

## **CORPORATE AND PUBLIC SERVICES OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE**

**22<sup>nd</sup> June 2017 at 6.00pm at the Council House, Walsall**

**Panel Members Present**      Councillor A. Andrew (Chair)  
Councillor S. Craddock  
Councillor K. Phillips  
Councillor L. Rattigan  
Councillor R. Martin  
Councillor G. Sohal  
Councillor S. Wade  
Councillor M. Ward

**Portfolio Holder**              Councillor S. Coughlan – Leader  
Councillor L. Jeavons – Deputy Leader  
Councillor K. Chambers - Personnel and Business  
Support/Agenda for Change  
Councillor C. Jones – Clean and Green  
Councillor A. Nawaz - Children's Services and  
Education  
Councillor I. Robertson – Health

**Other Members**              Councillor J. Fitzpatrick  
Councillor R. Worrall

### **Officers Present**

	<b>Walsall Council</b>
Simon Neilson –	Executive Director (Economy and Environment)
Julie Alderson -	Interim Executive Director (Change & Governance)
Elise Hopkins-	System Leader, Money Home Job
Chris Knowles -	Finance Business Partner
Nikki Gough –	Democratic Services Officer
	<b>WHG</b>
Gary Fulford –	Chief Executive
Rob Gilliam –	Corporate Director of Operations
Paul Dockerill –	Director of Energy and Programme Management (Chair of whg Fire Safety Committee)
Nigel Harris –	Director of Home Maintenance
Eddie Hughes -	Chair
	<b>WATMOS</b>
Kul Bains	Chief Executive
Jason Russell –	Group Asset Manager
	<b>Other Organisations</b>
Alan Yates –	Accord
David Baker –	Commander (West Midlands Fire Service)

#### **189/17 Apologies**

Apologies for absence were received on behalf of Councillors M. Bird, C. Creaney, and D. Coughlan.

#### **190/17 Substitutions**

Councillor R. Martin substituted for Councillor M. Bird for the duration of the meeting.

#### **191/17 Declarations of Interest and Party Whip**

There were no declarations of interest or party whip.

#### **192/17 Local Government (Access to Information) Act 1985 (as amended)**

There were no items to consider in private session.

#### **193/17 High Rise Blocks**

The System Leader for the Council reminded Members that Walsall Council no longer had direct responsibility for management of fire safety in social housing buildings as Walsall Council's housing stock was transferred in 2003. The Council does have a responsibility for undertaking fire risk assessments in the temporary accommodation retained to house homeless households in Walsall. The Council had responsibility for one high-rise building which was over 6 storeys which does not have external cladding. It was stressed that the cause of the fire at Grenfell Tower public housing flats was not known although there was wide speculation that the exterior cladding aided the fire to spread. However the facts were not yet known but the fire service were committed to keeping partners informed.

The Committee were informed that the Chief Executive of Walsall Council had written to all registered social landlords in the borough asking them to communicate with their tenants about action taken to ensure their safety. In addition to this private owners of high rise residential buildings have also been contacted to ask that they review their fire risk assessments.

The Chief Executive of whg was invited to speak. He addressed the Committee and informed Members that whg was responsible for 17 high rise blocks which had thermal wrapping (Rockwool) but not Aluminium Composite Material (ACM) Cladding. All of these buildings had up to date fire risk assessments, which are undertaken annually for this category of property. The Director of Programme Management - whg also informed the committee that residents had been provided with reassurance that the buildings were safe, which had been endorsed by West Midlands Fire Service (Mia Temple) via resident meetings at the blocks. The Director of Home Maintenance

Services (HMS) informed Members that the information request had been returned to the Department for Communities and Local Government (DCLG) as requested. All risk assessments had been reviewed and were in date. In addition all high rise fire alarms had been checked and were actively monitored. The Chair of whg stated that there was a tannoy system in the flats which allowed communication with residents.

The Executive Director of Regeneration for Accord stated that they had responsibility for blocks of flats which were composed of steel with cladding and thermal insulation. Fire risk assessments were up to date and Accord had been in touch with residents to reassure them that the build and materials used were satisfactory. It was also noted that smaller buildings had also been inspected.

The Chief Executive of WATMOS stated that it was responsible for 21 tower blocks with no cladding. Risk assessments had been carried out in 2015 and the organisation had ensured that individuals involved in the Tenant Management Organisation (TMO) understood their responsibilities. The Group Asset Manager explained that in 2011-12 works had been carried out on properties and those high risk properties were all fitted with safety features. Letters had been delivered to residents on the day of the incidents to provide reassurance.

