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**Decision Session – Executive Member for Culture, Leisure and Tourism**    24 June 2016

Report of the Assistant Director (Communities, Culture & Public Realm)

**Review of Arboricultural Management of Council Trees**

**Summary**

1. This report sets out a proposed policy for the management of the Council’s own “public” tree stock. Much of the information contained within the policy has previously been published on the Council’s website but it has never been brought together into one report before for Member consideration and approval.

**Recommendations**

2. The Executive Member is asked to agree the attached policy for the management of the Council’s public trees.

Reasons:

- To ensure that the Council’s duty of care toward tree management and protection remains consistent and transparent and that resources are used to the best effect
- To give a better understanding of tree management practices in York
- To protect valuable trees from unnecessary damage, inappropriate work or removal

**Background**

3. The Council has responsibility for an estimated 30,000 public trees within the city. We manage trees adjacent to the highway, in housing estates and open spaces, including parks, gardens, amenity spaces, sports grounds, nature reserves, closed churchyards and woodlands. We also assist schools in the management of their trees.
4. Responsibility for the management of the Council’s trees sits with the Arboricultural Manager who is based in the Public Realm Service.

5. A healthy and sustainable tree population plays a major role in creating an attractive and vibrant landscape where people want to live. In addition, trees provide a range of social, economic and environmental benefits including:
  - a) Combating climate change by absorbing carbon dioxide from the atmosphere
  - b) Mitigating the effects of climate change by reducing floodwater run off through interception and absorption and providing shade
  - c) Offsetting air pollution by removing particulate matter
  - d) Providing a habitat for wildlife
  - e) Contributing to a quality of environment that promotes physical, social and psychological wellbeing
6. In financial terms Council owned trees have an estimated replacement value £200 million based on the Capital Asset Values for Amenity Trees (CAVAT) methodology. York's highway or street trees are valued at approximately £89 million alone.
7. The public can currently look up basic information on the Council website on those Council trees which have been mapped; this includes location, species and "owning" service department. In addition, there is information on private trees with Tree Preservation Orders. Following the adoption of the policy these pages will be refreshed to give a clearer path to the information available.
8. Trees are not always valued by all residents. For example, there is a perception amongst a minority of residents that trees can be dangerous just because they are large. Requests for work and complaints are received daily; the adoption and publication of the proposed policy will help to explain and defend the authority's position.
9. Day to day care of trees is only one aspect of the authority's work. Officers in the Design and Conservation service advise on trees in relation to the planning process, including privately owned trees through some 515 Tree Preservation Orders and 30 conservation areas. Officers also support the work of:
  - a) *Treemendous* and other communities groups to develop new planting schemes.
  - b) York Tree Warden volunteers who act as the eyes and ears for the community and carry out limited tree maintenance, tree planting and educational activities at summer events and fairs.

10. The management of trees also needs to be seen within a national, regional and local context. At a national level central government, through Trees in Towns II (2008), requested that local authorities adopt tree policies and strategies that link with their council plan. At the regional level, York signed up to the Yorkshire and Humberside regional forestry strategy in 2006 which highlighted the region's low tree density and stressed the health benefits of promoting a tree-rich local environment.
11. As part of the Local Plan preparations the value of trees to the local environment will be addressed in a variety of policies and strategies which underpin the Local Plan. Public Realm officers will be supporting the Local Plan team in this work which is expected to be available in the autumn.

### **Proposed Policy**

12. Under health and safety legislation the Council has a duty to keep its trees as safe as reasonably possible. This is established by:
  - a) Having a recognised risk assessment process
  - b) Having a suitable recording system
  - c) Taking appropriate management action to address safety issues
13. The proposed policy is provided as Annex 1. Key sections to highlight are:
  - Policy Statement 3: Risk Management - this policy provides details on the frequency and methodology used to meet the statutory obligations
  - Policy Statement 4: Recording - this policy provides details with regard to what information is recorded and on what system
  - Policy Statement 5: Tree removal and pruning - this policy sets out the arboricultural reasons for undertaking work to a tree
  - Policy Statement 6: Pruning - this policy sets out the circumstances in which no work to a tree will be carried out
  - Policy Statements 10 to 12: Work near public trees - these policies reaffirm the national and local standards for work by staff and contractors in close proximity to public trees
  - Policy Statement 14: Tree Replacement – this policy sets out the Council's approach to replacing trees which have had to be removed.

- Policy Statement 15: Community involvement – this policy confirms the Council’s commitment to working with both voluntary groups and individual volunteers in caring for the city’s tree stock.

### **Options and Analysis**

14. For the reason set out in preceding paragraphs careful management is required if the Council’s tree stock is to be maintained in a safe and sustained manner for future generations. The principal option open to the Executive Member is to comment on and amend the policy statements within the Annex. If the Council does not agree a policy it will weaken the Council’s position in dealing with unjustified requests for work and its health and safety obligations including defending potential insurance claims.
15. Subject to agreement the policy will be made available on the Council’s website.

### **Council Plan**

16. The Arboricultural management policy contributes to the following Council Plan priorities:
  - Delivering frontline services for residents is the priority
  - Residents are encouraged and supported to live healthily
  - Focus on the delivery of frontline services for residents and the protection of community facilities.
  - Focus on cost and efficiency to make the right decisions in a challenging financial environment.

### **Implications**

17. **Financial:** The management of the tree stock is funded through existing service budgets.
18. There are no Equalities, Crime and Disorder, Human Resources, Legal, Information Technology, Property or Other implications arising from this report.

### **Risk Management**

19. In compliance with the Council’s risk management strategy the main risks that have been identified associated with the areas of work covered by the policy proposed in this report are those which relate to governance, i.e. stewardship of the Council’s tree assets, and legal and regulatory, i.e. relating to health and safety. Measured in

terms of impact and likelihood, the risk score has been assessed at 10 which equates to “Low”. This is acceptable but means that regular monitoring is required of the operation of the new arrangements.

### Contact Details

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| <b>Author:</b>   | <b>Chief Officer responsible:</b>   |   |                     |
| Dave Meigh<br>Operations Manager – Public Realm                        | Charlie Croft<br>Assistant Director (Communities, Culture and the Public Realm) |   |                     |
| Harvey Lowson<br>Arboricultural Manager                                | <b>Report Approved</b>  | ✓ | <b>Date</b> 6.6.16. |
| <b>Specialist Implications Officers:</b>                               |   |   |                     |
| <b>Wards Affected:</b>   |   |   | <b>All</b> ✓        |
| <b>For further information please contact the author of the report</b> |   |   |                     |

### Annexes

Annex 1: Arboricultural Policy for the management of City of York Council trees.

### Abbreviations in the report or annex

CAVAT - Capital Asset Values for Amenity Trees

CYC – City of York Council

NJUG – National Joint Utilities Group

QTRA - Quantified Tree Risk Assessment