



Walsall Council

Children, Families and Education Overview and Scrutiny Committee

Tuesday 7 April 2026 at 18:00

Conference room 2 at the Council House, Lichfield Street, Walsall

Public access to meeting via: www.walsallcouncilwebcasts.com

Membership:

Councillor N. Latham (Chair)
Councillor S. Cooper (Vice-Chair)
Councillor S. Ditta
Councillor T. Jukes
Councillor E. Morgan
Councillor L. Rattigan
Councillor C. Statham
Councillor C. Towe
Vacancy
Vacancy
Vacancy

Non-Elected

Voting Members:

Vacancy (Archdiocese of Birmingham Representative)
D. Smith (Diocese of Lichfield)
Vacancy (Parent Governor Representative)
Vacancy (Parent Governor Representative)

Non-Elected

Non-Voting Members:

S. Guy (Primary Teacher Representative)
W. Duffus (Secondary Teacher Representative)
G. Coles (Parent Governor Representative – Academies)
M. Abbas (Parent Governor Representative – Academies)

Portfolio Holder:

Councillor M. Statham – Children, Families & Lifelong
Learning

Quorum:

4 Members

Democratic Services, The Council House, Walsall, WS1 1TW
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[Walsall Council Website](http://www.walsallcouncil.gov.uk)

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please contact the person above**

Elected Members and the public are expected to follow the Nolan Principles and Jo Cox Foundation Joint Statement on conduct during the meeting:

- That a constructive and none intimidatory tone is used.
- Those participating act with integrity, honesty, and compassion.
- To behave respectfully towards other, including those we disagree with.

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The Relevant Authorities (Disclosable Pecuniary Interests) Regulations 2012

Members are reminded that both registered and new interests not yet registered should be declared.

Specified pecuniary interests

The pecuniary interests which are specified for the purposes of Chapter 7 of Part 1 of the Localism Act 2011 are the interests specified in the second column of the following:

Subject	Prescribed description
Employment, office, trade, profession or vocation	Any employment, office, trade, profession or vocation carried on for profit or gain.
Sponsorship	<p>Any payment or provision of any other financial benefit (other than from the relevant authority) made or provided within the relevant period in respect of any expenses incurred by a member in carrying out duties as a member, or towards the election expenses of a member.</p> <p>This includes any payment or financial benefit from a trade union within the meaning of the Trade Union and Labour Regulations (Consolidation) Act 1992.</p>
Contracts	<p>Any contract which is made between the relevant person (or a body in which the relevant person has a beneficial interest) and the relevant authority:</p> <p>(a) under which goods or services are to be provided or works are to be executed; and</p> <p>(b) which has not been fully discharged.</p>
Land	Any beneficial interest in land which is within the area of the relevant authority.
Licences	Any licence (alone or jointly with others) to occupy land in the area of the relevant authority for a month or longer.
Corporate tenancies	<p>Any tenancy where (to a member's knowledge):</p> <p>(a) the landlord is the relevant authority;</p> <p>(b) the tenant is a body in which the relevant person has a beneficial interest.</p>
Securities	<p>Any beneficial interest in securities of a body where:</p> <p>(a) that body (to a member's knowledge) has a place of business or land in the area of the relevant authority; and</p> <p>(b) either:</p> <p>(i) the total nominal value of the securities exceeds £25,000 or one hundredth of the total issued share capital of that body; or</p> <p>(ii) if the share capital of that body is more than one class, the total nominal value of the shares of any one class in which the relevant person has a beneficial interest exceeds one hundredth of the total issued share capital of that class.</p>

Schedule 12A to the Local Government Act, 1972 (as amended)

Access to information: Exempt information

Part 1

Descriptions of exempt information: England

1. Information relating to any individual.
2. Information which is likely to reveal the identity of an individual.
3. Information relating to the financial or business affairs of any particular person (including the authority holding that information).
4. Information relating to any consultations or negotiations, or contemplated consultations or negotiations, in connection with any labour relations matter arising between the authority or a Minister of the Crown and employees of, or office holders under, the authority.
5. Information in respect of which a claim to legal professional privilege could be maintained in legal proceedings.
6. Information which reveals that the authority proposes:
 - (a) to give any enactment a notice under or by virtue of which requirements are imposed on a person; or
 - (b) to make an order or direction under any enactment.
7. Information relating to any action taken or to be taken in connection with the prevention, investigation or prosecution of crime.
8. Information being disclosed during a meeting of a Scrutiny and Performance Panel when considering flood risk management functions which:
 - (a) Constitutes a trades secret;
 - (b) Its disclosure would, or would be likely to, prejudice the commercial interests of any person (including the risk management authority);
 - (c) It was obtained by a risk management authority from any other person and its disclosure to the public by the risk management authority would constitute a breach of confidence actionable by that other person.

Part 1 – Public Session

- 1. Apologies**
To receive apologies for absence from Members of the Committee.
- 2. Substitutions**
To receive notice of any substitutions for a Member of the Committee for the duration of the meeting.
- 3. Minutes**
To approve and sign the minutes of the meeting held on 9 March 2026.
(Enclosed – Pages 1-5)
- 4. Declarations of Interest**
To receive declarations of interest or the party whip from Members in respect of items on the agenda.
- 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. Family Hub and Best Start in Life plan.**
To provide an updated position statement on the Walsall Family Hubs and outlining the development of Best Start in Life Plan.

(Enclosed, Pages 6 - 69)
- 7. Adolescent Offer**
To receive a progress report on key developments which have strengthened the adolescent/youth offer in Walsall.

(Enclosed, Pages 70 - 97)
- 8. Recommendation Tracker**
To consider progress on recommendations from previous meetings.

(Enclosed, Page 98)
- 9. Areas of focus – 2025/26**
For Members to agree the areas of focus for 2025-26.

(Enclosed, Page 99 -100)
- 10. Forward Plans**
To receive the latest Forward Plans in respect of the following:
 - a. Walsall Council Executive Forward Plan.
 - b. West Midlands Combined Authority Board.
(Enclosed, Pages 101 - 113)
- 11. Date of next meeting**
The date of the next meeting will be agreed at Annual Council.

Children’s, Families and Education Overview and Scrutiny Committee

Monday 9 March 2026, 6:00pm

In Conference Room 2 at the Council House, Walsall

Committee Members present:

Councillor N. Latham (Chair)
Councillor T. Jukes
Councillor E. Morgan
Councillor C. Statham
Councillor L. Rattigan

Co-opted Members

W. Duffus, Secondary Teacher representative.
D. Smith, Diocese of Lichfield.

Portfolio Holder

Councillor M. Bird - Leader
Councillor M. Statham – Children, Families &
Lifelong Learning

Officers present (Walsall Council):

C. Male	Executive Director (Children’s Services)
R. Homer	Director (Children’s Social Work)
S. Kelly	Director (Access and Inclusion)
I. Vanderheeren	Director (Early Help)
R. Phillips	Head of Children’s Early Intervention and Adolescent Support
L. Wright	Head of Service, Support and Protection
R. Warren	Group Manager MASH, Exploitation and Turning Point
D. Elrington	Head of Community Safety and Enforcement
S. Jones	Head of Safeguarding Partnership

Partners

J. Brown	CEO, Street Teams
Z. Chowdhury	Violence Reduction Unit
Inspector D. Fox	West Midlands Police
A. Jones	Designated Nurse Adult Safeguarding, Black Country ICB

57 **Apologies**

Apologies were received from Councillors C. Towe, Councillor S. Ditta, and S. Guy for the duration of the meeting.

58 **Substitutions**

There were no substitutions for the duration of the meeting.

59 **Minutes**

The meetings of the meeting held on 27 January 2026 were considered by the Committee.

Resolved

That the minutes held on 27 January 2026 were agreed as a true and accurate record.

60 **Declarations of interest and party whip**

There were no declarations of interest or party whip.

61 **Local Government (Access to Information) Act 1985 (as amended)**

There were no agenda items requiring the exclusion of the public.

It was agreed that items 8 and 9 would be received prior to item 6.

62 **Children at Risk of Exploitation**

The Portfolio Holder introduced the report, and the Group Manager highlighted the salient points (annexed). The Committee was informed that the term 'child exploitation included child sexual exploitation, child criminal exploitation, county lines, modern slavery and trafficking. The Committee was informed that perpetrators may subject children and young people to multiple forms of abuse at the same time. The Walsall 'All-Age' approach to tackling exploitation for children, young people and adults had been in place since 2019 and was supported by a reduction strategy. Exploitation had remained a focus of the partnerships work.

Members considered the triage data 2025/2026 and noted that 307 child screening tools were received via the exploitation hub. Of these, 18 screening tools identified no evidence of exploitation or vulnerability to exploitation, and 7 were out of borough children. The remaining 282 exploitation screening tools for children were screened and discussed within the multi-agency exploitation triage and a level of exploitation was agreed. The impact of the 'Aspiring Futures' programme was considered, with 39 young people who were considered to be at high risk of exploitation supported since the model launched in May 2025.

The locality youth offer in Walsall was described by the Head of Children's Early Intervention and Adolescent Support, this alongside 'safe spaces' and 'Our Place' in Walsall town centre aimed to reduce the exploitation of young people. This was in response to children and young people reporting that they did not feel safe when travelling through the town centre.

Members were advised that the youth justice service worked with a small cohort of children at high risk of exploitation, often with more complex needs. A lived experience mentor worked with young people in this cohort.

Representatives from Street Teams, West Midlands Police, the Violence reduction Unit, Community Safety and the Integrated Care Board described their organisations contribution to tackling and responding to child exploitation in the Borough. It was noted that partnership working had strengthened and the representatives each provided a unique type of support to assist in the reduction of exploitation.

There then ensued a period of questioning, in response to challenge Officers confirmed that where young people moved out of the area, the local authority was notified that they had previously been identified as at risk of exploitation. In response to questions around timeliness of escalation, Members were assured that concerns were raised immediately.

Officers explained how parents and careers were supported to understand exploitation and assisted if they were struggling stating that Parents were seen as an additional Partner. Across the pathway parents received support from Street Teams and workshops were held for parents and in schools. It was noted that exploitation could happen anywhere at any time, and equally online.

Challenge was provided in relation to the training offered to hotels, Officers stressed that hotels were not licensed however lots of work had been done to raise awareness and encourage reporting. Members queried how online safety was promoted, Officers explained that parents were educated through workshops to understand the risks. The Head of Safeguarding stated that education was key, and that an 'all-age education' subgroup considered new and emerging online risks and had developed a strategic plan. The Chief Officer (Street Teams) informed the Committee that there was a focus on online harm for children in year 6 to prepare children for the increased exposure.

It was questioned how awareness could be raised with parents, and it was suggested that it was the responsibility of the partnership to collaborate and offer education sessions. The Violence Reduction Unit offered webinars for parents to make the offer readily available and take a preventative approach.

Resolved

That the Children at Risk of Exploitation report be noted.

63 Child Neglect Strategy

The Portfolio Holder introduced the report, and the Director (Early Help) presented the salient points (annexed). The Committee was informed that the report provided assurance in relation to the Ofsted ILAC 2025 recommendation that the effectiveness of practice with every child who was experiencing harm from neglect needed improving. The Child Neglect Strategy 2025 – 2030 updated the previous

2021 – 2025 approach. A key shift was the removal of the word ‘persistent’ from the definition of neglect, reinforcing that any level of neglect was harmful and that early action should be taken. The strategy was informed by an updated local needs assessment which identified several key areas of concern. The strategy set out three outcome-focused priorities:

1. Maximise opportunities for preventative support.
2. Improve identification, assessment and practice.
3. Strategic leadership and system accountability.

To further strengthen practice a multi-agency neglect pathway had been developed and launched, and a ‘Early signs of neglect tool’ had been developed and would be embedded within partnership guidance. Auditing had shown that practice was improving, however further consistency was needed. Techniques used to address practice variability were described, alongside prioritisation of neglect by the partnership.

