

## **Council – 25 April 2022**

### **Community, Leisure and Culture (Deputy Leader and Resilient Communities)**

#### **Councillor Garry Perry Portfolio Holder**

I am pleased to report to Council that the services within Community, Leisure and Culture have continued to deliver sterling work over the past twelve months. My services cover a wide variety of front-line services and I will start with those in Place & Environment:

#### **PLACE & ENVIRONMENT**

##### **SPORT & LEISURE SERVICES 2021-22**

###### **Covid-19**

Hard work preparing a 'make the comeback' New Year's marketing campaign proved to be in vein as rising covid case rates forced leisure facilities into immediate closure following the Government announcement on 30<sup>th</sup> December 2020. Despite festive leave arrangements the management team sprang into action within minutes of the announcement to communicate comprehensively with customers, staff, and other stakeholders to ensure a smooth transition into the closure period.

Despite being closed for leisure activities the sports halls at both Bloxwich and Oak Park Active Living Centres were opened as mass vaccination sites in January 2021 and operated in this way throughout the year allowing tens of thousands of local people to get vaccinated against the virus. Sport and Leisure staff once again stepped up to the mark and received incredible feedback for the customer care given as vaccination marshals, especially while societies most frail and vulnerable were on site.

Staff from Sport & Leisure continued to support other services throughout the year with members of the team backfilling in Bereavement Services and at the Saddlers Centre vaccination hub. Despite pressure from staff isolations our leisure facilities remained open for every minute that the Government restrictions allowed.

###### **Energy Efficiency**

New swimming pool filters were installed at Walsall Gala Swimming & Fitness Centre to replace the original units which dated back to the 1960's. An innovative and forward thinking approach was taken by opting for new ceramic filtration technology rather than traditional sand based filters. The new technology vastly reduces the amount of heated and treated water that is used to backwash the filters meaning that energy and chemical costs as well as carbon use will reduce.

At Darlaston Swimming Pool the original gas fueled boilers are end of life so more innovation has been deployed by the Service Area in seeking replacements. £2.6m external funding from the Public Sector Decarbonisation Scheme has now been granted to replace the gas boilers with air source heat pumps. Along with the installation of solar panels, LED lighting, improved air handling, and a new building management system, the project will save £20k a year in energy costs and an annual reduction of 400 tonnes of carbon. The target for completion is March 2023.

## **Facility Developments**

A Shapemaster power assisted exercise suite has been installed at Walsall Gala Swimming & Fitness Centre. This focuses on the local demographics and USP of the facility's 'health hub' offer.

At Darlaston Swimming Pool a little used space has been developed into a functional training and free weights area. Again, focusing on customer demand and demographics a cost effective development is increasing usage and growing income.

At Bloxwich Active Living Centre the team were quick to capitalise on an opportunity gifted by blended working. An oversized office space has been converted into a top of the range boutique indoor cycle studio, along with an extension of the fitness suite to expand our functional training offer.

## **Service Developments**

A new and improved self-serve online booking system has been launched as part of our ongoing digital transformation. Leisure Hub already has 2470 users registered and has received positive feedback from customers.

Our new 'Fitness Journey' has launched to offer a four stage intensive support structure for new joiners during their first 6 weeks using the facilities. Aimed at giving customers the advice, knowledge and encouragement that they need to create lifelong exercise habits the Fitness Journey will be a key tool in increasing member retention and thus also increasing income.

A focus on health has seen funding from Public Health secured to deliver successful weight management programmes across both Active Living Centres. Gym instructors have been trained in exercise referral and pathways are now being created to encourage medical professionals to prescribe exercise and signpost patients to our service.

Sport and Leisure Services have also been leading the way with internal delivery of the HAF (Holidays and Food) programme. Working closely with colleagues from Children's Services approaching £200k of HAF funding has been retained within the council and utilised to deliver physical activity sessions, and healthy meals, for disadvantaged children during school holidays. Sport and Leisure's commercial approach has been reflected by capitalising on the HAF opportunity to provide food packages for other services across the council thus driving more trade through the Active Living Centre coffee shops rather than local food providers.

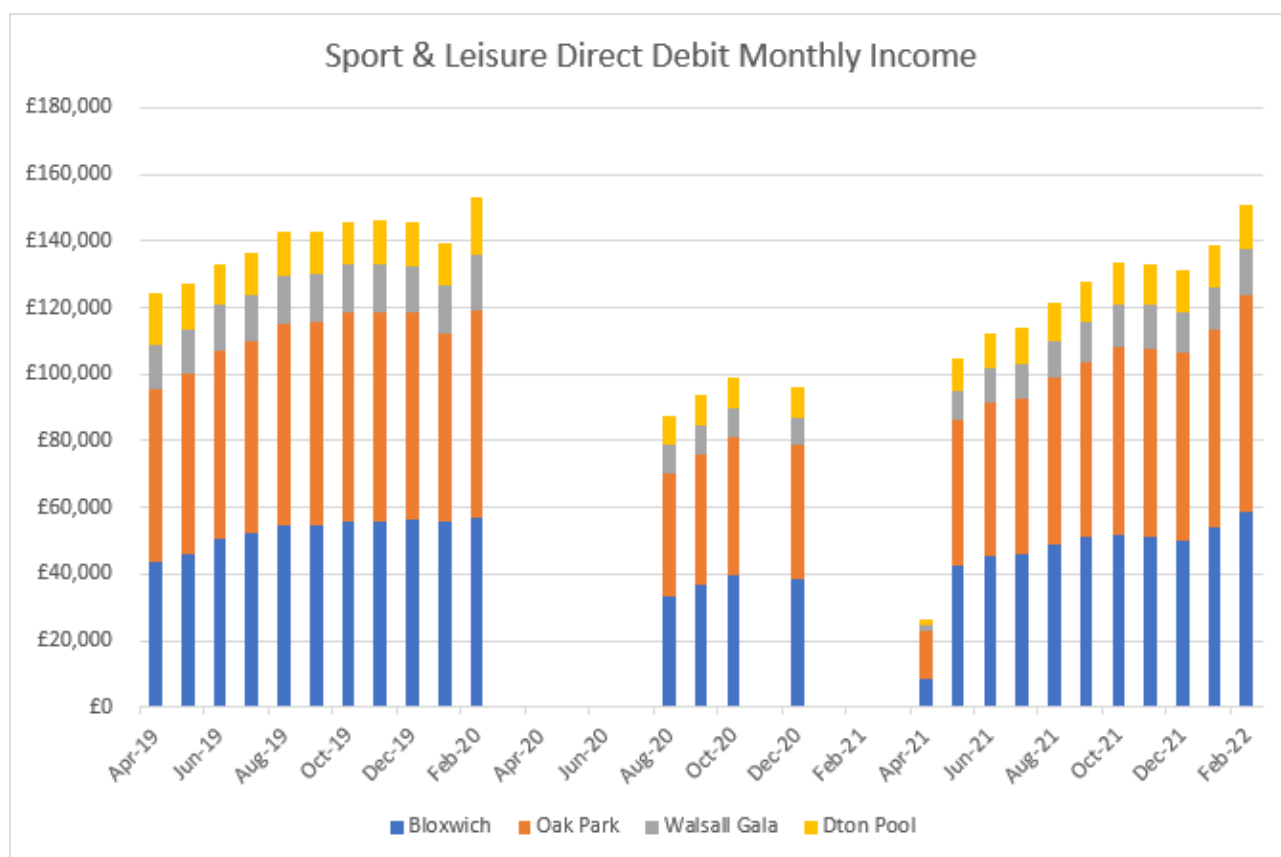
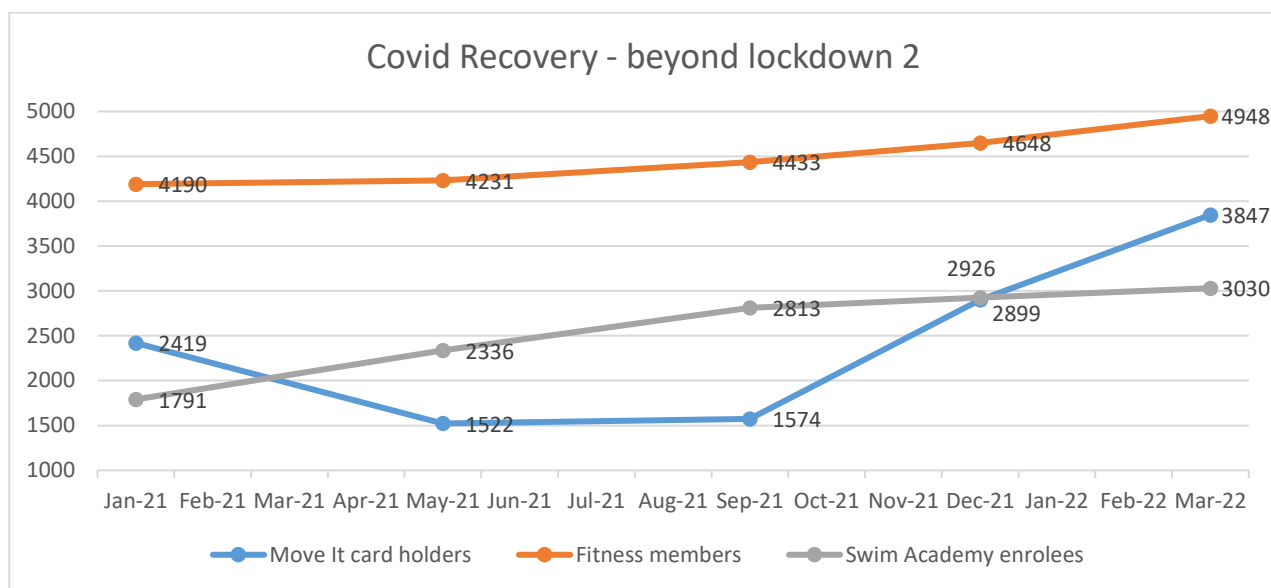
## **Workforce Development**

