) is welcomed. The following quote sets out a positive vision for future of the City centre:

"A vibrant, walkable, attractive, family-friendly city centre full of opportunity and potential. A city centre which is compact enough to be welcoming and accessible, but large enough to boast some of the UK's best retail, leisure and cultural facilities."

It is important that Wolverhampton gets its City centre 'offer' right if wants to make progress towards this vision. The document sets out a plan for improving the current 'offer' and making Wolverhampton a more attractive place. It is important that there is a clear and consistent message from the Council and other key local organisations that Wolverhampton is open for business and that everyone involved is working to the same overall shared vision for the future.

The challenges facing the City in achieving this are not new and have been the subject of previous scrutiny reviews. Many of the concerns about gaps in the current 'offer' are not necessarily within the direct control of the Council. However, the Council can and should seek to continue to positively influence partners whose decisions will help deliver an improved 'offer'.

The Council has a key role in leading efforts to market Wolverhampton and in making the necessary changes to deliver an 'offer' that is both attractive and competitive to the groups we want to reach.

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The Review Group's role has been to offer appropriate challenge to those people responsible for delivering an improved 'offer' and provide reassurance to the public that everything that can be done to improve the 'offer', is being done.

The Review Group has investigated the work being done to make Wolverhampton a more attractive place by tackling the issues that give people a poor first impression.

The Review Group also investigated the work being done to positively market and promote Wolverhampton, as a destination of choice.

The Review Group has taken evidence from the public and other interested parties who have kindly agreed to participate in this important review. The evidence collected has helped the Review Group to get a better understanding of issues that shape and inform people's views about Wolverhampton and where the Council and its partners needs to focus its attention.

A final draft of the report will be shared with witnesses who have contributed evidence to this review.

The Review Group is grateful for the employee support received during the review.

The Review Group does not want to see this report gather dust on a shelf, without any changes coming as a result of the findings. It is important therefore that the report is read and the recommendations acted upon by the Council and partner organisations. The review report recommendations set out a process for delivering an improved 'offer' that responds positively to the issues highlighted by witnesses.

We therefore commend our report and recommendations to Cabinet and look forward to working with all interested parties to improve the 'offer' and positively market Wolverhampton as a great place to visit, shop, study and do business.

Cllr Phil Bateman
Chair - First Impressions of the City Review Group

Review Recommendations

Objective 1 – Developing a joint marketing strategy and communication strategy for Wolverhampton

1. The Review Group support the proposed principles for the City Marketing Strategy and would welcome an early response from Cabinet Member for Economic Regeneration and Prosperity about how these will now be developed into a marketing strategy and plan that will be delivered by the council together with its partners.
2. The Review Group was concerned about achieving a joined up approach to marketing and communication. The Strategic Director for Education and Enterprise should provide a report and presentation within three months on how this will be achieved.
3. The Strategic Director of Education and Enterprise supported by the Head of Corporate Communications to produce a city marketing strategy and plan, including the identification and use of the main resources available across the Council to support its delivery. The plan should also include identifying any the key gaps in resource which will form the basis of discussions with partners, stakeholders and external funders.
4. A report detailing progress in the delivery of the plan to be presented to Cabinet every six months thereafter.
5. The Strategic Director of Education and Enterprise should incorporate activities being undertaken by key partners involved in either improving the "visit offer", "business offer" and the "shopping offer" and or Marketing Wolverhampton, in a further iteration of the plan. This should include a review on whether current resources are sufficient to support any planned future marketing initiatives, events and campaigns developed from the strategy.

Objective 2 – Improving the Wolverhampton ‘offer’

1. The Director of Education and Enterprise to be invited to include within the progress report at the start of each municipal year an analysis of any business and resident perception surveys, together with any other relevant information, together with any recommendations for improving the Wolverhampton offer and how they will be taken forward.
2. The Cabinet Member for Regeneration and Prosperity, in collaboration with other Cabinet Members as appropriate, to be invited to update Cabinet six monthly, on progress to address agreed actions to improve the Wolverhampton Offer, based on the business and resident perception surveys and other evidence provided by the Strategic Director for Education and Enterprise.

3. Consideration should be given to tasking the City Centre Member Advisory Group to scrutinise current work being done to improve the city centre 'offer' and follow up issues highlighted during the review evidence sessions and report their findings to the appropriate scrutiny panel.
4. The City Centre Member Advisory Group should review and report on progress in delivering specific regeneration projects against an agreed timetable; particularly those projects where delays are likely to impact negatively on the reputation of the City as a destination of choice.
5. The importance of the City's cultural 'offer' to the City and the wider Black Country has been highlighted in the Black Country Strategic Economic Plan and also the draft Greater Birmingham Visitor Economy.
6. The Strategic Director of Education and Enterprise to keep Cabinet updated on a quarterly basis on progress in securing external investments and the findings from the review.

Objective 3 – Managing and improving the reputation of Wolverhampton

1. The Head of Policy and Head of Communication to be invited to present a report to Cabinet on the feasibility of Wolverhampton Council adopting the Building Trust: Action developed by the Local Government Association. The results should be published either six monthly or annually. The information should be used to inform the development of the any future communication and marketing plans for the City.
2. The Head of Policy and Head of Communication to be invited to consider revising Wolverhampton Residents' Opinion Survey to include specific questions about what people overall think about the City and views about the current 'offer'.
3. The Head of Policy to review the findings of the relevant public survey responses should be reviewed and used to inform future plans aimed at improving the current 'offer'.

For example, the Express and Star – Your say survey and The National Student Survey findings from Wolverhampton University.

4. The Head of Policy to present a summary of the findings annually to Scrutiny Board. The results should be separated into "visit offer", "business offer" and "shopping offer" and include details of specific action taken to improve the 'offer'.
5. Head of Customer Services to be consulted on marketing and communication plans for the City to ensure that they are built around improving the current customer experience. Head of Customer Services to lead on development of work flow and rules for business and civic events in the public domain

To develop an information report to include intelligence relating to customer contact for these services. The report to be presented to the City Centre Project Board on a three monthly basis to inform their work.

Objective 4 - Harnessing the value of social media for Councillors

1. Head of Communication to be tasked to either arrange appropriate social media training for Councillors or share published guidance on the subject. Priority should be given to supporting those Councillors who regularly use Facebook and Twitter as part of efforts to engage with the public or have a keen interest in building their social media presence. The group should be invited to set out proposals for encouraging all Councillors to register on Wolverhampton Twitter and Facebook for email information alerts.
2. The Head of Communication to prepare a revised current social networking guide. The guide to be shared with all Councillors and appropriate support offered.
3. The Head of Communication to be invited to advise how the success of initiative in meeting its objectives can be assessed. The findings to be shared with the Councillor Development and Information Technology Advisory Group.
4. The Head of Communication to set up a community discussion forum similar to that developed by Dudley Council. The aim of the forum would be to provide a space to discuss local issues or future plans relating to the regeneration of the City or improving the current 'offer':

<http://vwww.dudley.gov.uk/media/media-releases/august-2013/community-forums-your-chance-to-have-your-say/>

<http://www.theguardian.com/local-government-network/2014feb/19/facebook-meeting-public-dudley-council?CMP=new> 1194

Summary of Report

Developing a joint marketing strategy and communication strategy for Wolverhampton

