

Children's Services Overview and Scrutiny Committee

**Agenda
Item No.**

7th April 2026

7.

Adolescent Offer

Ward(s): All

Portfolios: Cllr Mark Statham
Portfolio Holder

1. Aim

- 1.1 To provide the Children's Services Overview and Scrutiny Committee with a progress report on key developments which have strengthened the adolescent/youth offer in Walsall.

2. Recommendations

- 2.1 To provide Scrutiny with an updated position statement on Walsall's developing Adolescent Offer, summarising progress to date, the strengthening of preventative and targeted youth work, and the implementation of key national strategy shaping the future direction of adolescent support.
- 2.2 To offer assurance on progress, impact and sustainability, and to set out how the Adolescent Offer will continue to evolve through a whole-system, multi-agency approach — including the development of a clear practice framework, enhanced partnership delivery, improved youth voice structures aligned to the statutory duty and the national Youth Strategy and Young Futures Programme.

3. Report detail – know

3.1 National Context

3.1.1 Our Statutory Duty

Councils have a statutory duty to “so far as reasonably practicable, secure access for all qualifying young people to a sufficient quantity of ‘youth services’” (Education and Inspections Act (2006), Section 507B). By 'youth services', the legislation means educational and recreational leisure-time activities, and associated facilities, which are for the improvement of young people's physical, emotional, and mental well-being, especially those which are free or subsidised and voluntary to access. This refers to the totality of youth services available to a young person in a local authority area.

These include, but are not limited to:

- sports and informal physical activities
- cultural activities
- outdoor, residential, weekend or holiday-time activities

- special interest clubs
- volunteering activities

The above statutory duty creates the mandate for local authorities to provide a local youth offer for young people and, in line with strengthened guidance published on 28 September 2023, local authorities are required to ensure that their local youth offer is responsive to the needs of young people.

3.1.2 The National Youth Strategy

In December 2025, the Government published *Youth Matters: Your National Youth Strategy*, the first national youth strategy in over 20 years. The 10 year strategy sets out a cross-government commitment to improving outcomes for children and young people aged 10–21 (and up to 25 for those with SEND), with a strong emphasis on prevention, early support and empowerment. The strategy focuses on ensuring young people have access to trusted adults, safe and inclusive spaces, and enriching activities that support their physical, mental and emotional wellbeing.

3.1.3 Young Futures Prevention Partnerships and Young Futures Panels

The Young Futures programme, which aims to “tackle knife crime and address rising mental health issues among young people”, was first announced in October 2023. Young Futures Prevention Partnerships aim to bring local partners together to ensure children at risk of being drawn into knife crime, anti-social behaviour and violence against women and girls are identified earlier and offered support in a more systematic way.

We have been working with the Violence Reduction Partnership (VRP) who felt that the development of our youth offer meant that we would be well placed to implement the Young Futures Prevention Panel.

Following collaboration with the VRP, we were chosen by the Home Office for an Education pathfinder to trial new delivery approaches. We received £125k for the initial phase (October 2025–March 2026) and another £125k for a 12-month extension until 31/03/2027. Insights from these projects will contribute to the national evaluation by RAND and guide future programme delivery.

The focus of the ‘Building a Safer Tomorrow Today’ (as named by children and young people from Walsall) pathfinder prevention panel is to identify, assess and development a discretionary referral pathway for schools to support children and young people (aged 9-17) vulnerable to being drawn into crime, enabling partners to share information, coordinate responses and deliver proactive, joined-up support across Children’s Services, Community Safety, Police, Education, Health and the voluntary sector.

The panel was launched in October 2025 and between October and January 2026, 44 children and young people were referred and triaged through the Walsall panel. The cohort was generally younger than in other test and learn areas (Wolverhampton and Sandwell), with the most common age at referral being 13, and 95% of those discussed at panel aged 14 or under, reinforcing the panel’s preventative focus.

During this period, 7 panels were delivered in Walsall with strong multiagency attendance, averaging 11 professionals per panel. Of the 44 children and young people triaged, 24 (55%) progressed to panel discussion, with others not progressing where sufficient support was already in place or alternative statutory services were involved. Of those discussed, 21 were referred to positive early intervention support, including mentoring and other preventative offers, demonstrating that the panel is effectively filtering referrals and enabling timely, coordinated support for children most likely to benefit.

