

11 September 2018

Walsall Council Building Control & Local Authority Building Control

Ward(s) All

Portfolios: Cllr Adrian Andrew – Deputy Leader & Regeneration

Executive Summary:

- 1.1 This report provides guidance with respect to what Building Regulations are, the services that Walsall's Building Control undertake with funding from the Council, as well as the relationship between Building Control and Local Authority Building Control (LABC).
- 1.2 The proposed outcome is for Scrutiny to understand the competitive field that Building Control work within, the proposed benefits of securing further work and what benefits this could bring to the Council.

Reason for scrutiny:

- 2.1 For Scrutiny to better understand what Building Control is and what it does, and its relationship with the Local Authority Building Control (LABC) organisation.
- 2.2 The role of Walsall Building Control and LABC within the Council

Outcome sought from Scrutiny:

That Council services and partners are encouraged to promote and use the council's in-house Building Control service wherever possible.

Overview:

- 3.1 Buildings Regulations are defined by the English and Welsh Governments and current standards come under the Building Act (1984) and Building Regulations (2000). Building Control looks at how a property is built whereas Planning is concerned with land use and appearance.

Buildings Regulations ensure that new buildings, conversions, renovations and extensions, (domestic or commercial) are going to be safe, healthy and high performing. Detailed regulations cover specific topics including:

- Structural Integrity
- Accessibility
- Energy performance
- Drains

- Ventilation
- Acoustic performance
- Prevention against falls and ingress of moisture
- Electrical and Gas Safety
- Fire safety

3.2 The Local Authority Building Control organisation is a non-profit membership organisation that represents all Local Authority Building Control teams in England and Wales. This paper explains in more detail about LABC's role.

Current Position:

4.1 Building Control consists of a team of ten staff. The work is split into two parts. Firstly is the work undertaken for the council's own essential building-related services, and for which Building receives an annual revenue budget from Council. This includes:

- Enforcement
- Dangerous structures
- Demolitions
- Disabled applications
- Unauthorised building works
- Public safety at Walsall Football Club
- Advice to the public
- Dealing with complaints / ombudsman

The council's Building Control service is also responsible for a 24/7/365 emergency call-out service that, in the event of an unforeseen event, accident or disaster, attend the site to support the emergency services and offer advice and guidance as to the structure integrity of a building; in particular for example before personnel will enter buildings damaged by fire.

4.2 The Building Control service also bring in income (fees) from private work. This is generally for new build construction, housing sites, industrial and commercial developments.

4.3 Building Regulations have three main purposes:-

1. To ensure the health and safety of people in and around buildings,
2. The conservation of energy, and
3. Access and facilities for disabled people

4.4 In addition to the council's own Building Control service there is also the private sector Approved Inspectors (AIs). These individuals, or sometimes small companies made up of several AIs, provide fierce competition for private work, and may come from anywhere in the country. This obviously can mean a loss of business and income to the council's own service.

4.5 Developers, particularly national-wide companies, may choose to use their own AIs rather than Walsall's service and it is worth noting that in several instances developments have gone "out of borough" for their Building Control service.

4.6 Whilst the council's Building Control service have been used for the Active Living Centres at Oak Park and Bloxwich in 2015/16 and the Lichfield Street Central Library / Archive project in 2018, there have been several projects in Walsall that have not used Building Control and seen the work to go the external AIs. Several of these projects include:-

- Former Council Depot at Norfolk Place (234 new residential properties)
- Current Travelodge and McDonalds development by Tesco
- St Matthews development
- Former Mary Elliott school development (62 dwellings)

If these projects had come to Building Control they would have been worth approximately £50,000 of additional income.

4.7 Local Authority Building Control (LABC) is a network has over 3,000 professional surveyors. They offer impartial advice and services on a not-for-profit basis to home and property owners, architects, developers, building contractors and other professionals. The aim is to ensure buildings are safe, healthy and efficient to meet the standards set by the Building regulations. Walsall's Building Control are members of the LABC.

4.8 LABC also offer Continuing Professional Development (CPD), training events and free guidance to professionals and homeowners. It also publishes various documents such as the LABC Homeowner Guides and also a consultancy service covering such items as acoustic tests, fire risk assessments, air pressure and energy and sustainability.

4.9 Building Control is currently the focus of considerable high level media interest at a national level as a result of the Grenfell fire in London. The final outcome of the review and inquest is awaited.

Resource and legal considerations:

- 5.1 Legally, developers, contractors and property owners have a choice to use either a Local Authority Building Control service or private Approved Inspectors. As in any competitive field, the objective for Building Control is to promote the service to generate additional funding to invest in training and staffing resources.
- 5.2 The council's Building Control consists of ten members of staff including an Apprentice Surveyor who starts her degree course at the University of Wolverhampton in September 2018.
- 5.3 The costs to operate the service are as below:-
- £706.5k Service gross cost
 - £ 68.5k less CSS
 - £638k
 - less Central costs
 - £135k Admin and Management charge
 - £145k £ 10k Engineering Assistant's time
 - £493k Expenditure budget
 - £398k Income
 - £ 95k Net service cost

Council Corporate Plan Priorities:

- 6.1 This issue links in with the Council's economic growth priority as we want to grow our business, the communities priority where we are able to ensure that buildings are safe and healthy places for our residents. Also if we are able to win more work, we can, in accordance with the internal focus priority, look to invest and grow our service and ensure the service remains efficient and effective.

Citizen impact:

- 7.1 The public and relevant service users will receive an excellent Building Control service from our surveyors, with local knowledge of ground conditions, contaminated land and a 24hr inspection service.

Environmental impact:

- 8.1 Securing and retaining a greater market share by continued investment in our mobile working, will enable us to deliver our service in the most cost effective and environmentally efficient way with the ultimate goal of working paperless.

Performance management:

- 9.1 Additional funds would be invested in staffing and training enhancing the performance and delivery of the Building Control service.

Reducing inequalities:

- 10.1 In accordance with the corporate vision Building Control must ensure our budget is targeted towards securing the health and safety of all members of our community without prejudice, by ensuring efficient responses to reports of dangerous structures and effective action with respect to contravening Building Regulations.

Consultation:

N/A

Contact Officer:

Wesley Palmer
Building Control Team Manager
 01922 652626
wesley.palmer@walsall.gov.uk