Health and Wellbeing Board

18 September 2025

Agenda item

The Walsall Food Plan 2025-2030 (Feeding Walsall's Future)

1. Purpose

1.1 The purpose of this report is to present the multiagency Walsall Food Plan 2025-2030 (Feeding Walsall's Future) – for approval by the Health and Wellbeing Board (HWBB).

2. Recommendations

The HWBB approves Walsall's Food Plan. HWBB members recognise the importance of Walsall's Food Plan and its contribution to improving the health, environmental and economic wellbeing of Walsall.

The HWBB oversees the implementation of Walsall's Food Plan. A representative from the Food Partnership will feedback progress to HWWB on an annual basis.

The HWBB partners commit to support delivery of Walsall's Food Plan and contribute to actions where respective organisations have a role.

3. Report detail

3.1 Walsall's Food Plan has been developed following a recommendation from the 2022 Director of Public Health Annual report ("Feeding Our Future").

3.2 Walsall's Food Plan outlines our significant ambitions to transform Walsall's food system into a more sustainable, fair, and healthy environment. Walsall needs a roadmap to address major issues with diet-related ill health, food insecurity, and the environmental impact of food consumption. There is an urgent need to work in partnership to change the food landscape in Walsall to ensure it starts working better for everyone, better for our health and better for the planet.

3.3 Food and the economy have a complex relationship. Food production, distribution, and consumption significantly impact economic growth. Economic factors like income and price influence food choices and availability. Subsequently, this has an impact on a population's health and wellbeing, productivity and general contribution to society.

3.4 Nationally, the total costs attributed directly to poor diet and to the negative impacts of the food system amount to £268.3 billion, more than 90% of the spend on healthcare in the UK. This includes human costs (suffering due to lost opportunities, lives lived in pain, sick relatives), health care (managing, treating and caring for those with chronic disease), social care (support for those with long term conditions), welfare support (support payments for those incapacitated

by long term illness) and productivity losses (economic inactivity). According to the Office of Budget Responsibility, the general health of the UK population poses a substantial risk to fiscal sustainability in the form of greater health-related inactivity (individuals of working age who are not employed or actively seeking employment due to health conditions or disabilities).

3.5 Overconsumption and lack of balanced nutrition has led to number of health issues (e.g. diet related ill health including mental health, increased obesity prevalence) and a burden on the economy;

- increased obesity prevalence
- diet related ill-health (including mental health)
- poor dental health.

3.6 In 2023/ 24, 75% of Walsall's adults are considered overweight which is higher than the England average (64.5%). Almost 1 in 4 (24.7%) reception children in Walsall are living with overweight or obesity. A few years later, when children are about to leave primary school, between ages 10 – 11 years old, over 4 in 10 are living with overweight or obesity (41.6%). The Royal Society of Public Health have completed (awaiting report) some modelling that predicts 9 local authorities in England (including Walsall) will have 50% or more children who are classed as overweight or obese by 2035.

3.7 The risk of type 2 diabetes is greatly increased with increased weight and a diet high in sugar. Obesity is also associated with increased risk of cardiovascular disease, high cholesterol, and high blood pressure. Poor mental health, including depression and anxiety, has been linked to a poor-quality diet and nutritional deficiencies.

3.8 In 2022, over 1 in 4 five-year-olds in Walsall have dental decay and the rate of tooth extractions in Walsall is higher than the regional and national average. Five year-old children in the most deprived decile of Walsall are more than twice as likely (86%) to have decayed, missing, or filled teeth, compared with 41% in the least deprived decile.

3.9 There are several reasons for the issues outlined above. These include:

- Food environment (access)
- Food knowledge (including putting knowledge into practice)
- Affordability

3.10 The food environment plays a vital role in shaping what people buy, grow and eat. Food environments are a combination of the 'spaces' in which people make decisions about food, and the foods that are made available, accessible, affordable and desirable. One of the most effective and equitable approaches to changing food behaviours is to change the structural factors that drive food choice. Walsall's current food environment is not conducive to supporting healthy food choices.

3.11 Media and advertising, often focused on unhealthy foods, can make it difficult to maintain a healthy diet. Studies show that restricting advertising of high fat, salt and sugar products can lead to a reduction in unhealthy food choices. A review

of Walsall Council's Advertising and Sponsorship policy is pending and there is a need to increase (at least maintain) restrictions on unhealthy food advertising.