3.1.4 Youth work as an integrated offer of Family Hubs

Anna Freud has worked with a number of organisations including the National Youth Agency to consider the benefits of integrating a youth offer as part of family hub provision. Their findings highlight three key opportunities created by integrating youth services into the family hub model:

1. **Strengthened family connections** – providing more points of engagement with parents, carers, and whole families.
2. **Earlier intervention** – increasing opportunities to identify and address needs at the earliest stage.
3. **Workforce development** – enabling staff to build the skills and consistency required to deliver effective support for young people and their families.

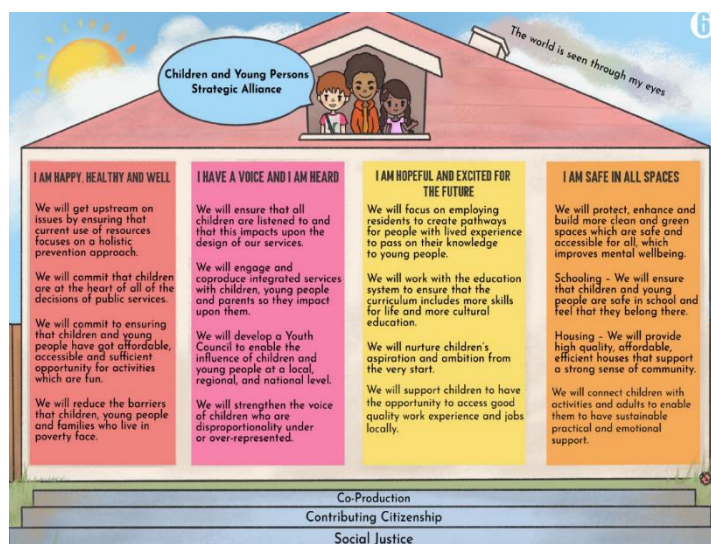
3.2 Walsall Adolescent steering group

The adolescent steering group, set up in September 2024 and led by Children's Services with support from Walsall Together, brings together key partners including Children's Services, Community Safety, VCS, Housing, health services, Police, Education, and others. Its aim is to create and oversee a sustainable, effective adolescent offer for Walsall, ensuring compliance with statutory duties and alignment with national youth strategy. The group defined adolescence as the transitional phase between childhood and adulthood, marked by major developmental changes, and is committed to supporting young people through this period, empowering them to make positive choices and thrive.

3.3 Local Context

We Are Walsall 2040 Children and young people strategy

As a result of the Big Conversation with 503 children and young people (2023) and comprehensive partnership engagement and planning workshop, the Children and Young People's Alliance published the WAW2040 Children and Young People Strategy in October 2024. This focussed on 4 key areas:



Youth Violence and increased youth ASB have been key issues within Walsall, with a number of serious incidents taking place involving young people. Reviews of children involved in these incidents identified several themes including inequalities/system harm, gender and ethnicity,

unmet need, transition support, missed opportunities in focusing on younger siblings, accumulated harm and trauma (including loss and neglect), absent fathers or role models, and lack of a child-centred approach.

Walsall Youth Debate

In February 2025 we held our first Youth Debate. One of the topics was around fairer access to positive activities. Young people called for the following to be considered:

- **Barriers to Participation:** Young people highlighted barriers to involvement in social and civic activities, calling for more inclusive and supportive environments. Negative messaging like "no ball games" and "youth ASB" leads to feeling victimised and unfairly stereotyped. They want positive messaging and a sense of belonging in their communities.
- They urged for youth clubs to be revamped to look and feel more appealing, and dislike the term 'youth', which they see as off-putting. Engaging young people in designing and running these clubs is vital, offering them workplace experience and breaking down stereotypes.
- Young people also want more 'third places'—warm, free, welcoming spaces like libraries and community centres—to meet friends and build community, fostering positive behaviour. Mapping these spaces in Walsall could help the Council strengthen this offer.
- Finally, they find it hard to access information about local opportunities, as current platforms are outdated and confusing. They suggest the Council should use social media for a strong communication campaign, making activities and opportunities easier to find and join.

The Adolescent Needs Assessment

The Adolescent steering group commissioned a needs assessment to provide a comprehensive picture of the experiences, needs, and outcomes of adolescents aged 10–18 (and up to 25 for those with SEND or additional vulnerabilities) growing up in Walsall. It draws on a wide range of quantitative data, surveys of young people and stakeholders, and national and local evidence to inform the future development of a coherent and sustainable adolescent offer.