The service area continues to develop staff members in a bid to develop, retain and attract local talent in a competitive recruitment market. CIMPSA 'Re-Train' funding was secured to upskill current staff employees and Swimming Teachers' Association funding has been secured to train new swimming instructors.

Employees across the service area continue to take advantage of the apprenticeship scheme with courses spanning from level 2 to level 6 both completed and in progress.

Sport and Leisure were the first service area in the authority to recruit a team member through the Kickstart scheme, with 3 successful candidates now in place.

## Performance Growth



## BEREAVEMENT SERVICES 2021-22

2021 saw the service face another year of unprecedented challenges with staff continuing to go the extra mile to ensure our residents received the services they need and want at key moments in life. With regular rule changes, often at very short notice the teams across bereavement services exemplified the best characteristics of public service whilst balancing the demands of high workloads, maintaining public safety and ensuring their own well-being.

In November 2021 Streetly Crematorium and Cemetery was subject to its five-yearly inspection and audit and passed on all aspects of compliance, and in particular noting high levels of service provision.

With Covid-19 legislation ending in March 2022 all death registrations must now be completed face to face and we will not be able to register deaths over the phone. This is a national change and the General Register Office (GRO) are reviewing how to streamline the processes going forward. Discussions are underway with corporate colleagues on utilising more space in the First Stop Shop and/or Banking Hall.

The registration service now has Designated Register Office status allowing the team to provide a broader service; taking notices of marriage from Foreign, EU and British nationals

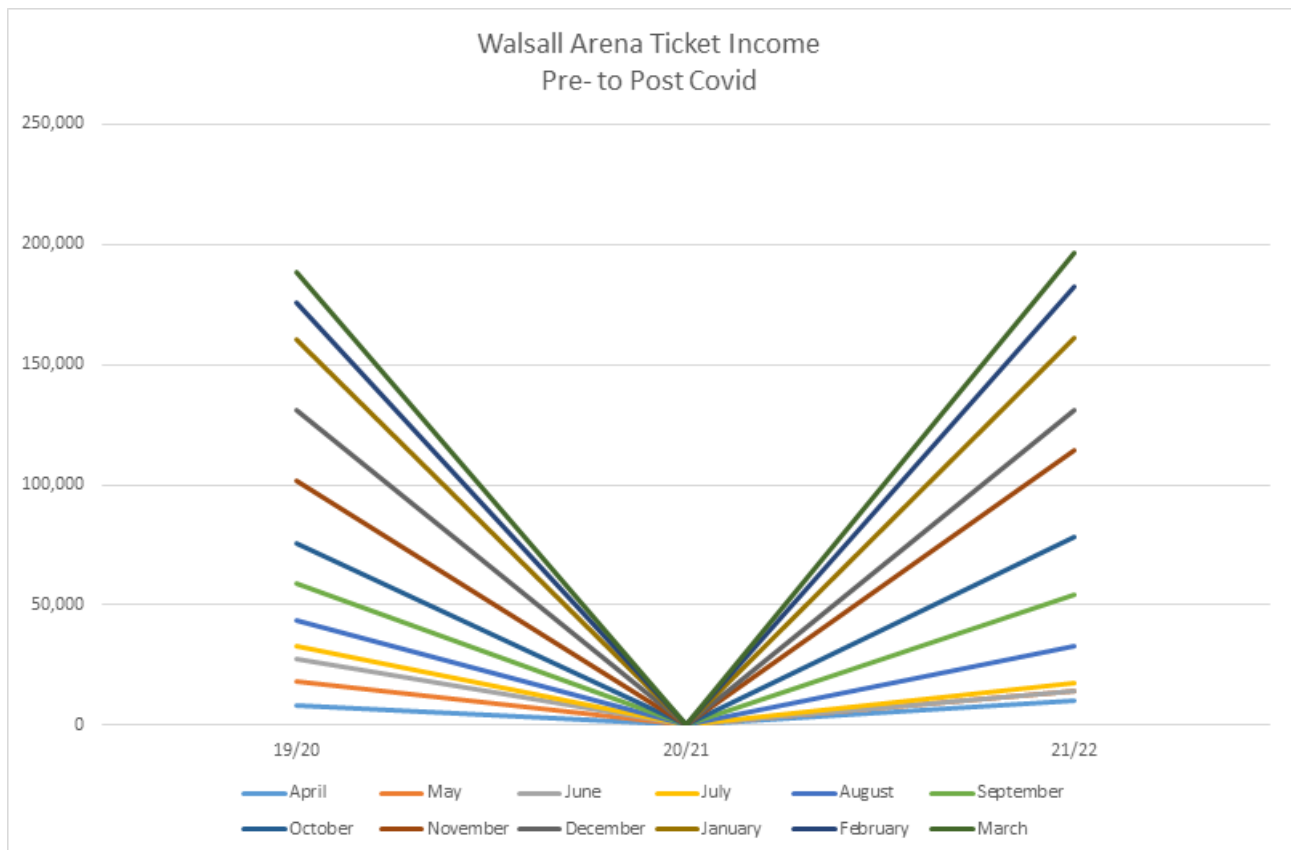
Work has started on the extension on the Muslim section of Streetly Cemetery, which will see the number of available plots increase.



## **REGENERATION & ECONOMY**

### **WALSALL ARENA & ARTS (incorporating Walsall Music Education Hub):**

Theatre and the Performing Arts were amongst the first sectors of the economy to close and amongst the last to re-open due to the Covid pandemic. However, during 2021/22 ticket sales began to increase with 196,540 sold.



Similarly, Education was heavily hit with children required to home school and learn remotely where possible. The Arena team pivoted quickly to support the music education team to get all our teaching resources online.