Officers were challenged in relation to the involvement of the voluntary and community sector, and Members were assured that a representative sat on the Neglect subgroup, and there had been significant training for ‘Holiday Activity Food’ (HAF) providers. Further work with the faith sector was planned, however it was acknowledged that this was a vast sector.

It was queried how clearly the strategy defined neglect; it was stated that this was at a high level to encourage preventative work to identify it. Further queries related to how early help to prevent neglect could be evidenced. The Director suggested that this could be identified in the referrals received. It was stressed that work carried out through the partnership had assisted and resulted in more referrals.

Further discussion was held around the lived experience of children, which was captured through practitioners and the threshold of neglect.

The Director provided detail on ‘where the silence is’, which was an exercise mapping children that had not previously been seen by professionals. Work was being done to break down barriers, and Members were advised that further detail would be provided through the Best Strat Plan at a future meeting.

Resolved

- 1. That Members note the progress made by the Safeguarding Partnership in responding to the Ofsted ILAC 2025 recommendation on neglect.**
- 2. That Members are assured that robust partnership governance, oversight and practice improvement activity are in place to reduce the risk of children experiencing neglect for prolonged periods.**
- 3. That Members support the continued focus on prevention, early help and sustained multi-agency practice improvement in relation to child neglect.**

64 **Recommendation Tracker**

The recommendation tracker was noted.

65 **Areas of focus – 2025/26**

The areas of focus were considered by the Committee.

Resolved

That the areas of focus was noted.

66 **Forward Plans**

The forward plans were considered by the Committee.

Resolved

That the forward plans were noted.

67 **Date of next meeting**

The date of the next meeting was noted as 7 April 2026.

There being no further business this meeting was terminated at 8.22 p.m.

Signed:

Date:

7 April 2026

6.

Family Hub and Best Start in Life plan

Ward(s): All

Portfolios: Cllr Mark Statham
Portfolio Holder

1. Aim

- 1.1 To provide Children's Services Overview and Scrutiny Committee with an updated position statement on the Walsall Family Hubs and Start for Life Programme, marking the end of the first phase of delivery (2022–2025) and outlining the transition into the development of Walsall's Best Start in Life Plan.
- 1.2 The report provides assurance on progress, impact and sustainability, and sets out how Family Hubs will evolve into Best Start Family Hubs as part of national reform and local priorities.

2. Recommendations

- 2.1 Acknowledge the significant progress made in delivering Phase 1 of the Family Hubs and Start for Life Programme.
- 2.2 Note that Walsall is moving from programme establishment to impact and outcomes, with Family Hubs forming the delivery foundation for the Best Start in Life Plan.
- 2.3 Support the continued development of a whole-system, outcomes-based approach to improving early child development, parental wellbeing and school readiness beyond March 2026.

3. Report detail – know

3.1 Context and End of Phase 1 Delivery

In February 2023, Walsall was confirmed as one of 75 local authorities nationally to receive Family Hubs and Start for Life funding for a three-year programme (2022–2025), with a further year of funding confirmed for 2025/26.

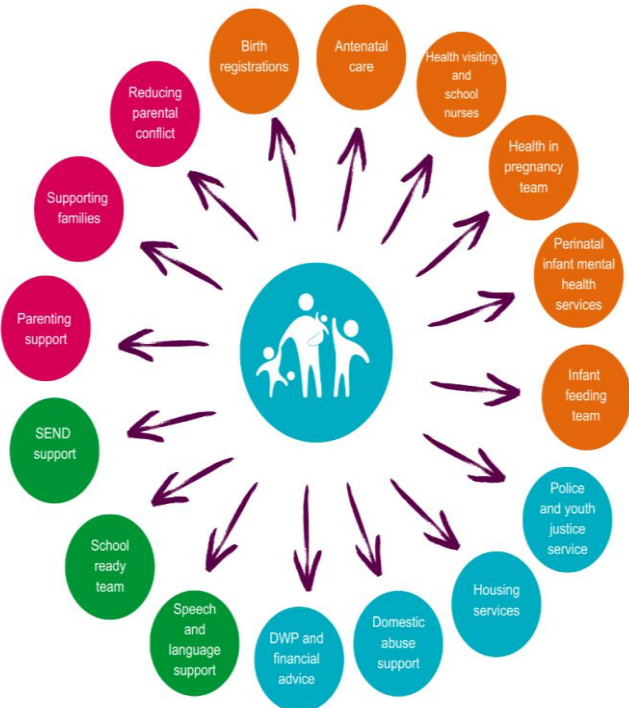
The first phase of delivery focused on establishing accessible places, trusted relationships and strong partnerships, particularly for families with children aged 0–2 and those impacted by the Covid-19 period.

By the end of Phase 1, Walsall has fully delivered on all of the 248 national minimum and most of the go-further expectations.

3.2 What Has Been Developed – Family Hub Foundations

The first phase of delivery focused on establishing accessible places, trusted relationships and strong partnerships, particularly for families with children aged 0–2 and those impacted by the Covid19 period.

Family Hubs are welcoming, friendly places where all children and young people aged 0–19, (up to age 25 for those with additional needs), along with new and expectant families, can come for help, advice and support when they need it most. Our hubs are based in the heart of local communities, bringing services together so families have one trusted place to turn to and someone to talk to in a safe, supportive environment about things that may be worrying them.



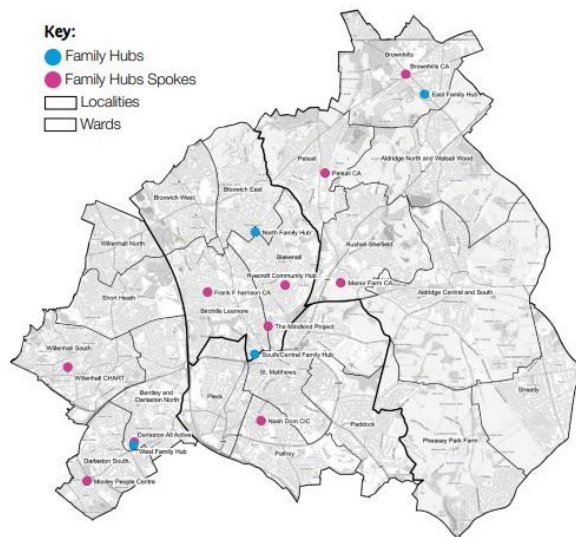
Family Hubs are about more than just buildings. Support is also offered across Walsall through a network of local spoke centres, helping us engage families closer to where they live and making support easier to access. In addition, the Family Hubs act as a one-stop shop, allowing families to access a wide range of services—from health and emotional wellbeing to parenting advice and practical assistance—all under one roof or through connected community spokes. This integrated approach ensures that families can easily find the help they need, when they need it, without having to navigate multiple agencies or locations. Alongside this, we offer a strong digital service, including the Walsall Family Hubs website¹, where parents can find clear, up-to-date information all in one place. We have also commissioned digital apps that give parents access to 24/7 advice and guidance, whether they are becoming a new parent or looking for extra parenting support.

By March 2025, Walsall had established a strong and sustainable Family Hubs infrastructure:

Places and Access

Four integrated Family Hub buildings, offering warm, safe and welcoming co-located spaces, including clinical rooms, birth registration facilities and family support areas. A commissioned network of Voluntary Community Sector community spokes and community shops, extending the Family Hub offer into neighbourhoods and trusted local settings.

¹ <https://www.walsallfamilyhubs.co.uk/>



Family Hub Partnerships and Development of the Workforce

Our Family Hub network focuses on helping families with infant feeding, parenting, parent–infant relationships, learning at home, and emotional wellbeing during pregnancy and after birth. All partners work together with a shared aim of giving children and families the Best Start in Life.

We also provide targeted support within local communities, including peer support for parents and carers, extra help for children’s speech and language development, counselling to support parent–infant relationships, and a specialist midwife to support parents who have experienced birth trauma or loss. Professionals are supported with shared resources and guidance, so families receive consistent, high-quality support at the right time.

Digital and Information

The Family Hubs website is a simple, one-stop place where families can find clear, up-to-date information about local services and support, available in over 100 languages. Parents and carers can access helpful resources such as the *Best Start for Life* and *Supporting Your Child’s Learning* guides, while professionals use shared tools to easily navigate and connect families to the right support.

Support for Families

Walsall Family Hubs support families from pregnancy through the early years, helping parents feel confident, connected and supported every step of the way. The Family Hub Network offer friendly, evidence-based parenting support, both in groups and one-to-one, along with activities that support children’s development, play and wellbeing. Families can also access extra help while waiting for specialist services, receive free care packages when needed, and enjoy fun programmes that support children as they grow and get ready for school. A quarterly timetable makes it easy to see what’s on across Walsall, including baby massage, PEEP sessions, Tiny Rangers and family events, as well as clear information about learning pathways and how to get additional support if needed.

Early Development, identification of needs and Infant Feeding

Family Hubs play an important role in spotting children’s needs early and providing the right support as soon as possible, helping every child get the best start in life. They

support children’s development in a joined-up way, including infant feeding, speech and language, and early learning, so families don’t have to wait until difficulties escalate.

Speech and Language Therapy capacity has increased, including regular drop-in sessions, which has helped reduce waiting times from up to 12 months to around 4 months, meaning children and families get help much sooner. Family Hub’s have achieved BFI Friendly accreditation (Level 1) and follow a clear infant feeding pathway, giving professionals confidence to offer consistent advice and support. Infant feeding support has also been strengthened through expanded peer-led support, delivered in partnership with voluntary and community sector organisations, alongside a growing network of over 50 Walsall Welcomes Breastfeeding Friendly venues across the borough. Together, this approach helps families feel supported early, listened to, and confident in accessing the right help at the right time.





Community Voice and Volunteering

An established Parent and Carer Panel plays a vital role in shaping Family Hub services, ensuring lived experience directly informs service design, delivery and ongoing improvement. Parents and carers have influenced a wide range of developments, including the creation of the Best Start in Life booklet, improvements to the Family Hubs website, and participation in audits of Family Hub provision. This has also included involvement in a recent regional peer-to-peer review of Family Hubs, helping to share learning and strengthen practice.

Alongside this, the Shaping My Tomorrow project and other approaches help us hear from families in different ways, including at events, through feedback forms, peer reviews and activities, ensuring a wide range of voices are listened to and valued. This commitment to listening and learning from families supports services to continually improve and better meet local needs.

This work is complemented by a redesigned WR4C Volunteer Service, providing a universal, community-based offer that strengthens engagement, builds connections and improves access to early help for families across Walsall.

Family Hubs has delivered measurable improvements across key areas:

 <p>Improved access to help and support at the earliest opportunity, parenting support and preventative services</p>	 <p>Reduced waiting times and improved parental confidence in supporting children’s communication</p>
 <p>Increased engagement through trusted community-based provision</p>	 <p>Positive qualitative feedback from families and professionals, highlighting trust, accessibility and relationship-based support</p>

4. Implications for Joint Working arrangements:

By the end of March Walsall will publish the Best Start in Life Plan (BSiL). It sets out how the partnership will improve outcomes for children from pre-birth to age five, building on the strong foundations established through the Family Hubs and Start for Life Programme (2022–2025).

The Plan responds to:

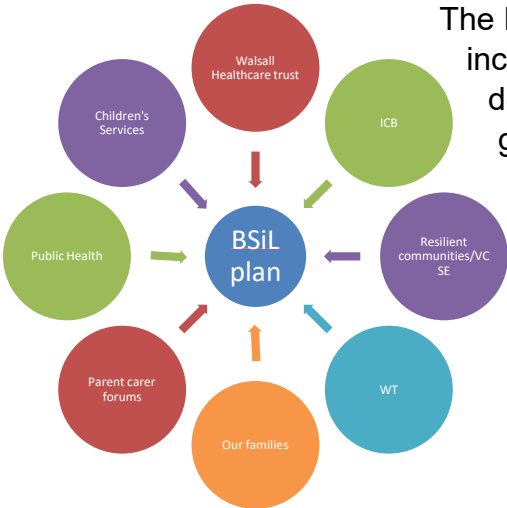
- National policy updates (DfE, September 2025), which expand Family Hubs into Best Start Family Hubs for all local authorities and place a renewed focus on child development and school readiness.
- The national ambition that 75% of children achieve a Good Level of Development (GLD) by 2028, with faster improvement for those furthest behind.
- Local evidence showing that while outcomes are improving, inequalities persist, particularly for children affected by poverty, SEND and speech, language and communication needs (SLCN)

The Best Start in Life Plan aligns with **We Are Walsall 2040**, the Council Plan and the Health and Wellbeing Strategy, positioning early childhood development as a critical driver of long-term health, wellbeing and life chances.

