

# COMMITTEE REPORT

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|-------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------|
| <b>Subject:</b>               | Tree Management Policy Review - Update and Comparison |
| <b>Committee:</b>             | <i>The Environment Committee</i>                      |
| <b>Item Number:</b>           | 10                                                    |
| <b>Date:</b>                  | 28 September 2026                                     |
| <b>Author:</b>                | <i>Jay Gawthorpe, Head of Environment</i>             |
| <b>Report status:</b>         | <i>Noting</i>                                         |
| <b>Confidential / Exempt:</b> | No                                                    |

## 1. Report Summary

This report provides an update on the review of the Tree Management Policy and, in particular, compares the existing Tree Policy with the current Version 7 draft. It identifies what is being retained, what is being expressed differently, and which detailed operational requirements are proposed to move from the policy into supporting procedures.

- 1.1 The purpose of this report is to update the Committee on the Tree Management Policy review and to set out the principal changes between the existing policy and the current draft.
- 1.2 The existing Tree Policy combines strategic principles with detailed operational requirements covering risk zones and inspection frequencies, public requests, property claims, contractor standards, planting and young-tree maintenance, riverside trees and ash dieback. The current draft is intended to operate as a shorter strategic policy, with detailed processes maintained separately through supporting procedures.
- 1.3 The comparison shows that the core approach to duty of care, risk-based management, tree retention, biodiversity and competent arboricultural practice remains. It also shows that some existing requirements are no longer stated at the same level of detail in the policy and would need to be secured through the supporting procedures if they are intended to continue unchanged.
- 1.4 The report is brought forward at this stage so that Members can see the direction of the review and the substantive differences from the existing policy before the draft reaches a later formal approval stage.
- 1.5 The Committee is asked to note the comparison and the progress of the review. No approval of the draft policy is sought through this report and the document remains under refinement.

## 2. Recommendations

It is recommended that the Committee:

- 2.1 Notes the update on the Tree Management Policy review, including the comparison between the existing Tree Policy and the current Version 7 draft set out in section 4, and notes that the draft remains under refinement before any later formal approval process.

## 3. Background

- 3.1 The existing Tree Policy is a combined policy and operational document. In addition to high-level duties and principles, it contains detailed arrangements for tree risk management, risk zones, inspection types and frequencies, requested tree works, nuisance issues, property claims, contractor requirements, planting and young-tree maintenance, riverside trees and ash dieback.
- 3.2 The current review has been undertaken in line with the Council's intention to separate strategic policy from operational procedures. The author estimates that approximately 40% of the existing document is strategic policy and 60% is operational procedure and action. The revised approach therefore seeks to retain the strategic principles in the policy while relocating detailed processes to supporting procedures.
- 3.3 The key issue for the review is therefore not only that the revised policy is shorter, but whether the commitments and controls in the existing policy are either retained in the strategic document or clearly carried forward into the supporting procedures. The principal changes identified by comparing the two documents are set out in section 4.

## 4. Proposal

- 4.1 The principal changes between the existing Tree Policy and the current Version 7 draft are summarised below.

| Area                                 | Existing Tree Policy                                                                                                                                        | Current Version 7 draft / change                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                        |
|--------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <b>Overall structure</b>             | One document combines strategic principles with detailed operational instructions, matrices, criteria and site-specific guidance.                           | Draft becomes a strategic policy. Inspection frequencies, response times, assessment criteria, contractor processes, emergency arrangements and site-specific guidance are moved to supporting procedures.                                                                              |
| <b>Governance and responsibility</b> | Sets out the Council's duty of care and responsibilities for its tree stock, but policy ownership and the procedure-governance framework are less explicit. | Identifies the Head of Environment as policy owner, assigns day-to-day responsibilities to operational managers, requires competent officers/specialists and allows supporting procedures to be maintained separately provided they remain consistent with the policy and legal duties. |

