



Walsall Council

You are hereby summoned to attend a meeting of the Council of the Metropolitan Borough of Walsall to be held on **MONDAY the 25TH day of APRIL 2022 at 6.00 p.m.** at the Council House, Walsall.

Public access via: <https://aisapps.sonicfoundry.com/AuditelScheduler/CreateSchedules/Past/41>

Dated this 13th day of April, 2022.

Yours sincerely,

Chief Executive.

The business to be transacted is as follows:

1. To elect a person to preside if the Mayor and Deputy Mayor are not present.
2. Apologies.
3. To approve as a correct record and sign the minutes of the meeting of the Council held on 24th February, 2022 (**pages 4 to 17**)
4. Declarations of interest.
5. **Local Government (Access to Information) Act, 1985 (as amended):**
To agree that the public be excluded from the private session during consideration of the agenda items indicated for the reasons shown on the agenda.
6. Mayor's announcements.
7. To receive any petitions

8. To answer any questions in accordance with Council procedure rules:
 - (a) From the public: None.
 - (b) From members of the Council: None.
9. Corporate Parenting Board Annual Report – Copy Enclosed (**Pages 18 to 33**)
10. **Portfolio holder briefings.** To receive a 5 minute presentation from the following portfolios:
 - (a) Health and Wellbeing - Councillor Craddock (**pages 34 to 41**)
 - (b) Deputy Leader and Resilient Communities - Councillor Perry (**pages 42 to 73**)

(Note: A member of the Council may ask the portfolio holder any question and another associated question without notice upon each report. Questioning by members is limited to 10 minutes for each report presented.)

11. To consider the following motion, notice of which has been duly given by **Councillor Nawaz and Councillor Hussain.**

The Black Country Plan (BCP) has created a lot of concern amongst our communities across the borough. The Green Belt is highly valued by our residents and is an asset for future generations.

There are several sites at risk of development including Home Farm, Sandhills; Land at Yorks Bridge, Pelsall and Yieldsfield Farm, Bloxwich. Another site is the Arboretum Park in Walsall and surrounding greenbelt such as Calderfields Farm, Aldridge Road which is enjoyed by many residents both from within Walsall and further afield. It is a highly valued, aesthetically pleasing and bio-diverse green space adding to the openness and enjoyment of the Arboretum by Walsall residents.

This Council notes that:-

- the BCP will identify and allocate sufficient land for development for the areas housing and employment needs for the next 15 years; and
- Dudley Council recently removed 2 sites from the BCP.

This Council:-

- Urges Cabinet to review any proposed Walsall Green Belt land including Calderfields Farm, Aldridge Road; Yorks Bridge, Pelsall and other sites currently included in the BCP, and brings a report to Full Council, before the final consultation ends, with proposals as to what, if any, Walsall Green Belt land should be included in the plan.

At this point the Council to consider the following item as charitable trustees *When the Council is acting in this capacity, Council procedure rules do not apply. A corporate trustee is a corporation which has been appointed to act as a trustee of the charity. Trustees should bear in mind that when they are dealing with the business of the charity, their overriding duty is to act in the best interests of that charity.*

12. Annual report of Barr Beacon Trust Management Committee. Report reproduced in the reports booklet for this meeting **(pages 74 – 78).**



Walsall Council

Minutes of the **ORDINARY MEETING** of the Council of the Walsall Metropolitan Borough held on **Thursday 24th February, 2022, at 6.00 p.m.** at the Town Hall, Walsall.

Present

Councillor R. Burley (Mayor) in the Chair

Councillor B. Allen

“ A. Andrew
“ H. Bashir
“ M.A. Bird
“ C. Bott
“ P. Bott
“ O. Butler
“ A.G. Clarke
“ S.J. Cooper
“ S. Craddock
“ C. Creaney
“ S.K. Ditta
“ S. Elson
“ K. Ferguson
“ G. Flint
“ M. Follows
“ N. Gandham
“ N. Gultasib
“ L.A. Harrison
“ A.J. Hicken
“ A. Hussain
“ K. Hussain
“ D. James
“ L. Jeavons
“ S. Johal
“ P. Kaur

Councillor E. Lee

“ Mrs. R.A. Martin
“ F. Mazhar
“ K. Murphy
“ J. Murray
“ S. Nasreen
“ A.A. Nawaz
“ A. Nazir
“ M. Nazir
“ K. Pedley
“ G. Perry
“ L.J. Rattigan
“ I.C. Robertson
“ S. Samra
“ K. Sears
“ G. Singh Sohal
“ P. Smith
“ C.A. Statham
“ M.A. Statham
“ C.D.D. Towe
“ V.J. Waters
“ J. Whitehouse
“ T.S. Wilson
“ R.V. Worrall
“ A. Young

67. **Apologies**

Apologies were received on behalf of councillors D. Coughlan, A. Underhill, G. Ali, W. Rasab and A. Harris.

68. **Minutes**

Resolved

That the minutes of the meetings held on 10th January, 2022 , copies having been sent to each member of the Council, be approved as a correct record subject to the inclusion of Councillor S. Craddock within the list of attendees.

69. **Declarations of interest**

Councillor J. Murray declared an interest in item 11 – Pay Policy.

70. **Local Government (Access to Information) Act, 1985 (as amended)**

There were no items to be considered in private session.

71. **Mayor's announcements**

Death of Sir Richard Shepherd.

The Mayor referred to the death of Sir Richard Shephard Member of Parliament for Aldridge – Brownhills, from 1979 to 2015. Councillors Bird, Perry. Murray, Smith, Nawaz and Waters paid tribute to Sir Richard Shephard, following which it was **moved** by the Mayor, duly seconded and:

Resolved:

That this Council have heard with deep regret of the death of Sir Richard Shepherd, Member of Parliament for Aldridge – Brownhills, from 1979 to 2015 and places on record their appreciation of his services to the borough over a period of many years and expresses its condolences to his family at this sad time.

72. **Petitions**

The following petition was submitted:

- Councillor J. Murray – Pedestrian Crossing – Birmingham Road, Aldridge.

73. **Questions by members of the Public**

None

74. **Questions by members of the Council**

Councillor Smith asked a question in relation to the academisation of Walsall local authority run schools which was duly responded to by the Portfolio Holder for Education, Councillor Towe. Councillor Smith then asked a supplementary question which again was responded to by the Portfolio Holder for Education.

Councillor Smith then asked a second question relating to democratic accountability which was responded to by the Leader, Councillor Bird. Councillor Smith then asked a supplementary question which again was responded to by the Leader.

Councillor Worrall asked a question relating to the provision of mitigating, effective, traffic calming/road safety/speed reduction measures on feeder routes to the proposed Householder Waste Recycling Centre at Middlemore Lane, Aldridge which was responded to by the Deputy Leader and Portfolio Holder for Regeneration, Councillor Andrew.

75. **Mayoralty 2022/23**

It was **moved** by Councillor Bird, Seconded by Councillor Andrew and

Resolved

(a) Mayor Elect

That Councillor Rose Martin be nominated as Mayor of the Walsall Metropolitan Borough Council for the municipal year 2022/23; and

(b) Deputy Mayor Elect

That Councillor Chris Towe be nominated as Deputy Mayor of the Walsall Metropolitan Borough Council for the 2022/23 Municipal Year.

76. **Annual Audit Report**

It was **moved** by Councillor Johal, Seconded by Councillor Andrew and

Resolved

That the Annual Audit Report be noted.

77. Recommendation of Personnel Committee

(a) Pay Policy Statement and Living Wage

The report to Personnel Committee on 24th January, 2022 was submitted.

It was **moved** by Councillor Bird, seconded by Councillor Andrew and:

Resolved

- 1) That the Pay Policy Statement for 2022/2023 be approved; and
- 2) That the continuation of the living wage as detailed in the Pay Policy (section 6.5) and section 4.2, (option a) of the report (appended) be approved.

78. Recommendations of Cabinet

(a) Our Council Plan 2022 - 2025

The report to Cabinet on 9 February, 2022 was submitted.

It was **moved** by Councillor Bird, seconded by Councillor Andrew and:

Resolved

- 1) That the 2022-25 Our Council Plan be approved.
- 2) That the final design of the document be agreed with the Chief Executive in consultation with the Leader.

(b) Corporate Budget Plan 2022/23 -2025/26, incorporating Capital Strategy; and the Treasury Management and Investment Strategy 2022/23.

The Monitoring Officer informed Members that a recorded vote would be required on the budget recommendation and confirmed that he had granted a dispensation to all members in order that the matter could be debated and determined.

The mayor confirmed that the final precepts and settlements had been received and there were no changes to the figures in the budget recommendation contained within the covering report to Council.

It was **moved** by Councillor Bird and seconded by Councillor Andrew:

Resolved

That the following be approved:

3.3.1 Revenue

- a) The financial envelope of resources for 2022/23 as set out in **Section B - Part 1** "The Revenue Corporate Budget Plan and Capital Programme".
- b) A Walsall Council net council tax requirement for 2022/23 of £138.43m and a 1.99% increase in council tax, plus a further 1% increase for Adult Social Care precept (total council tax increase of 2.99%).
- c) That the recommendations of the S151 Officer in respect of the robustness of the estimates made for the purposes of the budget calculations and the adequacy of reserves **be approved**, including the levels of central contingency and an opening general reserve of no less than £16.11m, as set out in the S151 Officer Section 25 statement in **Annex 11** of the Budget Plan.
- d) The final levies below for outside bodies:

LEVY	AMOUNT (£)
West Midlands Combined Authority Transport Levy	11,411,844
Environment Agency	85,178

- e) The following statutory determinations (references are to the Local Government Finance Act, 1992 as amended), and subject to any final changes arising from receipt of final specific grant allocations, and technical/legislative guidance:

- I. **£703,984,510** being the aggregate gross expenditure, which the council estimates for the items set out in Section 31A(2) (a) to (f) of the Act.
- II. **£565,559,260** being the aggregate income which the council estimates for the items set out in Section 31A(3) (a) to (d) of the Act.
- III. **£138,425,250** being the amount, by which the aggregate at (e) (I) above exceeds the aggregate at (e) (II), calculated by the council in accordance with Section 31A(4) of the Act, as its council tax requirement for the year.
- IV. **£1,927.84** being the amount at (e) (III) above, divided by the council tax base of 71,803.35, calculated by the council in accordance with Section 31B of the Act, as the basic amount of its council tax for the year (average council tax at band D).