Drawing on the findings of this needs assessment and aligned with the National Youth Strategy's (NYS) three system shifts (national to local, fragmented to collaborative, and excluded to empowered) as well as NYS Actions, several key reflections and considerations have emerged to guide the development of a sustainable and effective adolescent offer:

- **Sustainable Commissioning and Long-Term Funding**
Adolescent services require stable, multi-year funding to enable strategic planning and consistent support, especially for those at risk. Embedding NYS Action 10 supports accountability and long-term planning.
- **Enhanced Collaboration and Integration**
Improved cross-agency partnership is vital. Centralised referrals, information sharing, and regular forums will provide coordinated support and reduce duplication, reflecting NYS's collaborative system shift and Action 2.
- **Workforce Development**
Ongoing professional development in adolescent needs and trauma-informed practice is crucial. NYS Action 2 calls for a skilled, confident workforce with clear progression and apprenticeship routes.
- **Youth Voice and Co-Production**
Young people should help design, deliver, and evaluate services. Making youth participation standard practice ensures relevance and trust, aligned with NYS Action 9.
- **Targeted Outreach and Tackling Inequality**

Focused outreach for deprived and under-represented groups is needed. Targeted investment will address barriers and poor outcomes, supporting NYS Actions 4 and 7 for fair access to activities and places.

- **Clear, Youth-Friendly Communication**

Better communication, especially via digital and social media, will raise awareness of available support. This addresses NYS Action 3 on healthy relationships and digital safety.

- **Streamlined Pathways and Early Intervention**

Simplified referrals and faster access to support will prevent issues escalating, in line with NYS Action 6 and national priorities for early intervention.

- **Emotional Resilience and Wellbeing**

There is a growing need for emotional wellbeing support. Professionals need further training, and NYS Action 8 expands Mental Health Support Teams. The approach is shifting from "mental health" to strengths-based emotional resilience, promoting coping skills and reducing stigma for long-term wellbeing.

3.4 **The development of our Borough wide preventative/early intervention offer for adolescents**

The development of our adolescent/youth offer is aligned to the implementation of the Family Hub and Families First for Children pathfinder and is responding to the needs identified through the adolescent needs assessment, building on the assets we have already have and the learning from programmes delivered and the two annual Youth Summits (summer 2024 and summer 2025).

The aim of the youth offer is to:

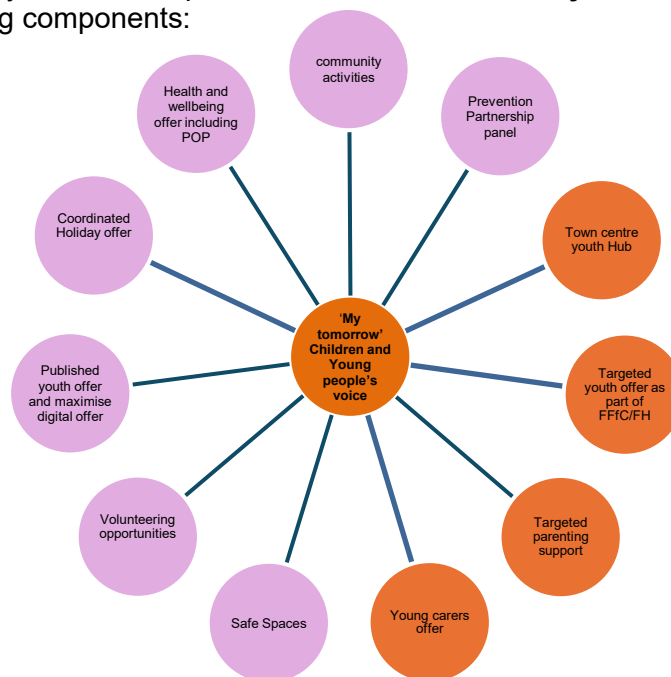
- Develop a wide range of activities which young people want to take part in
- Identify vulnerable young people at the earliest stage possible and provide support
- Encourage young people to volunteer and become involved in their communities
- Work with all sectors to develop services to meet the needs of young people and ensure they have a good network of support
- The role of parents and carers is valued, and they are supported to improve young people's wellbeing and resilience.
- Ensure good access to Information, Advice & Guidance
- Improve access to employment and learning opportunities
- Enable and support young people to have their views considered in decisions that affect their lives

3.4.1 The development of our adolescent/youth offer consists of two key elements.

Firstly, the **creation of a practice framework**, which is informed by the insights and experiences of young people themselves. Importantly, young people have emphasised that good support does not always require the introduction of new or additional services, but rather the provision of reliable, consistent help from a range of trusted adults. Whether these are teachers, youth workers, health workers, community workers, social care professionals, or others, it is the quality and reliability of the support that is valued most. By fostering a collaborative and unified approach across all those engaging with adolescents, and ensuring that young people are acknowledged, listened to, and respected, Walsall is committed to delivering more effective and sustainable support for all adolescents in the borough.