4.1 How the Plan Is Being Developed

The Best Start in Life Plan is being developed as a whole-system, partnership-owned plan, not a single-service strategy. Its development has been informed by:

- Learning from Phase 1 Family Hubs delivery, locally, regionally and nationally.
- A refreshed early years needs assessment and the *“Where the Silence Is”* work, identifying families and communities who are not consistently engaging with universal services.
- Lived experience from families, including insights from annual conversations with parents and carers as well as consultation through our parent carer panels.
- Practitioner consultation across health, early years, education, Family Hubs and the voluntary and community sector.
- National guidance and evidence, including emerging learning from the Future Minds report on early emotional wellbeing.



The Plan is being co-produced through partnership workshops including our parent and carer panels and strategic development sessions, with final sign-off through agreed governance routes, including the Health and Wellbeing Board.

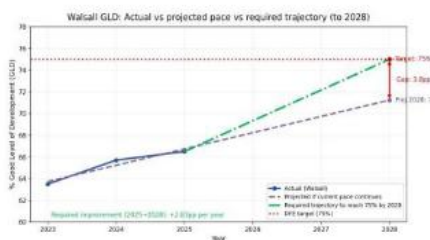
4.2 Key Drivers for Change

The Best Start in Life Plan is driven by a clear set of challenges and opportunities identified through data and system learning:

- GLD outcomes are improving but not fast enough to meet national and local ambitions, with significant gaps for children eligible for Free School Meals, boys, and some localities.

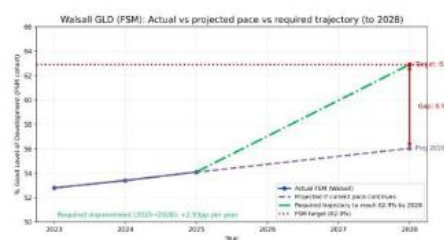
Our 2028 milestone – if we continue to improve at the current rate....

75% of all children



based on the current improvement trajectory, 71.2% of children would reach by 2028, leaving a 3.8% gap to our target.

62.9% of Children on FSM



based on the current improvement trajectory, 57% of children on FSM would reach by 2028, leaving a 6% gap to our target.

- Speech, language and communication needs are a key driver of later attainment gaps and are strongly linked to deprivation.
- Enhancing engagement with early education, health checks and Family Hub services presents an opportunity to ensure more children are identified and supported at an earlier stage.
- Families value trusted, local, relational support, but pathways are not always clear or consistent.
- Workforce capacity, variation in practice and fragmented data systems limit the impact of early intervention at scale.

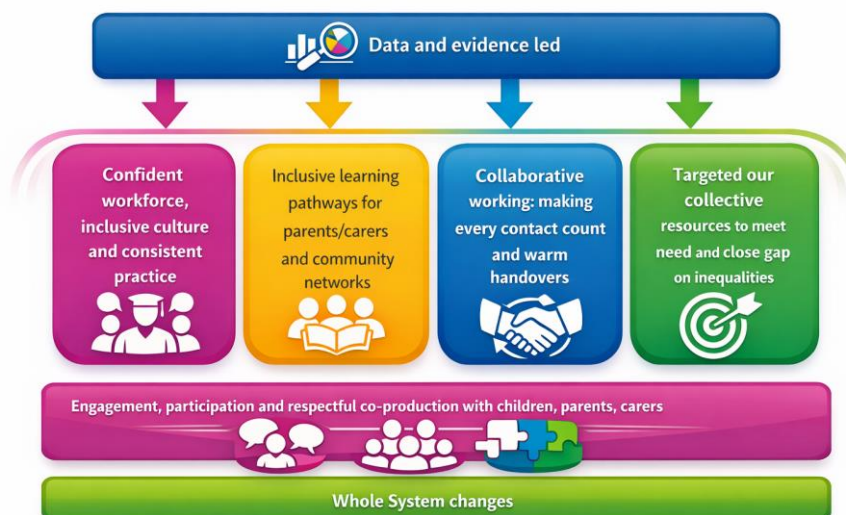
4.3 Our Walsall partnership ambition:

Walsall will be a truly child friendly borough, where every baby, child and family is supported to thrive from pregnancy through early childhood and beyond. By acting as one system and investing early, we will ensure that all children are safe, healthy, confident and ready to learn, with inequalities reduced and life chances no longer determined by where a child grows up.

4.4 Pillars of Success

To deliver this ambition, we will organise our partnership action through Walsall's Pillars to Success:

Four delivery pillars



1. Confident workforce, inclusive culture and consistent practice – building a confident, skilled workforce with consistent understanding of child development, SEND and communication and language. Reduce variation across services through shared tools, pathways and expectations.
2. Inclusive learning pathways Parent and Carer Learning Pathways – providing clear, accessible and consistent guidance to help families support development at home.
3. Collaborative Working at Key Contact Points – strengthening joint working and warm handovers at critical moments such as developmental checks and transitions into early education and school.
4. Targeted collective Support and Resource Allocation – using data and locality insight to focus additional support where need and silence are greatest.

Three cross-cutting pillars

- Data and Evidence-Led Practice – improving shared data, outcomes frameworks and feedback loops to track impact and inform decisions.
- Engagement, Participation and respectful Co-production – embedding lived experience and community voice in design, delivery and review.
- System Change – aligning governance, commissioning, pathways and infrastructure so families experience a joined-up system.

The Best Start in Life Plan represents the next phase of Walsall's early years transformation, signalling a comprehensive whole system change. This initiative builds directly on the success of Family Hubs, responds to national reform, and sets out a clear, evidence-led approach to improving child development, parental wellbeing and school readiness. Crucially, the Plan recognises that achieving these outcomes requires the active involvement of all partners—health, education, social care, voluntary sector, and community organisations—working collaboratively to deliver consistent, targeted and measurable early interventions for children and families across Walsall. Best Start Family Hubs will act as the delivery backbone for the Plan, ensuring integration and joint

responsibility among partners, so every child receives the support they need for the best start in life.

4.4 Supporting a Good Level of Development in Walsall: Our Best Start in Life Plan Milestone

As a critical milestone in the delivery of the Best Start in Life plan will be that by 2028 at least 74.7% of children overall in Walsall will reach a Good Level of Development at the end of reception and 62.9% of children eligible to Free school meals, demonstrating that the system is successfully enabling children to be ready to learn — with the fastest improvement for those currently furthest behind.

This represents an additional **294 children** needing to achieve a Good Level of Development to meet the overall target, and a further **84 children** to meet the Free School Meal target.

4.4 Our Outcomes framework

We are developing a outcomes framework which will measure six system-wide outcomes for children, all of which are directly relevant to the Health and Wellbeing Board's role in tackling inequalities and improving population health.

1. Children experience strong early development, particularly in communication and language

Children develop the core skills they need to be confident, curious and ready to learn, with a strong focus on:

- Communication and language
- Personal, social and emotional development
- Early identification of speech, language and communication needs

2. Children are physically healthy and emotionally secure from pregnancy onwards

Children benefit from strong early health, attachment and emotional wellbeing, reducing avoidable harm and escalation later.

Key areas include:

- Uptake of mandated health reviews (new birth, 6–8 weeks, 9–12 months, 2–2½ years)
- Breastfeeding initiation and continuation
- Immunisation uptake
- Healthy weight at Reception
- Early identification of perinatal and infant mental health needs

3. Children are identified early and supported inclusively

Children's additional needs are identified early and met through **strong universal inclusion**, rather than late escalation.

This includes:

- Earlier identification of SEND and emerging developmental needs
- Timely access to advice, support and graduated response
- Reduced numbers of children starting school with unidentified needs

4. Parents and carers feel confident, supported and able to help their children thrive

Families experience trusted, consistent support that strengthens the home learning environment and wellbeing.

Children benefit when parents:

- Feel confident supporting communication, play and early learning
- Are engaged with Family Hubs and community support
- Are less likely to miss key appointments (“Was Not Brought”)

5. Children are ready to learn, with smoother transitions

Children experience continuity of support from early years into Reception, with:

- Improved take-up of early education entitlements
- Better information sharing before school entry
- Reduced numbers of children starting school with unmet or unidentified needs

6. Inequalities in early childhood outcomes are narrowing

Improvement is fastest for children and communities currently furthest behind, particularly:

- Children affected by poverty (FSM)
- Children with SEND or emerging needs
- Children from communities with lower engagement in services
- Priority localities identified through data and insight

4. *Financial information*

The Best Start in Life plan is being delivered with the support of a £1.9 million investment from the Department for Education (DfE) over a three-year period. This funding enables the implementation of Family Hubs and strengthens strategic leadership across the Best Start in Life plan. In addition, we are aligning prevention funding in relation to the Families First for Children and exploring opportunities presented by the SEND reform to further enhance support in the delivery of the plan.

We are also exploring opportunities to the 10-year health/neighbourhood plans aligned with Walsall Together.

5. *Reducing Inequalities*

The BSIL plan is underpinned by a commitment to reducing inequalities and improving outcomes for all children our ambition sets out that “ By acting as one system and investing early, we will ensure that all children are safe, healthy, confident and ready to learn, with inequalities reduced and life chances no longer determined by where a child grows up”.

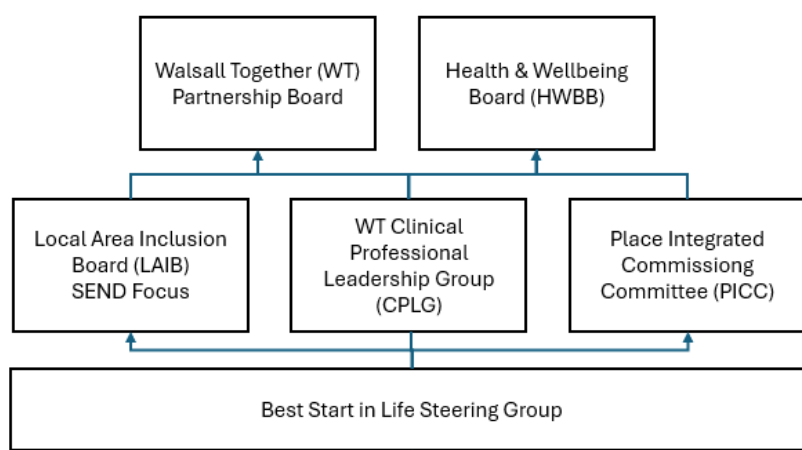
6. *Review*

We have established a Best Start in Life Steering Group, which will be responsible for providing robust oversight and strategic support to the Best Start in Life plan. The Steering Group's key responsibilities include:

- Ensuring integrated, accessible services for families from conception to age 19 (and up to 25 for SEND)

- Focusing on reducing inequalities, improving child health, and supporting school readiness
- Delivering the Best Start for Life offer and contributing to the national target of 75% of 5-year-olds reaching a Good Level of Development (GLD) by 2028
- Aligning local implementation with national policy, funding requirements, and sustainability planning

The Steering Group will feed into key strategic groups, including the Local Area Inclusion Board (SEND focus), Walsall Together Board, Place-Based Integrated Commissioning Board, and Health and Wellbeing Board.



Background papers

Appendix A - Best start in life – plan on a page

Appendix B best start in life plan

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Walsall Best Start in Life 2026–2040

A whole-system plan so every child is ready to learn.



