

## **Director of Public Health Annual Report 2020**

### **1. Purpose**

This report describes the content and recommendations of the 2020 Director of Public Health Annual Report which is focussed on children and young people.

The annual report highlights the key issues affecting children and young people's health and wellbeing as identified in the recently commissioned ethnographic study "Growing up in Walsall" and in quantitative intelligence. It identifies where there is an inequality both within the Borough and in comparison with other areas of the country.

This year, we intend to use findings from the Annual Report and "Growing up in Walsall" to form the basis of the new proposed long term young people's strategy and as part of this, further engage with Health and Wellbeing Board partner organisations and other partners such as Housing or licencing who have influence over the different aspects of a child's life so that as a Borough we can work towards improving child wellbeing.

### **2. Recommendations**

- 2.1 That the Health and Wellbeing Board note the findings presented in this year's report and the learning from the ethnographic study "Growing Up in Walsall" and their implications for the health of children in Walsall.
- 2.2 That the Health and Wellbeing Board members support the implementation of relevant recommendations in their respective organisations

### 3. Summary

3.1 Local and national research tells us that setting protective measures in place and intervening early is a powerful way to reduce improve wellbeing in our young people. It also highlights that work to influence the wider factors which impact on a child and family such as access to well-planned homes and environments or minimise the impact of stressors such as insecure employment or fear of crime are more effective than targeting the individual child or family.

3.2 The overall aspiration within the Director of Public Health Annual Report is to work together to **support all children in Walsall to have the best possible start in life and be safe from harm, happy, healthy and learning well as well as feeling able to contribute to society as they leave school or college.**

3.3 In order to do this, the report focuses on action to keep children well and maximise the factors which are protective of wellbeing. It identifies the areas of action whereintervening early will be most beneficial, paying attention to those who may be most vulnerable. This involves coordinating work across children's lives, such as work to support good parenting (Chapter 3), ensuring that all children attend a healthy school and are given relevant work experience (Chapter 4) and embed the child's voice in planning action their local area (Chapter 5).

3.4 To achieve this, the report focuses on the following areas of action:

- **Ensuring the child's voice is heard when making decisions**
- **Improving the wellbeing of children and young people**
- **Responding to the Covid-19 pandemic with immediate and long term plans for support and recovery**
- **Ensuring families are offered services that are effective, easy to access, and reach those who need it most**
- **Working collaboratively to mitigate effects of poverty and social deprivation on families and young people**

3.5 These overarching areas of action were informed by an ethnographic study undertaken in the late summer 2020 to ask the children and young people of Walsall themselves about what it is like growing up in the Borough.

10 detailed qualitative ethnographic studies of children and young people 11 to 18 years living in Walsall were undertaken to gain young people's views about the challenges they face as they grow up, their hopes, dreams and fears for the future, as well as their recommendations.

### **3.6 Recommendations Arising from the Director of Public Health Annual Report**

#### **3.6.1 Ensure the child's voice is heard when making council decisions**

Immediate

1. Complete a self-assessment based on the National Youth Agency Hear by Right framework and work with partners including young people to develop an action plan to increase youth engagement.
2. Work with internal partners to develop an action plan to further develop youth engagement that will support young people participation in the recommendations listed in this Annual Report
3. To work with young people, the Youth Justice service, Street Teams and the police to understand the real life impact of crime on our young people and identify actions which can reduce the impact

Longterm

4. Foster a culture of participation with young people, using their views to help shape the decisions made by organisations both within and outside of the Council whose actions affect their health and wellbeing

#### **3.6.2 Improve the wellbeing of children and young people**

Immediate

5. Advocate for Walsall's Health and Wellbeing Board members to prioritise mental wellbeing in young people.

## Longterm

6. Ensure the benefits of the Town Deal Fund are extended to other parts of the Borough in order to create vibrant, colourful gateways into district centres, working to improve play areas and create biodiversity programmes.
7. Build in the promotion of good mental wellbeing into the work of all organisations that influence the lives of young people
8. Ensure that the protective factors which impact on a healthy weight and mental wellbeing are set in place incorporating the contributions of the community, young people, the police, education and teams supporting parenting with choices maximised in the areas where there is greater need.
9. Identify the wider teams who have an impact on community wellbeing; support them to understand their contribution and set the measures in place that will promote the wellbeing of children and young people ensuring that young people are part of the planning process

### **3.6.3 Respond to the Covid-19 pandemic with immediate and long term plans for support and recovery and support**

#### Immediate

10. Education partners to continue to prioritise good educational outcomes for all Walsall's children; pledging to not leave behind those with the least access to resources and those adversely impacted by the Covid-19 lockdowns.
11. Partners supporting children to continue to ensure that Educational Health and Care Plans are not unduly delayed
12. Use the political process to lobby central government for additional resources to support children with special educational needs including those with Social Emotional and Mental Health (SEMH) Needs based on their needs.