V. Valuation bands

Being amounts given by multiplying the amount at (e) (IV) above by the number which, in the proportion set out in Section 5 (1) of the Local Government Act 1992, is applicable to dwellings listed in valuation band D, calculated by the council in accordance with Section 30 and 36 of the Act as the amounts to be taken into account for the year in respect of categories of dwelling listed in different valuation bands.

A	B	C	D
1,285.23	1,499.43	1,713.63	1,927.84
E	F	G	H
2,356.25	2,784.66	3,213.06	3,855.68

- f) The final precepts from the Fire and Rescue Authority and the Police and Crime Commissioner, issued to the Council in accordance with Section 40 of the Local Government Finance Act, 1992, for each of the categories of dwelling shown below:

PRECEPTING AUTHORITY	VALUATION BANDS			
Police And Crime Commissioner	A	B	C	D
	125.03	145.87	166.71	187.55
	E	F	G	H
	229.23	270.91	312.58	375.10
Fire & Rescue	A	B	C	D
	45.35	52.91	60.47	68.03
	E	F	G	H
	83.14	98.26	113.38	136.05

- g) That having calculated the aggregate in each case of the amounts at (e) (v) and (f) above, the Council, in accordance with Section 30 (2) of the Local Government Finance Act 1992, hereby sets the amounts of council tax for 2022/23 for each of the categories of dwellings shown below:

A	B	C	D
1,455.61	1,698.21	1,940.81	2,183.42
E	F	G	H
2,668.62	3,153.83	3,639.02	4,366.83

- h) That notice **be given** of the council tax within twenty one days of it being set by publishing details of the same in the “Express and Star” newspaper circulating in the Authority’s area.
- i) That the S151 Officer **be instructed** to take all necessary action in relation to council tax, community charge and national non-domestic rates, including, where appropriate, the signing of all documents, billing, the giving of notices and the taking of necessary steps to ensure collection thereof.
- j) That the S151 Officer **be given delegated authority** to make transfers to and from reserves in order to ensure that reserves are maintained as necessary and in particular, adjusted when reserves are no longer required, or need to be replenished.
- k) That, pursuant to Section 52ZB and 52ZC of the Local Government Finance Act 1992, the relevant basic amount of council tax for the Council is not excessive in relation to determining whether a referendum is required.

3.3.2 Capital

- a) The allocation of capital expenditure plans as set out in **Section B - Part 1** “The Revenue Corporate Budget Plan and Capital Programme”, and that the capital and leasing programme as set out in **Annex 9 be approved, revised**

for the below change, bearing in mind the principle that unless affordable from within current resources, specific projects funded by borrowing will not be commenced until a payback agreement is in place. Schemes funded from grant will commence when final allocations are published.

Change - External funded programme increased by £7,923,614 for Social Housing Decarbonisation grant, resulting in a total capital programme of £194,881,080 for 2022/23 (£79,701,064 council funded and £115,180,016 external funded).

- b) That the S151 Officer be **given delegated authority** to determine how each source of finance is used to fund the overall capital programme and to alter the overall mix of financing as necessary, to maximise the flexibility of capital resources used and minimise the ongoing costs of borrowing to the council.
- c) That the S151 Officer, after consultation with the Leader (Portfolio Holder for Finance), be **given delegated authority** to release capital resources held back for any contingent items that may arise (earmarked capital receipts for essential or emergency spend), and also for any match funding requirements that may be required of the council in order to secure additional external capital funding (e.g. bids for government or other funding).
- d) The Capital Strategy set out in **Annex 8** of the Budget Plan **be approved**.
- e) The Flexible Use of Capital Receipts Strategy set out in **Annex 10** of the Budget Plan **be approved**.

3.3.3 Treasury Management

- a) **Section B – Part 2A** – The Treasury Management and Investment Strategy 2022/23 onwards, including the council's borrowing requirement, borrowing limits, and the adoption of prudential indicators, **be approved**.
- b) That decisions to effect movements between conventional borrowing and other long term liabilities, such as leases, **be delegated** to the S151 Officer.
- c) That decisions to use capital receipts or borrowing within the framework of approved prudential indicators **be delegated** to the S151 Officer.
- d) **Section B – Part 2B** – Treasury Management Policies, **be approved**.

An Amendment was moved by Councillor Nawaz and seconded by Councillor K. Hussain to create a £1m 'Cost of Living Crisis Fund' for 2022/23 financed by an additional investment of £500,000 from general reserves and incorporating the existing £500,000 Crisis Support Scheme budget by amending recommendation 3.3.1 of the report, as submitted, as follows, noting that this amendment would require a change to the statutory determinations within the Council resolution, increasing both gross expenditure and gross income by £500,000 as follows:

Section 3.3.1 Revenue

e) The following statutory determinations (references are to the Local Government Finance Act, 1992 as amended), and subject to any final changes arising from receipt of final specific grant allocations, and technical/legislative guidance:

- I. **£704,484,510** being the aggregate gross expenditure, which the council estimates for the items set out in Section 31A(2) (a) to (f) of the Act.
- II. **£566,059,260** being the aggregate income which the council estimates for the items set out in Section 31A(3) (a) to (d) of the Act.

Additionally, it would increase the cash limit for Customer Engagement by £500,000 and increase use of reserves by £500,000 for 2022/23 only within **Section B - Part 1** "The Revenue Corporate Budget Plan and Capital Programme".

Note: There is no impact on other sections of the recommendations in 3.3.1 or on the recommendations in 3.3.2 and 3.3.3.

Advice from the Chief Finance Officer to enable consideration of the amendment

The amendment as set out changes the statutory determinations but does not amend the council tax requirement, the level of council tax or council tax bands from those proposed by Cabinet to Council.

The proposal is for £500k of new one-off investment into a cost of living crisis fund for 2022/23. The net effect of this proposal is nil, as it includes the use of general reserves of £500k to fund the investment.

In relation to the proposals in this amendment, I can advise as follows:

The current estimated opening level of reserves as at 1 April 2022 is c£16.61m. The recommended level of reserves is £16.11m, leaving £500k of reserves available. After reviewing the budget risks, I can confirm that the release of the £500k reduces the authorities' flexibility in meeting unknown financial pressures as the £16.61m estimated level of reserves assumes use of £1m in 2021/22 as reported in the S25 Statement, Annexe 11 of the Budget report, to fund a forecast general fund overspend - should this increase, then the £500k currently available would not be available for use to fund this amendment. However, I consider the risk of this to be low.

General reserves provide a buffer and mitigate against risks, such as unavoidable and unknown demand and other service cost pressures which may arise in the year and are therefore not normally planned to be used. In this case, as the level of opening reserves are above the recommended level, there is headroom in the general reserves balance, so the minimum opening general fund balance required of the medium term financial strategy would not be compromised if this amendment were agreed.

This additional £500k investment is proposed to be used to top up the existing crisis support scheme fund for 2022/23. This proposal doubles the available resources (currently £500k per annum) in 2022/23. Details of the scheme, if

proposing to change the criteria used to agree claims, may require approval by Cabinet, and equality impact assessment, as appropriate, prior to implementation.

Summary Chief Finance Officer advice

The Council is required to set the budget for the forthcoming year, which is 2022/23. The amendment, if approved, represents a balanced budget for 2022/23, with a call on the use of one-off reserves in 2022/23.

On being put to the vote **the amendment** was declared **lost** the voting being recorded as follows:

For the amendment – 14 members

Cllr: A.A. Nawaz
R. Burley
H. Bashir
C. Bott
P. Bott
S.K. Ditta
N. Gultasib
K. Hussain
L. Jeavons
F. Mazhar
S. Nasreen
A. Nazir
I.C. Robertson
A. Young

Against the amendment- 35 members

Cllr: M.A. Bird
B. Allen
A. Andrew
O. Butler
A.G. Clarke
S.J. Cooper
S. Craddock
S. Elson
K. Ferguson
G. Flint
M. Follows
N. Gandham
L.A. Harrison
A.J. Hicken
A. Hussain
D. James
S. Johal
P. Kaur
E. Lee
R.A. Martin
K. Murphy
J. Murray
K. Pedley
G. Perry
L.J. Rattigan
S. Samra
K. Sears
G. Singh Sohal
P. Smith
C.A. Statham
M.A. Statham
C.D.D. Towe
V.J. Waters
J. Whitehouse
T.S. Wilson

There being no further amendments, the Mayor put **the substantive motion** to the vote which was declared **carried**, the voting being recorded as follows:

**For the motion –
34 members**

Cllr: M.A. Bird
B. Allen
A. Andrew
O. Butler
A.G. Clarke
S.J. Cooper
S. Craddock
S. Elson
K. Ferguson
G. Flint
M. Follows
N. Gandham
L.A. Harrison
A.J. Hicken
A. Hussain
D. James
S. Johal
P. Kaur
E. Lee
R.A. Martin
K. Murphy
J. Murray
K. Pedley
G. Perry
L.J. Rattigan
S. Samra
K. Sears
G. Singh Sohal
C.A. Statham
M.A. Statham
C.D.D. Towe
V.J. Waters
J. Whitehouse
T.S. Wilson

**Against the motion –
15 members**

Cllr: A.A. Nawaz
R. Burley
H. Bashir
C. Bott
P. Bott
S.K. Ditta
N. Gultasib
K. Hussain
L. Jeavons
F. Mazhar
S. Nasreen
A. Nazir
I.C. Robertson
P. Smith
A. Young

and it was:

Resolved

That the following be approved:

3.3.1 Revenue

- a) The financial envelope of resources for 2022/23 as set out in **Section B - Part 1** "The Revenue Corporate Budget Plan and Capital Programme".
- b) A Walsall Council net council tax requirement for 2022/23 of £138.43m and a 1.99% increase in council tax, plus a further 1% increase for Adult Social Care precept (total council tax increase of 2.99%).
- c) That the recommendations of the S151 Officer in respect of the robustness of the estimates made for the purposes of the budget calculations and the adequacy of reserves **be approved**, including the levels of central contingency and an opening general reserve of no less than £16.11m, as set out in the S151 Officer Section 25 statement in **Annex 11** of the Budget Plan.
- d) The final levies below for outside bodies:

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- e) The following statutory determinations (references are to the Local Government Finance Act, 1992 as amended), and subject to any final changes arising from receipt of final specific grant allocations, and technical/legislative guidance:

- VI. **£703,984,510** being the aggregate gross expenditure, which the council estimates for the items set out in Section 31A(2) (a) to (f) of the Act.
- VII. **£565,559,260** being the aggregate income which the council estimates for the items set out in Section 31A(3) (a) to (d) of the Act.
- VIII. **£138,425,250** being the amount, by which the aggregate at (e) (I) above exceeds the aggregate at (e) (II), calculated by the council in accordance with Section 31A(4) of the Act, as its council tax requirement for the year.
- IX. **£1,927.84** being the amount at (e) (III) above, divided by the council tax base of 71,803.35, calculated by the council in accordance with Section 31B of the Act, as the basic amount of its council tax for the year (average council tax at band D).