Fig 1: Example of Food Advertising in Walsall

3.12 Nationally, the proportion of meals eaten outside of the home (e.g. cafes, restaurants) is increasing, with more than 1 in 4 of adults and 1 in 5 children now eating from out-of-home food outlets at least once a week. These meals tend to have larger portions, and higher fat, sugar and salt content and lower nutrients than meals eaten at home. Walsall has 134 fast-food outlets per 100,000 population (389 in total) which is one of the highest in the UK and higher than neighbouring areas including Dudley and Wolverhampton. These outlets, often more densely populated in more deprived areas, shape our food landscape and contribute to the increasing gap in health inequality. Views of local people on the over concentration of takeaways in Walsall is captured in this clip from BBC Sounds ('Walsall just isn't a salad eating town' - BBC Sounds).

3.13 There are 2345 registered food businesses in Walsall. Walsall has a very diverse food offer, with an expansion in small international shops, restaurants, and takeaways offering speciality foodstuffs from around the globe. Although this is a positive step in relation to accessibility for our communities, it also brings challenges in relation to differences in the way foods are imported, processed and labelled. Walsall Council's Environmental Health and Trading Standards services activities in 2024/25 include:

- 285 food complaints relating to hygiene.
- 123 programmed inspections of established food businesses.
- 182 initial inspections of unrated new food businesses.
- Investigation of 235 notifications of cases of infectious diseases (e.g. salmonella) and several allegations relating to food poisoning (not formally diagnosed)

3.14 Food growing opportunities (e.g. in a garden, community space, a balcony container) is an important component of a good food environment. "Grow your own" can improve physical and mental health, promote sustainability, and foster stronger communities.

3.15 Walsall Council currently has 35 allotment sites which provide in the region of 1,500 plots. Majority (27) of the sites are managed by allotment associations through a lease agreement with the council. Greenfields Road (Rushall-Shelfield), Sutton Road (Paddock), Broadway (Palfrey), Delves 1 & 2 (Palfrey) and Goscote Lane (Bloxwich East) have a good supply of plots, few vacant plots and no one on waiting lists. Short Heath, Willenhall North, and Willenhall South have limited supply and high demand. Walsall Council are in the process of purchasing two additional sites to help address the short fall. The Nature Towns and Cities programme (£1 million external funding secured through National Heritage Lottery Fund) will be looking to expand the number of community growing spaces.

Fig 2: Broad Lane Allotment (left), North Walsall Allotment Association Growing Competition (right)

3.16 Food knowledge is an important aspect of health literacy because it helps individuals make informed decisions about what they eat and how it affects their health. Knowledge does not necessarily, however, translate into action. For example, 85% of individuals (nationally) are aware of the 5 a day message, however a considerably lower percentage achieve it. In Walsall, 21.3% achieve the recommendation compared to 31.3% nationally.

3.17 The Eatwell Guide is a policy tool used to define government recommendations on eating healthily and achieving a balanced diet. The most deprived households with children in Walsall would need to allocate 70% of their disposable income to comply with guidance in line with the Eatwell Guide.

3.18 Walsall's Food Plan has evolved through the collective contributions of key stakeholders and residents across the borough, including through the Walsall Council hosted Food Summit at Bescot Stadium in January 2024. At the Summit, the vision for food in Walsall was conceived and the priorities for action were outlined.

3.19 Walsall's Food Plan has the following collective vision; "A sustainable and fair food environment where good food is grown, accessible and promoted for our residents to have healthy, nutritious, affordable and appealing food choices."

Fig 3: Vision for Walsall's Food Plan produced during Walsall's Food Summit

3.20 The Food Plan identifies four key priority areas for action:

- **Good food choice**: supporting access to affordable, nutritious food and empowering residents with knowledge and skills to make healthy food choices.

- **Good food environment**: improving the food landscape to make healthy eating easy and convenient, and promoting local food growing initiatives.

- **Sustainable, responsible and resilient**: enhancing the sustainability and resilience of the food system to secure Walsall's food future and working to reduce the environmental impact of Walsall's food system.

- **Leadership, commissioning and procurement**: leading by example through enriching catering and food procurement practices and supporting partner organisations to embrace the actions of the Food Plan.

3.21 For each of the priority areas a set of actions have been identified. These are included in the action plan on page 51 of Walsall's Food Plan. The actions include a range of different interventions including policy development (e.g. Local Plan), marketing and promotion (e.g. targeted campaign to increase uptake of Healthy Start Vouchers, normalisation of breastfeeding), training and development (e.g. food preparation and cookery courses) and new innovative and evidence based support programmes (e.g. HENRY research to increase good food knowledge/ access amongst Walsall parents, development of food offer in primary schools and nurseries).

