

Rating Action: Moody's changes Walsall Housing Group Ltd's outlook to positive from stable, affirms A3 ratings

17 Feb 2022

London, 17 February 2022 -- Moody's Investors Service ("Moody's") has today affirmed the A3 long-term issuer rating of Walsall Housing Group Ltd (whg or the group) and the A3 senior secured debt rating of WHG Treasury plc. Moody's also affirmed the Baseline Credit Assessment (BCA) of whg at baa1. Both entities' outlooks were changed to positive from stable.

RATINGS RATIONALE

RATIONALE FOR CHANGING THE OUTLOOK

Whg's outlook change to positive from stable reflects Moody's expectations that whg's marked improvement of balance sheet strength will continue, while maintaining interest coverage ratios at a level stronger than its peers. We expect that whg will further reduce leverage, with gearing (debt to assets at cost) expected to align with rated peers over the next three years, stabilising at 52%. Whg's strong cash generation from operations combined with its ability to secure grants limited its borrowing needs, resulting in a faster improvement of gearing than we expected to 56% in fiscal 2021 from 79% in fiscal 2017.

Moody's also notes the group's strengthened policies and procedures relating to financial management and a continued focus on low-risk social housing lettings. Whg caps its sales income at 20% of turnover, net of sales, a level we deem as moderate.

RATIONALE FOR AFFIRMING THE BCA AND THE FINAL RATINGS

The affirmation of the A3 issuer rating reflects the entity's solid operating performance, with the operating margin expected to strengthen to around 30% over the next three years, underpinned by whg's commitment to deliver savings, as well as an anticipated increase in turnover, supported by the positive rent settlement policy and the entity's growth. As of December 2021, whg is on track to outperform its saving target for the second year in a row, further strengthening its operating margin.

The continued focus on low-risk activities combined with the strong management of spending, underpins whg's stronger than peers' interest coverage. Whg's cash flow volatility interest coverage (CVIC) consistently remained above rated peers, as exemplified in fiscal 2021, when the group's metric reached 2.2x, compared to the A3 rated peer median of 1.7x. The rating is further supported by the robust regulatory framework governing English social housing providers.

The A3 debt rating of WHG Treasury plc reflects whg's issuer rating, including its simple debt structure and solid liquidity profile. Whg is expected to retain comfortable liquidity over the next two years with immediately available facilities covering 1.6x net cash needs as of fiscal 2021.

As per the application of Moody's Joint Default Analysis for Government-Related Issuers, whg's Baseline Credit Assessment is baa1. The final rating of A3 incorporates the one-notch uplift provided by Moody's assessment of a strong likelihood of support from the United Kingdom, Government of (Aa3 stable) in the event that whg were to experience liquidity distress.

ENVIRONMENTAL, SOCIAL AND GOVERNANCE CONSIDERATIONS

Environmental considerations are material to whg's credit profile. Energy efficiency and decarbonisation more broadly are becoming an increasingly acute priority for HAs with a target of all homes obtaining an energy performance certificate (EPC) of C or above by 2030 in England. Moody's expects this to require material levels of capital expenditure - which would either divert cash flows away from development programmes or increase debt levels. Whg has included achieving EPC C for all its properties by 2030 in its combined business plan.

Social risks are material to whg's credit profile. In particular, the sector is exposed to risks stemming from

socially-driven policy agendas affecting social rents, benefits and capital grants in addition to the impact of demographic trends on demand which are captured in Moody's assessment of the operating environment.

Governance considerations are also material to whg's credit profile. Moody's raised the score for financial management, one of two key governance considerations, reflecting whg's stable strategy with moderate development targets and well-defined risk appetite underpinned by established golden rules to limit exposure to risks and to maintain the entity's financial resilience.

FACTORS THAT COULD LEAD TO AN UPGRADE OR DOWNGRADE OF THE RATINGS

Positive pressure on the ratings could result from a marked improvement in debt metrics with gearing sustained at levels below 55% and debt to revenues around 3.5x, with maintained good operating performance despite meeting the nationwide retrofitting ambitions.

A downgrade is unlikely given the positive outlook. However, we could stabilize the outlook from one or a combination of the following: (1) a weakening in financial performance metrics, including interest coverage ratios at levels close to or below 1x, (2) a ramp-up in risk appetite, including higher exposure to market sales than the moderate level currently projected (3) an increase in indebtedness, including gearing sustained at levels above 60%. In addition, a weaker regulatory framework or dilution of overall support from the UK government for the sector could also exert negative pressure on the ratings.

The methodologies used in these ratings were European Social Housing Providers published in April 2018 and available at https://www.moody's.com/researchdocumentcontentpage.aspx?docid=PBC_1113602, and Government-Related Issuers Methodology published in February 2020 and available at https://www.moody's.com/researchdocumentcontentpage.aspx?docid=PBC_1186207. Alternatively, please see the Rating Methodologies page on www.moody's.com for a copy of these methodologies.