X. Valuation bands

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2,356.25	2,784.66	3,213.06	3,855.68

- h) The final precepts from the Fire and Rescue Authority and the Police and Crime Commissioner, issued to the Council in accordance with Section 40 of the Local Government Finance Act, 1992, for each of the categories of dwelling shown below:

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	E	F	G	H
	83.14	98.26	113.38	136.05

- i) That having calculated the aggregate in each case of the amounts at (e) (v) and (f) above, the Council, in accordance with Section 30 (2) of the Local Government Finance Act 1992, hereby sets the amounts of council tax for 2022/23 for each of the categories of dwellings shown below:

A	B	C	D
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E	F	G	H
2,668.62	3,153.83	3,639.02	4,366.83

- h) That notice **be given** of the council tax within twenty one days of it being set by publishing details of the same in the “Express and Star” newspaper circulating in the Authority’s area.
- i) That the S151 Officer **be instructed** to take all necessary action in relation to council tax, community charge and national non-domestic rates, including, where appropriate, the signing of all documents, billing, the giving of notices and the taking of necessary steps to ensure collection thereof.
- j) That the S151 Officer **be given delegated authority** to make transfers to and from reserves in order to ensure that reserves are maintained as necessary and in particular, adjusted when reserves are no longer required, or need to be replenished.
- k) That, pursuant to Section 52ZB and 52ZC of the Local Government Finance Act 1992, the relevant basic amount of council tax for the Council is not excessive in relation to determining whether a referendum is required.

3.3.2 Capital

- a) The allocation of capital expenditure plans as set out in **Section B - Part 1** “The Revenue Corporate Budget Plan and Capital Programme”, and that the capital and leasing programme as set out in **Annex 9 be approved, revised**

for the below change, bearing in mind the principle that unless affordable from within current resources, specific projects funded by borrowing will not be commenced until a payback agreement is in place. Schemes funded from grant will commence when final allocations are published.

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- b) That the S151 Officer be **given delegated authority** to determine how each source of finance is used to fund the overall capital programme and to alter the overall mix of financing as necessary, to maximise the flexibility of capital resources used and minimise the ongoing costs of borrowing to the council.
- c) That the S151 Officer, after consultation with the Leader (Portfolio Holder for Finance), be **given delegated authority** to release capital resources held back for any contingent items that may arise (earmarked capital receipts for essential or emergency spend), and also for any match funding requirements that may be required of the council in order to secure additional external capital funding (e.g. bids for government or other funding).
- d) The Capital Strategy set out in **Annex 8** of the Budget Plan **be approved**.
- f) The Flexible Use of Capital Receipts Strategy set out in **Annex 10** of the Budget Plan **be approved**.

3.3.3 Treasury Management

- e) **Section B – Part 2A** – The Treasury Management and Investment Strategy 2022/23 onwards, including the council's borrowing requirement, borrowing limits, and the adoption of prudential indicators, **be approved**.
- f) That decisions to effect movements between conventional borrowing and other long term liabilities, such as leases, **be delegated** to the S151 Officer.
- g) That decisions to use capital receipts or borrowing within the framework of approved prudential indicators **be delegated** to the S151 Officer.
- h) **Section B – Part 2B** – Treasury Management Policies, **be approved**.

79. **Portfolio Holder Briefings**

Children's Services

A report was submitted.

The Portfolio Holder for Children's Services, Councillor Wilson, gave a presentation.

Members asked questions in relation to the presentation which were responded to by Councillor Wilson.

Internal Services

A report was submitted.

The Portfolio Holder for Internal Services, Councillor M. Statham, gave a presentation.

Members asked questions in relation to the presentation which were responded to by Councillor M. Statham.

80. Notice of Motion – Rise in National Insurance Contributions

A report was submitted.

The following motion, notice of which had been duly given was **moved** by Councillor Nawaz and seconded by Councillor Hussain:

That:

This Council is opposed to the rise in National Insurance contributions which will exacerbate in work poverty and disproportionately impact on young people and less affluent residents within the Borough; and asks the Leader of the Council to write to the Chancellor of the Exchequer to express Walsall Council's opposition to this unjust tax rise.

On being put to the vote the motion was declared **lost**.

The meeting terminated at 8.50 p.m.

Mayor:

Date:

Council

25 April 2022

Corporate Parenting Board Annual Report

Ward(s) All

Portfolios: Councillor Tim Wilson – Children's

Report:

The Corporate Parenting Board produces an annual report for submission to Council each year. The draft annual report was submitted to the Corporate Parenting Board for comment and subsequently approved on 4th April 2022.


Recommendations:

That:

That the annual report is noted.

Contact Officer:

Nikki Gough – Democratic Services Officer

 01922 654767

Nikki.gough@walsall.gov.uk

Corporate Parenting Board Annual Report 2020 – 2022



Walsall Council



Foreword

I am pleased to introduce the annual report of the Corporate Parenting Board which covers the 2020-21 and 2021-22 municipal years. As corporate parents, we take our duties toward looked after children and care leavers seriously and are committed to providing the best possible support to meet their needs.

The Corporate Parenting Board provides a welcoming forum for children looked after and care leavers. We have endeavoured to ensure that the way we engage with young people is meaningful. As meetings moved online due to the Pandemic, we introduced a Shadow Board held in private to capture feedback from young people, to inform the Board which met in public and streamed on YouTube. It appears that this was a success as a representative of the Children in Care Council has said:-

"I really enjoyed the Shadow Board, I found it interesting and it was nice to meet the people, I felt it was good that people was listening to my views" - Representative of Children in Care Council.

Within this report are details of the issues considered and outcomes achieved are set out. It is important to acknowledge that the Shadow Board has effectively contributed to these outcomes and shaped the Boards thinking around many of the items considered. -. It is my view that the Board has made great progress and continues to influence services available for young people who are looked after and leaving care.



Councillor Tim Wilson
Chair of the Corporate Parenting Board

The Corporate Parenting Board

The purpose of the Corporate Parenting Board is to assist the Council fulfil its legal obligations and responsibilities towards children looked after and leaving care by providing strategic direction to ensure they are effectively supported to reach their potential. Walsall's Corporate Parenting Board provides a welcoming forum for children and care leavers to discuss and influence the full range of services available to them. The Board convenes six times a year and comprises seven councillors (as below) together with the following advisors:

- The Designated Nurse LAC (Clinical Commissioning Group)
- The Head of the Virtual School.
- The Director Customer Engagement.

Advisors provide crucial contribution and expertise, in relation to their specialist areas, which are important to the lives of all young people in care/care leavers. Other attendees include the Executive Director (Children's Services), the Director of Children's Social Care and the Children and Young Peoples Champion together with officers from children's services and other directorates whom attend when requested to discuss key issues. By including these advisors we are helping to ensure that Walsall Council and Partner agencies have a joint commitment to corporate parenting in order to achieve continuing improvements in outcomes for our children and young people in care and care leavers.



Councillor Wilson
Chair of the Board



Councillor Worrall
Vice Chair



Councillor Ferguson



Councillor Hicken



Councillor M. Nazir



Councillor Murphy



Councillor Mazhar

Hearing the Young Persons Voice

The Covid-19 pandemic provided emergency legislation to enable Council Committee meetings to operate virtually. Once the legislation expired on 6th May 2021 elected members were required to attend committee meetings physically.

In Walsall, meetings recommenced physically but in a hybrid way to allow physical attendance by Committee Members and remote attendance by presenting officers, with meetings streamed to You Tube.

This presented a challenge for the Corporate Parenting Board as young people are invited to attend each meeting to ensure they have a voice. It was agreed that it would not be appropriate for those young people who were looked after or previously looked after, to be part of the meeting which was broadcast onto YouTube.

In order to ensure that engagement with young people continued, the Corporate Parenting Board met as a Shadow Board in private. The Shadow Board included all elected members and young people (via Teams) directly before the full Board meeting. This provided Members of the Board with the opportunity to listen to the views of young people and this influenced the work of the Board.

This arrangement was revised to be more effective and engaging for young people. The Shadow Board continued to focus on the voice of the child with a reduced attendance to facilitate a more open discussion and be more welcoming to young people - the Chair and Vice-Chair are the only Member attendees. All young people are encouraged to attend the Shadow Board, and a representative of the 'Children in Care Council' attends the formal Board to represent their views, Co-Chair the Young People Engagement item and provide feedback and challenge.

Work Programme

The Board has considered a number of matters during the 2020-21 and 2021-22 municipal year. All reports and associated minutes are available to view on the council's website. Items considered have included:-

<input type="checkbox"/> Young People Engagement	<input type="checkbox"/> The Regional Adoption Agency
<input type="checkbox"/> Quarterly Performance information	<input type="checkbox"/> The Fostering and Adoption Annual Reports
<input type="checkbox"/> The Local Offer	<input type="checkbox"/> CCG Assurance report
<input type="checkbox"/> Health History document	<input type="checkbox"/> Performance of the Virtual School and NEET
<input type="checkbox"/> Housing and accommodation needs for Young People	<input type="checkbox"/> Increasing Employability for Care experienced Young People
<input type="checkbox"/> CAMHS and emotional wellbeing of Children in Care and Care Leavers	<input type="checkbox"/> Independent Visiting Service Annual report
<input type="checkbox"/> Development of a website and app for Children in Care	<input type="checkbox"/> Corporate Parenting Strategy

Outcomes

Young People Engagement

The Board is passionate and strive to improve engagement with young people. The Children and Young Persons Champion supports the Children in Care Council (CiCC) and provides a valuable link between the Board and young people. The CiCC is the forum where Walsall's looked after children, young people and care leavers are able to shape and influence the parenting and support that they receive. The forum enables young people to build friendships, peer networks whilst learning new skills. The Chair was fortunate to be invited to a CiCC meeting via 'Teams' in July 2021 and had the opportunity to participate in discussion with young people.