1. The Council has responded positively to criticisms about past delays in bringing forward major city centre regeneration schemes. There is strong evidence from developers to suggest that the new approach to developing the City Centre Prospectus is very much welcomed. The Review Group support efforts to actively involve representatives of the private sector in the process and also the pragmatic approach adopted about what can be realistically achieved. It is important that there all available resources are used efficiently to deliver an improved 'offer'.
2. The Review Group acknowledge the excellent work over many years of the Cabinet Member for Economic Regeneration and Prosperity in driving forward the regeneration of the City and positively marketing the City and its 'offer'. There is a concern about the breadth of the portfolio and consider that consideration should be given about how the role can be better supported. For example, in some situations delegating specific areas of work to other Councillors to provide extra resources needed to support the delivery of an improved 'offer', and hopefully a development opportunity to increase the pool of resources available.
3. The evidence from witnesses stresses the importance of having a clear overall integrated marketing and communication strategies for Wolverhampton. The strategy should have objectives for the Council and local partners to work together with the objective of both changing the public view of the Council, as well as improving the reputation of Wolverhampton as a City and as a city centre to visit. We accept that these strategies may be distinct but will only be effective if formed, evaluated and acted on together.
4. The Review Group recognise the need for a twin track strategy that tackles those specific problems which give visitors a poor first impression of the City and which also deliver an effective marketing and communication strategy. The Review Group are therefore very supportive of the proposed Wolverhampton Marketing Strategy.
5. The Council's Constitution does not specifically detail where the responsibility and accountability is for the work being done to market Wolverhampton. It would help to have some clarity.

Improving the Wolverhampton 'offer'

6. The Review Group while acknowledging the importance of individual wards in contributing to delivering an improved Wolverhampton business, shopping and visitor 'offer', agree that we need to get the city centre 'offer' right first, if Wolverhampton is to become a more desirable destination.
7. The quality and popularity of the City's cultural offer has been recognised nationally in terms of awards. Wolverhampton has a good leisure offer, which is very popular with residents.
8. It is important that there is an honest assessment about the quality of the current 'offer' and agreement about the priority areas for action, particularly in those areas considered to be weak. However, it is important to avoid raising expectations about what the City can realistically deliver given the resources available.
9. The overall impression from the evidence presented is that while Wolverhampton has many advantages such as good road and rail links and popular cultural and entertainment venues it needs a much stronger retail and business 'offer' if it is to compete successfully with neighbouring areas such as Telford and Walsall.
10. The Review Group conclude that unlike our near neighbours, Wolverhampton has not kept pace with others areas in delivering improvements to the current 'offer' and successfully marketing itself as a destination of choice. For example, the lack of a quality range of city centre hotels and family friendly restaurants is a common issue highlighted by witnesses in evidence to the review.
11. There is general consensus among witnesses that Wolverhampton has much greater potential to improve its current 'offer', compared to other areas across the Black Country. The findings of the **Options for the future of Wolverhampton's culture and entertainment offer** (July 2013) report support this view and conclude that investment to upgrade key entertainment venues will lead to an improved daytime and night time offer and increased visitor numbers. The document makes clear that the issues facing Wolverhampton in trying to improve its entertainment and cultural 'offer' are not unique to the region.
12. At the national level a recent report from Visit England highlighted changing trends in how people decide where to visit. The report refers to the example, of the increasing use by the public of social networking sites to review comments about a location before visiting and the growth of families taking multiple short breaks, rather than the traditional fortnight holiday break. Visit England also highlighted in their report that a major challenge to areas looking to grow their visitor

economy is the perceived lack of appeal beyond already established destinations.

13. The Review Group welcome the progress of Wolverhampton's Portas Pilot scheme in getting five previously vacant City centre premises filled and its contribution to improving the current 'offer'. The success of the Portas Pilot has helped to raise Wolverhampton's profile in the media and among national retailers.

Managing and improving the reputation of Wolverhampton

14. The ongoing challenge for the Council and local partners in making the City centre a more attractive shopping destination, is how best to respond to increasing number of empty shops, the growth of charity shops for example, which all add to the difficulty in giving visitors a good first impression and competing with neighbouring areas for visitors. It is important that the Council continues to actively support local entrepreneurs and businesses that could help Wolverhampton to offer a more diverse shopping experience which encourages more people to visit.
15. The friendliness and attitude of Wolverhampton residents is seen as a positive part of the 'offer' by many witnesses. The views of local people about the City are important because their feelings and experiences will help shape and inform the views of any intended target audience; particularly when published in local newspapers and on social media sites, such as Twitter and Facebook.
16. The Review Group are concerned among witnesses suggesting that the City is not seen by the public as being a safe place to visit at a time when reported crime rates have fallen consistently. The Review Group, while accepting that it will take time to shift public views about this issue, agree that it is important that this message about the reality of risk of being a victim of crime is highlighted to the public wherever possible.
17. The Review Group conclude that there is a need to consider how to inform and in some situations challenge, public perceptions about the ability of the Council to tackle problems which give the City a poor first impression. The evidence from witnesses has highlighted that many of the problems are outside the direct control of the Council as they typically based on the commercial considerations of private sector businesses.
18. The lack of clarity about Wolverhampton's USP (unique selling point) is a concern because it is difficult to deliver a clear and consistent message to the intended target audience about what it can offer them. There is a need to separate efforts aimed at promoting and managing the reputation of the Council, from efforts to market Wolverhampton the City.

19. There is a concern among the Review Group about whether different groups and organisations involved in marketing and promoting Wolverhampton are all working towards an agreed shared vision.
20. A clear message from witnesses to the review has been the importance of developing a clear marketing and communication strategy for Wolverhampton. The strategy should be focused on establishing a clear process for responding to the public criticisms of the City and detailed plans aimed at improving our reputation in the short and medium term.
21. The Review Group understand that following a review that a new structure for marketing and communication work within the Council has been agreed. The Review Group have been reassured that internal processes will ensure an effective co-ordination of efforts aimed at selling Wolverhampton, improving the current 'offer' and giving visitors a good first impression of the City. It is important that the new working arrangements make clear who is responsible for delivering what and that there is appropriate oversight by Councillors to review progress.
22. The proposed Wolverhampton Marketing Strategy outlines different levels of involvement by people who can help promote Wolverhampton and its 'offer'. Local Councillors are ideally placed to be part of the group that can actively 'champion' and support efforts to market and promote Wolverhampton as a destination of choice. An important part of this process is attracting inward investment to help regenerate the City and support the Council's effort to improve the appearance and make it a more attractive place for visitors. The Review Group welcome the work being done by the Council.
23. The success of the Council's effort to market Wolverhampton as a destination of choice will be highly dependent on developing the right mix of policies and programmes. However, any future success can be greatly affected by relationships with the media and how local issues are reported and comments on social networking sites.
24. Evidence from WV One and the City Marketing Team highlight the advantage of having the necessary level of funding to deliver an effective planned programme of promotional and marketing events throughout the year. Based on past experience this can generate financial returns much greater, than the original sums invested.

Social media savvy Councillors

25. The Review Group recognise the power of social media sites such as Facebook and Twitter in providing the public with the opportunity to share their views on a range of topics. The growth of sites such as TripAdvisor.com has increasingly become an important source of information for businesses wanting increase market share and for the public looking information or to share their experiences with a wider audience.

The Local Government Association and other organisations have produced useful guides to support Councillors, for example, [Connected Councillors A guide to using social media to support local leadership](#). The guide discusses how social media can be used to create a space for community conversation.