Our Ambition

Walsall will be a child friendly borough, where every baby, child and family is supported to thrive from pregnancy through early childhood and beyond. By acting as one system and investing early, we will ensure that all children are safe, healthy, confident and ready to learn, with inequalities reduced and life chances no longer determined by where a child grows up.

Our 2028 milestone

74.7%

of children in Walsall will reach good level of development by the end of reception.

62.9%

of children eligible for free school meals will reach good levels of development

Guiding Principle



- Support for all families, with extra reach and intensity where need is greatest
- Reducing inequalities without creating parallel systems
- Going where the silence is, not waiting for needs escalating and crisis



Why This Matters



- Early years are the foundation for later outcomes across Walsall’s Children and Young People Strategy priorities.
- Walsall’s needs profile shows inequalities by place, with deprivation patterns and variable engagement in universal services (including cohorts who remain “silent”).
- The system has a strong locality model to build on e.g. Family Hubs, FFC, strong VSCE and strong Early Years provision

Our Pillars to success

Pillar 1: Confident workforce, inclusive culture and consistent practice

- A skilled, confident and trauma-informed workforce across health, education, early years and VCSE
- Shared values, language and expectations for how we support families
- Consistent use of evidence-based approaches from pregnancy through early childhood

Pillar 2. Inclusive learning pathways for parents, carers & communities

- Clear, accessible learning and support pathways for parents and carers
- Strong focus on early relationships, language development and infant feeding
- Community-based and culturally responsive approaches that build confidence and capability

Pillar 3. Collaborative working, warm handovers & every contact counts

- Strong partnership working across services and sectors
- Joined-up pathways with clear roles and responsibilities
- Every interaction used as an opportunity to identify need and offer help

Pillar 4. Targeted response to need

- Early identification of emerging need using shared intelligence
- Proportionate, timely support that increases in intensity where required
- Targeted outreach to families least likely to engage with universal services

Cross cutting pillar: Engagement, participation & respectful co-production
 Ongoing parent/carers voice and lived experience shaping design, delivery and review — especially for least heard groups

Cross-cutting Pillar — System & operational change
 Remove system barriers (information sharing, aligned commissioning, integrated pathways) so families experience “one system”.

Cross cutting pillar: Data & evidence-led practice
 Shared intelligence, visibility of who is missing, outcomes tracking, and learning loops so decisions are timely and accountable

Walsall Best Start in Life Plan: 2026-2040

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Executive Summary

Our Walsall partnership ambition:

Walsall will be a child friendly borough, where every baby, child and family is supported to thrive from pregnancy through early childhood and beyond. By acting as one system and investing early, we will ensure that all children are safe, healthy, confident and ready to learn, with inequalities reduced and life chances no longer determined by where a child grows up.

The We are Walsall 2040 Children and Young People Strategy (2040¹) sets out four long-term priorities shaped by understanding local need and what children, young people and families have told us matters most. 'Best Start in Life' provides the early years foundation for all four priorities set out in the strategy, ensuring that progress made later in childhood and adolescence is built on strong developmental, relational and community roots.

Best Start in Life contributes by:

- Strengthening early health, wellbeing and development interventions, reducing avoidable inequalities before they widen.
- Building confidence, communication and emotional security, so children arrive at school ready to learn and engage.
- Supporting family stability and aspiration, enabling parents and carers to support learning, wellbeing and participation.
- Embedding voice, trust and inclusion from the earliest years, ensuring children and families experience services as relational, respectful and responsive.

Supporting a 'Good Level of Development' in Walsall: Our Best Start in Life Plan Milestone

As a critical milestone on this journey, by 2028 at least 74.7% of all Walsall children, and 62.9% of children eligible for free school meals will reach a Good Level of Development (GLD) at the end of reception, demonstrating that the system is successfully enabling children to be ready to learn - with the fastest improvement for those affected by deprivation.

The 'all children' figure represents at least an additional **294 children**, and a further **84 children** eligible for free school meals needing to achieve a Good Level of Development to meet the overall target. These figures are based on the 2025 cohort.

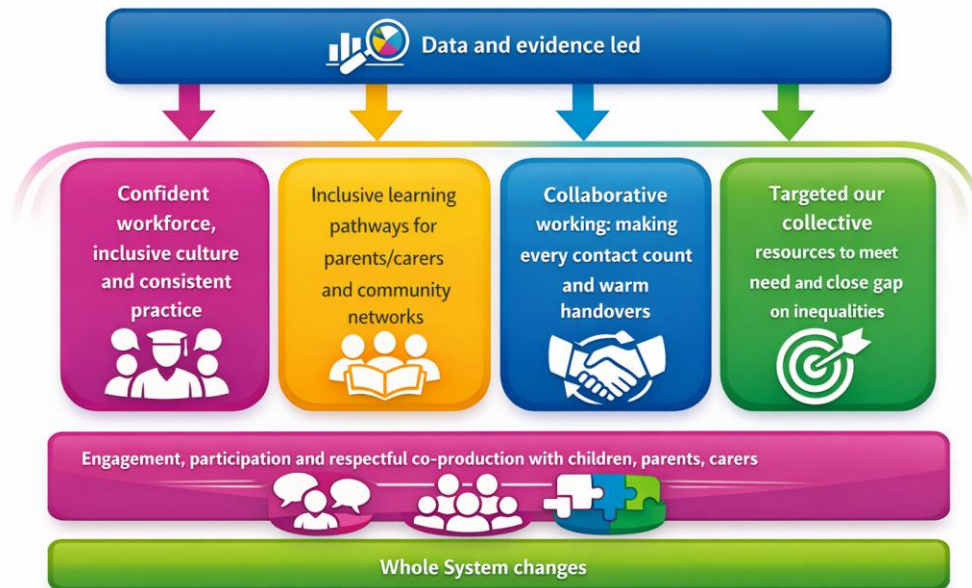
¹ [Walsall Children and Young People's Strategy 2024 2026 0.pdf](#)

Pillars to Success - building on our strong foundations

Over the past three years, Walsall has undertaken significant transformation in developing a high-quality Family Hubs network, establishing a strong foundation of locality based, multi-agency support for families from pregnancy through to age five. This work has included strengthening integrated pathways, embedding partnership delivery, improving accessibility, and aligning Family Hubs with wider prevention and early help offers across the borough. Building on these foundations, the Best Start in Life Plan sets out the next phase of our ambition - fully aligning Walsall's model to the national Best Start in Life Family Hubs guidance and its core elements of delivery:

This plan covers babies and children from pre-birth to age five and sets out how Walsall will strengthen early child development, school readiness, and family support. It aligns with other strategies such as: Walsall Right 4 Children (WR4C), We are Walsall 2040 ambitions, the Neighbourhood Health Plan and the Best Start Family Hubs programme. Importantly, this is a whole-system approach that recognises the need for strong partnership delivery across agencies, organisations, and communities, including health services, early years providers, schools, Family Hubs, SEND services and the voluntary, community and faith sector, to achieve the best outcomes for children and families.

To deliver this ambition, we will organise our partnership action through Walsall's Pillars to Success:



PART 1: Strategic drivers for change

Legal Requirements

The Childcare Act provides the statutory framework for delivery across three key areas:

- improving early years outcomes,
- the provision of early years services,
- and fulfilling sufficiency and information duties.

Local Authorities are required to ensure there is sufficient childcare provision, and that clear, accessible information is available for children and families. These duties underpin the Best Start in Life Plan, with a particular focus on supporting children to achieve a Good Level of Development.

Statutory Responsibility

Local Authorities in England have a statutory responsibility to commission and deliver key elements of the Healthy Child Programme (HCP), particularly for children aged 0–5. This requirement mandates provision of core public health services such as health and development reviews, screening, immunisations, and parental support delivered through health visiting teams. These mandated elements ensure that all families receive a universal public health offer, with additional targeted support where needed, forming part of Local Authorities' wider statutory public health duties.

Strategic Context

National context (DfE, September 2025 update):

- A renewed focus on child development and an ambition that 75% of 5-year-olds in England reach Good Level Development by 2028.
- Learning from Sure Start, Family Hubs and Start for Life to create “Best Start Family Hubs”.
- Best Start Family Hubs expanding to all local authorities with clearer guidance and investment.

SEND reform and White paper

The Government's SEND and Alternative Provision (AP) Improvement Plan and associated reforms set a clear national direction for transforming outcomes for children and young people with Special Educational Needs and Disabilities, with a strong emphasis on earlier identification, inclusive universal services and reduced escalation. The reforms recognise that too many children's needs are identified late, leading to poorer outcomes, greater pressure on specialist services and widening inequalities.

A central theme of SEND reform is that the early years are critical. Evidence underpinning the White Paper highlights that unmet or unrecognised need in the first five years—particularly relating to communication and language, social interaction, sensory processing and emotional regulation—significantly increases the likelihood of later SEND identification, exclusion from learning, and reliance on specialist provision. The national direction is therefore to shift the system upstream, strengthening what children and families experience before difficulties become entrenched.

Key national proposed reforms that shape Walsall's Best Start in Life approach include:

- Early identification and intervention
- Stronger universal inclusion
- Reduction variation and inequality
- Clearer pathways and better system join-up

10 Year Health Plan

The 10-Year Health Plan outlines a major NHS reform programme focused on shifting care from hospitals to communities, from analogue to digital, and from treating sickness to preventing it. Following Lord Darzi's 2024 review, which found the NHS in critical condition, the plan proposes a "neighbourhood NHS" designed to deliver more personalised, preventative care closer to home, improve access and outcomes, and tackle health inequalities. Children's services—already working across key determinants such as education, family support, and early intervention—are central to this model, particularly for children with complex needs. Integrated Neighbourhood Teams (INTs) will bring together the NHS, local authorities, social care, and community partners, with opportunities to build on Family Hubs to coordinate physical, mental, and social care around children and families.

School Based Nurseries Programme

The school-based nurseries programme is a national initiative to expand high-quality early years provision by creating and growing nursery places on school sites, particularly in disadvantaged areas. Phase 1 funded 300 schools to create up to 6,000 new nursery places, and Phase 2 continues this expansion by enabling primary schools to apply for up to £150,000 to establish or extend nursery provision, improving access to affordable childcare and supporting school readiness. Phase 3 of the programme—running from 2027 to 2030—provides capital grants for local authorities to create or expand nursery places in eligible primary schools, maintained nursery schools, and Best Start Family Hubs, with a strong focus on supporting disadvantaged communities, improving school readiness, and increasing access for children with SEND through inclusive, high-quality environments.

Early Learning for 2s

In Walsall, we need to increase take-up of Early Learning for 2-year-olds (EL2), particularly among disadvantaged families and children with SEND, to support our Best Start in Life and GLD targets. The Department for Education has introduced new minimum expectations for EL2 participation—77.9% with a stretching goal of 88.9%. As part of this, a review of local barriers to take-up will be undertaken whilst making use of the enhanced DWP data to identify families eligible for both the working parent entitlement and EL2.

Attendance

The national focus on school attendance is centred on driving absence back to— and beyond—pre-pandemic levels through stronger accountability, clearer expectations, and targeted support for families. The Government has introduced Attendance Baseline Improvement Expectations (ABIEs), giving every school a minimum attendance improvement target and using AI-powered data to match schools with high-performing peers for support. Updated statutory guidance reinforces the need for a whole-school culture that values attendance, early identification of barriers, and multi-agency collaboration for pupils at risk of persistent or severe absence. Alongside this, national policy continues to emphasise the importance of the early years as a foundation for later attendance, recognising that strong early engagement with education—through high-quality early years provision and consistent attendance in the EYFS—supports children’s routines, readiness for school, and long-term engagement in learning.

Learning from SEND Inspections

Walsall received a Local Area Partnership SEND inspection in December 2025.