The Music Education Hub was able to offer online tuition to all children within weeks of the first lockdown occurring.

The digital resources made available provided seamless transitions between face to face and online learning as the pandemic continued and individual schools tried to cope with new regulations.

Despite Covid over 18,000 music lessons were provided to Walsall children in 2020/21.

The Music Hub has been granted £480,967 for the 2022/23 academic year. The service has been given one of the lowest risk ratings in the Midlands due to its excellent performance.

The Arena has a partnership with Black Country Dance Hub to provide professional quality performances with workshops for schools approximately six times a year. To watch and learn about contemporary dance, as art-form, provides Walsall young people with new opportunities and aspirations.

The Arena has bounced back from re-opening with record ticket sales and full house audiences.

More large acts are being drawn to the town.

The venue aids Walsall's burgeoning reputation as a town of culture.

The venue has been chosen by the BBC to host Question Time in May.

Increasing commercial success continues to generate income to offset any costs to the Council.

## **NEW ART GALLERY 2021-22:**

### **Exhibitions**

The Gallery re-opened in May 2021 with a major exhibition by British painter **Anj Smith**. The exhibition brought together the largest body of work by the artist ever to be seen in a UK public gallery. Two In Conversation events took place, one with Dr Zoe Whitley and one with Dr Joost Joustra, the first online and the second at the Gallery. Both were recorded and shared. Other resources included an exhibition guide, filmed interview with the artist and a children's trail designed by the artist. The exhibition can currently be seen at Museo Bardini, Florence.

**Yasmin David (1939 – 2009)** Opening in July 2021 an exhibition of atmospheric landscape paintings by Yasmin David. David was the niece of Kathleen Garman, benefactor to the Gallery, and daughter of poet Laurie Lee. Her brother, Michael Wishart, was an acclaimed painter, but his sister's work has never before been exhibited to the wider public. Yasmin was one of few women working in landscape painting during the post-war period and produced a body of work which is both intimate and dramatic, emotional and turbulent, and captures the molten qualities of sky and land.

While Yasmin was compelled to paint (and write) continuously throughout her life, producing a significant body of work over 50 years, she did not exhibit her work publicly. Since her death her daughter, the filmmaker Clio David, has discovered some 100 unseen paintings and over 150 drawings and notebooks, hidden in cupboards and in her mother's studio at the family home in rural Devon; many of these only uncovered during last summer's lockdown.

In September 2021 the University of Wolverhampton, School of Art **MA Fine Art** degree exhibition was exhibited. Students are given development support throughout the year from Gallery staff and 1 artist residency is awarded to an MA Graduate.

**Keith Piper: Jet Black Futures** In January 2022, we launched a major exhibition by Keith Piper who was a founder member of the highly influential Blk Art Group in the Midlands in the 1980s. The exhibition includes brand new work by the artist and extends to the Window Box. A publication is underway with essays by Keith and Anjalie Dalal-Clayton. An exhibition guide and filmed interview with the artist are available as resources and we are currently editing footage from an In Conversation event with the two essayists. We have received reviews in Frieze and Art Quarterly and the exhibition was celebrated as one of the best ten exhibitions to see in the world in March.





**Karen McLean: *Ar'n't I a Woman!*** The exhibition opened in Feb 2022 (delayed from April 2020) and has been created in the spirit of the women who used their strength and ingenuity to survive adversity and oppression. Drawing parallels with issues facing women today, Karen celebrates this ingenuity and vitality and (in the face of adversity) acknowledges the continued resistance of women for control of their bodies.

A digital exhibition guide is available with an essay by Gill Perry and an essay to be added by Emily Zobel Marshall.



## Collections

Following an open call-out, which received submissions from 220 artists across the region, in Spring 2021 the Gallery acquired 32 new works by 30 West Midlands' based artists with their individual responses to the significant events that shaped 2020-2021. The works, spanning a variety of media from collage and photography to drawing and painting, respond to world events over a tumultuous year; from the Covid19 pandemic and National Lockdowns, to Black Lives Matter and Brexit, to Class Inequalities and Climate Change.

**The Twenty Twenty Collection** Artists have all had the opportunity to be profiled on our social media channels during 2021, ahead of this dedicated eight-month long presentation of the new collection in our Community Gallery. An extensive artist-led events programme will be offered alongside.

It has been incredibly important for The New Art Gallery Walsall to continue to support regional artists after a particularly difficult period for the arts which has seen venues closed, projects postponed or cancelled and financial insecurity experienced by many.



## Schools

Christmas Tea Party 2021 – a networking event for teachers, artists and arts organisations took place at the Gallery on 2<sup>nd</sup> December 2021 in collaboration with Walsall Cultural Educational Partnership (CEP). A Walsall officer is now Chair of Walsall CEP.

We were successful in securing £12,500 for the Gallery to be a partner organisation in the INSIDE OUTside project, funded by Creative Academies Network in collaboration with Sandwell CEP, Arts Connect, Your Trust Charity and Midland Metropolitan University Hospital. This STEAM programme encourages children and young people to explore what happens inside and outside their bodies via the theme of 'Body, Health and Wellbeing'. The project has engaged with 3 schools and 270 pupils over the academic year 2021/2022. The Gallery receives £5,000 of the funding and the remaining £7,500 pays for two of the Gallery's artist educator's fees and materials.

In January 2022 we partnered with Walsall Music Education Hub to offer Walsall secondary school pupils (Year 9) an art and music composition opportunity, whereby 131 young people in three local schools worked together in groups and with artist, Rob Conway and composer, Craig Stevens to develop unique sound pieces inspired by artworks in the New Art Gallery Walsall's Collections. The sound pieces were pre-recorded and played in front of the artworks on 16<sup>th</sup> February.

The Gallery is the WM partner of Art Bytes, a new national art programme for schools, combining an inter-school art competition with virtual gallery and augmented reality. Eight schools have signed up to the project.

Walsall Council is now part of The Creativity Collaborative – new initiative aimed to share best practice around creativity between schools and arts organisations. We hosted the first ever meet-up in March 2022. The Collective includes 20 teachers from local Primary Schools, Stan's Café, Black Country Living Museum and Open Theatre.



Requests for Teacher Continual Professional Development are booming. We have delivered 10 outreach sessions in schools since January 2022.

We regularly work with three home educated groups and develop resources in collaboration with them.

## **Families**

The team ran 35 Family workshops in 2021 and an average of 84 participants attended each drop – in workshop, and most paid workshops were fully booked; this far exceeded expectations and shows the increased reach of the gallery services.

Wednesdays for All and Saturday Playdates are all drop-in, free and always very popular.

Thursday Skills workshops in school holidays are always fully booked and oversubscribed.

Monthly Tuesday Tots and Baby & Me workshops continue to be oversubscribed with waiting lists.

5 Feb – A Day of Stories. The team developed a multi-sensory storytelling session for children on the autism spectrum with The Play House. The Selfish Giant story took place in the Landscapes Room of the Garman Ryan Collection. Officers are working with Creative Black Country (CBC) and Fantastic Journeys CIC to develop an offer for young people with Profound and Multiple Learning Difficulty (PMLD).



Over 70 Online workshops have been created since February 2021, initially in response to the pandemic and a need to continue to reach families remotely. Since returning to the Gallery we have committed to posting a new online workshop every 10 weeks, to engage with those families who are unable to visit us in-person.

A film was made to celebrate Inter-Faith week (14-21 Nov 2021) which was distributed via social media and directed people to our YouTube channel. This focused on the use of hands in prayer and featured Muslim, Sikh and Christian colleagues. We promoted this to local families via our Winter families' leaflet.

## **Communities**

Diwali - 31<sup>st</sup> October 2021. Families enjoyed making woven lanterns with artist Benny Semp, and rangoli patterns with The Canal and River Trust. People received wonderful mehndi designs, explored the galleries with Colour and Light Gallery Trails and enjoyed performances and interactive workshops with Bollywood Dreams. Approximately 150 adults and 75 children attended the event along with Surjit Singh and Cllr. Richard Worrall.