A number of Board Members attended a litter pick in Willenhall on 15 January 2022, which was organised by one of the young people that attends the CiCC, as a result of a letter she wrote asking the Council to do more about her local community making it cleaner and nicer, this has further developed the relationship with young people.

A report on 'Young People Engagement' is taken to each Corporate Parenting Board meeting, the report highlights activity at CiCC, key updates, partnership working and it also details celebrations and achievements of young people.

Walsall Local Offer

It is a requirement for Local Authorities to publish information about services offered to care leavers and other services that may assist care leavers to transition to adulthood and independent living. This is done through the Local Offer and includes financial support, housing, health, education and training, Members received information on the current offer for care leavers and were consulted on additional support in the future. In Walsall the Local Offer covers the following main areas:

- Health and well-being
- Relationships
- Education and Training
- Employment
- Accommodation
- Participation in society

The Board had received feedback from young People at the Shadow Board that the 'setting up home grant' of £2000.00 was not adequate and needed to be increased to support young People. Subsequently the Board were assured, that as a result of this feedback, that the grant received by care leavers to equip new homes would be increased to £2500.00.

Housing accommodation needs for Young People

The Board received the findings of a joint audit undertaken by 'Money, Home, Job' and Children's Services in respect of children leaving care as they transition in adulthood. The key findings of which would be used to inform the Local Offer for Care Leavers. The Board were advised that fifty young people who had left/were leaving care had been reviewed, and taken part in focus groups. This has resulted in the identification of key areas for improvement for transition planning for care leavers. In considering the findings of the audit and the feedback received from young people, the following recommendations were approved and demonstrate the influence and the importance of gaining feedback from the Shadow Board.

1. The development of a training flat is costed and a report is presented to the Directorate Management Group for consideration. This has been progressed and the training flat will be integrated into the Local Offer in 2022/23.
2. The decision to evict a care leaver from local authority housing accommodation will only be made by the Director of Customer Engagement (or a delegated substitute) following consultation with the Director of Children's Social Work. Whenever safe, and practical to do so, these Directors will jointly develop a plan, with the aim of preventing the eviction from occurring. It was agreed to implement this recommendation.
3. The Board asks Walsall Council to develop a rent guarantor scheme with Registered Social Landlord/s in Walsall and a report is presented to the Directorate Management Group for consideration. A rent guarantor scheme has been developed with Walsall Housing Group, and has been included in the Local Offer.
4. The Local Authority meets the first month's rent for young people to reduce the risk of young people entering debt and a report is presented to the Directorate Management Group for consideration. There are number of measures in place to ensure that young people were financially supported.
5. The Board asks the Housing and Welfare Team to explore the costs associated with improving the offer to young people leaving care to help support them with the expense of setting up and managing their home. A business plan will be developed, and taken to Cabinet, to seek approval for any additional funds that may be required to support the development of this scheme. The 'Setting up Home Grant' was increased from £2000.00 to £2500.00 and applies to all young people leaving care and irrespective of where they choose to live.
6. The Corporate Parenting Board visit the range of accommodation options provided for children leaving care and care leavers, when it is safe to do so. Plans are in place to progress this recommendation from March 2022 due to restrictions related to the pandemic.

Performance

A quarterly performance report is taken to the Board with a dashboard of measures detailing the direction of performance.

Members provided challenge on those measures where performance had dipped and sought reassurance that action had been taken to rectify any issues. An example of this was the percentage of Children in Care with an up to date dental check. The Board were informed that this was a national issue caused by the pandemic and national lockdowns. In order to ensure this issue was resolved the Board requested, a briefing on data relating to dental appointments for children in care. Subsequently, at the request of the Board, the Chair wrote to NHS England to highlight the importance of dental checks for looked after Children. The most recent report demonstrated that performance in this area had drastically improved.

Corporate Parenting Strategy

The Corporate Parenting strategy outlines the priorities for supporting looked after Children and sets a framework for the council and partners to be held accountable on their promises. The previous Corporate Parenting Strategy was published in 2017, following the approval from the Corporate Parenting Board. Building on the foundations of the existing strategies vision, aims and priorities, the council has developed a proposed corporate parenting strategy which aligns with the Corporate Plan and the changed legislative and national policy context. The Corporate Parenting Board received the revised Strategy at its meeting on 11 January 2022. Delivery against the strategic priorities within the strategy will be monitored by the Corporate Parenting Board. Further consultation and engagement will take place with children in care and care leavers with publication planned for March 2022.

The following priorities within the strategy were agreed, a list of commitments to children and care leavers, developed and agreed by the young people themselves and endorsed by the Corporate Parenting Board.

- Safety and Permanency
- Mental and Physical Health and Wellbeing
- Education and Employment
- Transitions and Independence
- Influence and Involvement

Every Elected Member and officer within a council has a statutory responsibility to make good decisions for children in care and care experienced young people (also known as care leavers) as a parent would for their own child, in this context councillors are Corporate Parents. Members of the Board considered the importance of Elected Member being effective corporate parents and in recognition of this the Board recommended that a programme of mandatory training for Elected Members in developed to support them in their role as a corporate parent.

Fostering and adoption service

The Board receives an annual report of the adoption service, which is provided through adoption@heart – a regional adoption agency, providing adoption services on behalf of Sandwell, Dudley, Walsall and Wolverhampton Councils. The service is hosted by Wolverhampton City Council and became operational in April 2019. Information provided to Members included the number, type and age of children waiting for adoption and the length of time waiting and the number of children adopted. Reports provided detail of recruitment of new adoptive parents. Members provided challenge to this information and sought assurances.

The Board also receives an annual report of the fostering service. The Walsall Fostering Service is located within the Children's Services Directorate of Walsall Council. A range of information is provided to the Board, including the challenge of recruiting new foster carers. In response to this the Board recommended Walsall Council review the advertising of independent fostering agencies on traffic islands and that Walsall Council identify advertising space for the Council fostering service (free of charge). The Director Customer Engagement agreed to raise this issue at the appropriate Proud programme work stream.

Employability for care experienced young people

Care leavers have poorer educational and life outcomes than the general population on average, and are underrepresented in higher education. All universities and colleges must now consider care leavers in their access and participation plans in order to encourage and support them into higher education. However only 6% of care leavers nationally (and from Walsall) going into higher education. In regards to training and employment opportunities, many of our care leavers have not been afforded the stability that allows them to gain the skills that would make them more employable within the job market. This often leads to poor outcomes in all areas of their lives including maintaining suitable accommodation, experiencing poverty, mental health issues and involvement in criminality. The Board considered the data and the range of activity which aimed to improve this in Walsall. It was recommended by Members that a care leaver mentor scheme, for those looked after children who are interested in attending university, is developed. Members were informed that a number of young people had expressed an interest in joining the police or armed forces. In response to this, at the request of the Board, the Chair wrote to the West Midlands Police to request that a proportion of apprenticeships were ring fenced for care leavers. Further to this a positive response was received from West Midlands Police to confirm that they would be happy to work with looked after and previously looked after young people, and suggested that a Cadet Unit could be opened. There was also a commitment to offer volunteer opportunities for 17-18 year olds as Cadet Leaders. Further to this a proposal the response stated that a proposal would be taken to the governance board requesting that looked after and previously looked after children have opportunities to work with the police in Walsall in a similar way to other areas.

Assurance report CCG

The assurance report provides an overview of the statutory health responsibilities of the CCG in relation to children in care and provided further detail of action taken to deliver on-going improvements to health outcomes for looked after children.

As a result of the information presented the Board recommended that the CCG are asked to review the KPI's for 'Initial Health Assessments' and 'Review Health Assessments' to ensure that measures were ambitious enough to deliver on-going improvements for looked after children.

The Chair, on behalf of the Board, wrote to NHS England to highlight the importance of dental checks for looked after children.

Health Passports in Walsall

The Board received a report detailing the findings of an audit of the views of young people in relation to the health passport. The health passport provides a concise account of a young person's health and any significant health issues. The Health Passport is a quick reference guide to confidential details about a young person's personal health. It is a unique document, which holds individual confidential information and can only be viewed with the permission of the young person who owns it. It is recommended that Care Leavers have access to their health history and that they are enabled to be equipped to manage their own health needs wherever possible. As part of the process young people had given feedback that they would prefer a digital passport rather than a paper copy and suggested that the format needed updating. Currently this document was not shared with Children's Services and was provided for young people's use only. It was suggested that greater involvement with Personal Advisors and Social Workers in relation to the health passports would be beneficial in the future. At a subsequent meeting assurance was provided that the Trust had taken on board the feedback from young people and were considering a 'health passport app' (on trial at Sandwell Council).

Independent Visiting Service Annual report

An Independent Visitor is described as a trained volunteer who is there to "befriend and support children and young people in care" The statutory guidance states that the appointment should be considered as part of the development of the care plan and looked after review process. The child's wishes and feelings should be ascertained as to whether or not an Independent Visitor should be appointed. 'Change Grow Live' is the Walsall's Independent Visitor provider and this is a sub-regional contract in partnership with Dudley, Sandwell and Telford & Wrekin.

Walsall's contribution has been £10,000 for at least 6 years; this reflects the target number of children for Walsall, which is 10. In consideration of the information presented, the Board recommended that the annual target of 10 children (accessing the Independent Visitor Service) was reviewed and that the revised target is reported back to the Corporate Parenting Board.

Virtual School Annual Report and those Young People Not in Educational Employment Training (NEET)

The Corporate Parenting Board has responsibility to promote the educational achievement of looked after and previously looked after children, to this end Members considered the Virtual School annual report which outlined the activity of the Virtual School and reported on the educational outcomes of Walsall's looked after children and the work carried out to support the education of looked after children during Covid19.