3.4.2 Secondly, the development of a **delivery offer**, which consists of the following components:



The elements in orange are directly delivered by the Local Authority Children's Services targeted youth offer aligned to localities, whilst the other elements will be a coordinated partnership offer.

LA direct delivery (orange):

1. Shaping my Tomorrow Participation Offer

This includes

- We have recruited two young people into participation apprenticeship roles, empowering them to help shape and develop our 'Shaping My Tomorrow' participation offer as well as supporting them to develop employment and leadership skills. Both young people are working towards a Level 3 apprenticeship qualification in youth work.
- Lead on the development and implementation of a range of opportunities for young people to develop their employment skills and experience through volunteering and apprenticeship opportunities within the team. The team will be responsible for developing a 'Shaping My Tomorrow' Quality Mark for organisations across Walsall, based on Hear By Right.

- Developed a “Shaping My Tomorrow” Youth Collaborative, providing us with the mechanism to maximise opportunities through existing youth forums, while amplifying their voice and developing new opportunities for underrepresented and unheard voices.
- Coordinated and Support young people to organise regular youth debates, an annual “Shaping My Tomorrow Big Conversation” and Summit, providing opportunities for a wider group of children and young people to have a voice in the changes that are needed.
- Established the Town Centre Our Voice monthly youth group to empower young people in guiding the development of the Town Centre Youth Hub, "Our Place," and to influence future positive activities within the town centre. This initiative ensures alignment with ongoing town centre developments and provides ample opportunities for young people to engage constructively in shaping the community's future.

2. Targeted youth offer

Using the Families First for Children prevention funding we have created a dedicated youth work team to develop a targeted youth offer across our localities:

Support to Voluntary and Community Sector Youth Provision: As part of our wider work to develop our Localities, the Targeted Youth Workers link closely with voluntary and community sector youth organisations to coordinated and maximise resources to connect young people with the right provision and enable long term sustainable support. This support takes into account individual skills and strengths in each organisation, identify gaps in provision for young people and working collaboratively to find solutions together.

Missing Home interviews: two dedicated youth workers are aligned to the locality youth work resource but are focussed on conducting the return home interviews for children assessed as low risk exploitation via daily triage meetings facilitated by Aspiring Futures and coordinate any follow-up support as a result.

Targeted Youth Work in Groups: Targeted Youth Workers will develop, coordinate and deliver evidence-based group work programmes with young people. These are delivered directly or alongside other professionals and other partners (including school health). Current programmes being delivered are Brain HQ training and Progressive Masculinity.

One-to-one youth work: Following an assessment by Family Help practitioners the targeted Youth Worker can be requested to facilitate one to one interventions.

3. Targeted parenting programmes:

- **Don't Slam That Door Parenting Workshop:** An introductory two-hour session helping parents understand teenage behaviour and communication, with further online parenting resources available.
- **Parent Aware:** A two-hour contextual safeguarding awareness workshop for parents, based on evidence from Ivison Trust (formerly PACE).
- **Supported Togetherness -online and targeted support for parents:** Delivered in community libraries and connected services throughout Walsall and through home visits Supporting individual parents to access Togetherness training online. Parents have access to further online training.
- **0 – 19 parenting coffee morning**

All **universal parenting interventions** are available to book via Bright Bookings on the Family Hubs website for parents or via an internal referral form for practitioners.

4. Young Carers offer

We have continued to increase the profile and awareness of the Walsall Young Carers Service, supported by strong partnerships with schools, health services, Adult Social Care

and Children's Social Care. This sustained focus on early identification and referral has resulted in significant growth in the number of young carers being recognised and supported across the borough.

There are currently 483 young carers supported by the service, reflecting improved identification, increased awareness across partner organisations, and a more joined up approach to supporting carers of all ages.