The Commander (West Midlands Fire Service) stated that the fire service had held a strategic housing meeting with all Local Authorities to set a strategy to communicate and provide reassurance. The fire service would be working with all housing providers in Walsall to provide support and if tenants were concerned they were able to request 'safe and well' visits from the fire service.

A discussion was held around the 'stay put' policy; at this point the fire commander said that West Midlands Fire service (WMFS) does not have a stay put policy for high rise. Housing providers explained that buildings were designed to contain fire. However if residents were in direct danger then they should evacuate. It was stressed that the Grenfell fire had very unusual circumstances. Housing providers have generally communicated guidance given by WMFS. Members also considered alternative means of escape and fire safety equipment available to reach high rise flats.

The Fire Service Commander explained that vehicles could reach up to the 6/7<sup>th</sup> floor and higher than this the fire was tackled internally. Vehicles which could reach above this height were not available as British roads would not withstand the weight.

Housing providers at the meeting concluded that there were not currently sprinklers in the tower blocks although it was a requirement for new builds. It was also concluded that this would be a consideration for all social housing providers in the near future once further guidance has been issued.

Following a Member query around gas supply in flats The Director of HMS – whg, confirmed that 2 out of their 17 tower blocks had gas supplies and this

would be reviewed. WATMOS confirmed that one of their blocks had a gas supply to it and this would also be reviewed.

The Chair stated that he had received a number of questions to ask at the meeting however due to the timing of the request and the complexity of the questions he had requested a written response to the questions.

**Resolved that:-**

- 1. The Council should undertake a further review of fire risk assessments in all Council owned residential blocks once the preliminary findings on the Grenfell Tower Fire have been released by the fire service.**
- 2. The Council and partners should consider opportunities for feeding back issues or recommendations into the Public Enquiry.**
- 3. The Council should continue to proactively seek to identify any properties where sleeping takes place that have been clad with ACM products in Walsall and feed this into the fire service or other relevant enforcement agencies to take relevant action.**
- 4. Where possible the Council should consider building any lessons learnt about the Grenfell Tower Fire into future planning guidance for Walsall.**

**194/17 Areas of focus – 2017-18**

The Chair stated that this item allowed for the Committee to consider and agree areas of focus for the committee during 2017-18. The two Executive Directors each gave a short presentation and tabled documents which detailed areas within their remits (annexed). Members discussed potential items for scrutiny for the coming municipal year. The Chair stated that he would consider holding special meetings to receive petitions. The Committee were informed that the Public Health Service had historically been scrutinised by the Social Care and Health Overview and Scrutiny Committee.

The Chair asked Members to forward any suggestions for the work programme to the Democratic Services Officer or to himself as Chairman. The following items were requested by Members of the Committee for inclusion within the agenda; -

- An update on Walsall market development,
- Engagement with social housing providers,
- Discussion on CCTV,
- Housing White Paper,

- New bin collection regime,
- The impact of welfare reform,
- Community Cohesion Strategy,
- It was noted that the Remembrance Day Working Group had reached its conclusion and would shortly be wrapped up.

## **Resolved**

**That the following items are added to the work programme of the Corporate and Public Services Overview and Scrutiny Committee; -**

- An update on Walsall market development,
- Engagement with social housing providers,
- Discussion on CCTV,
- Housing White Paper,
- New bin collection regime,
- The impact of welfare reform,
- Community Cohesion Strategy,

## **195/17 Corporate and Public Services Financial Performance – Pre-audit outturn position for 2016/17**

This report summarised the pre-audit revenue and capital financial position for 2016/17, for services within the remit of the Corporate and Public Services Overview and Scrutiny Committee. The position was a revenue underspend against the original budget of £2.690m. Following a corporate review of the budgets £787k was reallocated to other services leaving an underspend against revised budgets of £1.902m based on a net use of reserves of £5.064m.

The position on capital was that of the £78.573m budget, £11.449m had not been spent and has been requested to be carried forward. Elected Members confirmed that the current format of the report met the needs of the Committee.

## **Resolved:**

**That the report be noted.**

## **196/17 Date of next meeting**

## **Termination of Meeting**

There being no further business, the meeting terminated at 7.40 p.m.

Signed: .....

Date: .....