Holi Hai Celebration, 19<sup>th</sup> March 2022. The Indian Festival of Colours- featured performances with Bollywood Dreams, workshops with artist Nilupa Yasmin. Approximately 80 adults and 60 children attended the event. This is the first time the Gallery has celebrated Holi – an important festival for Indian communities.

The team has developed a link with Afghan Community Welfare Centre and Walsall Council led a weaving workshop on 22<sup>nd</sup> Jan with artist Nilupa Yasmin. The workshop engaged with 30 from the community and feedback was excellent.

The team also has a good working relationship with two Muslim women's groups. We have hosted three events at the Gallery in 2022.

### **D/deaf Audiences:**

24 March – BSL Tour of Jet Black Futures. Deaf artist Olivier Jamin developed our first BSL tour aimed at the D/deaf community. Olivier will deliver Deaf Awareness Training for staff in June.

### **Adult life-long learners**

'Walk and Draw' in Aug 2021. Monthly sessions – fast-paced and incorporating the 'five ways to wellbeing'. These sessions have become very popular and are fully booked, led by artist Tess Radcliffe.

### **Volunteers and Work Experience**

The team has developed an L&E Volunteer Programme. We have 8 active and regular volunteers, assisting term time with the Schools Programme, and in holiday periods with the Families Programme.

### **LEATHER MUSEUM:**

The Leather Museum re-opened to the public on 18 May 2021, but prolonged concerns about Covid in the community meant that the museum's older demonstrators did not return. The demonstrators play an important part in engaging, entertaining and informing museum visitors, with their decades of experience in the leather trades, and their handling of popular visitor activities. Their absence was a significant loss to the visitor experience.

In response, funding from the Culture Recovery Fund for Heritage - set up to assist heritage attractions in mitigating the impact of Covid-19 – enabled the Leather Museum to commission videos of its volunteer demonstrators. These now bring to life on big screens the bridlery, saddlery and light leather goods workshops whenever the museum is open, incorporating also still photographs of leather-working across the decades, so as to demonstrate the heritage and continuity of leather-working in the town. The workshop screens proved a transformational change for the museum, significantly increasing visitor dwell time, as visitors are engaged by the video presentations.

To accompany the videos in the workshops, the museum has had its 115 oral history recordings digitised to enable the oral testimonies of leather workers, accompanied by the ambient sound of leather-working, to fill the gallery spaces. Staff training in creating the soundscapes increased the agility of the museum to adapt to different occasions. For example, when the Women's Tour came to Walsall, the museum display was accompanied by a soundscape of women's experience of working in the Leather trade.

A new promotional video was also professionally produced for the museum, which will also enhance the redevelopment of the museum foyer in the coming year.

As part of the Digital Confidence project funded by the Heritage Fund, a new digital interactive installation has been created to introduce the visitor to the three recreated leather workshops – for bridlery, saddlery and light leather goods. The system uses algorithms to colourise and sharpen historical photographs to make them more accessible to present-day viewers, and mixes images, text and audio via a large 46” touch-screen module.

A Community Day event was organised jointly with the New Art Gallery and proved very successful in attracting visitors and engaging them in a variety of activities, including teaching people to saddle-stitch a notebook, make a leather pouch or emboss and paint a bookmark. Its greatest success was in the cross-generational and cross-cultural appeal in bringing people together.

As a result of Covid concerns, activities did not get into gear again fully until the autumn programme whose events were consistently full or over-subscribed. Meeting room bookings and outreach activities have also recommenced, and two new volunteer demonstrators have been recruited.

A new combined café/shop offer was introduced, with a new coffee-machine and range of refreshments resulting in a positive take-up. Similarly a large donation of leather goods from a local factory has boosted sales in the museum shop, as visitors are starting slowly to return slowly but strikingly to the museum.

## **RESILIENT COMMUNITIES**

### **LIBRARIES:**

Our Libraries are changing, they have moved to a model that supports the communities in which people live. This came to the fore during the COVID pandemic where staff worked as part of the resilient communities approach. As Libraries have re-opened we will keep that link and further develop our work of further integration of the Library Service with our communities. We will link more closely with our book exchanges to ensure that books and other services are available where residents want them. This shift of emphasis will create better opportunities for people to use Libraries and will be more closely aligned with our communities and a key part of our Resilient Communities approach.

Walsall's libraries re-opened from Monday 21 March 2021, welcoming the public through the doors for the first time since closing for lockdown in March 2020.

Libraries, galleries and museums across the country have found the public to be hesitant in returning, particularly older people, who are often the most dedicated and regular library users. In Walsall, after bucking the national trend for the past three years with increasing annual book issues, it was a particular shock to find issues down by about a third; but this was less than in some other authorities in our region, and it has been good to see that borrowing has started to increase again.

Public Health concerns meant that although our libraries were open, it was only in the last weeks of the year 2021-22 that restrictions were fully relaxed – to allow seating to be

restored, for example. This has impacted the service available with restrictions on visit times and distancing requirements.

The restrictions have had an impact on library take-up in 2021-22, but with the restoration of library furniture, removal of restrictions on PC bookings and sessions, and a re-introduction of normal library activities, libraries are becoming more attractive places again.

Despite the difficult year, more than a quarter of a million books were borrowed from Walsall's libraries in 2021-22 – a total of 285,825 loans.

Darlaston Library is now open after a lengthy refurbishment and will be formally opened in May.

The annual Computer Learning Sessions Programme has been re-instated this year, as restrictions lifted on the PCs. The public PCs in libraries are a key resource to support people within communities to develop functional digital skills, and so facilitate and support the Council's transformation agenda. The Computer Learning Sessions Programme this time has a focus on online safety, setting up e-mail and engaging with Zoom. These sessions are available between January and June this year at all libraries across the Borough.

Libraries and Community centres will be places for people to attend to support with access to Council services. This will help transform the way that residents interact with the Council as part of the Proud programme of transformation.

The Summer Reading Challenge, managed by the Reading Agency, operates every year in libraries across the country, with a goal of keeping children's reading ages up over the school summer break. The summer 2021 theme was Wild World Heroes, with a focus around nature and the environment.

Despite the pandemic, 925 children took part in Walsall Libraries this year, supported by 17 Summer Reading Challenge volunteers. The Challenge is run through all the static libraries and the Mobile Library, and every library was bought two Wild World Heroes book collections, specially chosen by the Reading Agency, one collection for younger and one for older children. For the second year running we also purchased eBooks from the collections so that the scheme could be undertaken using BorrowBox.

42 events were run over 6 weeks as part of the Libraries HAF 2021 offer, funded through the Children's Services HAF programme. External-provider events complemented the 13 in-house craft events delivered by library staff. Our external events were all themed around the Wild World Heroes Summer Reading Challenge theme. Library staff worked with Walsall New Art Gallery to deliver book-themed sessions where children interacted with local artists. Two of our own staff delivered 4-week courses: Manga for teens and a course based around the Marice Sendak book, "Where The Wild Things Are". Mindful Colouring sessions also supported young children with mental health issues relating to Covid/returning to school. There were also some 350 craft gift bags for HAF children to enjoy at home.

Linked to the Mini Winter Challenge, and as part of the HAF Christmas programme, 200 children's Christmas books were specially bought in for gifting in advance of the festive season.



## LICHFIELD STREET HUB (Central Library & Archives):

### Library

Lichfield Street Hub (LSH) Library is continuing to grow and develop its services to the community post COVID. We continue to offer our core services of book loans whether this be physical, audio or via our electronic platforms, our ICT provision which includes printing and scanning facilities in addition to the PC's onsite and the ability for customers to use their own devices and connect to the council WIFI and our enquiry service.