REGULATORY DISCLOSURES

For further specification of Moody's key rating assumptions and sensitivity analysis, see the sections Methodology Assumptions and Sensitivity to Assumptions in the disclosure form. Moody's Rating Symbols and Definitions can be found at: https://www.moody's.com/researchdocumentcontentpage.aspx?docid=PBC_79004.

For ratings issued on a program, series, category/class of debt or security this announcement provides certain regulatory disclosures in relation to each rating of a subsequently issued bond or note of the same series, category/class of debt, security or pursuant to a program for which the ratings are derived exclusively from existing ratings in accordance with Moody's rating practices. For ratings issued on a support provider, this announcement provides certain regulatory disclosures in relation to the credit rating action on the support provider and in relation to each particular credit rating action for securities that derive their credit ratings from the support provider's credit rating. For provisional ratings, this announcement provides certain regulatory disclosures in relation to the provisional rating assigned, and in relation to a definitive rating that may be assigned subsequent to the final issuance of the debt, in each case where the transaction structure and terms have not changed prior to the assignment of the definitive rating in a manner that would have affected the rating. For further information please see the ratings tab on the issuer/entity page for the respective issuer on www.moody's.com.

For any affected securities or rated entities receiving direct credit support from the primary entity(ies) of this credit rating action, and whose ratings may change as a result of this credit rating action, the associated regulatory disclosures will be those of the guarantor entity. Exceptions to this approach exist for the following disclosures, if applicable to jurisdiction: Ancillary Services, Disclosure to rated entity, Disclosure from rated entity.

The ratings have been disclosed to the rated entity or its designated agent(s) and issued with no amendment resulting from that disclosure.

These ratings are solicited. Please refer to Moody's Policy for Designating and Assigning Unsolicited Credit Ratings available on its website www.moody's.com.

Regulatory disclosures contained in this press release apply to the credit rating and, if applicable, the related rating outlook or rating review.

Moody's general principles for assessing environmental, social and governance (ESG) risks in our credit

analysis can be found at http://www.moody.com/researchdocumentcontentpage.aspx?docid=PBC_1288235 .

At least one ESG consideration was material to the credit rating action(s) announced and described above.

The Global Scale Credit Rating on this Credit Rating Announcement was issued by one of Moody's affiliates outside the EU and is endorsed by Moody's Deutschland GmbH, An der Welle 5, Frankfurt am Main 60322, Germany, in accordance with Art.4 paragraph 3 of the Regulation (EC) No 1060/2009 on Credit Rating Agencies. Further information on the EU endorsement status and on the Moody's office that issued the credit rating is available on www.moody.com.

Please see www.moody.com for any updates on changes to the lead rating analyst and to the Moody's legal entity that has issued the rating.

Please see the ratings tab on the issuer/entity page on www.moody.com for additional regulatory disclosures for each credit rating.

Maylis Chapellier
Analyst
Sub-Sovereign Group
Moody's Investors Service Ltd.
One Canada Square
Canary Wharf
London E14 5FA
United Kingdom
JOURNALISTS: 44 20 7772 5456
Client Service: 44 20 7772 5454

Marie Diron
MD - Sovereign Risk
Sub-Sovereign Group
JOURNALISTS: 44 20 7772 5456
Client Service: 44 20 7772 5454

Releasing Office:
Moody's Investors Service Ltd.
One Canada Square
Canary Wharf
London E14 5FA
United Kingdom
JOURNALISTS: 44 20 7772 5456
Client Service: 44 20 7772 5454

MOODY'S
INVESTORS SERVICE

© 2022 Moody's Corporation, Moody's Investors Service, Inc., Moody's Analytics, Inc. and/or their licensors and affiliates (collectively, "MOODY'S"). All rights reserved.