26. The Review Group agree that there is a need for more Councillors to see the potential of social media and embrace the opportunity to engage with residents about issues of local interest or concern. Councillors need to consider registering with social media sites such as Wolverhampton Today, to ensure they can engage in debates on topical issues and also get alerts to keep them informed.
27. A number of useful national guides have been produced to support this aim. In addition, the following link in a newspaper article argues why local authorities should embrace social networking sites such as Facebook and its potential benefits.

<http://www.theguardian.com/local-government-network/2014/feb/09/facebook-10-year-anniversary-tool-councils-social-media#>

This would address a concern that people don't know what is happening in Wolverhampton and also help keep them updated about the progress of previously announced major regeneration projects.

28. The Review Group are concerned that there is no effective challenge to comments posted on social media sites about Wolverhampton by the public, particularly in respect of the reasons for the delays in bringing forward major City centre regeneration projects. The negative comments in response to what are 'good news' stories on social media sites are a matter of concern to the Review Group.

The City has to provide reasons for people to want to visit and spend their money in Wolverhampton. The Council and local stakeholders need to continue to work together to support this work.

29. The success of the **Wolverhampton - Into the Light - Enchanted City** Weekend event held in October 2013 in attracting large numbers of families into the city centre demonstrates the ability of the Council and local partners to deliver programme at short notice, is very much welcomed.

The 'Into the Light - Enchanted City' event was a free event featuring a light display across landmark buildings in the City centre including Queens Square, St Peters Church, the University and Wolverhampton Art Gallery. The aim was to bring the City centre to life and encourage families, young people and community groups to enjoy a spectacular event of visual entertainment and home-grown performing arts talent. The event ended with a spectacular firework display.

The event was actively supported by local young people and businesses. Local businesses contributed funds and resources to support the event. The event itself generated lots of positive headlines about Wolverhampton and income for business.

30. The Review Group consider that the City needs to be willing to 'grasp the nettle' and occasionally take risks in marketing and promoting itself in order to make the changes needed to give visitors a good first impression of the City and its offer.
31. The Review Group accept that the City faces a major task in tackling those issues that give visitors a poor first impression and in persuading critics that there is a commitment to deliver the desired improvements to the 'offer'. The responses from public opinion surveys suggest that more needs to be done to explain the challenges in bringing forward major developments and provide regular updates on progress.

Introduction

- 1.1. The overall purpose of the review has been twofold. Firstly, to find out what people think about the current Wolverhampton 'offer' .Secondly, to review the work being done to improve the current offer and to positively market Wolverhampton as a destination of choice to visitors, shoppers, businesses, developers and students.
- 1.2. The term 'offer of a city' or 'offer' is a concept derived from destination marketing, particularly within the tourism industry. **For the purpose of this review the term 'offer' is a general phrase which describes the range of economic, cultural and entertainment facilities on offer across the City to visitors, business investors and students.**
- 1.3. The 'offer' itself can be broadly separated into the following areas - "visit offer", "business offer" and "shopping offer"
- 1.4. The Review Group started from position that while the City has many venues to be rightly proud of such as Wolverhampton Art Gallery and Wolverhampton Grand Theatre; there are aspects of the 'offer' that need to improve.
- 1.5. Ongoing development and improvements of Wolverhampton's 'offer' is key to the Council's wider strategic efforts to market the City as great place to locate, shop, study, do business and visit. In the current economic climate, a strong 'offer' will not only help to achieve this aim, but also enable Wolverhampton to compete more effectively with neighbouring areas to attract shoppers and visitors.
- 1.6. It is clear from survey comments from members of the public who were asked to contribute evidence that many "Wulfrunians" care very much about what happens to the City. Furthermore, many are keen to see action being taken to regenerate the City centre and tackle problems which they have expressed concerns about.
- 1.7. Wolverhampton City Council has a key role in helping to both positively market the City as a destination of choice and also working effectively with local partners to make the necessary changes that can deliver an 'offer' that is both attractive and competitive.
- 1.8. Wolverhampton, along with other areas in the West Midlands region has been affected by changes in consumer spending patterns due to factors such as, the growth of internet shopping, rising levels of unemployment, and how national businesses manage and deliver their services at local levels. This development has led to an increasing focus on improving the quality of the shopping, cultural and entertainment 'offer' as part of wider efforts to support the regeneration of the city and create jobs.

- 1.9. The Review Group welcome the work being led by consultants to develop a **Visitor Economy Strategy for Birmingham and the Black Country**. The review is considering the strengths and weaknesses of the regional tourism offer, how it is managed, future market and opportunities for growing the visitor economy. The findings should be used to inform future plans for regenerating the City centre.
- 1.10. The issues facing city centres has been the subject of many national reviews such as the Government initiated 'Portas Review'. The review findings highlighted the importance of the city centre in helping to revive an area and also the range of factors that have contributed to its decline in some areas of the country.
- 1.11. The current challenging economic conditions and reductions in local authority spending have highlighted the need to ensure limited resources are used to maximum effect and make a real difference to tackling gaps in the current offer. The Review Group have taken a realistic view about the task facing Wolverhampton in wanting to deliver an improved 'offer'.
- 1.12. Evidence was collected through interviews with subject experts, round table discussions, site visits and presentations of videos and other relevant information to answer specific questions, within the agreed terms of reference.
- 1.13. Witnesses were invited to share their views about the quality of the current 'offer', both good and bad. Witnesses were also encouraged to suggest practical suggestions of changes that could be made to help improve the current 'offer' and give visitors a good first impression.
- 1.14. The Review Group has also sought the views of local people and Councillors to better understand the gaps in the current offer, and what changes they would like to see in the future, to enable Wolverhampton to compete more effectively with neighbouring areas.
- 1.15. The views of local people matter as it is clear from the quote below submitted in evidence to the review that the concerns highlighted are likely to be the same issues that contribute to lower levels of satisfaction about the quality of the current 'offer', that visitors, students, shoppers and businesses are also likely to be concerned about.

"What is apparent to me during the daily crossover is how little love Wolverhampton seems to have for its self. It's missing care and attention. Shops are boarded up; the ones that are open are payday loan companies, bookies, cheap clothes shops or charity shops. None of these establishments are what the majority of everyday people want and need."

2. Findings

2.1. The findings has been organised around a number of broad themes.

The themes reflect the views of witnesses and the Review Group alike about the City's current 'offer', the main challenges to improving the offer, and suggestions about what needs to happen to give visitors a good first impression of the City and what it can 'offer'.

2.2. First Impressions of the City

- The findings from the surveys such as the [Residents Opinion Survey 2013](#), [Options for the future of Wolverhampton's culture report](#) and [Wolverhampton Town Centre – Operator Survey Findings](#) present a generally positive picture of Wolverhampton as a place to live, shop and do business. However, the reports also highlight public criticisms about the perceived decline in the appearance of the city centre and gaps in the current 'offer'.
- In written evidence submitted to the review it was stated that **the success of efforts to regenerate the city centre is dependent on a range of factors, many of which are not within the direct control of the Council**, and are also often skewed by public perceptions and expectations of an area. These factors include the catchment area and employment, customer profile (influenced by income levels), car parking, sales, crime, tourism, vacancy rates.
- The evidence from witnesses presents a very consistent message of concern among the public about the apparent slow progress in bringing forward major regeneration projects and tackling those issues which gives a poor first impression of Wolverhampton.
- The following quotes are taken from public responses to a questionnaire inviting comments about their views of the City, what the City is doing well to improve the 'offer', but also areas where improvements are needed.
 - "I think the shop "Shop in the Square" is the best shop that has opened in the town for a long time. There are such lovely handmade gifts that one is compelled to buy something as they are all so lovely.