What the Young Carers Team has delivered:

The dedicated Young Carers Team has continued to strengthen both direct support for young carers and systemwide capacity:

- Supported 261 young carers through 20 targeted youth sessions, offering inclusive activities such as outdoor gym sessions, silent discos, teambuilding, interview skills, Black History Month activities, homework support, autism awareness, and music studio sessions.
- Developed and secured funding for bespoke Holiday Activities and Food (HAF) provision tailored specifically for young carers.
- Supported nine young carers to attend the National Young Carers Festival, providing opportunities for confidence building, peer connection and positive experiences beyond their local area.
- Established and supported Young Carer Champions, helping to identify young carers within education settings and providing outward bound and skills based activities to support transition into adulthood.
- Common caring roles identified: Siblings 203 Parent/Adult 303 (this is higher than overall young carers as some young carers support both parents and siblings)
- 144 Schools and community groups engaged
- Worked closely with 25 secondary schools to strengthen transition support for young carers moving into post16 education, training or employment.
- Engaged 144 schools and partner organisations across Walsall, strengthening awareness, identification and ongoing support for young carers within education and universal services.
- Actively participated in National Young Carers Action Week, contributing to the national 'Fair Futures for Young Carers' theme and delivering a programme of celebration, awareness raising and professional engagement during March 2026.
- Collaborated with Adult Services to develop a unified All Age Carers Strategy, strengthening alignment and continuity of support as young carers move into adulthood.
- Introduced a monthly group for older young carers, with 42 young people attending regularly, providing peer support and shaping the future direction of the service through coproduction.

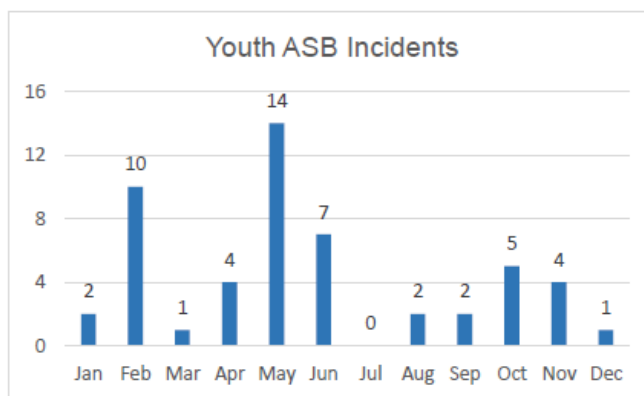
5. Development and delivery of the Town centre Youth Hub – 'Our Place'

The youth hub is one of 15 projects agreed as part of the £20M regeneration bid and has an allocation of £384K in capital investment. In June, we opened a temporary Town Centre Youth Hub called 'Our Place,' named by young people. Our Place is currently staffed through the Children's Services Youth Work team. The Team work with the detached provision in town (previously Aspire 4 U, currently MLSS and EYES), funded by the Community Safety Partnership, to engage with young people and address identified issues and challenges, aiming to provide a constructive experience.

Since opening *Our Place*, it has demonstrated strong and sustained engagement from young people and a positive impact on the town centre environment. Attendance has increased steadily since opening, peaking at 124 young people per session in October 2025, with an average attendance of around 70 young people per session up to January 2026. Overall, the hub has engaged approximately 1,720 individual young people aged

11–19, from a wide range of local schools and colleges. The hub provides a safe, welcoming and free space for young people to socialise, participate in structured activities and access trusted youth workers, with particularly high engagement during school holiday periods when targeted programmes have been delivered.

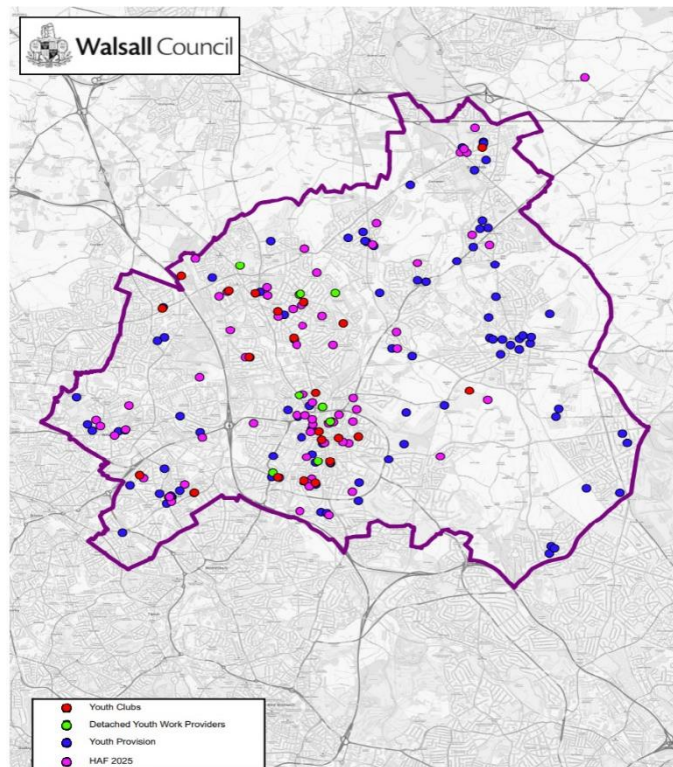
Alongside high levels of participation, data indicates a sustained reduction in youth antisocial behaviour (ASB) in the immediate town centre area since the hub opened. Feedback from partners, including businesses and security staff, highlights fewer incidents involving young people and improved relationships between young people, local services and town centre stakeholders. The consistent presence of youth workers, combined with positive activities and early intervention, has enabled constructive engagement with young people and contributed to a safer and more welcoming town centre environment. Learning from the temporary hub continues to inform the development of the longer-term Town Centre Youth Hub, which is due to open by the end of 2026.