CREDIT RATINGS ISSUED BY MOODY'S CREDIT RATINGS AFFILIATES ARE THEIR CURRENT OPINIONS OF THE RELATIVE FUTURE CREDIT RISK OF ENTITIES, CREDIT COMMITMENTS, OR DEBT OR DEBT-LIKE SECURITIES, AND MATERIALS, PRODUCTS, SERVICES AND INFORMATION PUBLISHED BY MOODY'S (COLLECTIVELY, "PUBLICATIONS") MAY INCLUDE SUCH CURRENT OPINIONS. MOODY'S DEFINES CREDIT RISK AS THE RISK THAT AN ENTITY MAY NOT MEET ITS CONTRACTUAL FINANCIAL OBLIGATIONS AS THEY COME DUE AND ANY ESTIMATED FINANCIAL LOSS IN THE EVENT OF DEFAULT OR IMPAIRMENT. SEE APPLICABLE MOODY'S RATING SYMBOLS AND DEFINITIONS PUBLICATION FOR INFORMATION ON THE TYPES OF CONTRACTUAL FINANCIAL OBLIGATIONS ADDRESSED BY MOODY'S CREDIT RATINGS. CREDIT RATINGS DO NOT ADDRESS ANY OTHER RISK, INCLUDING BUT NOT LIMITED TO: LIQUIDITY RISK, MARKET VALUE RISK, OR PRICE VOLATILITY. CREDIT RATINGS, NON-CREDIT ASSESSMENTS ("ASSESSMENTS"), AND OTHER OPINIONS INCLUDED IN MOODY'S PUBLICATIONS ARE NOT STATEMENTS OF CURRENT OR HISTORICAL FACT.

MOODY'S PUBLICATIONS MAY ALSO INCLUDE QUANTITATIVE MODEL-BASED ESTIMATES OF CREDIT RISK AND RELATED OPINIONS OR COMMENTARY PUBLISHED BY MOODY'S ANALYTICS, INC. AND/OR ITS AFFILIATES. MOODY'S CREDIT RATINGS, ASSESSMENTS, OTHER OPINIONS AND PUBLICATIONS DO NOT CONSTITUTE OR PROVIDE INVESTMENT OR FINANCIAL ADVICE, AND MOODY'S CREDIT RATINGS, ASSESSMENTS, OTHER OPINIONS AND PUBLICATIONS ARE NOT AND DO NOT PROVIDE RECOMMENDATIONS TO PURCHASE, SELL, OR HOLD PARTICULAR SECURITIES. MOODY'S CREDIT RATINGS, ASSESSMENTS, OTHER OPINIONS AND PUBLICATIONS DO NOT COMMENT ON THE SUITABILITY OF AN INVESTMENT FOR ANY PARTICULAR INVESTOR. MOODY'S ISSUES ITS CREDIT RATINGS, ASSESSMENTS AND OTHER OPINIONS AND PUBLISHES ITS PUBLICATIONS WITH THE EXPECTATION AND UNDERSTANDING THAT EACH INVESTOR WILL, WITH DUE CARE, MAKE ITS OWN STUDY AND EVALUATION OF EACH SECURITY THAT IS UNDER CONSIDERATION FOR PURCHASE, HOLDING, OR SALE.

MOODY'S CREDIT RATINGS, ASSESSMENTS, OTHER OPINIONS, AND PUBLICATIONS ARE NOT INTENDED FOR USE BY RETAIL INVESTORS AND IT WOULD BE RECKLESS AND INAPPROPRIATE FOR RETAIL INVESTORS TO USE MOODY'S CREDIT RATINGS, ASSESSMENTS, OTHER OPINIONS OR PUBLICATIONS WHEN MAKING AN INVESTMENT DECISION. IF IN DOUBT YOU SHOULD CONTACT YOUR FINANCIAL OR OTHER PROFESSIONAL ADVISER.

ALL INFORMATION CONTAINED HEREIN IS PROTECTED BY LAW, INCLUDING BUT NOT LIMITED TO, COPYRIGHT LAW, AND NONE OF SUCH INFORMATION MAY BE COPIED OR OTHERWISE REPRODUCED, REPACKAGED, FURTHER TRANSMITTED, TRANSFERRED, DISSEMINATED, REDISTRIBUTED OR RESOLD, OR STORED FOR SUBSEQUENT USE FOR ANY SUCH PURPOSE, IN WHOLE OR IN PART, IN ANY FORM OR MANNER OR BY ANY MEANS WHATSOEVER, BY ANY PERSON WITHOUT MOODY'S PRIOR WRITTEN CONSENT.

MOODY'S CREDIT RATINGS, ASSESSMENTS, OTHER OPINIONS AND PUBLICATIONS ARE NOT INTENDED FOR USE BY ANY PERSON AS A BENCHMARK AS THAT TERM IS DEFINED FOR REGULATORY PURPOSES AND MUST NOT BE USED IN ANY WAY THAT COULD RESULT IN THEM BEING CONSIDERED A BENCHMARK.

All information contained herein is obtained by MOODY'S from sources believed by it to be accurate and reliable. Because of the possibility of human or mechanical error as well as other factors, however, all information contained herein is provided "AS IS" without warranty of any kind. MOODY'S adopts all necessary measures so that the information it uses in assigning a credit rating is of sufficient quality and from sources MOODY'S considers to be reliable including, when appropriate, independent third-party sources. However, MOODY'S is not an auditor and cannot in every instance independently verify or validate information received in the rating process or in preparing its Publications.

