

Scrutiny Overview and Scrutiny Committee – Housing Standards Working Group

Initiation Document

Working Group Name:	Housing Standards Working Group
Committee:	Scrutiny Overview Committee
Municipal Year:	2023/24
Chair:	Councillor Hicken
Lead Officers:	Elise Hopkins (Director, Customer Engagement) Appollo Fonka (Strategic Housing and Standards Leas) Nikki Gough (Democratic Services Officer)
Membership	Councillors A. Nawaz, V. Waters, P. Bott, A. Hicken, Follows
Co-opted Members	Not specified

1. Context

- 1.1. During the first round of Overview and Scrutiny meetings, Housing Standards was identified as a potential working group topic. It was agreed that this Working Group would commence in January 2024.
- 1.2. Where people live impacts health, educational achievements, and life chances in general. Housing is a key determinant of health; poor quality housing being intrinsically linked with poor health. House condition may either cause ill health or make it worse. Addressing defect causes within homes can improve occupants' health and lower the costs to the health service through fewer GP visits, fewer emergency admissions to hospital and fewer accidents that then require expensive and intensive rehabilitation.
- 1.3. Poor housing affects children particularly severely, not just in childhood but throughout their life. Guaranteeing all children, a decent quality home that their family can afford would transform lives for decades to come.
- 1.4. People should all be able to afford to rent or buy a home that meets their needs, whatever their income. Housing costs shouldn't stop people buying life's essentials, or stand in the way of getting a job or higher pay.
- 1.5. All homes should be in places of security and comfort, where people can relax free from risks and with the right support in place. Homes should support people's health and wellbeing, not make it worse.
- 1.6. Homes must be comfortable to live in, cheap to heat, and no longer reliant on burning expensive fuels for energy.
- 1.7. Investment in housing, and the dynamics of the housing market itself, have wide-ranging impacts on growth, jobs, skills, productivity and financial stability at a local and national level. Our housing strategy must actively support our objectives for local growth and stability.

2. Objectives

2.1 To determine how Walsall Council can design and deliver a long-term plan to meet the following themes, as set out in the National Housing Federation's report – 'Why we need a long-term plan for housing'.

1. Every child should live in a good quality, secure home with enough space to play and learn.
2. Everyone lives in a home they can afford, and that makes work pay.
3. Everyone lives in healthy and safe home, which meets their needs.
4. Everyone lives in a warm and energy efficient home.
5. Housing underpins local growth and economic stability.

3. Scope

In order to review the Borough's readiness to meet the themes outlined in the plan the working group will consider the following:

- 'Why we need a long-term plan for housing' - National Housing Federation's report.
- Stock Condition Survey 2019.
- Walsall Council Housing Strategy.
- Housing availability and need.
- Understanding the responsibility of tenants and landlords.
- Feedback from local residents.

In addition to the above we will also consider the readiness of other providers such as:

- Social Housing providers.
- Private Landlords.
- Housing of Multiple Occupation providers.

4. Equalities Implications

- 4.1. The Equality Act 2010 protects children, young people and adults against discrimination, harassment and victimisation in relation to housing, education, clubs, the provision of services (including healthcare) and work.
- 4.2. The public sector equality duty in Section 149 of the Equality Act requires public bodies, including local authorities and healthcare providers, to take active steps to eliminate discrimination and to do positive things to promote equality.

5. Who else will contribute?

- 5.1 Walsall Housing Group, Green Square Accord, Head of Regeneration, Cabinet Members National Housing Federation, National/local landlord forums. Feedback from local residents.

6. Timescale and Reporting Schedule

- 6.1. The following dates are based upon the need for the working group to be completed in the same municipal year:
 - a. Terms of Reference to be approved by Overview Scrutiny Committee – 6 February 2024
 - b. Draft report to be considered by Working Group – Early April 2024
 - c. Final report to be considered by Overview and Scrutiny Committee – 18 April 2024
- 6.2. A detailed timetable of meetings and activities can be found at Appendix A.

7. Risk Factors

7.1. The following table documents potential obstacles to the progress of the working group:

Risk	Likelihood	Mitigation
Short timescale to complete work.	Medium	Realistic expectations of what can be achieved. Clearly defined objectives and timetable.
Social Landlords are not able to engage within timescale.	Medium	Invite Partners as soon as possible, allow virtual attendance.
Objectives of the Group are broad within the timescales available.	Medium	Members complete research and information gathering outside of meeting – report back at meetings.

Appendix A Timetable

Date at 5pm.	Activity
23 rd January	Initial meeting – Terms of Reference agreed.
6 th February	Terms of Reference presented to Scrutiny Overview Committee.
13 th February	Information and evidence gathering by Working Group.
26 th February	Information and evidence gathering by Working Group.
12 th March	Information and evidence gathering by Working Group.
21 st March	Information and evidence gathering by Working Group.
8 th April	Draft conclusions and recommendations agreed by Group.
18 th April	Present final report and recommendations to Scrutiny Overview Committee.