With so many big stores closing down in Wolves, there needs to be an enticement to bring people back into the town and I think free car parking over two days should bring back old customers who tend to favour Merry Hill and Walsall."

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- "I love our city. I love Kings Street, the Chubb building and of course, St. Peters Church.
- "What is apparent to me during the daily crossover [the person commutes from Wolverhampton to Birmingham daily] is how little love Wolverhampton seems to have for its self. It's missing care and attention. Shops are boarded up; the ones that are open are payday loan companies, bookies, cheap clothes shops or charity shops. None of these establishments are what the majority of everyday people want and need."
- "Firstly, a positive. I think the AR/154 development (including the Vine Island works) and the proposed schemes outlined in the Stafford Road Corridor Area Action Plan send out a very clear message that Wolverhampton is a modern, innovative city which is well and truly open for business.

I have commuted to work in Birmingham by train for the past 9 years. The sight that greets rail visitors as they pull into Wolverhampton coming from the South is just appalling. Looking out to your left is just derelict wasteland, including the old mill. When I have mates come to stay they never fail to comment on how bad it looks. In direct contract to '1, this sends out a message that this is a city in dire straits, on its knees.

The former Charles Clark building on Chapel Ash. What can I say that hasn't already been said before?"

- Wolverhampton train station is one of the main gateways into the City and there is agreement about the need for major refurbishment.
- A common theme highlighted by witnesses and in documentary evidence is the lack of family friendly or quality restaurants and entertainment venues in the City centre. The Review Group welcome the opening of the new restaurant near the train station and other planned developments in the area which will hopefully partly address complaints from visitors and present a much more attractive area to visitors.
- During an interview with the Editor of the Express and Star, there was concern that Wolverhampton looks a down market area, which does not offer a positive reason for people to either visit or to invest.
- The Review Group welcome the Express and Star's commitment to promoting the City and support the idea of a " I ♥ Wolverhampton" campaign and argue that more needs to be done by the City to capitalise on the popularity of venues such as Dunstall Racecourse, the Greyhound Stadium and Wolverhampton Grand Theatre.

- The following groups, while not complete is intended to give an indication of the number of high profile individuals and or organisations involved in either marketing and or promoting Wolverhampton and its 'offer':
 - **WV One**
 - **WV One Marketing Group**
 - **Business Champions**
 - **Wolverhampton City Council:**
 - **City Marketing Team**
 - **City Centre Project Board**
 - **City Centre Operational Group**
 - **Regeneration Advisory Group**
 - **Partners in Progress**
 - **City Centre Tasking Group**
 - **High Street Champion**
 - **Wolverhampton University**

- There was some concern among the Review Group about the general level of knowledge about the work of the respective bodies, their remit, and the extent to which they are all working to the same objectives. It is important that all key groups involved in marketing and or promoting Wolverhampton are presenting similar core messages about the quality of Wolverhampton's 'offer' in their publicity and marketing material.

- The Review Group consider there is a need for an explicit commitment from representatives of the organisations involved to work to an agreed vision, for example, as set out in the City Centre Prospectus:

"A vibrant, walkable, attractive, family-friendly city centre full of opportunity and potential. A city centre which is compact enough to be welcoming and accessible, but large enough to boast some of the UK's best retail, leisure and cultural facilities."

- The Editor of the Express and Star highlighted Telford as an example of a city that has developed a simple strapline message – 'Safe City, Good Shopping', which makes clear its priority and the focus of its 'offer'.

Conclusions

- There are major challenges to efforts aimed at regenerating the City centre and improving the 'offer'. The Review Group was very much aware that this is a massive topic which could not be properly covered sufficiently during such short review. However, the review has provided the opportunity for members of the group to consider the current situation and the work being done to improve the 'offer'.
- Wolverhampton City Council needs to reassure the public and other key groups that it is listening and responding to their concerns and that there is a plan to take the necessary action.
- The work should separate those issues within the control of the Council to influence from those issues which are outside its control to avoid raising expectations about what can be realistically delivered given the current resources.
- The issue of crime and safety in the City centre has been highlighted as an issue of concern among the public. Wolverhampton needs to avoid sending out a message which may suggest that the City is not safe, particularly to visitors, shoppers and potential businesses looking to invest in the City.
- Information from a range of sources about what the public and the intended target audience thinks about Wolverhampton's current 'offer' needs to be collected regularly and analysed to identify trends.

2.3. Improving the appearance of public realm

- For the purpose of this review the term 'public realm' is defined as any publicly owned streets, pathways, right of ways, parks, publicly accessible open spaces and any public and civic building and facilities.
- The City Centre Prospectus document sets out a planned programme of work aimed at improving the physical appearance of the City centre to make it more attractive. The approach for developing plans to regenerate the City centre was described as being less prescriptive compared to previous plans and based on a phased approach to future developments.
- Previous scrutiny reviews have commented on the lack of Grade A office standard buildings in the City centre and the gap between what we have and what we can offer.

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- The Review Group welcome current progress in securing an anchor tenant for the Mander Centre development and the work being done by the Council to improve the retail core and the plans for the Westside redevelopment.
- The Review Group have concerns about the impact on existing City centre businesses of two major planned shopping developments which are likely to draw footfall and spending away from the established shopping and market areas. The concerns relate to the prospect of having two large supermarkets opening in the City centre, at a time when the Mander Centre is planning a major investment in the shopping centre and also on the longer term prospects for jobs among existing small businesses in the area.
- The plan for a creating Business Improvement Districts (BID) covering the City centre area is welcomed. (BIDs are partnerships in which businesses within a defined area elect to make a collective contribution to the development and improvement of their commercial district. These funds are then used solely to deliver approved business plans as agreed by the businesses.) If the BID plans are supported by the business community then it is anticipated that this will create a potential budget of £3 million (over five years) that could be used to fund approved City centre improvements. Virgin Trains supports the WV One bid to improve the city and efforts to promote the City as a visitor destination.

Conclusions

- The Review Group welcome planned work to improve the appearance of the City Centre.
- The Review Group welcome the work done to actively involve potential the developers during the drafting of the City Centre Prospectus because this gives confidence that all key partners are working to a shared vision.
- The Review Group acknowledges criticism from the public in response to questionnaires about issues such as the overall look and feel of the City, which give a poor impression of Wolverhampton.

2.4. Wolverhampton's cultural and entertainment offer

- The City has a well-deserved regional and national reputation for the quality of its cultural and entertainment offer. Wolverhampton Grand Theatre, Dunstall Racecourse and Wolverhampton Civic Halls are often quoted as popular venues in public research surveys.