LSH is often the first place individuals will come if they have tried to access the First Stop Shop having been unaware that it was still closed. In this case LSH staff will signpost customers to the correct council service, providing the contact information for the customer or in some cases making the initial contact with the service on their behalf. Other examples of signposting include to the Citizens Advice service, Foodbank provision and the Jobcentre.

The layout of the building has enabled LSH to provide a greater capacity than other Library sites in the borough both in regards to PC usage and in study space. The increased use of study spaces by students, staff and other customers who require a space away from home. Council services staff have arranged to meet to meet with members of the public or other colleagues.

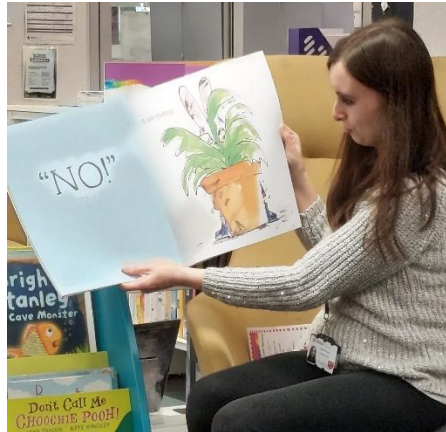
Our core services have also restarted with our Library based groups. These are as follows:

- Tiny Tots – a group for children aged 18m-3yrs and their parents which is held on Fridays weekly during term time providing stories, rhymes, play and crafts. The purpose of the group is to help establish a good relationship with books and the library for children, and a safe place where parents can share and discuss parenting challenges. Walsall Family Information Service has visited to provide parents with information around childcare choices and funding. Recent feedback from the group:

*“Staff is so lovely and caring. They do hard work ensuring that the kids have a great time in every session”*

*“The staff are amazing and really interactive with the children. The kids love it....everything is perfect”*

- Loose Leaves a monthly book club for Adults. Recent titles read and discussed include: The Mystery of Edwin Drood - Charles Dickens, Everyone Brave is Forgiven – Chris Cleave and Persepolis- Marjane Satrapi. Persepolis provoked much discussion as it is in a graphic novel format which not many of the group had experienced previously. The member of staff who facilitates the group offered to bring a selection of other graphic novels to the next meeting so participants could explore the different types.
- Murder they Wrote a monthly Crime Book club for Adults. Recent titles read and discussed include: Gone –Mo Hayder, Relentless – Simon Kernick, That Night – Gillian McAllister and The Maltese Falcon – Dashiell Hammett.
- Saturday Story time a weekly story session for children



Gaining feedback from customers and through the insight of my CMDA Dissertation, we have in the last couple of months started up several new groups as customers had expressed interest in or had enquired these types of groups locally.

- Caterpillar Club 0-18m Wednesdays weekly –stories, rhymes, play. Based on the existing Tiny Tots group but for the youngest of our customers, it has the same purpose. This group started after February half term and is growing rapidly.
- Craft and Chat a weekly Tuesday group for all ages which encourages social interaction, learning new skills or developing existing ones. It also helps to create new friendships for those who have not interacted for the last 2 years and support mental health and well-being.

*“Nice to be out doing something, meeting and chatting with new people. One of the other ladies in the group was returning to knitting after a long time and was nervous but the rest of the group all helped and encouraged her.”*

- Board Games group a weekly Thursday group for adults which encourages social interaction with new people in a safe environment.



- Saturday Children’s board game group a weekly session for children to engage with others within the library space, make friends and develop social skills.

*“My children really enjoyed this group and are asking to come next week. It is good for them to mix with new people. The staff are very friendly and happy to join in, explain the game and help things run smoothly.”*



LSH has also continued to offer one off events linking to national book promotions and events or during school holidays. These events strive to increase library visits and promote a love of books and reading.

- Harry Potter night – 22 children enjoyed an afternoon of Harry Potter themed activities including a quiz, owl making and Horcrux Hunt. Most of the children, and some of the accompanying adults, came dressed up for the occasion and one parent bought homemade wands for all the children.

*"What an amazing event! The staff have been incredibly welcoming and so much effort has been put into this evening. Well done to all the staff involved- from the decorations, the lighting, the sound, the planning and the activities. My son has had a brilliant time."*

*"Really good afternoon. Both ladies were lovely & engaged with the children."*

*"Excellent event!"*



- February Half Term – Pokémon week. This consisted of a variety of drop in activities including a Pokémon Hunt. We also held a one off event which included crafts, a quiz and other tasks which when completed gained the participant a Pokémon Trainer certificate - 16 children attended.

*"We had a fantastic time and especially enjoyed the craft."*

*"Both my kids enjoyed it. There were lots of activities to keep them busy and they really liked the game."*

*"Entertained the kids for an hour and good value for money."*

*"Really fun but next time can we have real Pokémon and battle them."*



- In partnership with National Literacy Trust and World Book Day we were an exchange point. We had multiple copies of each of the World Book Day titles which children could have in exchange for vouchers given out in schools.

LSH is also involved in some longer term initiatives and projects:

- We have hosted students from Queen Marys High School and St Thomas More Catholic School on work experience placement introducing them to all elements of our service, supporting them to feel part of a team and giving them an excellent experience of customer service in action.

*"Everything was well organised and there was plenty of work to do. All of the staff were helpful and polite."*

*"I found this placement valuable and enjoyable...was inclusive and interesting."*

- We have also begun to offer placement for young people undertaking their Duke of Edinburgh Award. A requirement of the award is to complete a volunteering element. We currently have one young person on placement who volunteers at our Saturday Story session and another starting this week who will be volunteering at our Children's Board Game group.



- Computer Classes in partnership with Walsall College have restarted. Many of the participants have expressed interest in further courses or one to one's to enhance the skills learnt.
- We continue to be a provider for Walsall HAF with two activities scheduled for the Easter period.
- Continue to host Manor Farm within the library space to meet clients for employment support – clients are encouraged to join the library in order to utilise PC's to further their skills and enhance their employability.
- Walsall Works continue to be based at LSH providing support for local people to find jobs, apprenticeships and access training and supporting local businesses. This has also brought in new customers for LSH who join and then are able to utilise the PCs for Job searches etc.
- We are continuing to work with Shopappy to be a local collection point for customers.
- There is an upcoming project with the First Stop Shop/Money, Home, Jobs to look to deliver a mini FSS from the LSH to support local people who require support and don't access to the facilities at home, this could be in the form of digital support and accessing their My Walsall accounts.

## Archives

Walsall Archives reopened to the public in September 2021 after the pandemic. We have been delivering a service to the public with and have adapted well to working with the restraints of COVID regulations. We introduced a booking system to ensure that there were not too many people in the room and have introduced the Archives Card ticket system which replaces the CARN ticket. After a slow start we are having increasing numbers of people coming in and more of our regulars are coming back to us.

We are updating our offer by replacing our out of date microfilm and fiche readers and reader printer with new microfilm/fiche scanners. This will replace unreliable and out of date equipment and enable a better viewing experience for our customers. As the machines take both microfiche and film, customers will have more chance of using a machine and be able to switch between film and fiche without using a separate machine. The machines will use conventional computer screens and customers will be able to print out from them without having to use a separate printer.

We the use of a high quality A3 flatbed scanner this will enable us to produce high quality scans of from our photograph and document collections. These will be used to produce digital images for customers, display work and images for other council departments.

We have supported work experience students from Queen Mary's High School and St Thomas More Catholic School. The students have all had tours of the archives and been assisting with routine tasks in our research room.

We are supporting council departments in their work and projects:

- Walsall Town Centre development - photographs of Park Street.

- An artist researching at Walsall Archives to add material to her residency at the New Art gallery.
- Planning department and conservation use our building plans and photographs to find out about historic building in the borough, most recently the Guildhall in High Street.
- We loaned documents and reproduced photographs for the Walsall Illuminations exhibition at the Leather Museum.