The Area SEND inspection found that while children and young people with SEND in Walsall experience inconsistent outcomes, there has been significant improvement since the previous inspection, with a clear ambition across the partnership to improve services. The findings strongly align with the Best Start in Life priority of early identification, early intervention, and integrated family support.

Inspectors highlighted strong early years practice, with children's SEND needs identified quickly and supported by an effective local authority early years SEND team. Early years settings are increasingly well trained, and Education, Health and Care (EHC) plans for young children are completed promptly and within statutory timescales, supporting smoother transitions into education. The embedding of speech and language therapists, health visitors (0–19), and SEND practitioners within family hubs was identified as a strength, enabling earlier advice, support, and multi-disciplinary working.

The inspection also identified significant challenges impacting children's early development and wellbeing, particularly long waits for specialist health services such as speech and language therapy, neurodevelopmental assessments, dietetics, dysphagia services, and CAMHS. These delays were found to negatively affect children's communication, emotional wellbeing, and health, increasing the risk of widening inequalities from an early age.

Inspectors noted that while partnership working has improved, joint commissioning and data sharing remain underdeveloped, limiting the system's ability to consistently meet need and track impact. Strengthening integrated commissioning, improving information sharing, and increasing clinical capacity were identified as essential to ensuring children with SEND receive the right support at the right time, particularly in the early years.

Learning from recent published research

In Walsall, we regularly undertake horizon scanning and actively draw on opportunities from national research and reviews to inform and enhance our Best Start in Life Plan. This ensures that our approach remains evidence-based, responsive to emerging trends, and aligned with best practice across the sector.

The Best Start in Life (BSiL) Plan has particularly reflected on insights from two recent publications to inform its development and direction.

The Institute for Government report *Starting behind, staying behind* shows that:
Key findings (evidence base)³

³ [Staying-behind-left-behind-boys-low-income.pdf](#)

- Boys from low-income families are the least likely group to be “school ready” at age 5 and the gap opens before school and then widens over time
- The issue is not a single factor, but a combination of:
 - lower exposure to language and communication rich interactions at home
 - family stress and poverty related pressures
 - inconsistent access to high quality early years provision
 - missed opportunities for early identification, especially for Special Educational Needs Development and Speech Language Communication Needs
- Policy has often focused on entitlement expansion (e.g. childcare hours) without equal focus on child development, relationships and quality
- Systems tend to respond too late, once children are already struggling, rather than shifting support earlier and more intentionally
- Unconscious bias, delayed recognition, and variability in practice are also important factors to consider.

Core recommendations (relevant to local areas)

The report calls for:

- Earlier, more intentional support before age 2
- A strong focus on communication, language and self-regulation
- Targeted approaches within universal services, not separate systems
- Better use of local data and insight to identify who is being missed
- Stronger join up across health, early years, family support and education

National evidence highlights that mental health challenges increasingly emerge early in life, shaped by family stress, poverty, trauma and access to support. The *Future Minds* report (2026) reinforces that prevention and early intervention in the early years —⁴through trusted, community-based support — offers the greatest opportunity to improve lifelong mental health outcomes.

Best Start in Life responds to this evidence by embedding emotional wellbeing, relational support and early identification across universal early years services, ensuring mental health is everyone’s business from pregnancy onwards.

Future mind report⁵ was published in January 2026 and sets out a roadmap to transform children and young people’s mental health by 2035. The report directly reinforces the five strategic implications for early years which have been considered as part of the Best Start in Life plan:

⁴ [Future Minds Report 2026](#)

1. ⁵ Future Mind Report (January 2026). A strategic roadmap for transforming children and young people’s mental health by 2035. [Future Minds Report](#)

1. **Scale up early attachment and emotional wellbeing support** for babies and young children at every universal touchpoint (health visiting, midwifery, hubs, early years settings).
2. **Integrate mental health with anti-poverty for families, parent and carers** — not treating emotional wellbeing in isolation.
3. **Actively reach “silent communities”** through peer connectors, trusted voices, and blended (digital + in-person) models.
4. **Implement digital tools safely**, ensuring alternatives for families facing exclusion.
5. **Invest in workforce capability** in emotional wellbeing, Special Educational Needs Disabilities /Speech Language Communication Needs, early identification, and digital skills.

PART 2: Local Insight Shaping a Whole System Response

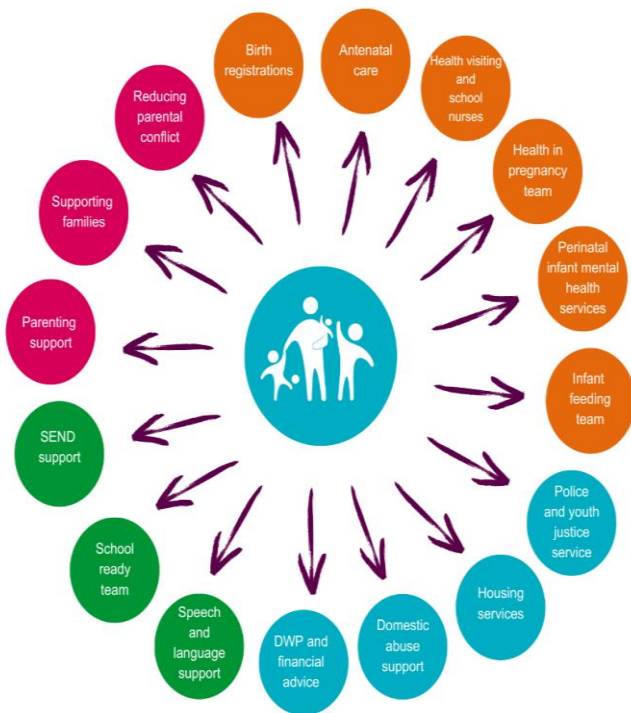
2.1 Building on the foundations of Family Hub - Phase 1 Delivery

In February 2023, Walsall was confirmed as one of 75 local authorities nationally to receive Family Hubs and Start for Life funding for a three-year programme (2022–2025), with a further year of funding confirmed for 2025/26.

The first phase of delivery focused on establishing accessible places, trusted relationships and strong partnerships, particularly for families with children aged 0–2 and those impacted by the Covid-19 pandemic period.

Family Hubs are welcoming, friendly places where all children and young people aged 0–19, (up to age 25 for those with additional needs), along with new and expectant families, can come for help, advice and support when they need it most. The hubs are based in the heart of local communities, bringing services together so families have one trusted place to turn to and someone to talk to in a safe, supportive environment about things that may be worrying them.

Family Hubs are about more than just buildings. Support is also offered across Walsall through a network of local spoke centres, helping us reach families closer to where they live and making support easier to access. In addition, the Family Hubs act as a one-stop shop, allowing families to access a wide range of services—from health and emotional wellbeing to parenting advice and practical assistance—all under one roof or through connected community spokes. This integrated approach ensures that families can easily find the help they need, when they need it, without having to navigate multiple agencies or locations. Alongside this, we offer a strong digital service, including the Walsall Family Hubs website⁶, where parents can find clear, up-to-date information all in one place. We have also commissioned digital apps that give parents access to 24/7 advice and guidance, whether they are becoming a new parent or looking for extra parenting support.



⁶ <https://www.walsallfamilyhubs.co.uk/>

Parents and carers can access helpful resources such as the *Best Start for Life* and *Supporting Your Child's Learning* guides, while professionals use shared tools to easily navigate and connect families to the right support.

Support for Families

Walsall Family Hubs support families from pregnancy through the early years, helping parents feel confident, connected and supported every step of the way. The Family Hub Network offers friendly, evidence-based parenting support, both in groups and one-to-one, along with activities that support children's development, play and wellbeing. Families can also access extra help while waiting for specialist services, receive free care packages when needed, and enjoy fun programmes that support children as they grow and get ready for school. A quarterly timetable of activities makes it easy to see what's on across Walsall, including baby massage, PEEP sessions, Tiny Rangers and family events, as well as clear information about learning pathways and how to get additional support if needed.

Early Development, identification of needs and Infant Feeding

Family Hubs play an important role in spotting children's needs early and providing the right support as soon as possible, helping every child get the best start in life. They support children's development in a joined-up way, including infant feeding, speech and language, and early learning, so families don't have to wait until difficulties escalate.

Speech and Language Therapy capacity has increased including regular drop-in sessions, which has helped reduce waiting times from up to 12 months to around 4 months, meaning children and families get help much sooner. Family Hubs have achieved BFI Friendly accreditation (Level 1) and follow a clear infant feeding pathway, giving professionals confidence to offer consistent advice and support. Infant feeding support has also been strengthened through expanded peer-led support, delivered in partnership with voluntary and community sector organisations, alongside a growing network of over 50 Walsall Welcomes Breastfeeding Friendly venues across the borough. Together, this approach helps families feel supported early, listened to, and confident in accessing the right help at the right time.

Community Voice and Volunteering




An established Parent and Carer Panel plays a vital role in shaping Family Hub services, ensuring lived experience directly informs service design, delivery and ongoing improvement. Parents and carers have influenced a wide range of developments, including the creation of the Best Start in Life booklet, improvements to the Family Hubs website, and participation in audits of Family Hub provision. This has also included

involvement in a recent regional peer-to-peer review of Family Hubs, helping to share learning and strengthen practice.

Alongside this, the Shaping My Tomorrow project and other approaches help us hear from families in different ways, including at events, through feedback forms, peer reviews and activities, ensuring a wide range of voices are listened to and valued. This commitment to listening and learning from families supports services to continually improve and better meet local needs.

This work is complemented by a redesigned Walsall Right for Children (WR4C) Volunteer Service, providing a universal, community-based offer that strengthens engagement, builds connections and improves access to early help for families across Walsall.

Family Hubs has delivered measurable improvements across key areas:

 <p>Improved access to help and support at the earliest opportunity, parenting support and preventative services</p>	 <p>Reduced waiting times and improved parental confidence in supporting children's communication</p>
 <p>Increased engagement through trusted community-based provision</p>	 <p>Positive qualitative feedback from families and professionals, highlighting trust, accessibility and relationship-based support</p>

What do we know about our 0-5 population in Walsall?

2.2 Borough-wide insight

In November 2025, we conducted a comprehensive early years needs assessment⁷, drawing on the most recent datasets provided by the local authority, Public Health, and NHS partners. This analysis offered valuable insights into current trends and challenges, highlighting areas for improvement in early years provision and identifying groups at risk of poorer outcomes. The findings have informed our ongoing strategy to strengthen early identification, support, and accessibility across Walsall.

2.2.1 Walsall 0–5 Population: Key Themes and Insights

Demographics and Diversity⁸

- Total population: 295,678; children under 5: 18,597 (6.29%)
- Birthplace: 1 in 7 residents were born outside the UK
- Ethnic diversity: 40% of children and young people under 15 are from non-white ethnic backgrounds.
- Poverty and deprivation: 41% of children live in poverty after housing costs, making Walsall the 12th most deprived local authority in England; severe deprivation is concentrated in the west (Blakenall, Birchills-Leamore), while the east (Aldridge, Streetly) is more affluent, creating an east–west divide that affects access to services and outcomes for children.

Health and Development Challenges

- Low birthweight: Rates have been consistently higher in Walsall than the national average since 2006, although rates have improved in recent years. Low birthweight is associated with the risk of childhood mortality, developmental problems, and poorer health outcomes later in life
- Childhood obesity: Approximately 24.5% of children in Reception are overweight or obese, higher than national rates. This can be attributed to both poor nutrition and lack of opportunity for physical activity.
- Oral Health: 27% of 5 year olds in Walsall experience dental decay, higher than the national average of 22.4%. Poor oral health can contribute to speech, language and communication skills, and time spent in hospital resulting in lost opportunity for learning and development.