It is acknowledged that, on average, care experienced young people had significantly poorer educational outcomes and life outcomes in comparison to the general population. They are also underrepresented in higher education. Lower levels of stability meant that young people had not always gained skills, which made them employable. The Board considered data on those young people who were not in education, employment or training. The Committee considered this data in comparison to neighbouring authorities, and were assured that the NEET data was comparable regionally. Information was also provided on in house programmes for NEET. Further reports are scheduled to monitor the support provided to looked after and previously looked after children.

CAMHS and emotional wellbeing of Children in Care and Care Leavers

The Board invited a representative of Dudley and Walsall Mental Health Trust to present a report describing the Child and Adolescent Mental Health Service in Walsall. Included as part of this report was a description of the Fostering, Looked-After and Adoption Supporting Hub (FLASH) which is a therapeutic service provided by Walsall Children's Services, that offers a range of interventions and support to children and young people, foster carers, residential Children's homes, Transitional Care leavers, adopters and Adoption/Fostering Teams. The Board had sought feedback from young people prior to the meeting, and raised these issues with the Mental Health Trust representative to ensure that their voices were heard.

Development of a Website and App for Children in Care

As part of the young people engagement item feedback was received from young people that they were not aware how to access services. Discussions were held on the development of a specified website or app to resolve this issue. The Board recommended that a report is taken to a future meeting of the Board detailing the options for an app to include functionality and accessibility for young people.

Looking Forward to 2022 - 2023

In 2022/23 the Board will continue to deliver its remit and in particular:-

- Build relationships with young people in care and care leavers and be an advocate for them.
- Attend future events and activities with young people to further develop relationships.
- Challenge services and partners to ensure that young people are receiving the best services and given every opportunity to succeed.
- Monitor the delivery of the Corporate Parenting Strategy, and set the Boards remit around its priorities.
- Consult with young people on the refresh of the Local Offer to ensure it is meeting their needs.
- Further promote the development of a website/app for young people.

CORPORATE PARENTING BOARD TERMS OF REFERENCE

Membership

7 Members of the authority as determined by the Council to include:-

- The Portfolio Holder for Children's Services (Chair);
- The Chair of Education and Children's Services Overview and Scrutiny Committee.

Note: A representative from the NHS shall be invited to each meeting as an advisor.

Substitution

Substitute members may be nominated to the Committee in accordance with paragraph 4 of the Council procedure rules (Part 4), subject to them having undertaken the relevant training as detailed below.

Chairman and Vice Chairman

The Chairman shall be the Portfolio Holder for Children's Services.

The Vice-Chairman will be appointed at the Annual Council meeting for the municipal year.

Quorum

The quorum of the Board shall be one third of the membership, subject to a minimum of two.

Meetings

The Board will meet every eight weeks or thereabouts and will usually meet at the Council House, Walsall at 6.00 p.m.

Access to information

The Board will comply with the Access to Information Rules set out in Part 4 of the Constitution.

Purpose

To assist the Council fulfil its legal obligations and responsibilities towards children looked after and leaving care by providing strategic direction to ensure they are effectively supported to reach their potential.

Remit

Members of the Corporate Parenting Board shall:

- (1) Provide clear strategic direction in relation to corporate parenting to improve the outcomes and life chances of looked after children and care leavers.
- (2) Ensure that Walsall Council and Partner agencies have a joint commitment to corporate parenting in order to achieve continuing improvements in outcomes for our children and young people in care and care leavers.
- (3) Make a demonstrable commitment to prioritising the needs of looked after children and young people.
- (4) Set objectives for monitoring the work of and evaluating the progress of the Officer level 'Operational – Corporate Parenting Steering Group'.
- (5) Develop and sustain clear linkages with Children in Care Council, 'Council 4 Kids', Walsall Safeguarding Children's Board, Walsall Foster Care Association and Partners to include the Police, the NHS and education providers and others.
- (6) Approve a work plan with clear aims and objectives which reflect the terms of Walsall's Corporate Parenting pledge.
- (7) Monitor progress on outcomes and performance indicators for looked after children.
- (8) Submit reports to the Council, the Executive, Education and Children's Services Overview and Scrutiny Committee or such other body as the Board considers appropriate or necessary.
- (9) Submit an annual report to Council in April each year.
- (10) Listen to, consult with and involve looked after children and care leavers and their carer's in the assessment, development and delivery of services, including inviting them to act as advisers to the Committee on a regular basis.
- (11) Develop knowledge and be aware of the experiences and concerns of looked after children and care leavers.

- (12) Promote achievement and acknowledge the aspirations of children and young people and show ambitions and aspirations for all looked after children and care leavers.
- (13) Champion the provision of Council based work placements and apprenticeships for looked after young people.
- (14) Monitor the effectiveness of the Virtual school.

1. Background

I am sure you will agree it has been another challenging year. Certainly, plans for the Public Health team to return to 'business as usual' were often thwarted by another lockdown or resurgence of COVID-19; and yet, there is much to celebrate and to be thankful for.

2. Introduction

Once again, I must commend the efforts of the whole Council, and its partners, as we endured this relentless test of strength and ability to carry on. Not least the services of the Communications team in ensuring the delivery of messages containing the latest COVID-19 advice, guidance and support for its residents, schools and businesses.

It is two years since the first domestic case of COVID-19 was reported in the UK. Directors of Public Health, along with their teams and the wider council, have spearheaded the local response to the pandemic, each developing Local Outbreak Management Plans to outline all aspects of the approach taken including community testing, local contact tracing, supporting self-isolation, controlling local outbreaks, ongoing surveillance and communication and engagement. This report highlights a range of achievements to show that, through innovation and resourcefulness, vital support and services have continued to reach those most in need.

So, I have to start with a huge thank you to Stephen Gunther and the PH team. They have worked throughout the lockdown, not least as a result of investment in new technology. Public Health have provided a 7-day a week helpline supporting residents, schools and businesses. Consequently, the majority of services have continued to be delivered during the pandemic – even a fire at the Beacon centre didn't stop the drug and alcohol service delivering their service.

In addition to the continuity of many services they commission to ensure accessibility for the vulnerable and isolated, Public Health have planned, prepared and are implementing a return to normal duties. They have faced another year of incredible pressure, both physically and mentally and I would like to express my gratitude for their commitment.

Whilst my colleague, Councillor Perry, will have much to say on the amazing work of the Resilient Communities team, I cannot let this opportunity pass me by to say that they have proved to be Walsall's jewel in the crown: supporting vulnerable and shielding residents during the lockdown; providing food parcels, prescriptions and shopping for many residents who couldn't leave home. Helping to fight the isolation felt by many with befriending calls which have continued after many of the other services have been scaled back.

My thanks too, to NHS/ CCG / Walsall Together who were almost overwhelmed in the first and second wave. It was only the close relationships created by Walsall Together and the partners that enabled the system to cope. Together they organised PPE, assisted patients returning home and moved the stroke unit to Hollybank house. A process that could have taken years in normal times was achieved in a few weeks thanks to all the partners taking a pragmatic approach to problem solving. Additionally, a big thank you to Walsall Housing Group for the painting, decorating and general building work that was necessary.

As the NHS changes its formal structures over the coming year, we'll continue to work with them to improve health and wellbeing outcomes for our residents.

Priorities for 2021 included a review of the Joint Strategic Needs Assessment (JSNA) to inform the Joint Health and Wellbeing strategy, (JHWBBS) improving mental wellbeing with the development and launch of a Mental Health and Wellbeing strategy and the development of a Health Protection strategy, together with the continued support for children and the safeguarding of vulnerable people.

The Health and Wellbeing Board has remained a-political, focusing on the role and the needs of the residents. Alongside the Health and Wellbeing Board, we created a Local Engagement Board to inform, develop and review the pandemic and changes in legislation.

Additionally, the Public Health team commenced a review of their services, priorities and overall structure with a management of change consultation taking place in the Autumn. This is a move towards the Council's vision of being a Wellbeing Council running alongside the PROUD programme of improvement to the delivery of its services to the residents of Walsall. The new structure will be in place from 1 March 2022.

3. Priorities 2021

COVID-19 Response

Over the past year, the Walsall Public Health team has continued to provide dedicated COVID-19 support to residents, education settings, workplaces and communities. They have:

- Received over 5,500 queries
- Processed over 10,000 contacts
- Created a bespoke software solution to record and report data
- Provided comprehensive support for all education settings
- Built a strong partnership with Children's Services / Headteachers to identify, inform and take necessary action to minimise disruption to children's education
- Promoted the vaccination programme
- Continued to work with organisations and Council teams to protect vulnerable groups
- Provided guidance on managing infection control /safe use of PPE equipment /catheter care in care homes
- Continued care home audits
- Developed a contact tracing team that provides local expertise and knowledge to identify and support Walsall residents who have tested positive or been in contact with positive cases providing guidance, support and assistance in accessing foods and medicines delivery or financial support
- Engaged with national and local teams to establish, manage and deliver symptom-free testing options across the borough
- Opened thirteen supervised testing locations
- Facilitated delivery of testing kits to 4,000 families
- Supplied 25,000 tests to education setting and a further 30,000 to health and social care settings
- 40,000 lateral flow tests have been conducted

The on-call service has been managed flexibly to deflect pressures, adjusting hours of service, shift patterns and staffing numbers in response to increasing case rates, changes of guidance, surge testing and new variants.

We have strengthened our Health Protection Team over the last year and working with partners in the UK Health security agency and NHS to further enhance our ability to respond to all hazards that emerge.

Communications

Effective communications and engagement have been key to ensuring guidance, advice and support messages are straightforward, targeted, personal and respectful, which enhances the Council's reputation as a trusted voice to our communities and businesses. This includes;

- Engagement with residents and encouraging conversations
- Use public health data and insight to shape and evaluate campaigns
- Work with partners across the health and social care, sharing and amplifying information and guidance
- Working collaboratively to open up opportunities to reach audiences that no single organisation could reach on their own
- Engaging effectively with local and regional media to run vaccine campaigns in trains, on buses and local radio

COVID-19 Community Champions

Walsall Council was awarded £432,000 under the government's Community Champions scheme to boost vaccination uptake in under-represented communities disproportionately impacted by the pandemic.