Some of our recent enquiries have included an Italian student asking for information from the diaries of the Reverend George Fisk, who made an extended journey to the holy land in the 18<sup>th</sup> century. We have these illustrated journals in the archive collections. Another interesting minister was the Reverend Noah Jones. Reverend Jones was congregational minister in Walsall and churches in the Black Country. Our customer was a resident of the same village where Rev Jones came from.

## LSH Collaborative Working

Children's Events

Lichfield Street Hub Library

Walsall works

Walsall Council  
Money, Home,  
Jobs

ShopAppy.com

Lichfield Street Hub Archives

Walsall College

manor farm  
COMMUNITY ASSOCIATION

Walsall Council

PROUD OF OUR PAST OUR PRESENT AND FOR OUR FUTURE

### COMMUNITY, EQUALITY & COHESION:

Equality, Diversity and Inclusion (Corporate)

EDI team took part in workshops and 121s and provided evidence towards WMCA – Race Equality Taskforce.

Walsall Council EDI team is currently chairing the **West Midlands Local Authority Equality Network (WMLAEN)**. In the last quarter the network shared:

- approaches to LGBTQ+ history coverage and Allyship programmes explored by Shropshire and Walsall;
- Changes adopted by other LAs on EqIA forms/guidance;
- International Women's Day events – shared resources;
- Ramadan awareness raising;
- Ukraine fact file and community engagement – Walsall.

Future topics - how to align the LA Equalities' plans with PH, ASC and Integrated Care health inequalities systems.

**Health Inequalities and Prevention Board** (Black Country integrated NHS) highlighted *Walsall for All Community Practitioners Research Programme* as best practice.

Walsall Council is a member of the national **Belong – Community Cohesion and Integration Network** charity, working in collaboration with DLUHC. The focus of the network is currently to understand implications of the Levelling Up agenda on local government, in the context of cohesion and integration, and feedback to government on key challenges.

EDI team are a member of the **Ethnic Minority Committee Steering Group of Black Country NHS Foundation Trust**. Discussion took place about improving access to customers. EDI team will take part in further meetings with Action Deafness, Mental Health Recovery College and Refugee and Migrant Centre to look at improvements. This will be fed back to CAM Proud Work stream.

**Walsall For All Partnership** is preparing 'end of MHCLG funded programme' Celebration event for mid-May. Promotion will take place after the pre-election period. The event will coincide with a launch of evaluation reports. The Partnership is currently considering its future post government funding.

### **Voluntary and Community Sector**

The financial year ended on a really positive for the VCS when one of our most kindest and proactive community members won her category at the Community Inspiration Awards. Jan Davies was nominated for her commitment and drive to showcase and promote the VCS particularly within her role as Chair of Walsall Community Network. It was also a pleasure to see Fahim from Afghan Community and Welfare Centre, Green Rivers Community Association, Abeline from Friends of Gypsy, Traveller and Roma were nominated for various awards.



Walsall Community Network is continuing to represent the sector on various strategic boards including Walsall Together Resilient Communities group, Town Centre Boards, Joint Engagement Assurance Group.

During 2021/22 funding was sourced to support the sector around their resetting agenda, to encourage residents to access services within their local community. Activities funded included coffee morning, physical activity classes, luncheon clubs, counselling, bereavement support and much more. Organisations were also able to support residents who still didn't feel comfortable leaving their homes so meals were delivered and door step befriending took place. The project also enabled the sector to support residents who were in hospital but had no family or friends. A few organisations produced Boredom Buster packs which were greatly received.



We have been fortunate to access additional funding to continue to resetting agenda into 2022/23.

The sector continues to support Walsall's vulnerable residents. 17 VCS organisations received funding through the Housing Support Fund to provide financial support to residents in crisis. The funding was distributed in December 2021 and residents were able to receive financial support towards energy costs, food, white goods including beds, cooker and also support with clothing and shoes. The families accessing this support were in crisis and having support available in their local area was vital and made support accessible. The Government have announced additional HSF for 22/23 and the sector are keen to access this funding again. We have offered the community officers working on this project access to the Councils counselling service, some of the stories residents have spoken to the



community staff about have been quite distressing. We will have data on the impact of this project in the next briefing report.

The sector have also been asked to support the roll out of the Government Council Tax rebate programme. Working closely with Mark Fearn, key community organisations will be promoted as places where residents can access advice and guidance.

Walsall Council CAM team and the WCN are supporting a project around digital access. Bloxwich Community Partnership are leading on this and have recruited an officer who will do some mapping on digital access and the skills within the community to provide support to residents.

A partnership between Walsall Healthcare NHS Trust and Manor Farm CA providing volunteering support at the Manor hospital is proving very successful and will be continued until March 2023. The officer is recruiting volunteers and providing practical advice and guidance.



Walsall Community Network have been administering the Jubilee small grant programme. Over 100 events have been funded with a small contribution of £250.00. There is a wide variety of events taking place around the Borough. All information will be published on the WCN and Walsall Council website.

Walsall council has been successful in securing DLUHC's Changing Places Toilets fund. Some community organisations are involved in this project including Darlaston Town hall, Aaina Community Hub and Bloxwich Library. It is envisaged that further expressions of interest will be asked from other groups.

## Community Cohesion and Integration

The **Ukrainian crisis** has experienced a proactive and fully committed response from the Cohesion team working closely briefing service areas impacted. Cohesion team is represented on the **West Midlands Strategic Migration Partnership**, alongside our Supported Housing team, where the Homes for Ukraine scheme and family visa schemes are formally explained/cascaded.

Marianna Solodcaia is the lead from the team as she can speak Russian and Romanian and has developed a network of Ukrainians to better understand the impact and needs. Weekly updates are used for service areas and are supplied for the community tensions meeting to ensure appropriate service understanding. Support for families relocating in Walsall will be based on the Nash Dom CIC befriending service developed through Walsall For All.

On line monitoring by Marianna has picked up people trying to exploit young women escaping and we continue to monitor and try and steer females to national and international agencies trying to coordinate a safe response.

**Ukrainian fact file resource** and guidance for schools have been developed and shared with those that are part of the School Linking programme.

**The Refugee and Migrant Centre (RMC)** located on Bridge Street in the town centre have a number of Russian speakers and Ukrainian speakers volunteering and are coordinating the statutory response for Walsall Council. This is a very fluid crisis and the communities of Walsall response has been amazing in terms of donations and offers to support.

**Nash Dom CIC**, our strategic partner around European communities have two staff on the border of Slovakia and Ukraine supporting families seeking to escape the war to the UK as well as coordinating aid and donations.

**ESOL demand** still exceeds supply. Harjinder Lal has facilitated a new partnership with Wolverhampton Adult Learning to work with local community partners to deliver more ESOL.. The **ESOL Intelligence Unit** has really proven to be the key to matching demand to supply, a key outcome of the Walsall For All programme. In terms of an effective local delivery WMCA is key to sustainable delivery so we do need to raise awareness of community provision for the future.

**Walsall Pride** planning discussions are currently taking place with the Arboretum looking like the venue for the bank holiday August event – a lot of excitement for the event to be outside for the first time in over two years.

Voluntary sector organisation, **MindKind** working in partnership with the CIC service delivered empowering sessions for both women and men around mental health, domestic abuse and confidence building in the area of Birchills and Croft street.. As the two genders were alongside each other, it was possible to nurture softer community engagement with the aim to build trust and open dialogue to reduce tensions and violence.

**School Linking** has been an unbelievable success due to the determination of Natalia Balan from the CEC service. While many places around the country have experienced a significant drop in schools signing up and some schools leaving Natalia has been determined to buck the trend. She has increased take up and while Covid has had a detrimental impact our schools response with the flexibility of the national School Linking Network and Natalia's hard work has been vital.