Educational Outcomes

- Good Level of Development: Walsall’s overall GLD is 66.5% (54.1% for children eligible for Free School Meals); improvement is steady but not on track for 2028 targets.⁹

⁷ [LINK TO DEEP DIVE](#)

⁸ [JSNA - Walsall Insight](#)

⁹ The GLD measure incorporates all children, including those with Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND)

- Gender gap: Girls are more likely to achieve GLD than boys; literacy is the area with the lowest achievement
- Vulnerable groups: Children eligible for Free School Meals, summer-born children, and certain localities have lower outcomes
- Boys from low-income families: More likely to experience delayed communication and language development, and less likely to be ready for school
- Speech, language, and communication needs: Prominent and closely linked to deprivation Improving outcomes for these groups is central to achieving Walsall's Good Level of Development ambition, with national evidence highlighting early language development, strong relationships and access to high quality early education as key drivers

Access and Uptake of Early Years Services

- Gaps in registration/uptake: Persistent gaps exist in early years provision, Family Hub activities, and statutory health checks
- Deprivation link: The lower uptake wards do contain some of the most deprived LSOAs, particularly in Blakenall, Birchills, and Leamore. However, deprivation alone doesn't fully explain take up patterns. For example, Blakenall—despite high deprivation and low levels of working parents—recorded a strong EL2 take up rate of **78.4%**, which is actually higher than the borough average of **72.4%**. This shows that take up does not neatly mirror deprivation levels.
- Statutory development health check attendance: Walsall average for 2-2.5-year reviews December 2025 was 88% and on an improving trend - latest figure from service: 92%.
- Underrepresented groups: 48.4% of children born in Walsall are 'White British' the next highest ethnicity is Pakistani (11.4%) and then Indian (10.5%) - 40% of white British children, 33% of Pakistani children and 35.5% of Indian children take up a place. The lowest take up is from Caribbean and 'Any Other' categories.
- Special Educational Needs (SEN) identification: National data shows variation across ethnic groups, with risks of under- and late identification within some communities; Walsall aims to use this insight for targeted, culturally responsive outreach, early identification of need in line with national SEND reforms

Changing Eligibility and Access to Funded Early Education

- Decline in targeted 2-year-old places: Fewer children eligible for funded early education due to unchanged national earnings threshold, not reduced need
- Low-income working families: Increasingly miss out on eligibility despite financial insecurity, risking delayed or missed early learning
- Equity implications: Reduced access at age two may widen developmental gaps before school entry. Ensuring children living in poverty access early education earlier is critical.

Childcare Market and Sufficiency¹⁰

- Market diversity: Broad and diverse, but sufficiency varies by location, age, and provision type
- Key challenges: Expansion of entitlements, rising demand for flexible childcare, and high-quality provision for under-twos and children with SEND
- Accessibility: Some areas face pressure on places due to demographic changes, workforce shortages, and affordability issues
- Parental access: Cost, wraparound care availability, and provider expansion trends impact families' ability to work and access early education
- Strategic need: Coordinated response for sufficiency, market development, targeted provider support, and locality-based planning

2.2.2 Going where the silence is

Across all four localities, the evidence shows a cohort of children and families who remain persistently unreached by universal and preventative services.

It is important to acknowledge that some families actively make informed and positive decisions regarding their engagement with early education and services, reflecting their unique circumstances and preferences and doing what they feel is right for their children.

However, some families may not attend early education, Family Hubs or statutory health checks due to language and communication barriers, cultural mistrust, digital exclusion, social mobility linked to poverty and access to transport, fear of services or lower-level needs that do not meet referral thresholds.

This can lead to children not being noticed by the system (silent) until they start school, by which time their needs may have grown and early opportunity to support has been missed. There is a group of children who arrive unprepared and behind. Missed chances include routine check-ins, where issues are not always spotted or acted on.

Going into silent communities requires a more proactive, place based and relational approach using following principles:

- Strengthening outreach through community connectors and champions to build trust and bridge access gaps so families can access support earlier
- Flexible, culturally responsive services delivered in familiar community settings
- Stronger data sharing and warm handovers across organisations
- Using locality intelligence alongside quantitative data to target support earlier

¹⁰ Childcare sufficiency strategy and Appendix Early Years Access, Eligibility and SEND Supporting Evid

2.2 Locality insight – understanding difference across Walsall

Children’s early experiences in Walsall vary significantly by place. Drawing on the Joint Strategic Needs Assessment (JSNA), early years deep dive analysis and Family Hub locality insight, this section summarises the distinct early years context across Walsall’s four localities. It highlights how population, deprivation, health need and childcare sufficiency shape children’s opportunities — and where Best Start in Life must focus effort to reduce inequalities and improve outcomes.

2.2.1 North Walsall¹¹

0–5 population, ethnicity and deprivation

North Walsall has a younger population profile with high concentrations of children aged 0–5 living in some of the most deprived neighbourhoods in the borough. Ethnic diversity is increasing, and a higher proportion of families experience poverty, housing instability and complex social pressures. JSNA analysis shows entrenched intergenerational disadvantage and lower healthy life expectancy compared to borough averages.

Key early years priorities

- Reaching children and families least likely to engage with universal services
- Earlier identification of developmental delay, SEND and speech, language and communication needs
- Building trust with families who have anxiety or mistrust of statutory services

Health needs

JSNA Healthy Start indicators highlight higher infant mortality, lower vaccination uptake, higher smoking rates in pregnancy and poorer maternal health outcomes in this locality. These factors increase early developmental risk and reinforce the importance of strong early attachment, infant mental health and consistent health visiting contact.

Sufficiency and access

North Walsall faces the highest levels of pressure on childcare sufficiency, especially for children under the age of two, as very few settings offer places for this age group.

The area includes three maintained nurseries, seven PVI, and fifteen schools providing early years places. Take-up of Early Learning for 2-year-olds (EL2) in Autumn 2025 reached 77.5%, which is significantly above the borough average of 72.4%. In addition, there has been an encouraging rise in take-up among working parents since Summer 2024.

However, workforce shortages, transport challenges, and limited flexibility among providers may restrict access for families without private transport.

¹¹ Information of this is informed by JSNA, EY deep dive and the neighbourhood/family hub workshops held in October 2025

2.2.2 West Walsall

0–5 population, ethnicity and deprivation

West Walsall has one of the highest concentrations of children under five in the borough and includes several neighbourhoods with high deprivation alongside rapid population growth. Communities are ethnically diverse, with a significant number of families experiencing economic insecurity and poor health outcomes.

Key early years priorities

- Improving engagement with early years services and developmental checks
- Supporting families experiencing parental mental health challenges
- Ensure children’s development is monitored and supported through coordinated health, early years and Family Hub services

Health needs

JSNA evidence points to persistent health inequalities, including maternal mental health challenges and lower uptake of preventative health services. Missed appointments and inconsistent engagement contribute to children arriving at school with unmet needs.

Sufficiency and access

West Walsall is experiencing a shortage of accessible childcare places, particularly in neighbourhoods with low car ownership where limited transport options create additional barriers.

There are also significant gaps in provision for some working parents, and the proximity to the Wolverhampton border means that a number of families choose to use childcare providers outside the borough.

Within the area, there are two maintained nurseries, nine PVI, and seventeen schools offering early years places. Take-up of Early Learning for 2-year-olds (EL2) in Autumn 2025 was 57.3%, which is considerably lower than the borough average of 72.4%. Since Summer 2024, there has also been a modest increase in take-up among working parents.

However, workforce shortages, transport challenges, and limited flexibility among providers may restrict access for families without private transport.

2.2.3 East Walsall

0–5 population, ethnicity and deprivation

East Walsall is often perceived as more affluent, but the JSNA highlights pockets of hidden deprivation and unmet need. While overall outcomes are stronger, some families — including those affected by neurodiversity, mental health challenges or social isolation — experience barriers that are less visible.

Key early years priorities

- Strengthen early identification of additional needs so support can be provided before children enter school
- Supporting families who may not meet thresholds for targeted services but still require help
- Improving inclusion and SEND responsiveness within a mixed childcare market

Health needs

Health outcomes are generally better than in the North and West, but emerging needs can be masked. Families may delay seeking support, leading to later identification of developmental or emotional wellbeing concerns.

Sufficiency and access

East Walsall offers the widest range of childcare provision in the borough, with one maintained nursery, eighteen PVIs and twenty-five schools delivering early years places. Take-up of Early Learning for 2-year-olds (EL2) in Autumn 2025 was 69.3%, slightly below the borough average of 72.4%. However, the area records the highest uptake of places among working parents, likely reflecting the higher proportion of working families living in this locality.

2.2.4 Central and South Walsall

0–5 population, ethnicity and deprivation

Central and South Walsall are characterised by high ethnic diversity, with many families where English is not the first language. Birth rates are relatively high, and there are marked inequalities within communities, linked to poverty, housing pressure and migration related anxieties.

Key early years priorities

- Addressing language, communication and cultural barriers
- Improve early access to communication and language support to strengthen school readiness
- Improving engagement with health checks, early education and immunisations
- Supporting families to navigate services confidently and without fear or stigma

Health needs

JSNA evidence shows lower uptake of immunisations, health reviews and early

education, despite significant levels of need. Concerns relating to immigration status, benefits and trust in services affect engagement and access.

Sufficiency and access

South and Central Walsall provide a strong and varied early years offer, supported by a mix of providers including two maintained nurseries, eighteen PVI's and eleven school-based nursery classes. Take-up of Early Learning for 2-year-olds (EL2) generally aligns with borough-wide patterns (77.4%), with engagement influenced by the diverse mix of families living in these areas.

Uptake among working parents remains positive, reflecting good access to providers and the availability of funded childcare options across Walsall.

This locality analysis and the "Going where the silence is" approach establish a clear evidence base for delivering Best Start in Life differently across Walsall. They guide targeted efforts to help children least likely to reach a Good Level of Development, ensuring support is timely, proportionate and matched to need, while also strengthening universal provision.

2.3 Insights from Shaping our Tomorrow family discussions

To complement quantitative data and locality analysis, Walsall undertakes annual conversations with 17 families with babies born in 2023, capturing their lived experience, aspirations and challenges over the course of their children growing up. This section draws on conversations with these families, using insight from updated family profiles and child-centred narratives to understand what early childhood looks and feels like in Walsall today. This will ensure that our BSiL plan is informed and shaped by services are shaped by the voices and experiences of families themselves

2.3.1 Strong family bonds and pride in place

This group of families consistently describe strong relationships, stability and love as central to their children's lives. Everyday moments — birthdays, milestones, first words and first steps — are deeply valued and often described as sources of pride and resilience. Where families speak positively about raising their children in Walsall they highlight a strong sense of belonging within their community, multi-generational roots, and attachment to neighbourhoods and an good support network where extended family networks provide emotional and practical support.

Even where challenges exist, parents demonstrate determination to provide safe, nurturing environments and express optimism about the future, particularly where they feel investment is being made in local areas and services.

2.3.2 Feeling safe and accessing spaces to play

Access to safe green spaces and parks features prominently in family profiles, with outdoor play recognised as important for children's physical development and family

wellbeing. However, families' experiences vary. Some feel confident allowing children to play locally, while others express anxiety linked to safety concerns, media narratives or the condition of local play areas. As a result, some families travel outside their immediate neighbourhood to access spaces they perceive as safer or better maintained.

These experiences echo wider locality insight and reinforce the importance of safe, welcoming community spaces in supporting early development.

2.3.3 Learning, development and being “school ready”

Families describe supporting their child's learning primarily through everyday routines — talking, reading, play, exploration and imitation at home. Parents value early years settings and schools that build trust and communicate clearly, particularly when they feel listened to and understood.

When asked what “school readiness” means, parents emphasise confidence, communication, social skills and emotional security, rather than narrow academic measures. For families of children born in 2023, this reinforces the importance of early identification of speech, language, communication and developmental needs, and clear guidance on how parents can support learning from the earliest stages.

2.3.4 Accessing support and navigating services

Families highlight a range of experiences when accessing help. Community assets such as Family Hubs, libraries, faith settings and trusted local organisations are valued spaces where parents feel welcomed and supported. Where relationships are strong, families describe feeling more confident to ask for help and engage with services over time.