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- Many local venues such as Dunstall Racecourse, the Molineux Football Ground and other city centre venues are considered to offer world class events. The events hosted at City centre venues are televised across the world in different time zones which help to promote the city. In addition, Wolverhampton Civic Halls continues to attract major acts and host national events such as the 2014 William Hill Grand Slam of Darts.
- Despite some criticism from witnesses about gaps in Wolverhampton's cultural and entertainment 'offer' the achievements listed below, suggest that there are reasons for optimism about the future:
 - Wolverhampton Art Gallery, Bilston Craft Gallery and Bantock House Museum all achieved accreditation from Arts Council England.
 - Wolverhampton Art Gallery's Meet Me @ WAG conversation club for over-50s won a 2013 West Midlands Arts, Health and Wellbeing Award (Public Sector).
 - Wolverhampton in Bloom achieved a Gold Award; Bilston in Bloom achieved a Gold Award.
 - Bantock House Museum awarded the prestigious Sandford Award. The Sandford Award recognises excellence in education at heritage sites and museums. Wolverhampton Art Gallery was awarded the Sandford Award in 2011.
 - Bantock House Museum was rated 'excellent' by VisitEngland (VisitEngland is the country's national tourist board).
 - Wolverhampton Art Gallery was rated a Certificate of Excellence 2013 winner by TripAdvisor.com (TripAdvisor.com is a travel website providing directory information and reviews of travel-related content. It also includes interactive travel forums)
 - A painting from Wolverhampton Art Gallery, 'Lord Volvo and his Estate' (1982) by Humphrey Ocean was chosen to feature in Art Everywhere. (Art Everywhere was a national project which featured more than 50 works by British artists that was displayed on poster sites across the UK in August 2013.)
 - Wolverhampton Art Gallery made a successful bid for £490,000 from Arts Council England for its Black Country Echoes project. Wolverhampton Art Gallery was also awarded £67,000 from the Esmée Fairbairn Collections Fund. Bilston Craft Gallery received £14,000 from the Happy Museum Project.

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- Mark Blackstock, Head of Entertainment and Events and Rupert Knowlden, Commercial Manager, were presented with the award for Best Venue Teamwork - Theatre/Concert at the Live UK Music Business Awards.
- The lack of awareness among the members of the Review Group about such awards is a matter concern as Councillors will not have the necessary information which could use to promote the City's 'offer'.
- The [Wolverhampton City Treasurers](#) project undertaken by Deb Shelley and Jo Rooney, first year fine-art students at the University of Wolverhampton. The project involved a public vote to choose the city's favourite building. The results showed a great deal of public affection for the many of the great architectural buildings across Wolverhampton, which often go unnoticed by the public.

The final 10 'treasures' along with other buildings of historical and architectural value were included in two self-guided Treasure Hunts. The guide, an adult version with cryptic clues and a children version, was launched as part of the Wolverhampton's Heritage Open Days weekend in September 2013. Wolverhampton Art Gallery was voted Wolverhampton's favourite City Treasure the other two finalists were St Peter's Church and the Posada pub.



- The Review Group consider that there is real opportunity to consider how to raise awareness about these events.
- Deb and Jo also set up a unique art project capturing the hopes and wishes of people in Wolverhampton using a chalkboard along the length of Victoria Street bearing the statement "Before I die . . ." and people were encouraged to write down their thoughts.

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The students were inspired by Candi Chang, a New Orleans artist, who turned the side of an abandoned house in her neighbourhood into a giant chalkboard. The following You Tube link shows details about the Wolverhampton project http://youtu.be/F7_xgw2sC9U

- The issues facing Wolverhampton in trying to improve its cultural and entertainment 'offer' are not new. The combined effect of the factors below presents a major challenge to efforts aimed at improving the quality of the current daytime and night time entertainment 'offer' in the City centre:
 - falling visitor numbers
 - concentration of entertainment, restaurants and leisure centres to Bentley Bridge away from the City centre
 - the closure of previously popular nightclubs in the City centre and image of not being a 'family friendly' location
 - the ease of travel to alternative places such as Birmingham which has a stronger entertainment offer.
 - the public perception that the City is not safe at night
- The Editor of Express and Star suggested that Councillors should be more involved in the work of the Grand Theatre given its significance and popularity among the public. The Grand Theatre is an important part of the City's night time offer and there was concern expressed about the granting of planning permission to businesses near the Theatre, which do not add to efforts to enhance the overall quality of the City's cultural offer.
- Wolverhampton City Council has been criticised by witnesses as not working in a co-ordinated way when dealing with enquires from promoters or event organisers wanting to host events in the City. A more facilitative approach across departments in enabling third party providers to deliver events is needed, particularly in relation to the outdoor public realm.
- All parts of the Council involved directly or indirectly in marketing or promoting the City need to work together more cohesively. Wolverhampton needs to learn from the experience of cities such as Liverpool and Glasgow; that are considered to be much more supportive and responsive to enquiries from promoters looking for locations to host events.

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- In evidence it was suggested that lack of a centralised ticketing system for the cultural 'offer' which would allow different venues to sell tickets for other entertainment venues across the City was highlighted as a weakness. Witnesses have highlighted benefits of making it as easy as possible for visitors to make use of increasingly sophisticated technology available to book tickets and find out information. This would require third party operators to collaborate with the Council.
- Mark Blackstock, Head of Entertainment and Events, Wolverhampton Civic Halls, in evidence to the review commented on how the Civic Halls ticket booking system allows the organisation to assess the effectiveness of its marketing work.
- There is support from witnesses that limited the financial and physical resources need to focus on selling Wolverhampton's 'offer'.

Conclusions

- The Review Group acknowledge the success of the City in continuing to attract sponsors to host national sporting and entertainment events, many of which attract national coverage. There is a concern among the Review Group however, that the Council's internal working practices need to be more supportive of efforts aimed at attracting new sponsored events to be held in the City or businesses to invest in the City.
- The use of social media sites to share views about issues will continue to grow. Therefore, there is a need for Councillors to be encouraged to engage with the public on social media sites on issues that give a poor first impression of the City and do not sufficiently promote the quality of its entertainment and cultural 'offer'.
- There is a concern that there is no agreed process to respond to negative public comments about the City, particularly on social media.
- The Review Group considers that regular briefings or email alerts about the City receiving either national awards or successful funding bids to Councillors would help to keep them informed.
- Councillors and the public alike need to be made aware of sources of information about future events in the City and encouraged to join mailing lists.
- The Review Group conclude that any work aimed at encouraging people to stay in the City will need to be supported by better public transport provision after 10.30 pm and an improved night time 'offer', which includes more family friendly venues.

- The Review Group accept that given the scale of the financial challenges facing the Council that available resources are used to deliver specific objectives and are focused on areas considered to be a priority by the public.
- The Review Group supports the need for the Council and partners to set out a clear plan to develop the daytime and night-time offer. It has been suggested that this should be part of a five year plan to supports its future growth. This plan should include trying to encourage high quality food trade vendors that are more attractive to visitors and help to reinforce the brand and how the City's offer differs from other areas. The strategy should set out clear objectives against which progress can be assessed.

2.5. Wolverhampton's shopping 'offer'

- The evidence from witnesses shows that the current shopping 'offer' is not strong enough to compete with the shopping experience offered from places such as Walsall, Merry Hill and Telford. Witnesses have commented that while other areas have improved, Wolverhampton's ranking as a retail centre has fallen.
- In evidence it was reported that Wolverhampton's biggest competitors are Merry Hill, Bentley Bridge and Telford. For a 'day out' or destination/experience younger shoppers will choose Birmingham and older shoppers Shrewsbury, Chester or Worcester. It was stated that in most cases this is because the balance is right between the 'offer', the cost (including parking) and convenience of getting there.
- Furthermore, it was reported that the issue of parking costs is less of a concern, if people get what they want or have a good day out. Evidence from WV One has suggested that the level of parking charges is not necessarily the deciding factor in whether people decide to visit a city.
- The level of car parking charges is an issue of public concern and the evidence from witnesses suggest that more work is needed to both explain how they are calculated and also challenge common misunderstandings about the role of Council in setting charges. The following points were highlighted in evidence by the WV One to the review.
 - City Council parking rates in the Wolverhampton city centre have been reduced by 33% in the last 3 years.
 - Many car parks have Safer Parking Awards, CCTV coverage and are in good repair.