## **Regulatory Services**

The Regulatory Teams of Environmental Health, Community Protection, Licensing and Trading Standards have had another busy year in terms of requests for service. In the region of 12,000 requests or enforcement investigations were undertaken by the teams protecting the public from a wide variety of harms including those from pests, rogue traders, fly tippers, litterers, unhygienic food premises, unsafe work places and products, counterfeit and illicit goods, infectious diseases and stray dogs.

The Services also inspect and administer licences regarding a wide range of businesses to ensure legal compliance.

In the last year this has included

- 1237 Private Hire Vehicle Licences
- 895 Premises Licensed for alcohol, entertainment, late night refreshment
- 535 Private Hire Drivers Licences
- 115 Personal licences to sell alcohol
- 105 Hackney Carriage Vehicle Licences
- 97 Persons or premises providing skin piercing services such as tattooists
- 82 Gambling Licences
- 72 Street Trading consents and licences
- 52 Licences for premises dealing with animals for example Pet Shops.
- 11 Taxi Base Operator Licences issued

In terms of enforcement, which is a core part of the services work, almost 250 statutory notices were served on those causing harm to the environment or residents of the Borough.

This included

- 86 Fixed Penalty Notices for litter from vehicles and fly tipping
- 81 Notices in relation to accumulations of waste
- 35 Notices served with regard to health & safety in the workplace breaches
- 13 Notices served requiring premises be secured against unauthorised entry
- 32 Revocation Notices removing private hire and taxi drivers licence to trade
- 5 Suspension Notices temporarily stopping taxi and private Hire driver from working
- 3 notices requiring the emergency closure of food businesses

## **Environmental Health.**

### **Food Standards Agency Recovery Plan**

After a period of time concentrating all efforts on the regulatory response to Covid 19 the normal work of environmental health has started to return to normal. The Government largely called a halt to the food hygiene inspection programme during Covid 19 but are now implementing a Recovery Plan which directs local authorities how to prioritise inspections of food businesses in their area.

The Recovery Plan runs from 1<sup>st</sup> July 2021 to 31<sup>st</sup> March 2023. During this period, the FSA expects local authorities to deliver in line with the Recovery Plan. The table below outlines the number of and deadlines for the inspection of Category A to D food businesses.

Category		By end of March 22	By end of June 22	By end of September 22	By end of December 22	By end of March 23
A		2				
B			19			
C (0-2)				32		
C (3-5)						427
D (0-2)					30	

Since 1<sup>st</sup> July 2021 a total of 119 inspections of rated food businesses have been completed. All Category A businesses have received inspections within the required deadline. The service is on track to complete all Category B businesses by the end of June 2022. The inspection of Category C (0-2) and Category D (0-2) is progressing but is placing pressure on the service because more time is required to inspect these businesses, which are non-compliant, and standards within these businesses have generally deteriorated during the Covid-19 pandemic.

The Recovery Plan requires the implementation of a prioritised inspection programme for unrated (often new) businesses. Since 1<sup>st</sup> July 2021, the service has inspected 119 unrated businesses. However, it will be difficult to reduce the number of un-rated businesses because the number of new registrations of food businesses received exceed the number of initial inspections completed. Since 1<sup>st</sup> July 2021, the service has received 199 new registrations.

### Emergency Closures of a Food Business

The emergency closure of food businesses to protect public health is a legal power Environmental Health wield sparingly and only for some of the worst possible conditions found at such premises. So far in 2022 the service has closed two businesses for unhygienic conditions including mouse infestations in food preparation or storage areas

- 8<sup>th</sup> February 2022, a Hygiene Emergency Prohibition Notice was served on the owner of Lazeeza Hayat Sweet Centre, 136 Caldmore Road, Walsall to close the business because of an infestation of rats and mice.
- 5<sup>th</sup> April 2022, a Hygiene Emergency Prohibition Notice was served on the owner of Unique Jamaica Food Store, 34 Caldmore Green, Walsall to close the business because of an infestation of mice.

### Sandwich Manufacturers



Over the past year the service has used intelligence to identify issues with local sandwich manufacturers using ingredients in their products with an over extended shelf life. Consequently, there are potential issues with the growth of pathogens and spoilage. Because of these concerns Walsall Environmental Health have recently commenced a targeted programme of inspections of large sandwich manufacturers which includes the sampling of their products to address concerns about product safety and extended shelf lives applied by manufacturers.

### **Operation Aidant**

Due to the unique position Environmental Health and others in Community Safety and Enforcement play in regulating business they are able to contribute to important work around issues such as Modern Day Slavery and Exploitation. During March 2022, Officers worked in partnership with the Police to target premises that intelligence had identified as being at risk for these crimes as part of Operation Aidant. During the visits, Officers from Environmental Health conducted health and safety inspections whilst concurrently the Police considered safeguarding issues.

### **Trading Standards**

#### **Scams**

Scams can target everyone but particularly vulnerable people and considerable money can be lost to these criminals. Trading Standards continue to work to rectify these issues and this year have undertaken the following work

- Contributed a Consumer advice article, which was published in the Christmas edition of the Pioneer magazine.
- Provided a presentation on scams and doorstep crime via webinar to adult safeguarding officers across the West Midlands.
- Obtained over £30,000 in financial redress for vulnerable consumers relating to fraudulent goods and services
- Identified over 100 scam victims via our work with National Trading Standards and provided advice to the victims as well as some cheques sent by consumers being intercepted and returned.

#### **Stafford Street**

Intelligence identified Stafford Street as a potential hotspot for Trading Standards infringements. Officers conducted an 'all out' day of inspections with police support. A range of offences were uncovered, weights and measures, safety, food safety, counterfeiting and illegal vapes. Follow up advice and enforcement action has significantly reduced non-compliance in this area.

#### **Self storage campaign.**

As part of a National Trading Standards project, officers visited all self-storage businesses in the area, advising on the national Trading Standards Tick box campaign and completing audits which resulted in the majority of businesses being signed up to the scheme.

#### **Counterfeit vodka and wine.**

Following a consumer complaint and national reports of counterfeit vodka and wine, 160 businesses in Walsall were identified as high risk and received a full trading standards inspection. In total 88 counterfeit bottles were seized and a range of other trading standards offences were identified, including out of date food and illegal vapes. On analysis the wine and vodka were not found to pose a significant health risk. Official warnings were issued to various traders and revisits were undertaken to those businesses posing greatest risk. Revisits to two offending retailers has uncovered more counterfeit wine being sold and prosecution files are being prepared for both of these retailers.

### **Illegal vape pens.**

A proliferation of the availability of brightly coloured illegal vape pens was highlighted as an area of concern by Trading Standards authorities. As a result all vape shops were visited and vapes pens were added to the inspection schedule for all other Trading Standards visits. Over 2596 illegal vape pens, containing up to 10 times the permitted volume of nicotine, have since been seized by officers and various alerts issued warning consumers and traders about their dangers together with an article written for Walsall Councils Licensing magazine to educate traders on vaping products.

### **Allergens.**

Officers have investigated several allergen complaints about caterers serving food that has led to the hospitalisation of the allergy sufferer. Such cases are difficult to evidence and follow-up warnings and advice together with covert test purchases have been used to ensure the businesses are complying with allergen regulations.

Dessert caterers were identified as a particular concern and these have all received advice letters and are being programmed in for inspection.

Allergen advice articles authored by a Walsall Trading Standards Officer have been published in the Trading Standards Business News regional online magazine.

### **Food Inspections.**

During targeted inspections officers have discovered and seized unsafe and unlabelled food together with over 300 unsafe out of date food items some as much as 24 days out of date.

### **Product Safety**

Interventions by officer have resulted in the removal from market of thousands of unsafe products imported by Walsall businesses. Examples include dangerous heaters, light bulbs, toys and electric chargers.