Conversely, some families describe challenges in knowing where to go for advice, understanding what support is available, or feeling hesitant to approach statutory services. These experiences align with wider system learning around families becoming quiet or disengaged, particularly where needs are emerging rather than acute.

2.3.5 Hopes and aspirations for the future

Across all family profiles, parents express consistent aspirations for their children: that they are safe, healthy, happy and confident, and that growing up in Walsall gives them fair opportunities regardless of background. Families want their children to feel secure in who they are, to be supported in their development, and to attend settings and schools that recognise and value diversity.

2.3.6 What this tells us

Learning from families with children born in 2023 reinforces that:

- Early childhood in Walsall is shaped as much by relationships, trust and confidence as by services
- Families value local, relational support that fits around everyday life
- Safety, play, communication and belonging matter deeply to parents

- Clear, accessible pathways and trusted contact points make a real difference to engagement
- Belonging is fostered when families feel rooted in a strong network of support, both within their community and through accessible services

2.4 What we learned from practitioners about supporting children ready to learn

Practitioner insight on improving ready to learn/ Good Level of Development (GLD) was gathered through a workshop in January– GLD session, which engaged with over 100 practitioners from across early years, health, education, family hubs and wider children’s services. Practitioners were asked to reflect on priorities, everyday actions and the support needed to achieve Walsall’s ambition of 75% of children reaching GLD by 2028.

What practitioners see as most important for ensuring children arrive at school ready to learn

- strong and consistent emphasis on early intervention across the 0–5 period, particularly pregnancy to age two and the 2–2½ year developmental check. Early intervention was the most frequently cited theme, alongside improved communication, awareness and clearer pathways into support.
- Practitioners repeatedly linked GLD to family access to Family Hubs and the local early years offer, highlighting the importance of simple, consistent signposting and clear information for both families and professionals. There was a strong view that improving GLD requires families to be supported earlier and more consistently, rather than waiting until school entry.
- Responses also highlighted that SEND, deprivation (FSM) and language and communication development are closely connected and must be addressed together. Practitioners noted particular concern for children from low-income families, those with emerging SEND, children with English as an Additional Language, and boys with delayed language and communication development.

2.4.1 What practitioners say they will do differently to support children arriving at school ready to learn

When asked to identify concrete actions, practitioners committed to a set of practical, everyday behaviours to support GLD target, including:

- Proactively signposting families to Family Hubs, 0–5 activities and digital resources during routine contacts.
- Checking and nudging families to ensure children receive their 2–2½ year developmental check and appropriate Health Visitor contact.
- Sharing simple crib sheets and resources across teams, schools, nurseries and health services.

- Asking targeted questions about early years funding entitlement, attendance at early education, and developmental checks.
- Actively promoting early literacy, reading at home and early years places as foundations for school readiness.
- Practitioners identified an opportunity to package these behaviours into a small number of consistent “everyday actions” that all professionals working with families could confidently apply.

2.4.2 What practitioners say they need to improve GLD outcomes

Practitioners were clear that achieving improved GLD outcomes at scale will require:

- Stronger joined-up working, particularly between health visitors, early years settings, childminders, schools, GPs and Family Hubs.
- Targeted SEND support, including clearer routes for advice and earlier specialist input.
- Workforce capacity and training, with easy to use tools to support confident conversations with families.
- Better data visibility, including ward level and Free School Meal focused insight on uptake of developmental checks and early education places.
- Practical access support, such as help with transport and reducing stigma or anxiety linked to engagement with services.
- Resources targeted towards deprived areas and families least likely to engage.
- Risks and pressure points identified by practitioners
- Practitioners also highlighted risks that could undermine Good Level Development progress if not addressed, including:
 - Ongoing access barriers, particularly transport costs, parental anxiety and stigma associated with statutory services.
 - Information gaps for children living in Walsall but attending schools outside the borough.
 - Workforce capacity pressures, especially in relation to 0–5 support and specialist language and communication provision.
 - Transition points, particularly from Reception into Year 1, where developmental progress can stall without continuity.

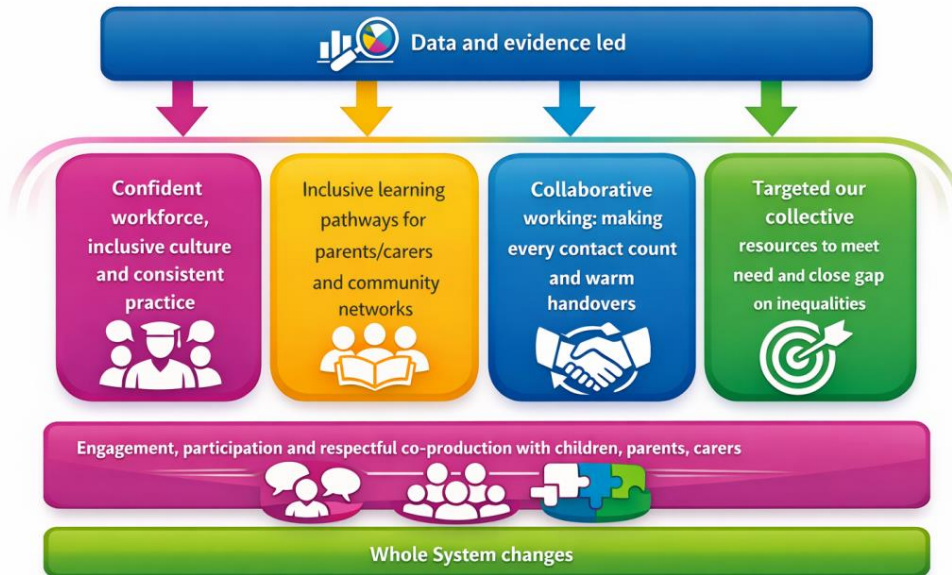
Walsall Reception Cohort: School Readiness Baseline Summary

The report shows that 78.4% of Reception children in Walsall are not school ready on entry, with the highest need concentrated in the East, North and West localities. Across the borough, Literacy, Maths and Communication & Language are the weakest GLD areas, and a group of 12 high-leverage schools—those with both high numbers and high proportions of children below age-related expectations—represent the greatest opportunity to shift overall outcomes. While nursery attendance data is available, outcomes cannot yet be compared by prior attendance. The report recommends focused

support for the highest-need schools, locality-level multi-agency intervention, early re-assessment of targeted pupils within six weeks, improved consistency in baseline judgements, and enhanced future data collection to understand the impact of school nursery participation on school readiness.

PART 3 Walsall's Pillars to Success: Delivery Framework

The Pillars to Success set out in this section have been developed through a clear understanding of where Walsall is on its Best Start in Life journey. They reflect what we have learned from recent delivery, data, practitioner insight and lived experience about what is working well, where progress has been made, and where gaps and variation remain. Building on the strong foundations established through Family Hubs and early system transformation, the Pillars respond directly to the challenges that continue to limit early identification, consistent practice and equitable outcomes for children. Together, they provide a focused, evidence-led framework to guide collective action from 2026–2028, ensuring that future delivery is grounded in our current reality, strengthens what already works, and accelerates improvement for children and families least likely to thrive without early support.



3.1 Pillars of success: Why they matter and what they change in practice

Pillar to Success	Rationale – why this Pillar is needed	What this means in practice
1. Confident workforce, inclusive culture and consistent practice	Practitioner evidence highlights that achieving good levels of development (GLD) relies on confident, consistent information and messages to parents, early identification of developmental needs and strong collaboration between health, early years, VCSE and family support services.	Deliver a unified training programme focused on understanding the importance of strong parent/child attachments from the start, 0–5 development, SEND and language; build workforce confidence to identify concerns, hold quality conversations with families, and ensure consistent action across services. Embed simple, shared tools and guidance setting out minimum expectations for routine checks, signposting and follow-up, reducing reliance on individual judgement or service-specific approaches.
2. Inclusive learning pathways for parents/carers and community networks	We recognise that supporting children means supporting parents and carers too, particularly where adults have experienced unmet need, disadvantage or exclusion, and may need tailored, accessible support to build confidence, skills and aspiration.	In practice, this means professionals taking time to understand parents’ own learning, confidence and support needs, offering clear, nonjudgemental guidance, practical help, flexible and evidence based/informed pathways, and adapting how support is delivered so parents who have been persistently left behind are not excluded by language, confidence, digital access or past experiences of services.
3. Collaborative working: making every contact count and warm handovers	System learning shows children are most likely to be missed at key moments—like the 2–2½ year review, early education uptake and nursery/school transitions. Fragmented working diminishes the impact of early support and increases the	Strengthen coordination between health, early years, Family Hubs and schools at critical contact points, ensuring opportunities to identify need and accelerate progress towards GLD are not lost.

	risk that early developmental concerns are missed or identified too late	
4. Targeted our collective resources to meet need and close gap on inequalities	Data shows the widest GLD gaps for children affected by poverty, SEND, language and communication barriers and low engagement. Universal approaches alone are not enough to close these gaps.	Apply proportionate universalism: provide additional outreach, capacity and targeted support for priority children, families and areas, informed by local data and practitioner insight.
Cross-Cutting: Data and Evidence-Led Practice	Practitioners identified data blind spots, fragmented systems and access barriers as limiting early and consistent action. Strong enabling infrastructure is required for sustained improvement.	Improve data sharing, visibility and infrastructure, enabling the system to identify who is missing, reduce duplication, support earlier intervention and allow staff to focus on families rather than navigating complex systems.
Cross-Cutting: Engagement, Participation and respectful Coproduction	Effective solutions require meaningful involvement and co-production with children, parents and carers, ensuring services reflect lived experience and local needs.	Embed approaches that actively and respectfully co-produce with children, parents, and carers, involving them with humility in the design, delivery, and review of services. This collaborative and humble engagement fosters greater trust, ensures support is tailored to real needs, and leads to improved outcomes.
Cross-Cutting: System Change	Fragmented systems and siloed working undermine impact. Coordinated, system-wide change is essential to deliver consistent, high-quality support and close GLD gaps at scale.	Drive operational and cultural change across all agencies, aligning strategies, processes and governance to support integrated, family-centred early years provision.

3.2 What we will deliver – our pillars of success

3.2.1 Delivery pillars

Pillar 1: Confident workforce, inclusive culture and consistent practice

Purpose:

Build a confident, inclusive, multi-agency 0–5 workforce that shares the same understanding, expectations and tools, so children are identified early, families receive consistent messages, and practice does not vary by service, setting or locality.

Early health, attachment and infant mental health

- Strengthen multiagency workforce capability in attachment informed practice, early emotional wellbeing and infant mental health, enabling practitioners to recognise early signs of distress and support secure parent–child relationships from pregnancy onwards.
- Embed consistent approaches to early emotional wellbeing and attachment across maternity, health visiting, early years, Family Hubs, education and VCSE services.
- Promote a shared, safeguarding informed approach to engagement with health appointments, improving trust and reducing “Was Not Brought” rates through consistent follow up and messaging across agencies.
- Improve support for Children in Care, with a focus on attachment, trauma informed practise and transitions.

SEND, inclusion and early identification

- Upskill the workforce to ensure a shared understanding of child development at each stage, with a strong focus on early identification of SEND and Speech, Language and Communication Needs (SLCN).
- Standardise early identification using shared tools and guidance (including ASQ, Development Matters and agreed pathways), reducing variation in thresholds and practice.
- Strengthen the Early Years Inclusion and SEND Pathway so that the graduated response supports strong universal inclusion and avoids unnecessary escalation.
- Improve data sharing and access to relevant information (including EHCPs where appropriate), ensuring professionals have timely insight to support joined up working.
- Build practitioner confidence to support groups at higher risk of delayed development, including boys from low-income families, children from diverse cultural backgrounds and home educated children, using evidence and local data to challenge assumptions and bias.
- Support all early year's settings to become a Communication Friendly Setting¹²

¹² [Communication Friendly Settings - Early Years | Elkklan Training Ltd](#)

Early childhood education and care – access & quality

- Promote consistent, accurate navigation of early education entitlements and the Family Hub offer across the workforce, reducing confusion that leads to partial take up or disengagement.
- Strengthen understanding of inclusive, high quality early years practice across all settings, ensuring children’s needs are supported within universal provision wherever possible.
- Reduce variation in advice and guidance given to families about childcare, funding and access, so families receive the same clear messages regardless of where they engage.