3.22 Food projects and policy developments already in train in Walsall are as follows:

- The "Future Foodies" programme, delivered by Walsall College in collaboration with Public Health Walsall, engages students aged 14–16 in learning about healthy, environmentally-conscious eating habits. This course promotes holistic life skills alongside knowledge of good food.

- Community Growing Spaces network (co-ordinated by whg) is supporting residents to convert disused land into new green growing spaces. Site developments have taken place in Willenhall, Bloxwich, Palfrey and Dudley Fields.

- Community Shops provide affordable food and essentials to residents, particularly those struggling wit*h* the rising cost of living. 5 community shops are now operating in Bloxwich, Blakenall, Bentley, Walsall Town Centre, and Mossley. A further 3 are planned for Willenhall, Palfrey and Darlaston.

  Fig 4: Inside Walsall's Community Shops including fresh produce from Goscote Greenacres

- The Child and Family Healthy Eating programme (delivered by the Soil Association's Food for Life team) supports around 19,000 children and their families in 41 Early Years settings and 53 schools. The programme has expanded to include support to more child minders due to the trialling of a national Early Years Award. Food for Life have supported 2 seed libraries in the community which offers residents a free resource to grow, harvest and then re share their seeds. The Nourishing Communities cooking and growing award has been awarded to 10 community groups. This has also been used as an opportunity for increased community engagement to help shape future policy and practice.

- Small grants focused on reducing health inequalities have been awarded to 30 community organisations for projects promoting physical activity, healthy eating, and green space access. There are 7 initiatives involving new green spaces, community gardens, and allotment access for children and young people.

- 600 residents were supported through Be Well Walsall's adult weight management programme between November 2024 and April 2025. Over 50% lose weight and 32% lose more than 5% of initial body weight.

- Exploration of opportunities to increase “good food” access through the development of the Local Plan.

4. Implications for Joint Working arrangements:

4.1 The Food Plan will be driven by Walsall’s Food Partnership. The Food Partnership is a broad coalition of local organisations and individuals working together to build a thriving local food system for Walsall. The Food Partnership has already been initiated and includes a range of partners (such as Walsall College, Soil Association, whg, Black Country Food Banks, Walsall Together). Funding has been identified to employ a project manager who will be responsible for facilitating Walsall’s new Food Partnership and co-ordinating action to deliver the Food Plan.

4.2 The HWBB is requested to provide governance for the implementation of Walsall’s Food Plan and to ensure involvement from key partners, including all members of the Board.

5. Health and Wellbeing Priorities:

5.1 Food and the economy have a complex relationship. Food production, distribution, and consumption significantly impact economic growth, while economic factors like income and price influence food choices and availability. Subsequently, this has an impact on health and wellbeing and a population’s level of productivity and potential contribution to society

5.2 Eating a healthy, balanced diet is an important part of maintaining good health and reducing the risk of chronic diseases such as cardiovascular disease, type 2 diabetes and some cancers, such as bowel, breast and pancreatic cancer. The World Health Organisation states that consuming a healthy diet throughout the life-course helps to prevent malnutrition in all its forms as well as a range of non-communicable diseases and conditions. Healthy eating plays a key role in supporting good mental wellbeing and can positively impact mood and cognitive function.

5.2 Walsall Food Plan contributes to We Are Walsall 2040 particularly the following outcomes:

- All Walsall children will have the best start in life with excellent support available to families to ensure they thrive

- Walsall will have a strong and sustainable voluntary and community sector that plays a key leadership role in shaping and delivering services vital for Walsall life.

- Walsall will have vibrant and sustainable community spaces that act as a hub for community life.

- People in all areas of the borough will live longer lives in better health, and we will have narrowed the gap in life expectancy and healthy life expectancy across all neighbourhoods.

- Walsall towns will be revamped with improved infrastructure where shopping and socialising locally will be the first choice for residents.

- Walsall will have flourishing markets, festivals, and events as hallmarks of a prosperous borough.

Supporting Documents

Director of Public Health Annual Report 2022 ("Feeding Our Future") - Walsall Director of Public Health Annual Report 2022 - Feeding our future

Director of Public Health Annual Report 2024 – Healthy and Well: Adding Life to Years in Walsall Director of Public Health Annual Report 2024

Background paper

The Walsall Food Plan 2025-2030 (Feeding Walsall's Future) – appendix 1

Contact Officer

Joe Holding
Senior Public Health Development Manager
☎ 01922 658073
✉ joe.holding@walsall.gov.uk

Dr Gabriella Morley
Public Health Specialty Registrar
☎ 01922 653585
✉ gabriella.morley@walsall.gov.uk