Advice has been provided to a number of new manufacturers and importers to ensure they are able to start trading fairly and safely

### **Underage sales test purchasing exercises**

The following covert exercises have been carried out using under age volunteers

- Knives, 11 attempts, 2 sales

- Cigarettes 4 attempts, 1 sale
- Alcohol 4 attempts, no sales
- Vapes 9 attempts, 4 sales

The last underage vapes exercise that took place in March resulted in four sales from four businesses, together with the seizure of illegal vapes from one store and the arrest of the seller for possession of a weapon and class B drug. As a consequence the Police have issued a Closure Order for the shop and are in the process of applying for a Review of the alcohol licence.

### **Illicit tobacco**

As part of the HMRC funded operation CeCe, Walsall Trading Standards Officers have seized more illicit tobacco than any of the other 14 Central England Local Authority's with 204,580 cigarettes and 57,000 g of tobacco seized.

Other notable successes in this area include

- Unlabelled shisha tobacco, unsafe counterfeit phone chargers, class A drugs and offensive weapons have been seized during operations.
- Three illicit tobacco retailers have been closed down following trading standards disruption work
- Immigration officers working alongside trading standards have identified four immigrants working illegally.
- A joint operation was conducted with Wolverhampton Trading Standards whereby shops in Wolverhampton were raided at the same time as a linked residential property in Walsall. 504,180 cigarettes and 218.4kg of Hand Rolling Tobacco were seized from the Walsall property.
- During two illicit tobacco operations Cannabis was found and seized by the police with approximate value of £250,000.
- Licence reviews were carried out on two premises leading to revocation of licences
- An educational video warning of the dangers of illegal tobacco was produced by trading standards and published on You Tube

### **Counterfeiting**

The National Markets Group has identified significant counterfeiting issues within Walsall. This has led to raids by Trading Standards Officers on several local businesses and residential premises. This included a Court warrant being exercised on a storage site in Walsall that resulted in the seizure of 7500 items of counterfeit clothing worth £1.5 from three storage units and a van. Investigations to identify and bring the offenders to justice are ongoing

Two major raids have been conducted at Bescot Market resulting in the seizure of £58,000 of football shirts and £85,000 of clothing, accessories and fragrance from six different traders.

Three fulfilment houses currently operate within the borough. The advisory work carried out by officers over recent years has greatly reduced the amount of unsafe and counterfeit electrical items passing through these businesses but such enterprises remain high risk and require substantial resource and monitoring.

## **Licensing**

During 2021 the Licensing Service consulted with the public and partners with regard to the five yearly review of the authority's Statement of Licensing Policy. The Policy shows how the authority intends to carry out its functions and promote the four licensing objectives of

- the prevention of crime and disorder;
- public safety;
- the prevention of public nuisance; and
- the protection of children from harm.

The Licensing Policy was altered this year to incorporate changes to the Cumulative Impact Policy that previously covered the Town Centre. Concerns were raised by Responsible Authorities over on and off sales of alcohol in certain areas as well as increases in late night refreshment venues and the litter and waste that can often accumulate as a result of their use. The consultation resulted in the Cumulative Impact Policy extending to incorporate the WS1 postcode beyond the Town Centre and into areas such as Caldmore and Palfrey.

In the year ahead Policy changes to Hackney Carriage and Private Hire Licensing, Street Trading and Gambling are all planned and the preparatory work has been ongoing recently to ensure this is a success and that Walsall's Licensing Service is modern, effective and value for money.

Licensing staff continue to work alongside internal colleagues and the Pound programme to implement online services to make applying for licences more efficient for both the applicant and the service.

## **Regulatory Services Community Protection**

Over the last year the Community Protection Team have continued to focus on and develop partner relationships in line with the Integrated Services & Enforcement elements/priorities outlined within the Resilient Communities model.

## **Environmental Crime**

A report detailing the Council's response to issues around fly tipping was presented to Scrutiny Overview Committee on the 15<sup>th</sup> March 2022. The report was well received and further planned activity was noted for the year ahead including

- A relaunch of the public reporting scheme which rewards residents for information that leads to a prosecution.

- Appropriate focus on environmental work through the Safer Streets initiative approved by cabinet in October 2021.
- Speedier and quicker issuing of Fixed Penalty Notices directly from CCTV footage.
- Increased focus and campaigns in problem areas and greater links with Community groups focusing on environmental initiatives.
- Increased communication through Social Media channels.
- Increased focus on behavioural change as a tool to fight fly-tipping.
- Further work with partners to develop a multi-agency approach to fly-tipping including a fly-tipping summit.
- Continual drive to develop best practice and the use of the work of keep Britain Tidy and the Association of Public service Excellence.

In a move to increase both the number of Fixed Penalty Notices (FPNs) for environmental crimes and the speed at which they are issued a process has been developed, trialled and implemented to issue FPNs to the registered keepers of vehicles in certain circumstances. CCTV operatives have been trained in this process and will be taking on this element of the work freeing up the Fly Tipping Team to undertake more complex investigations.

The Local Authority Support Officers continue to patrol the borough and issue FPNs for littering offences they witness, 1429 tickets have been issued this year.

### **Multi Agency Road Safety Operations (MARSOs)**

These events are organised by West Midlands Police and in addition to Community Protection they are regularly attended by a host of different agencies including DVSA; Immigration; HMRC, WMFS; Highways Agency; Environment Agency etc

The aim of the MARSO is:

- to promote road safety
- educate the motorist (and enforce where necessary)
- reduce collisions
- to reduce crime & ASB
- gather intelligence from both the vehicles and occupants
- to leave a positive footprint by providing reassurance to the public

In the last year, locations across Walsall have hosted seven of these events with additional Automatic Number Plate Recognition (ANPR) operations being carried out by local Neighbourhood Teams which Community Protection have led on. Community Protection have inspected a significant number of vehicles in relation to activities such as Taxis and Private Hire, Scrap Metal collection, Environmental Crime/Control of Waste. These inspections have resulted in a number of warnings, suspensions and notices being issued.



for a variety of offences ranging from drivers failing to display their badge & incorrectly liveried or damaged vehicles through to unlicensed scrap metal and/or waste collectors.

Community Protection have committed to continuing its involvement with the MARSOs as well as increasing the number of Stop Check operations to be carried out over the coming year.

## **Anti-Social Behaviour**

The team supported multi-agency work to tackle a large derelict site in Marsh Street, which was being used for activity that represented a very real safeguarding risk to young and other vulnerable people. Officers led on the successful use of a Community Protection Notice to secure the site to a very high standard and supported work to obtain a Closure Order through the courts.

This and other work removed the safeguarding risk and protected many vulnerable individuals who were travelling from across the regions to visit the site.

The Community Protection Enforcement Officers are working closely with police officers in Walsall Town Centre to tackle issues associated with problematic street drinkers. A male well-known for causing anti-social behaviour in the Town has been formally interviewed with a view to prosecution following intervention by the Team

Public Space Protection Order (PSPO) enforcement patrols are being re invigorated along with Police colleagues and targeted work is underway to confront unacceptable behaviours in those area affected.

## **Unauthorised Encampments**

Walsall Council fully acknowledge that the Travelling community have a right to their way of life and are protected in law through the Equality Act 2010. As a Council we additionally have legal duties under the public sector equality duty to consider the needs of Travellers and will attempt wherever possible to assist the Travellers with any welfare or other needs they have.

In circumstances where unauthorised Encampments cannot be tolerated the authority continues to take a robust approach to eviction.

The use of bailiffs, injunctions and other statutory powers has lead to evictions taking place in a much more timely way. On some occasions the encampments can simply move from one plot of land to another and so this year the Council will open its Transit Site in Pleck so that small groups of Travellers can be directed to take up pitches on the site or leave the Borough. It is hoped this much needed resource will assist both the Travelling Community, Police and the authority manage unauthorised encampments in a better way.

**Councillor G Perry**  
**Portfolio Holder for Community Leisure and Culture**

13 April 2022