Partnership initiatives (purple)

Mapping our youth offer and activities available to young people

A task and finish group used the National Youth Agency (NYA) guidance and toolkit to undertake a mapping of youth provision across the Borough:



The steering group has created a directory of youth provisions and mentoring services across the borough (see attachment A)

The mapping identified several areas we can build on in the development of a stronger, effective and efficient youth offer:

- There is a wide range of universal sports based, cultural and community-based provision as well as more targeted youth work including detached youth work and mentoring.
- The North and West have the least provision according to need and this is the areas we will need to focus on to build community and voluntary sector capacity.
- During the mapping it was clear that various providers were not aware of other provisions, even if they were working in the same area.
- Practitioners are not always aware of what is available, how to sign post or refer young people to provision.
- The mapping is continuously developing with new activity and providers being identified. There is a need for a coordinated publishing of the positive activities available as the current provision is fragmented and not well published and therefore resources may not be maximised.

To further strengthen our youth work capacity, we have secured investment to deliver training for both local authority (LA) youth work staff and voluntary and community sector (VCS) colleagues who do not currently hold a youth work specific qualification. This initiative will support four full-time LA workers, along with 20 VCS staff, to undertake the National Youth Agency Level 3 certificate in youth work. The programme will be delivered across two or three cohorts over a two-year period, with a total investment of £29,100.00, ensuring a sustainable increase in skilled youth work professionals within the borough.

Publishing our youth offer

To address the need for better coordination and visibility, a dedicated website (aligned to our Family Hub website) is currently being developed with young people to publish the youth offer across the partnership. This website will act as a one-stop shop, making it easier for young people, parents, community members, and professionals to find information and access services. In direct response to feedback, it will link to partner websites and offer

straightforward booking capabilities for courses and activities, ensuring that provision is accessible. The website will go live in April 2026.

“Safe Spaces” initiative

The Safe Spaces initiative was launched in November 2026 and is a boroughwide scheme led by Community Safety in partnership with Children’s Services and West Midlands Police. It works with council venues and community-based settings to provide clearly identified places where children and young people can go if they feel unsafe or need immediate, practical support, such as charging a phone, contacting a parent or carer, or seeking reassurance from a trusted adult. The initiative directly responds to consistent feedback from young people through the Big Conversation, Youth Summits and Youth Debate, where feeling safe in public spaces—particularly within the town centre—was identified as a priority. To date, 11 venues across Walsall have signed up as verified Safe Spaces, including the Town Centre Youth Hub (*Our Place*), leisure, cultural and library venues. The next phase of delivery will focus on working with local businesses to expand the Safe Spaces network further, increasing the number of accessible town centre locations and strengthening the visibility and reach of support for young people.

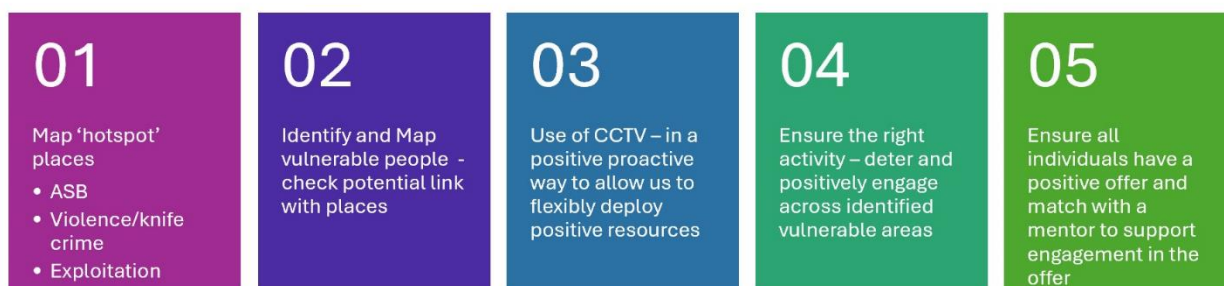
Holiday Coordinated offer

During Summer 2024 and 2025, we implemented a successful, coordinated Summer planning approach aimed at reducing the risk of antisocial behaviour, youth violence, and exploitation.