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- The City Council only controls around 40% of the car parks in the city centre. The level of charges set by NCP and Euro Car Parks are sometimes blamed on the Council.
 - Parking is free in all City Council car parks outside the city centre.
 - The Council mainly operates pay and display car parks or bays in the city centre which do not allow people to extend 'dwell time'.
-
- The success of Bentley Bridge Retail Park has been highlighted during evidence session as being a major contributory factor in the decline of the quality of the City centre shopping and entertainment 'offer'.
 - Witnesses have commented on the facilities at Bentley Bridge such as free parking, the range of restaurants, a cinema and leisure facilities which provide a much better overall shopping and leisure experience than that offered in the City centre.
 - There is a view that while Wolverhampton has greater potential than neighbouring areas such as Walsall, it has been unsuccessful in bringing forward planned shopping redevelopments to improve its shopping offer. The plans detailed in the City Centre Prospectus are welcome, particularly the plans for a new store.
 - The following quote from WV One gives an indication of the comments from representatives of the local business community about the negative impact on confidence levels caused by delays in delivering planned regeneration schemes

"The [WV One] company does receive many comments that 'nothing is happening' and this implies traders and the public have lost confidence in the speed at which change is taking place. Whilst we ourselves know of the good work of many people and organisations, investment plans and improved services that message is perhaps not getting out fast enough."
 - In evidence it was reported that footfall levels in Wolverhampton is relatively high at around 26 million between the two main shopping centres and around 1 million in the evening economy. In evidence presented by WV One it was reported there is a potential untapped resource of potential shoppers and visitors across the region who choose to go to other areas that could, with an improved offer and encouragement, be persuaded to stay in Wolverhampton for their shopping and entertainment needs.

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- The number of empty units across the City centre is a very visible reminder of the scale of the challenge it faces. It was reported in evidence that 227 national retailers have gone into administration since 2007. Furthermore, it was reported in evidence that vacancy rates in the City centre remain well above the national and regional average at 17.8% (national 11.1%, regional 12.4% Source: Springboard), which is in ongoing concern due to its impact on quality and range of shops available.
- There is a commonly held view among businesses and the public that the Council is able to make changes to respond to the concerns about those factors which influence where shoppers will go. For example, businesses complain about the level of business rates and shop rental rates. The comments suggest that more needs to be done to explain both what the Council can do to create the conditions for growth, but also the limitations of what the Council can do in these circumstances.
- The level of business rates is set nationally by Government. A reduction in shop rental levels to attract new businesses may risk upsetting existing tenants and also have an impact on rental income levels for landlords, making it less attractive investment.
- The information from the findings of the **City Centre Annual Review and City Centre Health Check (2009)**, **Wolverhampton Town Centre Operator Survey Findings (September 2013)** **Wolverhampton City Centre Customer Service Review 2013 - Synopsis** all provide useful information that can help inform decisions about how limited resources should be used to improve the current shopping 'offer'.

Conclusion

- Evidence from the surveys of shoppers and retailers can provide valuable information that can help inform the development of the activities aimed at marketing and promoting the City and also identifying those parts of the 'offer' which are being delivered.

2.6. A Marketing Strategy Wolverhampton

- The definition of the term 'City marketing' (related to city branding) is the promotion of a city, or a district within it, with the aim of encouraging certain activities to take place there. It is used to alter the external perceptions of a city in order to make it more attractive to the intended target audience. As a result, this has led to competition between cities for inward investment and government funding to support their job regeneration and economic growth objectives.
- A significant feature of a city marketing plan could be the development of new landmark, or 'flagship', buildings and structures. For example, the I54 development.
- The Review Group consider that Wolverhampton does not have a sufficiently distinctive and clear unique selling point or USP or an agreed strapline which presents a clear and consistent message to the intended audience, across all publicity and marketing documents. This has added to the challenge in presenting a consistent and clear message about the City's offer and its strengths.
- The Review Group agree with importance of this issue and need to look at what can do set Wolverhampton apart from neighbouring local towns and cities. Evidence has been submitted about previous discussions over many years about the issue of Wolverhampton's USP and the difficulties in reaching an agreement about what it should be.
- The Review Group support the establishment of the proposed Wolverhampton Marketing Strategy and its potential to support the delivery of the City Strategy Objectives 2011-2014. The Review Group are supportive of the three core elements of the strategy which could, if successful, address many of the issues about gaps in the current 'offer' highlighted as concerns during the review:
 - **Reputation Management** – Improve the organisations reputation and standing of the Council to establish and reinforce its role as the strategic marketing lead for the City.
 - **Marketing Campaign** – Adoption of a process that focusses on customer requirements and the ability of the city partners to deliver this requirement.
 - **Improve the Offer** – a programme of activities in key areas that both visually enhance the City and also demonstrate a quality proposition.

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- The proposal to create a funding team as part of the Wolverhampton Marketing Strategy has a number of advantages. For example, it would involve the appointment of a "campaign leader", supported by a team with the necessary skills, who could present the right message in front of the decision makers.

The establishment of a funding team would send out a strong message that Wolverhampton has the support of key organisations behind any proposed bid.

- The Review Group support the ideas detailed in the draft Wolverhampton Marketing Strategy. In particular, the focus on creating a formal structure with representatives from all the key partners working to the same goal of positively marketing the city and bringing together individuals with the necessary skills and knowledge to draft and present bids for funding.
- The Review Group are very supportive of the suggestion that there should be a clear separation of efforts aimed at changing the public view of the Council, from those efforts aimed at improving the reputation of Wolverhampton. This approach would give a clear focus to future communication and marketing work.
- The Review Group recognise the important role of WV One in marketing the city centre. The WV One web site is regularly updated and it was reported that the site had 10,503 unique visits in October 2014. There is a healthy pattern of posting, reposting and tweeting between city centre businesses, WV One and Wolverhampton Today (City Council), which needs to be encouraged further.
- A review of publicity and marketing material produced by Wolverhampton Council and others suggest that there is a need for a stronger co-ordination of efforts to make clear what the City's 'offer' is to visitors, businesses and shoppers.
- The Review Group recognise the importance of the work done by external bodies, such as Wolverhampton University in promoting the City, as part its efforts to attract students. The marketing department at Wolverhampton University has produced an impressive range of video material to both promote the benefits of studying at the University and also the City attractions.

