

City of Wolverhampton Council

Overview and Scrutiny in Wolverhampton

Scrutiny Scoping Exercise: Fire Safety

Scrutiny Scoping Exercise: Fire Safety in Tower Blocks

1. Reasons for conducting the scoping exercise

- 1.1 At the meeting of the Vibrant and Sustainable City Scrutiny Panel held on 29 June 2017 a recommendation was made that the Scrutiny Board consider whether a review should be undertaken on fire safety in tower blocks.
- 1.2 At the meeting of the Scrutiny Board held on 4 July 2017 the Board considered the recommendation from the Vibrant and Sustainable Scrutiny Panel and resolved that a scoping exercise be undertaken to assess how the Council had responded to the Grenfell Tower Fire.
- 1.3 Scrutiny Board was concerned that to carry out a full scrutiny review at this stage would not be the most effective option and that it would be best to wait until the formal investigation into the Grenfell Tower Fire was concluded and any new regulations or guidance issued by Central Government.
- 1.4 Scrutiny Board agreed that a scoping exercise would enable the Council to be ready to move forward immediately with any future regulations or recommendations issued by Government following the conclusion of the enquiry.
- 1.5 By setting up a group such as this the Council can ensure that tenant representatives and representatives of disability groups are included as co-opted members.
- 1.6 The scoping exercise will ensure that tenants are central to the investigations and witness sessions will be held with professionals from inside and outside of the Council.

2. Background

- 2.1. On 14 June 2017 a fire broke out at Grenfell Tower, a 24 storey residential housing block in North Kensington, London. The tower provided social housing in 127 flats and management of the block was the responsibility of the Kensington and Chelsea Tenant Management Organisation.
- 2.2 A public enquiry is being carried out into the fire.
- 2.3 The City of Wolverhampton Council (CWC) has a total of 36 high-rise tower blocks which are managed by Wolverhampton Homes (WH) on behalf of CWC. The individual blocks range from 9 to 23 storeys in height and have between 33 to 126 units per block. In total, there are around 2,164 high-rise units of which 58 are leasehold (2.7%).
- 2.4 The vast majority of these blocks were built in the 1960's, with some in the early to mid-1970's. In addition to the 36 high-rise tower blocks

Wolverhampton also has an additional 11 blocks of flats that are 6 – 8 storeys inclusive. None of these have any cladding systems.

- 2.5 All the blocks are designated as general needs blocks, which means they are occupied by a mixture of families, couples and single people.
- 2.6 In 2011, 8 high-rise tower blocks that had previously been designated as sheltered schemes, were decommissioned and were converted back to general need accommodation. Since then, the tenant profile in these specific blocks has not fundamentally changed and the needs of residents in these blocks through age and mobility etc. remains relatively high.
- 2.7 The Group is keen to ensure that the Independent Living Agenda is taken into consideration during the exercise and that areas such as sustainability, fire safety and mobility are considered in relation to all new builds and refurbishments.

3. Key question(s) that the review is seeking to answer

The overall aim of this review is to assess the response of the City of Wolverhampton Council to the Grenfell Tower Fire.

- 3.1. In view of the complexity of the issue the scoping exercise will be focused on four broad areas of work. This will ensure that the scoping exercise achieves a balance between being sufficiently robust and ensuring that different sides of the issue are properly explored, while also being sensitive to the subject.
- 3.2 The scoping exercise is expected to cover two full days and address the following areas:

A. Background – Legislation and Regulations

Housing Act 2004 Part 1 and Part 2
Management of Houses in Multiple Occupation Regulations 2006
Building Regulations 2010
The Regulatory Reform (Fire Safety) Order 2005

Statutory responsibilities and who does what:

- Role of Wolverhampton Homes
- Role of the Fire Service
- Role of the Council and Corporate Landlord
- The Responsible Person/Competent Person
- Role of the Concierge and Fire Marshals
- TMOs
- Risk Assessments and Inspections including fire safety inspections (including addressing disability issues for tenants)
- Communications – Council, Fire Service and Wolverhampton Homes (types and format of communications)
- Management of estate

- Contractor arrangements
- Emergency Planning (including disability issues)
- Training
- Compliance and enforcement – notices

Resources

- Are sufficient and the right resources available to the Council and Emergency Services
- Do people know how to use the resources such as fire extinguishers

B. The Council's initial response to the Grenfell Tower Fire

Communications:

- What information, the format of communications and to who?
- Involvement of:
 - Tenants,
 - Residents,
 - Councillors,
- Schools, academies, further education establishments
- Residential care homes
- Other partners including local businesses
- Trust
- Safe and Well visits