The Community Safety Partnership, Police, Public Health, VRP and Walsall Children’s Services collaborated to identify the needs and gaps in the current provision of summer activities and services, and to develop a coordinated plan to address them.

We maximised opportunities through our holiday and activity programme, providing a diverse range of events and initiatives for young people across the borough. Alongside this, mentoring programmes and detached youth provision were deployed to ensure that vulnerable young people received tailored support and were actively engaged in positive activities. This holistic approach helped foster safe environments, promoted resilience, and encouraged constructive participation among those most at risk, ensuring that no young person was left without access to the help and opportunities they needed.

The Summer Programme uses a 5 step approach:



Outcomes:

- Worked with 14 different providers to put in detached Youth Work throughout the holiday in 8 different locations across the borough where youth ASB/Violence/exploitation had been identified
- 45 referrals received (10 from schools) for bespoke mentoring (10 more than Summer 204) for children/young people identified as “at risk”
- Increase in attendance for most of the 45 children returning to school in September 2025
- Full evaluation being undertaken in comparison to Summer 2024
- Due to the positive impact of the Summer 2024 and 2025 projects, the VRP has confirmed funding for this project to be repeated in Summer 2026

Wellbeing offer – POP

The Positive Outcomes Project (POP), commissioned by Public Health, is a dedicated health and wellbeing service (digital and face to face) for young adults aged 15–25 in Walsall. POP offers tailored support for a variety of challenges, such as mental health and wellbeing, financial concerns, employment opportunities, loneliness and isolation, as well as other issues affecting young people. By addressing these needs holistically, POP aims to empower young adults to overcome barriers and achieve positive outcomes, ensuring they are equipped to thrive during this crucial stage of their lives.

[P.O.P Walsall | Support for 15-25's](#)

Volunteering opportunities:

- Young person volunteering opportunities are currently offered through Our Voice youth group - young people can volunteer their time once a month. There is also a structured work experience programme made by the Youth Support Apprentices for Year 10 young people planned for delivery in June 2026, based from Our Place town centre youth hub.
- From our cohort of WR4C Volunteers, we have 3 volunteers that have expressed an interest in supporting the Youth Offer and Participation team. These 3 volunteers have attended a meeting with the Adolescent Parenting Practitioner about the parenting offer and will be supporting with coffee mornings. They have also supported on a HAF event and a Young Carers celebration event.
- Training opportunities have been opened up to these volunteers
- The vision is that we will have volunteers to support the Prevention Panel and subsequent interventions.

4. *Financial information*

- 4.1 The development of Walsall's adolescent offer has been supported through a combination of direct Council investment and time limited external grant funding, aligned to the Council's prevention, early help and regeneration priorities.

The Council has made a sustained investment in its Youth Offer and Participation Team, providing core capacity to deliver participation, youth voice and targeted youth work functions across the borough. This includes permanent staffing to lead and coordinate participation activity, youth engagement, coproduction and workforce development, ensuring that young people have a meaningful voice in shaping services and local decision-making.

In addition, the Council has invested in a dedicated youth work presence within the town centre, supporting the delivery of open access youth provision through the Town Centre Youth Hub (*Our Place*). This investment reflects the Council's wider commitment to town centre regeneration, contextual safeguarding and the provision of safe, welcoming spaces for young people. Capital funding has been secured as part of the wider regeneration programme to support the development of a permanent youth hub, with revenue staffing currently provided through Children's Services.

Targeted youth work capacity within localities has been strengthened through prevention grant funding, including Families First for Children and violence prevention funding streams. This funding supports youth workers aligned to localities, enabling early identification of need, delivery of targeted group and one-to-one interventions, and close partnership working with schools, community safety, police, health and voluntary sector providers. These time limited grants are used to test and embed preventative approaches, build system capacity and reduce reliance on higher cost statutory interventions.

Alongside Council investment, Walsall has secured external funding linked to national priorities, including Home Office funding to support the Young Futures Prevention Partnership Pathfinder. This funding enables multiagency prevention panels and targeted early intervention for children and young people at risk of involvement in antisocial behaviour, violence or exploitation.