The existing community networks were utilised across the borough. In total, 22 community and voluntary sector organisations were offered small grants to undertake dedicated activities and recruit Community Champions to disseminate culturally appropriate and accessible materials, support vaccination clinics and organise tailored awareness sessions, assisting in supporting the health and wellbeing needs of residents.

Covid champions have worked over the pandemic to inform and encourage take up of the vaccine. We could not have achieved such high rates of vaccine uptake without them. They were subjected to some very unpleasant incidents with anti-vaxxers and I'm most grateful for their work in sometimes difficult circumstances.

I have personally attended a number of online forums with the community and faith groups to promote the uptake of the vaccine.

Joint Strategic Needs and Assets Assessment /Health and Wellbeing Strategy

I am pleased to report that the publication of both the JSNA and health and wellbeing strategy are on target. In December Sir Michael Marmot was the guest speaker at a development session with HWB Board members to discuss the Marmot principles of health inequalities. Emphasis was on the importance of providing a best start in life, education and

breaking the link between deprivation and development which has helped shape our emerging health and wellbeing strategy which is coming to the Board in April.

Mental Health and Wellbeing

Mental wellbeing has been an increasing topic of conversation throughout the last year with the impact and effects of the pandemic having far-reaching consequences for large numbers of people, whether it be through loss, unemployment, food/fuel poverty or isolation.

I cannot be more proud of the work undertaken by the Public Health Team in working with partners and colleagues to for their contribution to addressing this issue. £1m budget plan has been signed off by Cabinet and has been used to:

- Develop a Wellbeing plan to help people plan their own self-care
- Tender for Counselling and Talking therapy services
- Commission Bereavement Support services
- Commission and mobilise a Wellbeing Mobile Unit
- Offer Mental Wellbeing Training to communities and businesses supporting managers and leaders to recognise and understand mental health conditions how to promote and embed good mental health and wellbeing throughout the workplace
- Award community grants to voluntary groups and centres across the borough to improve mental wellbeing
- Run a mental wellbeing arts competition with young people from Walsall College
- Commission the No Wrong door project, that seeks to help anyone suffering from mental health to access help as soon as possible and avoid being passed from one organisation to another.

Supporting Walsall's Mental Wellbeing

Promoting and supporting mental wellbeing in Walsall has become a key issue for the Health and Wellbeing Board (HWBB) in the development of the Joint Strategic Needs Assessment, and as a key theme in response to the COVID-19 pandemic.

It has never been more important than now to consider the impact of the past two years on our mental wellbeing and there has been a multi-agency approach to the development and delivery of the Mental Health & Wellbeing strategy. The strategy aims to provide:

- A universal approach to promote good mental health and emotional resilience and prevent mental ill health for all age groups and populations
- A proportionately targeted approach to reduce mental wellbeing and health inequalities, to consider the clear mental health inequalities, both in terms of who experiences the greatest risk of poor mental health and in terms of unequal access to treatment

It is a known fact that I have suffered mental health issues in the past and I am proud to have been able to participate in the production of this long-awaited document.

It is therefore right that the Director of Public Health's annual report for 2021: Improving Mental Health in Walsall, focuses on the importance of good mental wellbeing and its key

message is “Together We Can” starting with Walsall’s Director of Public Health making recommendations on how to look after our own mental wellbeing:

1. Make a commitment to putting yourself first, even just for a while
2. Find out where you can get support if you need it
3. Make a (realistic) positive routine

It also has recommendations for improvements in Walsall. The report can be found [here](#).

The Health Protection Strategy

The importance of health protection resources within the Council has never been more needed or appreciated as it has over the past two years. I am immensely proud of the support from our Health Protection team, in particular concerning infection prevention and control and offering advice to care homes /domiciliary care /schools /organisations and individuals. They have continued to visit homes to carry out essential audits and to offer support throughout for a second year running and I would like to express a huge thank you on behalf of everyone for their invaluable contribution.

The profile of health protection has increased significantly in recent years with issues such as immunisation, food-borne infections, pandemics, healthcare associated infection and communicable diseases regularly being in the public eye. Health protection issues include the prevention and control of infectious diseases and environmental threats to the health of the population.

It is therefore timely that a review of the service and a multi-agency approach to the development of a Health Protection strategy has been one of our priorities over the past year.

Recommendations and actions arising from this report directly supports safeguarding and will benefit the most vulnerable sectors in the community. The strategy includes an action plan, the aims being to:

- Protect the population of Walsall from threats and hazards to human health
- Reduce inequalities in the burden of communicable disease
- Ensure the highest possible quality and uptake of immunisation and screening

4. The Team’s Core Work over the Year

Children and Young People

Food for Life, the school’s healthy eating programme, now reaches around 16,000 children in Walsall with a total of 28 early years and schools settings achieving an award and a further 85 working towards an achievement. Excitingly, this has been extended to include an oral health resource to support settings and engage with parents to improve the oral health of our children.

ONS data for Teenage Pregnancy in Walsall has shown a 63.2% reduction in teen conceptions between 2019 and 2020. The team has provided support to teenage parents but also to vulnerable young people

A Testament to the hard work of the teams is the fact that the 0-19 Healthy Child programme we commissioned was shortlisted for two awards – school nurses for ‘Unsung Heroes’ and Health Visitors for Team of the Year.

Healthy Lifestyles

A ‘Dance to Health’ programme for those aged 50 and over not only tackles the issue of isolation in older groups but also addresses their physical strength and balance, lowering the risk of falls.

Tier 2 Weight Management Services

The addition of a grant to target Tier 2 weight management has seen the commissioning of the following services with over 700 people signing up:

Intervention 1: OneYouWalsall commissioned to engage and work with two target groups to improve activity /healthy lifestyles – those with existing co-morbidities and those living in deprived areas.

Intervention 2: The Council’s Healthy Spaces team are now registered as a T2WMS provider and are facilitating the tracking of progress under the grant conditions. Programmes of work include:

- Couch to 5k programme
- Nordic walking
- Walsall Football Club Fit Fans programme
- Active Living Centres Gym Programmes

Intervention 3: A service for adults aged 18 years of over, with a BMI of >25, adjusted for people of Black African, African-Caribbean and Asian origin. It will:

- Target residents with poor mental health /at increased risk of weight gain
- Utilise voluntary and community sectors to add value to outcomes
- Be flexible enough to be delivered face to face in person or remotely

Social Inclusion

Drug & Alcohol Services

Over the past year the CGL/Beacon drug and alcohol treatment service continued to deliver a service to users via virtual appointments and users were moved from pharmacy supervised consumption and daily collection of medication to fortnightly unsupervised collection. The Glebe Centre offered services to the homeless such as delivering meals, showers and advice, whilst we worked closely with the Council’s housing team to support rough sleepers into finding accommodation.

With additional grant funding investment has been made to support test out screening for those with ADHD and be supported with assessment and treatment service in partnership with mental health services. This is gaining national interest.

Sexual Health

Walsall's Integrated Sexual Health service (WISH) moved many of their services on-line during the pandemic, taking advantage of the digital offering. This has resulted in high levels of satisfaction being reported by the service users. We'll plan to review these services in the coming year, learning from how we have had to adapt during the pandemic to ensure the services are accessible, relevant and trustworthy to those that need them.

5. Some Challenges Ahead

The unknown risk of new variants, mental wellbeing issues and the wider impacts of the pandemic remain a possibility and we must ensure that the strategies, policies, processes and lessons learned over the last 2 years are such that we are able to continue to rise to the challenge and support the people of Walsall.

How can we Help?

Our COVID Champions as well as our testing sites are an examples of if we work together we can have a much greater impact with our communities, helping to reach the more vulnerable and isolated groups /individuals through their community networks.

Strengthening partnership working will help us to focus, and overcome, the challenges ahead and together we can support each other through what I think will continue to be some challenging times.

6. What I am Proud of:

It is clear that a lot has happened over the past year so what messages can we take from this that make us Proud?

- Proud of our community, our partners and our businesses – we have shown that if we come together, we can respond more effectively and more efficiently and continue to build on this.
- The continued support of the team for the Covid-19 response and the resourcefulness displayed by them during an ever-changing landscape
- Their ability to ensure delivery of high quality services, working closely with partners and providers
- Their innovative ideas and ways of working during challenging times, obtaining and managing additional grant funding for services such as lifestyles, mental health and youth services
- The continuity of core services to support safeguarding of vulnerable adults and children across Walsall
- The continued dedication of support staff, public health specialists and junior doctors without who we could not have achieved any of the above.
- The residents of Walsall who have proved their strength and determination, battling through the pandemic at all cost and also to pay tribute to their 1000+ friends and relatives that have died in Walsall. In their honour, a Covid garden has been agreed as a permanent memorial to those they have lost. This will be supplemented by ward tributes across the borough.

7. Conclusion

This report is a snapshot of our achievements and future vision during another difficult and challenging year.

With the suspension /adaptation of many services during the pandemic, there will continue to be disruption as we get back to normal. Some services will be under immense pressure due to a backlog (eg routine immunisations and screening programmes). Also the increasing impact on the economy and cost of living will affect many in terms of their wellbeing, deprivation, job losses and our ability to adapt and reach all vulnerable and isolated groups will be paramount to ensuring accessibility to the right services at the right time.

How can Public Health help?

The pandemic is not over! We are living with Covid and, whilst for anyone who is vaccinated the effect is likely to be the symptoms of a heavy cold, this varies from hardly any symptoms to respiratory failure needing hospital treatment. New variants will occur. Be vigilant. Get your first, second and booster jab – it's not too late to get them.

We have been thankful for the Government grants that we have been able to use to fight this pandemic, enabling us to source and resource services and goods to assist us in reaching our residents, businesses and schools, however ongoing response needs ongoing investment.

Whilst there is still much to do, the Public Health team has continued to build on partnerships, working at a national, regional and local level. They continue to seek alternative ways in which they can help communities, other Council teams and external partners to continue the work across the health and social care economy to improve the health of our residents.

I am immensely proud of these successes and, in particular, of the resourcefulness shown by the members of the Public Health Team and our partners. 'Walsall Together' is the most effective way of ensuring we recognise, understand and attempt to meet the needs of the residents of Walsall.