#### Longterm

13. Support the children's services team to reduce all types of school absence, with particular attention to absences caused by poor mental health using understanding gained from young people who are missing school

### **3.6.4 Ensure families are offered services that are effective, easy to access, and reach those who need it most**

## Immediate

14. The parenting team and those delivering parenting courses to understand the barriers to accessing parenting courses; update the borough-wide parenting strategy to reduce these barriers and create a unified message and offer of support to parents to maximise uptake of these courses
15. Work with primary care and midwifery to understand the barriers to women quitting smoking both before and during pregnancy, maximise uptake of cessation services and thereby reduce the prevalence of smoking at birth
16. Childrens Services to evaluate how effective the services targeted at families with specific needs are and whether the groups we most want to reach access these.

### **3.6.5 Work collaboratively to mitigate effects of poverty and social deprivation on families and young people**

## Immediate

17. All those working with young children to actively promote access to early years education settings
18. Design and implement a Walsall Food Plan and a Walsall Physical Activity Plan as part of Walsall's young person's strategy informed by young people's views

## Longterm

19. To work with Education providers and young people to ensure that life lessons are offered in schools and that these meet the needs of young people
20. Ensure that all Walsall schools are signed up to the Walsall Healthy Schools programme.
21. To work with young people, employers and providers of further education to ensure that young people are given relevant and appropriate work experience with particular priority on children in and leaving care
22. Develop and implement a borough/ council-wide family poverty strategy, linking with the Walsall Strategic Economic Plan.
23. Maximise the uptake of the Department of Work & Pensions (DWP) Kickstart scheme which is developing a number of high quality 6-month work placements for young people aged 16 to 24 claiming Universal Credit benefit and at risk of long term unemployment.

#### 4. Implications for Joint Working arrangements:

4.1 The above indicate the partnership approach which is required to support Children and Young people. While services such as health or education are essential to reduce infant mortality or increase attainment and promote warm parenting, there are other teams identified by the young people which would improve their experience of growing up in Walsall, namely;

- **Police** to support in reducing fear of crime
- **Businesses** to increase access to mentoring and work experience
- **Planning** to build in access to healthy food or physical activity and design out crime
- **All** to seek opportunities for young people to participate in decision making

#### 5. Health and Wellbeing Priorities:

5.1 The Health and Wellbeing Board has as its key priority to **provide Walsall Children and Young People with opportunities to maximise their potential**. From the knowledge gained in the Director of Public Health annual report and from “Growing Up in Walsall”, we can see young people’s recommendations around how to maximise their potential and also how Health and Wellbeing Board priority 3 **creating healthy and sustainable communities** can be achieved

5.2 The young people questioned were offering their time to act as advisors and influence services. This offer of voluntary support needs to be built upon. The person who designed the front page of the annual report also volunteered his time and again this engagement will be built upon as the young person’s strategy is developed.

5.3 The Marmot Review - Fair Society Healthy Lives shows the importance of intervening in early childhood as well as improving the social factors affecting health. The impact of inequalities is significant on infant mortality and achievement, particularly for certain groups such as those growing up in deprivation, looked after children and those in the criminal justice system as well as young people who are not in education, training or employment.

5.4 Safeguarding: Recommendations and actions arising from this report directly supports safeguarding and will benefit the most vulnerable sectors in the community.

## **Background papers**

- 1 Director of Public Health annual report
- 2 “Growing up in Walsall” Ethnographic Study

## **Author**

Esther Higdon – Senior programme development and commissioning manager,  
Children and Young People

✉ [Esther.Higdon@walsall.gov.uk](mailto:Esther.Higdon@walsall.gov.uk)

Michael Soljak– Consultant in Public Health

✉ [Michael.Soljak@walsall.gov.uk](mailto:Michael.Soljak@walsall.gov.uk)