Overall, the financial approach balances core Council investment with external grant funding to maximise impact, strengthen prevention and ensure that resources are targeted where need is greatest. Ongoing work is focused on embedding learning, evidencing impact and supporting longer term sustainability as national funding arrangements evolve.

Overview of investment:

Funding stream	value	What does it fund
Council (ongoing)	£316,639	Participation team including 2 apprentices Parenting officer 2 youth workers Young carers provision
Council one off	£114K +29K for VCSE training and development	Town centre youth team to run the Youth Hub + VCSE youth work training and development
CRP capital – town centre regeneration	£384K	Town Centre Youth hub
Prevention grant (FFC pathfinder)	£196,040	4 additional youth workers
Home Office – until 31/03/27	£125k (26-27)	Prevention Partnership Panel
VRP and HAF (26/27)	VRP = £35k HAF = £50K	Summer 2026 funding

5. Reducing Inequalities

5.1 The adolescent offer in Walsall is actively contributing to the reduction of inequalities by prioritising inclusive and accessible youth work provision. Through targeted interventions, open access sessions and detached youth work, the service reaches young people who are at greater risk of isolation, poor mental health and exclusion. The effective use of funding streams enables the delivery of evidence-based programmes, ensuring support is focused on those who need it most. Furthermore, the commitment to amplifying youth voice and developing participation structures for children and young people with SEND demonstrates a focus on breaking down barriers and promoting equal opportunities for all.

6. Review

6.1 The National Youth Agency (NYA) undertook a light touch *peer consultancy visit* to Walsall in November 2026 as part of a DCMS funded peer support programme. The process brought together peers from other local authority youth services and NYA officer and focused on collaborative learning rather than inspection. The visit included discussions with council officers, partners, youth workers and young people, alongside a review of relevant documentation and service delivery in practice. The purpose was to support Walsall in reflecting on its adolescent offer, particularly around outcomes measurement, inclusion of children and young people with SEND, and alignment with national policy and best practice.

See attachment B for full report

6.2 What NYA identified

- NYA identified that Walsall's Youth Offer and Participation Team is well positioned within the wider local authority system, with strong links to Children's Services, Community Safety, Family Help, Youth Justice and schools. The team was recognised as agile and responsive, with the ability to adapt provision quickly in response to emerging need, particularly through open access youth work, targeted interventions and detached provision.
- The review highlighted strengths in workforce capability, noting a good balance of experienced, qualified youth workers alongside apprentices and trainees, supporting the development of relational, strengths based youth work practice. NYA also identified effective use of funding streams such as HAF and Families First for Children to test and deliver evidence based programmes and reach young people at risk of isolation, poor mental health or exclusion.
- Walsall was described as a forward looking authority, with a clear commitment to prevention, contextual safeguarding and early intervention. The development of the Town Centre Youth Hub, partnership prevention panels, and integration with Family Hubs were seen as strongly aligned with national priorities set out in the National Youth Strategy.
- NYA also recognised early progress in thinking about outcomes frameworks and impact measurement, noting that Walsall is ahead of many areas in this regard.

The review identified areas for further development, including the need to strengthen outcome measurement, particularly in evidencing impact on harder outcomes such as antisocial behaviour and safeguarding. NYA also noted that while progress is being made in amplifying youth voice, further work is needed to ensure the consistent inclusion of children and young people with SEND within participation and co-production structures.

6.3 NYA recommendations

- NYA recommended that Walsall continues to develop and embed a clear adolescent outcomes framework, linking youth work activity to council priorities and demonstrating impact to support sustainability and protect services from future funding pressures.
- They advised maintaining and strengthening the balance between experienced practitioners and trainee staff, ensuring ongoing professional development and support for relational youth work practice. Continued investment in leadership development for apprentices, youth collaborative members was encouraged.
- NYA recommended further embedding coproduction, particularly with children and young people with SEND, to ensure the youth offer is inclusive, accessible and shaped by lived experience. They also advised continuing to build strong partnerships across the system, including the voluntary and community sector, to maximise reach, reduce duplication and strengthen the local youth ecosystem.

Overall, the peer consultancy concluded that Walsall has strong foundations in place, is well aligned with national direction, and is well positioned to build a sustainable, evidence led adolescent offer through continued learning, partnership and system leadership.

The adolescent steering group will be taking these recommendations forward, ensuring they are integrated into ongoing strategic planning and operational delivery.

Background papers

Appendix A - Youth offer mapping



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Appendix B - NYA report



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