Virtual tour site <http://www2.wlv.ac.uk/international-virtual-open-day/>
and a more general video used to promote the City
<http://www.wlv.ac.uk/default.aspx?page=21502>

- Wolverhampton University undertake large scale surveys to assess student views .The Review Group consider a summary of the key findings should be shared with the Council and others to help determine the extent to which student expectations of the City are being matched by their actual experiences. The views of students who previously lived outside the City would provide information that could be a valuable resource for any future marketing or communication strategy aimed at responding to concerns about gaps in the Wolverhampton 'offer'.
- The Review Group accept that while it is important to develop a single overarching marketing strategy for Wolverhampton, that it will take time to reach agreement with the different organisations involved.
- The Review Group are concerned that evidence from witnesses suggest that the current marketing and promotional strategy for Wolverhampton lacks a clear focus in getting people to 'think Wolverhampton' in terms of meeting their personal, social, entertainment or business needs. **A further concern highlighted in the evidence there is a view that events that happen in the City are event-led rather than Wolverhampton-led. It is important to clear about who is doing what in terms of promoting Wolverhampton in areas outside the City.**
- The Review Group acknowledge the successful marketing strategies of previous years used to promote events such as the visit to 10 Downing Street reception visit, and the Partners in Progress - Wolverhampton's Famous Sons and Daughters event supported by Wolverhampton Council and the Express and Star.

These, and other events, generated a lot of positive news headlines for Wolverhampton. It is important however that the necessary follow up work is done to ensure that initial contacts lead to increased investment into the City.

- The evidence from DC Leisure, WV One and the City Marketing team highlight the real benefits of having a budget to market and attract sponsored events to the City.
- The Review Group acknowledge the important contribution of having dedicated funds in delivering successful marketing campaigns in the past. The Review Group, while acutely aware of the Council's budget position, remain concerned about the level of funding available to support work of efforts to market the City.

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- The Review Group conclude that given the limited marketing resources available there is a need to ensure that all the key partners has the relevant information about Wolverhampton and are presenting a clear and consistent message through their own publicity and promotional material.
- The Review Group accept that competition for 'customers' whether they are visitors, shoppers or businesses is fierce given the current economic challenges. Wolverhampton needs to consider whether it has sufficient financial and physical resources to respond to the challenge to increase City centre footfall.
- WV One have argued that there is a need to ensure that the public get regular and up to date feedback on current and future projects aimed at improving the 'offer'. This could be achieved through news-letters and regular features in the news and trade press and via social networks.
- The Review Group support the argument that the Council and other agents involved in marketing Wolverhampton communicate the offer in an honest way and do not rely on 'spin'. It is important that there is no difference between how Wolverhampton is being marketed or promoted and what the customers can expect to experience when they visit.
- The Review Group agree that it is important to learn from the experiences of other local authorities who have adopted similar city wide marketing strategy.
- The Review Group discussed the opportunities for Wolverhampton to secure funding either for marketing and promotional work or potential investment into the City. In particular, if there is an active programme to look for potential grant funding opportunities from national bodies or European bodies to support efforts to regenerate the City.
- The success in securing external funding for the 'Enchanted City' demonstrates that the proposed model detailed in the Wolverhampton Marketing Strategy can deliver a project that can be used to promote Wolverhampton's 'offer'.
- The Enchanted City attracted an estimated 8,000 to 10,000 people into the City centre over the weekend. The willingness of private sector businesses to support the project financially is a clear sign that this approach can make a real difference to improving the image of the City. The Review Group hope the event is repeated in the future and builds on the success.

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- Birmingham and Black Country Local Enterprise Partnership have an important role in supporting and co-ordinating bids for potential funding opportunities across the region and in raising the profile of the area. The establishment of Wolverhampton Marketing Strategy would need to consider how it can support regional efforts to improve the current 'offer' and to co-ordinate funding bid applications.
- The Review Group consider that Councillors have an important role in helping to shape a marketing strategy for Wolverhampton and the subsequent action plan. The Wolverhampton Marketing Strategy document identifies the important role of 'Ambassadors'. The Review Group consider that Councillors are ideally suited to the role to be 'Ambassadors' for the City.
- The Council has been criticised in some responses to the questionnaire that it does appear to be 'joined up' as an organisation, when dealing with enquiries from promoters wanting to host events in the City. There is a need for more work to be done across the Council to ensure that our internal policies and procedures are properly co-ordinated and make the process as easy and straightforward as possible, for promoters looking to host events in the City.
- The Review Group acknowledge that there is a need to keep the public informed about the progress of regeneration schemes. However, it is also important that the Council is clear with the public in its communication that completion of major regeneration projects are very dependent on the financial and commercial considerations of private sector businesses.

Conclusions

- The Review Group accept that while it is important to develop a single overarching marketing strategy for Wolverhampton, that it will take time to reach agreement with the different organisations involved.
- There is a need to have a city wide marketing and communication strategy for Wolverhampton. The strategy should make a clear distinction between those activities aimed at managing and promoting the role of the Council, from those activities aimed at managing and promoting reputation of the City to give visitors a good first impression.
- The Review Group are concerned that evidence from witnesses suggest that the current marketing and promotional strategy for Wolverhampton lacks a clear focus.

- It is not immediately apparent if there is a process to look for potential grant funding opportunities that could be used to improve the current offer and support efforts to positively market Wolverhampton.

2.7. Communication Strategy

- The development of a communication protocol developed as part of the safer city campaign to be adopted by all partners Council, Police, Wolverhampton Homes, LNP's and WVOne is very much welcomed.
- Mark Blackstock, Head of Entertainment and Events, Wolverhampton Civic Hall presented evidence highlighting concerns about the defensive response adopted by the Council when responding to negative press reports.
- The Review Group consider that there is need for the Council to adopt a more balanced approach when responding to negative news stories to media stories. The Review Group accept that the Council needs to be able to respond, and where necessary robustly, to inaccurate press reports. However, due consideration should be given to the risk of any potential reputational damage to City.
- The Review Group consider that care should be taken with campaigns which focus on raising public awareness about issues linked to crime and public safety, because there is a risk that such campaigns may give the impression that the City is not a safe place, particularly at night. The Review Group accept that it is a difficult balance to achieve in offering public reassurance about the level of risk and the need to take necessary precautions to avoid being a victim of crime.

Mark Blackstock, Head of Entertainment and Events, at Wolves Civic in evidence gave the example of the annual Christmas 'make it safe' campaign which involves the use of large displays highlighting the risk of crime and the triage tent in the City centre.

- In evidence to the review, it was suggested that the Local Government Association Reputation Management would be useful tool to review and assess progress of efforts to change public perceptions about the Council and its success in efforts to positively market Wolverhampton. It has been suggested that the use of this tool will give a clear focus and direction to Council's future communications. It is important that any plan to manage and improve the reputation of the Council is part of any future marketing strategy for Wolverhampton.

Conclusions

- The positive responses from partners who see the benefits of a communication protocol suggest that this can be successfully built upon as part of a wider strategy for the future.
- The Review Group agrees with the view that any communication material promoting Wolverhampton's 'offer' strikes the right balance between being positive about the City, but still gives an accurate picture of what visitors are likely to see when they visit.
- The Review Group accept there is a difficulty in keeping residents and businesses regularly updated on the positive work that is happening across the City with regard to regeneration and economic development. The use of social networking sites provides an easy way to help people to keep informed of developments. Wolverhampton Council and other organisations have established Twitter and Facebook sites, which would allow people to register for information alerts.
- The Review Group accepts while a regular flow of news stories is important there is no guarantee that the media will print the stories submitted. As a result social media sites will become more important sources of information. For example, Wolverhampton Today has a following of over 31,000 likes and users can register for alerts. Councillors and the public should be encouraged to join the [What's on Where events guide](#) mailing list which gives information on events and entertainment in and around Wolverhampton.
- In contrast, the Express and Star has one million unique visits in a month to its own web sites, which is expected to increase further in the future. The Review Group welcome the offer from the Editor of the Express and Star to work together/rather than in competition when it comes to disseminating news.
- The Review Group welcome the efforts of the Express and Star to present positive news stories about Wolverhampton and the work done to promote other entertainment venues through ticket offers.
- The ongoing support of the local newspaper, particularly one with a significant online readership, should be a key part of important efforts to present a positive, while at the same time realistic, view of the City and what it can offer. The success of the efforts to market and promote Wolverhampton as a destination of choice will depend to some extent on building a better relationship with the local media.

