

CITY OF WOLVERHAMPTON COUNCIL	Cabinet 19 January 2022
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Report title	Building Surveys of Large Panel System Blocks	
Decision designation	AMBER	
Cabinet member with lead responsibility	Councillor Bhupinder Gakhal City Assets and Housing	
Key decision	Yes	
In forward plan	Yes	
Wards affected	All Wards	
Accountable Director	Ross Cook – Director of City Housing and Environment	
Originating service	Housing	
Accountable employee	Lakhi Sahota Tel Email	Housing Enabling Officer 01902 551610 Lakhi.Sahota2@wolverhampton.gov.uk
Report to be/has been considered by	City Housing Environment Leadership Team Strategic Executive Board Cabinet Member for City Assets and Housing Briefing	7 December 2021 25 November 2021 15 December 2021

Recommendations for decision:

The Cabinet is recommended to:

1. Approve the requirement to hold a total of 18 void properties within the six tower-blocks built using the Large Panel Systems (LPS) to enable the completion of specialist surveys.
2. Hold suitable void properties within the each of the six tower-blocks to allow the survey work to be carried out.
3. Approve the rehousing of the tenants from these dwellings following a consultation period and housing needs assessment.
4. Approve a level of compensation payment and disturbance payments as detailed in exempt Appendix 2 for those tenants in identified properties within the six tower blocks to voluntarily move to suitable, alternative accommodation to decant the property in order to carry out the specialist surveys.

5. Delegate authority to the Cabinet Member for City Assets and Housing in consultation with the Director of City Environment, to agree any alternative compensation payment and disturbance payment to that detailed in exempt Appendix 2 under exceptional circumstances.

Recommendation for noting:

The Cabinet is recommended to:

1. Note a further report on the outcome of the testing and the future investment or regeneration of these tower blocks will be presented to a future meeting.

1.0 Purpose

- 1.1 To inform Cabinet on the requirement to test the six council owned tower blocks constructed using the large panel system, in accordance with Department for Communities and Local Government (DCLG) letter as detailed in Appendix 1.
- 1.2 To hold suitable void properties in the six tower blocks to allow the survey work to be undertaken.
- 1.3 To approve the requirement for a total of 18 flats from the six tower blocks to be held as void properties until the testing has been carried out.
- 1.4 To approve the priority rehousing of tenants from specific properties following a consultation period and housing needs assessment to facilitate the surveys/testing.
- 1.5 To approve a level of compensation payments and disturbance payments as detailed in exempt Appendix 2 for those tenants in identified properties within the six tower blocks to voluntarily move to suitable, alternative accommodation and vacate their property, so it can be used for the specialist surveys.
- 1.6 To approve delegated authority to the Cabinet Member for City Assets and Housing in consultation with the Director of City Housing and Environment, to agree an alternative cash incentive payment and disturbance payment to that detailed in exempt Appendix 2 for any exceptional circumstances, in order to secure a voluntary move.
- 1.7 To receive a further report on the outcome of the testing which will determine the future investment or regeneration requirements of these tower blocks.

2.0 Background

- 2.1 There are six council owned tower-blocks constructed using the Large Panel System (LPS), where pre-cast concrete panels are used to form the walls and floors, which were craned into position and secured with steel fixings.
- 2.2 A breakdown of the addresses and wards of the six tower blocks are detailed in the following table:

ADDRESS	WARDS
Arthur Greenwood Court, Coronation Road, Wolverhampton WV14 0HS	Ettingshall
Hugh Gaitskell Court, Parkview Road, Bilston WV14 6HE	Bilston North
Winston Churchill Court, Parkview Road, Bilston WV14 6HF	Bilston North
Clem Attlee Court, Parkview Road, Bilston WV14 6HG	Bilston North
St Andrews House, Evans Street, Wolverhampton WV6 0PW	St Peters
Whitmore House, Lowe Street, Wolverhampton WV6 0PN	St Peters

2.3 In the wake of the Grenfell Tower tragedy, Local Authorities across the country were undertaking comprehensive audits of their high-rise stock. In September 2017, the then Department for Communities and Local Government, issued a circular (see appendix 1) to all councils highlighting concerns about the safety of Large Panel System buildings (after major problems were identified in four blocks on the Ledbury Estate in the London Borough of Southwark).

2.4 A range of testing has already been undertaken by specialist structural engineers on these blocks in accordance with best practice. The testing that remains to be done follows the guidance in BR511 (published by the Building Research Establishment) and will assess the structural strength of the buildings. The surveys will inform the future management and investment approaches for these blocks.