| <b>Area</b>                                                   | <b>Existing Tree Policy</b>                                                                                                                                                                                                                         | <b>Current Version 7 draft / change</b>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                            |
|---------------------------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <b>Risk management and inspections</b>                        | Contains detailed High, Medium and Low risk zones, three inspection types, inspection frequencies and an inspection matrix within the policy itself.                                                                                                | Retains a documented risk-based system and informal, formal and detailed inspections, but moves frequencies, response arrangements and detailed methodology to the Tree Inspection, Risk and Emergency Response Procedure.                                                                                                                         |
| <b>Public requests, nuisance and claims</b>                   | Contains detailed criteria for light, television/satellite reception, encroachment, hedges, highway clearance and property-damage claims, including evidence requirements and process guidance.                                                     | Retains strategic criteria for when works may be justified, identifies normal seasonal/perceived nuisance that will not usually justify works, and retains principles for boundary encroachment and property claims. Detailed assessment criteria move to procedure.                                                                               |
| <b>Planning, wildlife and environmental controls</b>          | TPO/conservation-area requirements and wildlife protections are contained within different operational sections, including detailed seasonal and contractor instructions.                                                                           | Creates a dedicated strategic section covering planning controls, TPOs, conservation areas, protected species, nesting birds, bats, designated sites, priority habitats and wider biodiversity.                                                                                                                                                    |
| <b>Planting, replacement and young trees</b>                  | States that at least one tree should be planted for every tree felled, promotes species diversity and "right tree, right place", and specifies watering for two years and annual inspection of young trees for the first three years.               | Retains "right tree, right place" and replacement planting but changes the wording to a presumption in favour of appropriate replacement planting subject to site suitability, space, services, landscape, biodiversity, maintenance, sustainability and resources. Detailed establishment, watering and young-tree maintenance move to procedure. |
| <b>Contractors and technical standards</b>                    | Includes detailed requirements for Arboricultural Association accreditation, LANTRA/NPTC qualifications, £10m liability insurance, risk assessments/method statements, monitoring and specific highway/power-line requirements, as well as BS 3998. | Retains competence, insurance, risk management, safe systems of work and BS 3998 at policy level. Detailed procurement, technical specifications, site safety, utilities/highways, protected-species precautions and quality assurance move to the contractor-management procedure.                                                                |
| <b>Riverside trees, ash dieback and site-specific matters</b> | Contains standalone detailed sections on riverside tree management and ash dieback, together with operational guidance elsewhere in the policy.                                                                                                     | Moves riverside trees and ash dieback into site-specific/thematic procedures and adds other matters such as CCTV obstruction, historic viewpoints, Market and Guildhall Square trees, allotment trees, low branches, anti-social behaviour and hedge enquiries.                                                                                    |

| <b>Area</b>                | <b>Existing Tree Policy</b>                                                                                                                    | <b>Current Version 7 draft / change</b>                                                                                                                                                               |
|----------------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <b>Review and updating</b> | Operational and strategic requirements sit together, so changes to detailed working arrangements can require amendment of the policy document. | Keeps formal review of the strategic policy but allows supporting procedures to be reviewed more frequently in response to legislation, guidance, risk, operational requirements, pests and diseases. |

- 4.2 Overall, most of the change is structural: detailed operational material is being moved out of the policy so that the policy focuses on strategic principles and governance. The draft also makes policy ownership, biodiversity, climate resilience, accessibility and record keeping more explicit.
- 4.3 The comparison also identifies some wording that is materially different rather than simply relocated. In particular, the existing policy states that at least one tree should be planted for every tree felled and specifies young-tree watering and inspection requirements; it also contains specific contractor accreditation, qualification and insurance requirements. The current draft expresses these matters at a higher level and refers the detailed requirements to supporting procedures. These points should be checked during refinement so that any commitments intended to remain are captured clearly in either the final policy or the relevant procedure.
- 4.4 No approval is sought at this stage. The purpose of this report is to give the Committee visibility of the changes while the policy and supporting procedures continue to be developed.

## **5. Options Considered**

- 5.1 Continue refinement of the strategic policy and supporting procedure framework
- 5.1.1 Continue refining the draft using the comparison in section 4 to confirm which existing requirements should remain in the strategic policy and which should be transferred into supporting procedures. This is the current approach and no approval is sought through this update.
- 5.2 Further refinement before formal consideration
- 5.2.1 The draft remains capable of amendment as the supporting procedures are developed. Particular attention should be given to ensuring that operational requirements removed from the policy are not inadvertently lost where the Council intends them to continue.
- 5.3 Retain the existing combined policy format
- 5.3.1 The existing format could be retained, but this would continue to combine strategic policy with detailed operational instructions that may need more frequent amendment as guidance, legislation and operational practice change.
- 5.4 No preferred policy wording is being put to the Committee for approval at this stage. The comparison is intended to inform the continuing review before the final policy is brought through the appropriate governance process.

## **6. Financial Position**

- 6.1 No capital or revenue decision is sought through this update.

- 6.2 Routine inspection, maintenance, planting, specialist advice and contractor expenditure will continue to be managed through the Council's approved budgets and normal financial controls.
- 6.3 Any future operational proposal arising from the final policy or supporting procedures that creates additional expenditure or a new financial liability will remain subject to the appropriate budget, procurement and approval requirements.
- 6.4 The revised structure supports efficient administration by allowing operational procedures to be updated without requiring a full policy review where the strategic policy itself is unchanged.
- 6.5 No additional budget approval is requested through this report. Any subsequent proposal with a material financial consequence will be considered through the Council's normal financial governance arrangements.

## **7. Legal and Governance Considerations**

- 7.1 This report is an update on a policy review and does not seek a substantive legal or governance decision. The draft policy continues to set out the Council's responsibilities for the management of trees on land it owns, occupies or manages.
- 7.2 The draft policy is intended to support compliance with relevant legal duties and controls, including health and safety, occupiers' liability, planning controls, wildlife protection and environmental legislation. Individual tree works will continue to require compliance with any specific statutory consent, notice or exemption that applies.
- 7.3 The final policy will need to follow the Council's appropriate governance process before it is adopted. This report does not seek that approval.
- 7.4 A key governance consideration in developing the framework is ensuring that supporting procedures remain consistent with the strategic policy, relevant legislation and the Council's legal obligations. The draft assigns responsibility for policy maintenance, review and implementation to the Head of Environment.