Chronology of events

C. What the Council is doing now.

Testing Standards

- Materials and Construction
- Procedure and testing schedule – cladding and insulation
- Testing in Council, public and private buildings
- Result of testing so far
- Testing of electrical equipment, gas appliances and smoke detectors in tenants and non-tenants flats
- Ongoing communications

D. What are the plans for the future.

Fire Safety Measures

- Sprinklers
- Alarms
- Smoke detectors
- Cladding

- Modernisation/maintenance – wires/electrics/disability access and escape routes
- Communications - the need for tenants to trust the advice given by the Council and Fire Service and for the communications to be in the right formats.
- Ensuring that those housed above the ground floor can use the property safely
- Awareness of the disabilities of all the people in the property (not just tenants)

Emergency Planning

- Existing plans and date of last review
- Who is responsible
- Communications framework
- Category 1 and 2 Responders
- The Voluntary Sector and community organisations
- Provision of emergency housing/evacuation centres
- Resources to deal with psychological impact of an emergency
- Local Resilience Forum

4. Outcomes expected from conducting this work

- 4.1. There will be an increased level of awareness and knowledge among Councillors, tenants and residents in relation to the measures and steps that have been taken and continue to be taken in Wolverhampton following the Grenfell Tower Fire.
- 4.2 There will be an understanding of how the Council communicates the above measures and steps with tenants, residents and councillors.
- 4.3 There will be an understanding as to whether these communications are sufficient for tenants to trust the advice given by the Council and Fire Service and whether tenants will adhere to this advice in an emergency.
- 4.4 There will be increased transparency and understanding of which organisations are accountable for what.
- 4.5 There will be an enhanced understanding of what steps are being taken to ensure that tenants with a disability are equally protected and able to access services in an emergency situation.
- 4.5 A view will be taken as to whether what we currently do is good enough and what standards the Council should be aiming to achieve.

5. Resources – Member Involvement

- 5.1. The membership of the Scrutiny Scoping Group has been agreed:

Chair of Scrutiny Group

Councillor Greg Brackenridge

Councillors on the Group:

Councillor Philip Bateman

Councillor Jacqueline Sweetman

Councillor Patricia Patten

Councillor Paul Singh

Councillor Louise Miles

Co-opted Group Members

Sue Roberts (MBE), Wolverhampton Homes Board Chair

Bob Deacon – Unison Representative and Wolverhampton Tenants Association Representative

Barry Appleby – Chair of the Disability Advisory Group on Leisure Activities

Karen Ryder – Co-ordinator One Voice

Scrutiny Officer

Julia Cleary

6.0 External Organisations expected to contribute

Witnesses:

- Wolverhampton Homes
- City of Wolverhampton Council Corporate Landlord
- City of Wolverhampton Council Emergency Planning
- West Midlands Fire Service
- West Midlands Fire Authority
- Tenants
- Representatives from the voluntary sector
- Local councillors and cabinet members
- TMOs
- Wolverhampton Federation of Tenants' Associations

7. Meetings and Evidence Gathering

- 7.1. It is suggested that wherever possible evidence should be heard in person from witnesses. Witnesses should be encouraged to submit evidence in advance to give opportunity to review members to prepare questions.
- 7.2. At this stage it is envisaged that there will be a need for 2 meetings of the Group

Meeting	Objective	Witnesses
---------	-----------	-----------

Meeting	Objective	Witnesses
Session 1	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Context for the review • Agreeing the scope of the review • Statutory responsibilities • Initial response to the Grenfell Tower fire and Communications timeline 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Wolverhampton Homes • Corporate Landlord • Emergency Planning • West Midlands Fire Service • West Midlands Fire Authority
Session 2	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Fire Safety – Sprinklers etc. • Emergency Planning • Public Question and Answer Session • Recommendations 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Wolverhampton Homes • Emergency Planning • West Midlands Fire Service • Voluntary Sector • TMOs

8. Report Drafting – Key Stages – to be agreed at first meeting

Activity	Target Date
-----------------	--------------------

Draft report completed

Consideration of draft report findings and recommendations by the scoping group.

Draft report presented to Directorate Leadership Team Meeting, Relevant meeting with Wolverhampton Homes, Strategic Executive Board and the relevant Cabinet Member(s) for comment on the content and recommendations.

Scoping group approve final draft report.

Report to be considered by Scrutiny Board

Report presented to Cabinet.