We are already planning our priorities for the coming year which include further development of our physical activity framework to get more people more active more often, development (with partners) a wellbeing service for Walsall and refresh our drugs and alcohol approach with partners in the Safer Walsall Partnership to reduce the number of people who are dependent as well as the impacts of their dependency.

Councillor Craddock
Portfolio Holder for Health and Wellbeing

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 30th 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.

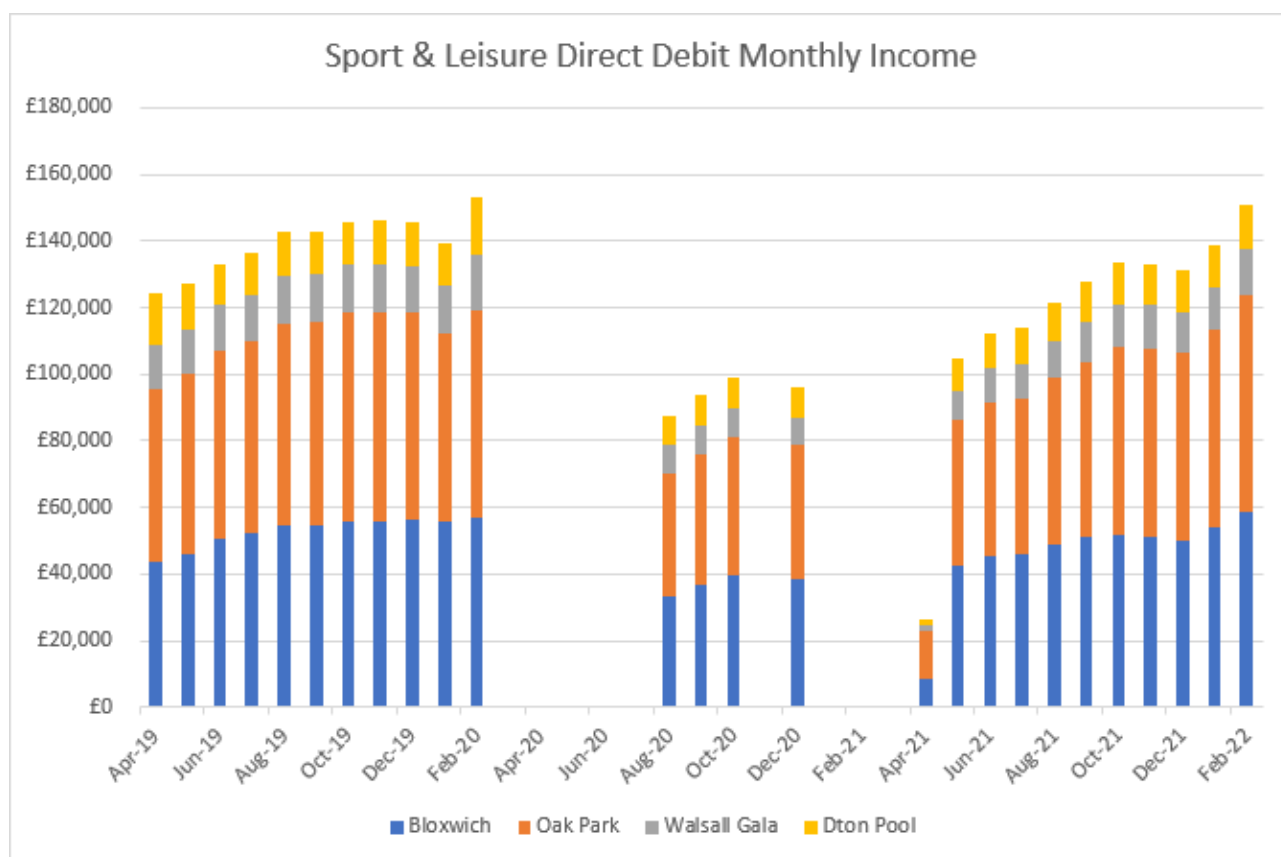
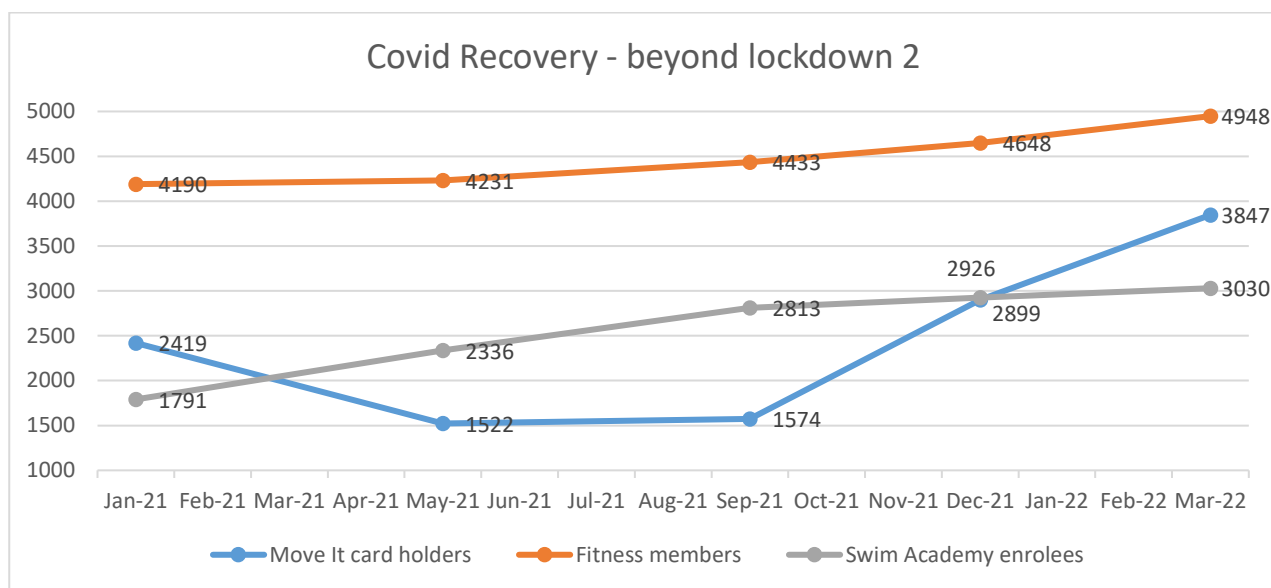
Workforce Development

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

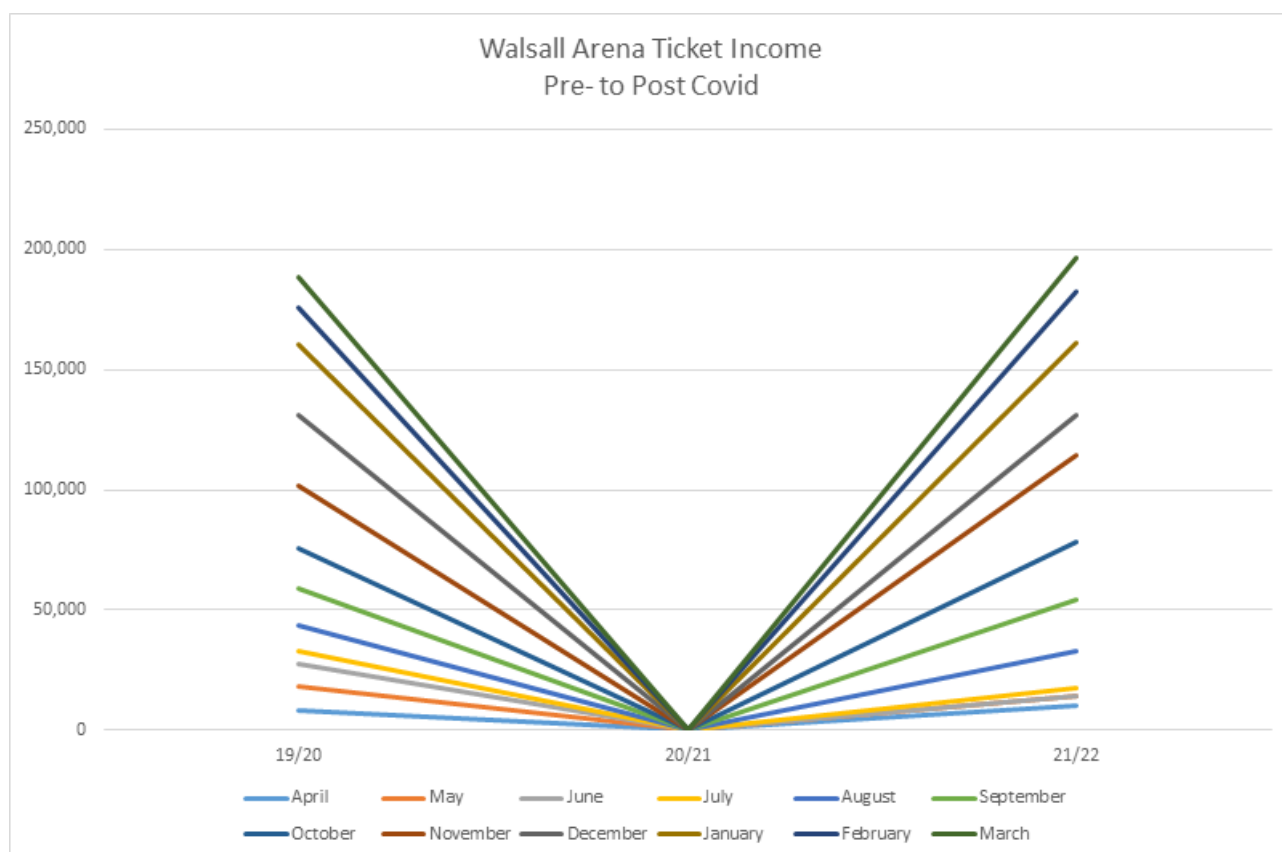
Work has started on the extension on the Muslim section of Streetly Cemetery, which will see the number of available plots increase.