## **8. Consultation and Engagement**

- 8.1 The draft policy has been refined through officer review as part of the Council's work to separate strategic policy from operational procedures.
- 8.2 The review has focused on retaining the Council's strategic commitments while moving detailed processes, response arrangements, specifications and site-specific rules into supporting operational documents.
- 8.3 The material provided for this update records officer review of the draft. No separate public consultation is described in the author notes.
- 8.4 The proposed approach is intended to allow supporting procedures to be reviewed and updated more frequently where required, while remaining consistent with the strategic policy, relevant legislation and recognised arboricultural practice.

## **9. Strategic and Policy Alignment**

- 9.1 The revised policy supports the Council's stewardship of its land and assets and its environmental objectives by protecting and enhancing tree stock and recognising the

contribution of trees to biodiversity, carbon storage, air quality, shade, cooling, flood resilience, landscape character, heritage, public amenity and health and wellbeing.

- 9.2 The draft policy also provides that the Tree and Ecosystem Service Strategy and other approved strategies, plans and evidence will inform planting, replacement, canopy cover, species diversity and climate resilience objectives.

## 10. Implementation and Next Steps

- 10.1 Following this update, the next steps in the review are expected to be as follows:

10.1.1 Continue refinement of the draft Tree Management Policy.

10.1.2 Continue developing the supporting operational procedures referred to within the draft Policy.

10.1.3 Bring the final policy through the appropriate Council governance process once the review is complete.

- 10.2 The anticipated timetable is:

| Milestone                                                            | Date      |
|----------------------------------------------------------------------|-----------|
| Complete comparison and refine draft Policy                          | 30 Oct 26 |
| Complete / cross-check supporting procedures against existing policy | 31 Dec 26 |
| Final policy through appropriate governance process                  | 11 Jan 27 |

- 10.3 Responsibility for progressing the review sits with the Head of Environment, supported by relevant operational managers and officers as appropriate.

## 11. Additional Relevant Information

- 11.1 The author's stated intention is that reducing the policy's length should not weaken the Council's standards, safeguards or environmental protections. The comparison in section 4 shows that many existing controls are being moved into procedures rather than removed; however, some commitments are expressed differently and should be checked as part of the continuing review.

- 11.2 Before the final policy is brought forward for approval, the supporting procedures should be cross-checked against the existing policy so that Members can be satisfied that detailed requirements intended to continue - including inspection arrangements, public-request criteria, contractor controls, planting and establishment requirements, site-specific guidance and tree-disease management - are appropriately retained.

## 12. Implications

| Implication Area | Impact | Comments / Mitigation                                                                                                                                                                                                         |
|------------------|--------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Financial        | None   | No financial decision is sought through this update. Any future expenditure arising from the final policy or supporting procedures will remain subject to normal budget and approval processes.                               |
| Legal            | Low    | No substantive legal decision is sought. The comparison assists the review by identifying where statutory, safety and governance requirements currently contained in the policy are proposed to sit in the revised framework. |

| <b>Implication Area</b>            | <b>Impact</b>  | <b>Comments / Mitigation</b>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                  |
|------------------------------------|----------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <b>Risk</b>                        | Medium         | There is a risk that detailed requirements could be lost or weakened unintentionally when operational material is removed from the policy. This is mitigated by cross-checking the final policy and supporting procedures against the existing policy before formal approval. |
| <b>Personnel</b>                   | Low            | Officer time is required to complete the comparison, refine the policy and develop the supporting procedures. No staffing establishment change is proposed through this update.                                                                                               |
| <b>Environmental Impact</b>        | Positive / Low | The draft makes biodiversity, canopy cover, climate resilience, flood resilience and ecosystem services more explicit. Existing planting and site-specific protections should be checked to ensure that intended environmental commitments remain captured.                   |
| <b>Equalities Impact Statement</b> | Low            | No specific equality impact arises from noting the update. The draft expressly refers to accessibility and safe public access; detailed procedures should continue to reflect equality considerations where relevant.                                                         |
| <b>Community / Public Impact</b>   | Low            | The comparison provides greater transparency for residents and Members about what is changing and which detailed matters will sit in operational procedures rather than the strategic policy.                                                                                 |
| <b>Procurement / Contractual</b>   | Low            | The existing policy contains detailed contractor accreditation, qualification, insurance and monitoring requirements. The draft retains competence and insurance at policy level but proposes to place detailed controls in the contractor-management procedure.              |
| <b>Property / Asset</b>            | Low            | The review concerns the management framework for the Council's tree assets. No direct disposal, acquisition or other asset decision is sought through this report.                                                                                                            |
| <b>Data Protection</b>             | None           | No new processing of personal data is proposed through this update.                                                                                                                                                                                                           |