- The lessons from Derby City Council's relationship with the media and the Bondholder schemes are a good model that could be adopted by Wolverhampton. This work should be part of a wider strategy to look at possible external funding opportunities to deliver a programme of planned activities aimed at marketing the City.

2.8. Improving transport gateways and signage along major routes into the City

- Wolverhampton's road, rail and motorway transport links have been a key selling point in promotional material to attract potential investor, visitors and shoppers to the area.
- The poor state of the signs at major routes into the City is a concern in that it does not give a positive impression to visitors.
- Wolverhampton Train Station is an important part of efforts to regenerate the City and increasingly people are using the station to catch connecting trains, rather than travel to Birmingham.

The following figures give basic details about the station:

- 18 train movements an hour — three minutes between trains
 - 4.1 million passengers use the station annually
 - 52 staff at station
 - The majority of staff are residents of Wolverhampton
 - 500 car park spaces
 - The station is open from 5 am till 1 am
 - The station is manned 24 hours a day
 - There is a maintenance team based at the station
- The Review Group welcome the continued commitment from Wolverhampton Station to be involved in joint work aimed at improving the current service and in supporting the development of the Wolverhampton's entertainment and cultural offer by providing extra services, when major events planned.
 - The poor state of the station is a matter of concern because of the impression it gives users of the station and how this might affect visitor expectation of the City. The Review Group very welcome planned changes to improve the appearance of the station, better catering facilities and security, which all contribute to efforts to promote Wolverhampton's night time offer.
 - The prospect of a 7 per cent annual increase in Wolverhampton train passenger numbers is very much welcome and there is opportunity to encourage people to stay longer in the City, particularly those people who are waiting to catch connecting trains.

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- The Review Group accept the difficulties in making major changes to the station due to the physical layout which has meant that it is not possible to introduce automated ticketing barrier service, which would clearly provide a better customer service.

Furthermore, any major work at the station would cause major disruption to the service, as it would require closing a number of platforms in order to do the necessary work.

- The Review Group on a visit to the station noted the advertising signs promoting Birmingham City University rather than Wolverhampton University. The Review Group accepts that Wolverhampton University is free to choose how it uses its advertising budget. The review group hopes that if the opportunity arises in the future to bid for the advertising space that the University will reconsider its decision.
- The Review Group supports the work of the Interchange Development Steering Group and efforts to prepare a bid to fund a new railway station and car park refurbishment.
- The Review Group accepts that any major refurbishment work will be dependent on the outcome of rail franchise bidding process and also the strict limitations on Virgin Trains to change the livery of the station due to restrictions in its agreement with Network Rail, who own the station.
- The Review Group welcomes the major signal work planned for August 2014 and progress in Wolverhampton Station becoming an interchange.
- The Review Group are concerned about the lack of progress in resolving the future of Corn Hill Building by the owners, following the fire five years ago and the problems caused by the road closure. The road closure continues to create access problems to the station at peak times and regular travel disruption in surrounding roads.

The issue creates a poor impression of station and does not allow Virgin Trains to offer the quality passenger experience.

- DC Leisure has expressed concerns about the traffic difficulties caused by the traffic flow arrangements experienced by visitors to the centre which needs to be improved.

Conclusions

- There is clear commitment from staff working at the station to provide a good customer experience despite the difficulties in making improvements.

The progress on Wolverhampton Interchange and upgrading of facilities which will provide a more efficient and reliable service is very much welcomed. Virgin Train staff clearly have pride in the work that they do and also want to deliver a better customer service experience to increasing the numbers of passengers using the station. The Review Group welcomes the efforts of Virgin Trains to provide additional services to support Wolverhampton's night time economy.

- The Review Group welcomes the planned extension of the Midland Metro line which will bring benefits such as the seamless transfer of passengers between the train service and local transportation.
- Good transport rail and road links all contribute to efforts to attract more visitors to the City and in particular business investors and developers. An improvement in the appearance of the welcome signs at the main road gateways should be part of any future marketing or promotional strategy.
- While acknowledging the excellent commitment and dedication of the staff at Wolverhampton Train station to deliver an improved customer service, it is clear significant improvements to the station will need major financial investment into the facilities. At present this is unlikely. However, the appearance of the station contributes to the first impression that visitors have of the City and does help present an attractive destination for shoppers and visitors.
- The Review Group would welcome an urgent report which details a proposed timetable removing the scaffolding off the highway and the re-opening of the Horseley Fields route and discussions with the owners.

2.9. Wolverhampton's Leisure Offer

The Review Group acknowledge the excellent work of DC Leisure in managing Wolverhampton Swimming & Fitness Centre on behalf of the Council. The evidence below presented by DC Leisure shows major increases in activity levels and attendance at the centre and is very much welcomed:

Attendances

50,000 full year in old Facilities
650,000 in new facility

Fitness Membership

0 at Old Facilities
3,000 at New Swimming & Fitness Centre (1,500 pre-opening sales)

Turnover

£75,000 at old facilities
£2 million at new facility

Swimming

Weekly Swim lessons at old facility totalled 70 users.
Weekly Swim Lessons at new facility 2,500

The Review Group welcome the very positive comments from DC Leisure about its experiences of working with the Council involved in the planning process. DC Leisure commented positively on the speed in concluding the PFI agreement and the approach taken to deliver a successful project.

The Review Group welcome the comment from DC Leisure that the City's investment in the building the Bert Williams Leisure Centre has ensured that the authority is well placed when compared with other local authorities when it comes to satisfying the 'leisure offer'.

DC Leisure did comment on feedback from centre users that getting to the building is difficult due to the ring road.

Review Group Members

- Cllr Bateman (Chair)
- Cllr Bedi
- Cllr Inston
- Cllr Gwinnett
- Cllr John Rowley
- Cllr O'Neill
- Cllr Wynne
- Cllr Simkins
- Cllr Sweetman

Witnesses

- David Whitehouse – Station Manager- Wolverhampton Train Station / Mandy Robinson, Commercial Finance Partner (Virgin Trains)
- Ashley Mason (Area Manager) ,D C Leisure Management Limited
- Steve Dyson, Dyson Media Ltd
- Keith Harrison, Editor, Wolverhampton Express and Star
- Ian Bustin, Consultant, Wolverhampton City Council
- Mark Blackstock, Head of Entertainment and Events, Wolves Civic
- Barbara Holt, City Marketing Manager, Wolverhampton City Council
- Kim Gilmour, Operations Director, WV One
- Cllr Peter Bilson, Cabinet Member for Economic Regeneration and Prosperity
- Deb Shelley and Jo Rooney, Wolverhampton City Treasurers (Wolverhampton University)
- Simeon Chandra, President of the University of Wolverhampton Students' Union /Jane Dunn, International Student Support Officer - Wolverhampton University

Scrutiny Link Officer - Sue Handy, Head of Service Delivery