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 2nd 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 16th 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 - 31st 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, 19th 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 22nd 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. They 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. [Page 57 of 78](#)

- 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 18th 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 1st July 2021 to 31st 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 1st 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 1st 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 1st 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

- 8th 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.
- 5th 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 15th 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

Community, Leisure and Culture Portfolio (Deputy Leader and Resilient Communities) Annual Council Briefing 2021/22



£2.6m external funding from the Public Sector Decarbonisation Scheme has now been granted to Darlaston Swimming Pool.



115 oral history recordings digitised as part of the funding from the Culture Recovery Fund for Heritage.



More than **250k** books were borrowed from Walsall's libraries in 2021-22 – a total of **285,825 loans**.



3746 births and **2719 deaths** during 2021/22



Walsall Community Network have been administering the Jubilee small grant programme. **Over 100 events** have been funded with a small contribution of £250.00.



12k enforcement investigations were undertaken by Regulatory Services.



18k music lessons were provided to Walsall children. The Music Hub has been granted **£480,967** for the 2022/23 academic year. The venue has been chosen by the BBC to host **Question Time** in May.



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.



WALSALL COMMUNITY NETWORK

During 2021/22, WCN supported residents who still didn't feel comfortable leaving their homes. Meals were delivered and door step befriending took place.



NAG acquired **32 new works** by 30 West Midlands' based artists. Approximately **150 adults and 75 children** attended the Diwali event in October 2021



Lichfield Street Hub are offering placement for young people undertaking their Duke of Edinburgh Award.





THE BARR BEACON TRUST MANAGEMENT COMMITTEE



Annual Report May 2019 – April 2022

Council – 25 April 2022

1.0 Summary of report

- 1.1 This report presents the work of the Management Committee for the period May 2019 to April 2022 which takes into account the period of the Covid-19 pandemic, the consequent national lockdown and ongoing Covid restrictions from March 2020 to February 2022.
- 1.2 The Committee has met on eight occasions, less than normal due to the pandemic, however, the Trust can be assured that all necessary site maintenance matters and projects were overseen by the Chair and Vice-chair of the committee during that time to ensure that the site remained open for public exercise whilst adhering to the Covid restrictions and social distancing requirements at the time.
- 1.3 The Committee has ensured that all activities on Trust land have been provided in accordance with the purposes of the Trust and have fulfilled Charity Commission Public Benefit requirements.

2.0 Recommendation

That the work of the Management Committee be noted.

3.0 Background

- 3.1 Barr Beacon is an easily recognised and well used landmark in Walsall and the Black Country, has strong local heritage significance and is a site of ecological importance for nature conservation due to its range of habitats and the wide variety of species that it supports. The land was conveyed to trustees in 1918 essentially to provide and maintain open space for the benefit of the local community and to keep in repair the War Memorial. Walsall Council became trustee following Local Government reorganisation in 1972.
- 3.2 A Management Committee was established in February 2007 to deal with the regular administration of the Trusts affairs subject to the Trust being kept informed of the work of the committee by way of an annual report.
- 3.3 The Committee comprises the Councillors for the Pheasey Park Farm, Streetly and Aldridge Central and South Wards, being the areas where the site is located together with the Cabinet Members whose portfolio includes Leisure and Regeneration.

- 3.4 A regular group of volunteers have continued to provide valuable support to open and close the car park barriers and inform Council officers of any issues or problems.

4.0 **Site Management**

- 4.1 **Site maintenance:** The Council's Healthy Spaces and Countryside operations teams continue to focus resources on essential maintenance to ensure that the Council as Trustee fulfils its purposes and its obligations for the site as a Local Nature Reserve. During the pandemic, the Beacon remained open, having regard to government restrictions, and was maintained at the same levels as other Council parks at that time. The importance of open green spaces for health and wellbeing was emphasised during this difficult time and, anecdotally, increased the numbers of people using the site.

The Arboricultural work recently undertaken on site was the final phase of the work approved by the committee in August 2018 to reinstate the view looking west from the memorial which had gradually been obscured by the increasing tree canopy growth. This view is significant as it takes in the majority of the Black Country, south Birmingham, Shropshire and across to Wales. To restore the view, the arboricultural work affected a line of Birch trees, a common species across the site, which has been mitigated via woodland management.

- 4.2 **Site Security:** The Trust will be aware that there has been an increase in anti-social behaviour on site and the committee has therefore recently authorised a major investment, in conjunction with the Council, to implement measures to prevent unauthorised access to the site. This has been funded by a combination of Council Capital Programme monies and a £61,000 match fund contribution from the Trust. The security measures include providing power feeds to both sides of the site to enable CCTV and electrical gates to be installed. The installation and maintenance of security measures on the site is a legitimate spend of Trust funds as it is to preserve and protect the site and comply with the Trust's Duty under Health and Safety legislation and Occupiers Liability to enable people to access the site safely. In turn this will enable more use of the site for recreational use according to the Trusts purposes.

4.3 **Other Site Improvement Initiatives:**

The committee has supported the council's Healthy Spaces team to introduce a number of significant and exciting initiatives and opportunities for the development and promotion of the site for the benefit of local residents and as a wider visitor attraction, these include:

Green Flag Status: Barr Beacon has been submitted for Green Flag assessment. The Green Flag Award is an accreditation given to publicly accessible parks and open spaces, primarily in the UK, to promote standards

of good management and best practice amongst the green space sector. Although the site still has its challenges, the ongoing work to address these shows that it is being managed, and maintains good community perception and use. A long term management plan for the site is being prepared. Judging is expected to take place in the next month.

Purple Horizons: This is a significant long term project which, working with Natural England, has restored heathland on the site and will enable more habitat creation and restoration work to be carried out to create regional stepping stones of property habitat between Sutton Park and Cannock Chase. Barr Beacon is instrumental in acting as an important stepping stone for species to move between these two larger areas of heathland. This is a 20 year project which is nationally recognised and is one of only five in the country.

“10 Tiny forests”: This is an initiative promoted by the environmental charity Earth Watch which had funds available in the West Midlands Combined Authority area to create 70 tiny forests, with up to 10 in the Walsall area. Tiny Forests provide a publicly accessible place for people to relax, enjoy and appreciate nature in the built environment. They can support health and wellbeing through simple aesthetic value, actively watching wildlife, personal involvement in the project and as an educational resource or skills-building experience. Tiny forests are approximately the size of a tennis court. Planting took place on Barr Beacon on 10 January 2022 with committee members and approximately 20 volunteers attending the planting day. A “Keeper Team” is being created which will maintain and monitor its growth and collect environmental and social data to help assess the benefits that these forests provide over time.

5.0 **Events and Activities:**

- 5.1 **Annual Wreath Laying Remembrance Ceremony:** Ceremonies took place on 8 November 2019, 12 November 2020 and 6 November 2021. Both the 2019 and 2021 events were well attended as usual by Committee members, the Mayor, local veterans and local school children. The 2020 service, given the circumstances, was attended by a limited number of invited guests with wreaths being laid by the Chair of the committee on behalf of the Trust and by the Councils Armed Forces Champion on behalf of veterans. Covid restrictions regarding face coverings and social distancing were adhered to throughout the ceremony.
- 5.2 **The Queen’s Platinum Jubilee – Beacon Lighting event:** The Committee is keen for Barr Beacon to be part of the national beacon lighting event on 2 June 2022 and therefore options for the lighting of a beacon on the site and associated activities at national lighting up time of 9.45pm are being discussed. The scale of the event will have to have regard to the need to ensure the safety of attendees at that time of night, the open nature of the site and the unknown weather conditions.

- 5.3 **Love Exploring:** As part of digital developments across the borough, the committee has supported the introduction of Love Exploring to interact with sites in a very different way. Love Exploring provides a range of discovery games and guided tours that are fun to do and free to use. The first game is a dinosaur safari – using augmented reality to search for and take photos with dinosaurs on the site as well as answering questions. Plans will be to introduce a heritage trail, to interact and learn about heritage features on the site, as well as tree and habitat trails to explore, see and learn about what is on the site in an interactive educational way with smart phones.

6.0 **The Lodge**

The Lodge is used regularly by an adult learning organisation whose students and staff have been participating in horticultural activities based at the Lodge. The arrangement works well for both the organisation and the Trust and therefore the committee has agreed to essential interior maintenance and decoration to be carried out to ensure that it remains fit for purpose. Quotes for the work are being obtained to enable the work start soon.

7.0 **Accounts**

- 7.1 The committee continues to be content for the Council's Finance officers to manage the accounts on behalf of the Trust and accordingly, a finance report has been received at each meeting. The accounts are independently examined.
- 7.2 The Trust currently holds COIF income shares (a specialist charity Common Investment Fund) with a current market value of around £420,000 which are held as a long term investment. COIF charities investment fund has a highly diversified and well-balanced portfolio of investments designed to help meet growth and income requirements of charities. In the light of recent events in the Ukraine, the current investment portfolio has been reviewed and has shown no exposure to equity based in Russia.
- 7.3 The level of investments helps to attract significant external funding for major projects on the Beacon. Having this healthy investment balance also provides an annual return, ordinarily around £11,000, which is used to fund day to day maintenance and activities on the site. The losses as a result of the Covid pandemic have recovered however, the return is decreasing at the moment given the situation in the Ukraine. The Trust is holding around £33,000 available cash which is carefully managed by the committee to be used for Trust purposes. Some of this will be used to fund the renovation of the lodge and the various commemorative and celebratory events of significance this year.
- 7.4 The committee has authorised expenditure for specialist insurance cover, which includes public liability, property damage and trustee indemnity, to ensure that the Trust is adequately protected. This has been arranged through the Councils Risk and Insurance Team on behalf of the Trust.

8.0 Annual Return

The annual returns required by the Charity Commission for the period of this report have been completed.

9.0 Conclusion

Over the past year, the committee has continued to work closely with Council officers to make and plan improvements to the site and has recognised the significant contribution that the Council makes to maintain the open space and to support its future development.

The activities on the site not only further the Trusts purposes but are also consistent with the Council's priorities to encourage people to lead active lives to maintain or improve their health and wellbeing; and to build a strong sense of community.

The contribution of the volunteers is also appreciated and the committee looks forward to continuing this relationship in the coming year to ensure that the site remains an asset for the community to enjoy.



Councillor A. Andrew
Chair, Barr Beacon Trust Management Committee
13 April 2022

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