To the extent permitted by law, MOODY'S and its directors, officers, employees, agents, representatives, licensors and suppliers disclaim liability to any person or entity for any indirect, special, consequential, or incidental losses or damages whatsoever arising from or in connection with the information contained herein or the use of or inability to use any such information, even if MOODY'S or any of its directors, officers, employees, agents, representatives, licensors or suppliers is advised in advance of the possibility of such losses or damages, including but not limited to: (a) any loss of present or prospective profits or (b) any loss or damage arising where the relevant financial instrument is not the subject of a particular credit rating assigned by MOODY'S.

To the extent permitted by law, MOODY'S and its directors, officers, employees, agents, representatives, licensors and suppliers disclaim liability for any direct or compensatory losses or damages caused to any person or entity, including but not limited to by any negligence (but excluding fraud, willful misconduct or any other type of liability that, for the avoidance of doubt, by law cannot be excluded) on the part of, or any contingency within or beyond the control of, MOODY'S or any of its directors, officers, employees, agents, representatives, licensors or suppliers, arising from or in connection with the information contained herein or the use of or inability to use any such information.

NO WARRANTY, EXPRESS OR IMPLIED, AS TO THE ACCURACY, TIMELINESS, COMPLETENESS, MERCHANTABILITY OR FITNESS FOR ANY PARTICULAR PURPOSE OF ANY CREDIT RATING, ASSESSMENT, OTHER OPINION OR INFORMATION IS GIVEN OR MADE BY MOODY'S IN ANY FORM OR

MANNER WHATSOEVER.

Moody's Investors Service, Inc., a wholly-owned credit rating agency subsidiary of Moody's Corporation ("MCO"), hereby discloses that most issuers of debt securities (including corporate and municipal bonds, debentures, notes and commercial paper) and preferred stock rated by Moody's Investors Service, Inc. have, prior to assignment of any credit rating, agreed to pay to Moody's Investors Service, Inc. for credit ratings opinions and services rendered by it fees ranging from \$1,000 to approximately \$5,000,000. MCO and Moody's Investors Service also maintain policies and procedures to address the independence of Moody's Investors Service credit ratings and credit rating processes. Information regarding certain affiliations that may exist between directors of MCO and rated entities, and between entities who hold credit ratings from Moody's Investors Service and have also publicly reported to the SEC an ownership interest in MCO of more than 5%, is posted annually at www.moodys.com under the heading "Investor Relations — Corporate Governance — Director and Shareholder Affiliation Policy."

Additional terms for Australia only: Any publication into Australia of this document is pursuant to the Australian Financial Services License of MOODY'S affiliate, Moody's Investors Service Pty Limited ABN 61 003 399 657AFSL 336969 and/or Moody's Analytics Australia Pty Ltd ABN 94 105 136 972 AFSL 383569 (as applicable). This document is intended to be provided only to "wholesale clients" within the meaning of section 761G of the Corporations Act 2001. By continuing to access this document from within Australia, you represent to MOODY'S that you are, or are accessing the document as a representative of, a "wholesale client" and that neither you nor the entity you represent will directly or indirectly disseminate this document or its contents to "retail clients" within the meaning of section 761G of the Corporations Act 2001. MOODY'S credit rating is an opinion as to the creditworthiness of a debt obligation of the issuer, not on the equity securities of the issuer or any form of security that is available to retail investors.

Additional terms for Japan only: Moody's Japan K.K. ("MJKK") is a wholly-owned credit rating agency subsidiary of Moody's Group Japan G.K., which is wholly-owned by Moody's Overseas Holdings Inc., a wholly-owned subsidiary of MCO. Moody's SF Japan K.K. ("MSFJ") is a wholly-owned credit rating agency subsidiary of MJKK. MSFJ is not a Nationally Recognized Statistical Rating Organization ("NRSRO"). Therefore, credit ratings assigned by MSFJ are Non-NRSRO Credit Ratings. Non-NRSRO Credit Ratings are assigned by an entity that is not a NRSRO and, consequently, the rated obligation will not qualify for certain types of treatment under U.S. laws. MJKK and MSFJ are credit rating agencies registered with the Japan Financial Services Agency and their registration numbers are FSA Commissioner (Ratings) No. 2 and 3 respectively.

MJKK or MSFJ (as applicable) hereby disclose that most issuers of debt securities (including corporate and municipal bonds, debentures, notes and commercial paper) and preferred stock rated by MJKK or MSFJ (as applicable) have, prior to assignment of any credit rating, agreed to pay to MJKK or MSFJ (as applicable) for credit ratings opinions and services rendered by it fees ranging from JPY100,000 to approximately JPY550,000,000.

MJKK and MSFJ also maintain policies and procedures to address Japanese regulatory requirements.