3.0 Proposals

3.1 In order to carry out the surveys, it is essential that testing is carried out to three flats adjacent to the flank end walls, from three separate floors within each block. Testing is required to 18 flats in total. For the work to be delivered cost effectively, all of the surveys must be carried out in a block at the same time.

3.2 The surveys will require the properties to be tested and stripped of any asbestos containing materials that are present, the removal of fitted kitchen units and disconnection of electric and water services. Once the testing has been completed, there will be reinstatement works required. In total, these works will take around 4-6 weeks. It is not feasible for this to be carried out to occupied properties and it is therefore necessary to utilise any current or future void properties to minimise the disruption to existing tenants.

3.3 There are currently five void flats that can be used for testing as they are situated in the correct position within the respective tower blocks. These have been requested to remain

as void properties until testing can be carried out, and any additional void that arises will also be held for testing. The remaining flats required are currently occupied but should additional void properties become available they will be held for the purposes of the survey work and not made available for allocation.

- 3.4 It is proposed to contact tenants living in identified properties by letter to provide details of the proposed survey works and establish their interest in being rehoused. All tenants will be offered financial support to move on a first come, first serve basis as detailed in exempt Appendix 2.
- 3.5 Delegated authority is required for the Cabinet Member for City Assets and Housing in consultation with the Director of City Housing and Environment to agree any alternative compensation to that listed in Appendix 2, should there be exceptional circumstances to consider, in order to secure a voluntary move.
- 3.6 If additional flats are required after this process, a housing needs assessment will be carried out to relocate tenants and support given to enable alternative accommodation to be found.

4.0 Alternative Options

- 4.1 If the testing is not carried out, we will be unaware of whether the blocks are suitable for further investment or regeneration.

5.0 Reasons for decision(s)

- 5.1 The surveys are needed to inform our long-term approach to the management of these assets.

6.0 Financial implications

- 6.1 The cost of the surveys will be met from the Housing Revenue Account (HRA) capital programme which includes approved budgets for investment in these blocks as part of the programme for High Rise Mechanical and Electrical Infrastructure, Fire Safety and Sprinkler Systems.
- 6.2 Should the results of the survey not support going ahead with this investment, then the re-provision of homes for the residents and eventual demolition of the blocks would need to be prioritised and provided for within the HRA capital programme going forward.
[JM/16112021/B]

7.0 Legal implications

- 7.1 Under sections 3 and 4 of the Housing Act 2004, a local housing authority must keep the housing conditions under review with a view to identifying any action that may need to be taken by them. A local housing authority must carry out an inspection if they consider it appropriate when determining if any category 1 or 2 hazards exist on the premises.

7.2 Under Section 111 of the Local Government Act 1972 local authorities have power to do anything (whether or not involving the expenditure, borrowing or lending of money or the acquisition or disposal of any property or rights) which is calculated to facilitate, or is conducive or incidental to, the discharge of any of their functions.

7.3 It is possible for qualifying tenants to receive a payment of Home Loss compensation and/or Disturbance payment through the Land Compensation Act 1973. This will vary depending on the tenant's circumstances.

[JA/18112021/E]

8.0 Equalities implications

8.1 The proposals in this report will allow tenants to volunteer to move and be supported in their rehousing requirements to provide vacant properties to be surveyed to help understand the construction design of the six tower blocks. An assessment of their housing need will be undertaken should there be an oversupply of voluntary transfers.

9.0 All other implications

9.1 The proposals in this report will allow the testing of non-traditional properties to establish a programme of investment or regeneration proposals to improve the quality of council stock.

9.2 The proposals within this report will allow the testing of existing stock to inform future investment or regeneration programmes which will bring forward better quality affordable housing for tenants.

9.3 The outbreak of Coronavirus (COVID-19) declared by the World Health Organisation was described as a 'Global Pandemic' on 11 March 2020. The restrictions throughout the pandemic have impacted on the management and maintenance of council stock due to social distancing requirements and working in properties occupied by vulnerable tenants.

9.4 The proposals in this report will be carried out in line with current Government guidelines and it may be necessary to carry out consultation in a number of ways such as contacting tenants via personal mobiles, email and also utilising Microsoft Teams, rather than holding face to face meetings with vulnerable tenants.

10.0 Schedule of background papers

10.1 None.

11.0 Appendices

11.1 Appendix 1 - Department for Communities and Local Government – Safety of Large Panel System Buildings letter.

11.2 **Exempt** Appendix 2 – Tenant Compensation.