Transitions into school and Reception readiness

- Ensure all professionals understand what **Good Level of Development** and school readiness look like, and how early years practice contributes to smooth transitions into Reception.
- Standardise expectations and practice around transitions, early learning, communication, independence and emotional readiness.
- Improve follow up and information sharing where children are not known to early years services prior to school entry, reducing late identification and “surprises” at Reception.

System enablers: building confidence and consistency

- Delivery of this pillar will be supported by aligned system effort, with workforce development, capacity growth and practice change focused across partners in line with their contribution to early identification, prevention and improved Good Level of Development outcomes.
- Develop a collective, multiagency workforce development pathway across health, early years, education, Family Hubs and the VCSE, including routes into community-based roles.
- Introduce a minimum core training offer for all professionals working with 0–5s, ensuring consistent standards and shared understanding across the system.
- Develop a shared Resource Hub and Continuing Professional Development offer for our collective 0–5 workforce, providing easy access to high-quality information, tools, guidance and training. This will include real-time forums and interactive spaces where practitioners can ask questions, share insights and receive timely support.
- Provide safe, supportive spaces for reflection and learning, including clinical supervision, locality conversations and peer learning, so training translates into improved practice.
- Use dip sampling, audits and reflective reviews to test consistency in practice and continuously improve quality across services.

What difference we going to make

- Children and families will experience more confident, consistent and timely support from every professional they encounter.
- Developmental concerns, SEND indicators and barriers to engagement will be identified earlier and acted on more effectively, reducing missed opportunities.
- Practitioners will share a common understanding of child development, inclusion and school readiness, reducing variation and postcode-based differences.
- Families will receive clearer, more consistent messages about development, early learning and support,

Pillar 2: Learning pathways for Parents, Carers and community network

Building confidence, capability and engagement so families can support children's development early.

Early health, attachment and infant mental health

- Promote consistent messaging on attachment, early relationships and emotional wellbeing.
- Align parenting and early help offers to support parental confidence and caregiver wellbeing.
- Undertake a whole system review and align parenting programmes across our partnership from pregnancy to ensure they are evidence based/informed, accessible and clearly mapped to need.
- Preconception resources are consistent and available for all partners.

SEND, inclusion and early identification

- Provide clear guidance to parents on recognising developmental milestones and early signs of need.
- Ensure families receive timely support when concerns are identified at mandated contact points.
- All partners contribute to the local offer ensuring information on services is current and consistent.
- Workforce being aware of the graduated response including early identification and pathway for support.

Early childhood education and care – access & quality

- Improve understanding by effective communication to support take up of early education entitlements.
- Align learning pathways for parents with evidence based/informed parenting and HLE programmes. Ensuring all parent get good advice and support around how to support their children's development at every change from pregnancy to Adolescents

Transitions into school and Reception readiness

- Embed consistent messages on school readiness, including communication, independence and toileting.
- Support families to engage earlier with early years settings and transition activity.

System enablers

- Develop joined up learning pathways across Family Hubs, health, education and VCSE partners.
- Improve accessibility through flexible delivery, digital options and community based provision.
- Strengthen ESOL and adult skills support to reduce engagement barriers.
- Upscale the Community Champion model by creating paid, skills-building opportunities for parents and carers to deliver peer-to-peer support as part of the Best Start in Life offer. This will include developing structured training, coaching and experience pathways so Community Champions can build confidence, gain

accredited skills and develop employment-enhancing experience, while acting as trusted connectors within their communities. This approach will strengthen cultural competence, widen access for families least likely to engage, and embed lived experience at the heart of early years delivery

What difference we going to make

- Parents and carers will feel more confident, informed and supported to help their children thrive.
- Clear, joined-up learning pathways will mean families receive consistent messages about communication, play, early learning and school readiness—wherever they access support.
- Families facing the greatest barriers will be better reached through flexible, culturally responsive delivery, strengthened ESOL and adult learning, and trusted community settings. This will strengthen the home learning environment, improve engagement with early years services and developmental checks, and help children arrive at school more confident, communicative and ready to learn.

Pillar 3: Collaborative working, making every contact count and warm handovers

Purpose: Use partnership working to intervene earlier and more effectively at key points. This ensures children's needs are identified quickly, support is prompt and consistent, and services are well-aligned. Through standardised identification, clear escalation pathways, and improved follow-up, we provide a strong foundation for all children—especially those who are disadvantaged or have SEND—to thrive and be ready for learning

Early health, attachment and infant mental health

- Strengthen collaboration across maternity, health visiting, Family Hubs and early years, Family First ensuring early attachment, infant mental and physical health and parental wellbeing are addressed consistently at universal contact points.
- Improve continuity of support for families with emerging or complex needs across our multi-agency delivery models including Family Hubs, Young & Thrive and Family Help approaches, reducing fragmentation and escalation.
- Develop children's champions model, there will be different children's champions for example through Walsall Housing Group, to improve breastfeeding uptake and support the transition from hospital to community based care, and a bespoke children's champions model in Pleck.

SEND, inclusion and early identification

- Pilot joint health and early years progress assessments, aligning the 2–2½ year EY’s progress check and ASQ to reduce duplication and missed opportunities.
- Explore the feasibility of a joint 18-month early developmental check, delivered collaboratively by Health Visiting, Speech and Language Therapy and Early Years practitioners, informed by learning from other areas.
- Strengthen early identification pathways so developmental, communication and SEND needs are recognised earlier and acted on consistently.
- Deliver enhanced Speech and Language Therapy support to targeted settings, building practitioner confidence and reducing unnecessary referrals.
- Develop a Joint Early Years Waiting Times Improvement Plan with the ICB (especially for dietetics, Dysphagia and CAMHS services), alongside an enhanced Supported Waiting Offer delivered through Family Hubs.

Early childhood education and care – access & quality

- Review and further develop the Family Hub buildings and commissioned community spokes model, ensuring places, spaces and co-location are aligned to need, deprivation and access — and maximise their role as trusted access points for early years support.
- Embed early education, entitlement guidance and childcare access within Family Hubs and community outreach activity, ensuring families receive joined up support at the earliest opportunity.
- Strengthen collaboration between early years providers, Family Hubs and health services to support inclusive practice and consistent quality across settings.

Transitions into school and Reception readiness

- Establish a Preschool Integrated Information Sharing and Transition Framework, setting out how Health Visitors, early years settings, schools and Family Hubs share information before school entry. This should align with the integrated neighbourhood teams model.
- Embed warm handovers as standard practice so developmental concerns, SEND indicators and family context are known and acted on before children start school.
- Develop ready to learn drop in sessions and targeted transition activity across all localities for children at risk of not achieving a Good Level of Development.
- Integrate Summer Passport / Holiday Activity Food programme early years activity within the Family Hub locality model to support engagement, transitions and readiness for school.

Place based and system enablers

- Prototype a fully integrated Best Start in Life Early Years Team to deliver joint assessments and coordinated interventions for children not attending early years settings. This prototype will bring together health visiting, early years, Family Hubs and SEND practitioners to ensure children who are not in formal provision

receive timely developmental checks, early identification, and targeted support through a single, joined-up offer.

- Deliver a Cradle to Career programme in Blakenall, providing a coordinated, place based model of support from birth through to adulthood in one of Walsall's most deprived communities, with a strong focus on early years and school readiness.
- Deliver community champion pilot in Pleck, to build trust, improve engagement and opportunities for early intervention, particularly for families with children aged 0-5 not currently accessing services
- Strengthen operational integration between Young & Thrive, Family Help and Family Hubs, ensuring families with complex needs experience coordinated, timely and holistic support.
- Explore and test locality based and Saturday clinic models in areas of lowest uptake, bringing together health, early years, SALT and entitlement support.
- Use buildings, community spaces and colocation strategically to reduce access barriers, improve engagement and support joinedup delivery.

Develop and embed a Community Champion role, using trusted local people to build sustained relationships with families, provide culturally competent community-based support, promote key health and early years messages (including vaccination, maternity engagement and developmental checks), enable warm handovers into services, and feed community insight back to commissioners and partners to inform continuous service improvement—reflecting learning from Connector meetings on the importance of trust, relationships and local presence.

What difference we going to make

- Every contact with a family will become an opportunity to support development, wellbeing and school readiness.
- Stronger collaboration at key moments—such as the 9-month, 18-month and 2–2½-year checks, Family Hub engagement and transitions into early education and school—will reduce fragmentation and improve continuity.
- Families with multiple or more complex needs will experience warmer handovers, clearer communication and better coordinated support across health, early years and family help. Joint working will reduce delays, improve transitions and ensure no child reaches school with unmet or unidentified needs.

Pillar 4. Collaborate to Target Resources

Focusing collective effort where it will have the greatest impact on children least likely to meet a Good Level of Development.

Early health, attachment and infant mental health

- Target outreach and preventative support in areas with the **lowest uptake of mandated health checks**, breastfeeding and early intervention, informed by birth data and service engagement patterns.
- Align investment with **Healthy Start, perinatal and infant mental health priorities**, ensuring early attachment and emotional wellbeing support reaches families most at risk.
- Use Family Hubs and community-based delivery to reduce barriers linked to trust, access and stigma, particularly for families in “silent communities”.

SEND, inclusion and early identification

- Use data from the “Going where the silence is” deep dive to prioritise early identification and intervention for children least likely to meet GLD, including those affected by poverty, emerging SEND, SLCN and low engagement.
- Invest our collective effort in developing inclusive provision and activities and early SEND support ensuring children are supported through strong universal inclusion and graduated response before escalation. This will include a clear SEND offer as part of each BSiL Family Hub.
- Prioritise inclusion funding, specialist support and SEND-ready expansion in localities with higher proportions of children with SEND.
- Ensure targeting does not create parallel systems, but strengthens universal practice as the foundation, applying proportionate universalism across the system.

Early childhood education and care – access & quality

- Address childcare sufficiency gaps by locality, age and need, using live supply-and-demand data for under-2s, 2-year-olds, 3–4-year-olds and SEND-inclusive provision.
- Target expansion funding to areas of greatest shortfall, particularly North Walsall, including planned nursery and PVI expansions.
- Increase take-up of funded early education through community outreach, culturally competent communication and SEND-accessible provision.
- Expand wraparound childcare (WAC) in partnership with schools, focusing on schools with no current provision and families requiring flexible or irregular hours.
- Introduce locality-specific affordability actions, recognising cost pressures vary across the borough.
- Ensure all expansion plans include **inclusion readiness** (SEND capability, training and space adaptation), not just place numbers.

Transitions into school and Reception readiness

- Target School Readiness Clinics and integrated school-community support models in areas with the lowest GLD and highest proportions of children from silent communities.

- Focus targeted transition support on children not previously known to early years services, summer-born children and those with emerging SEND.
- Align early years, school and community-based interventions so classroom support for children is matched by parent and family support in the community.
- Use locality insight to prioritise early transition activity that closes development gaps before school entry.

System enablers - joint commissioning, data and place-based delivery

- Implement a BSiL Joint Commissioning Framework with the ICB, aligning commissioning intentions, funding streams and outcomes across:
 - speech, language and communication
 - Family Hub provision
 - Young and Thrive
 - perinatal and infant mental health
 - SEND
 - Preconception and maternity services
- Develop Neighbourhood Connector and Enhanced Community Champion models, recruiting trusted bilingual staff to improve access, engagement and feedback from Somali, Polish, Pakistani and other communities.
- Build feedback loops so community insight directly informs commissioning and service redesign, not just engagement activity.
- Target resources geographically using birth data, uptake patterns and locality-level insight, reviewing impact regularly through partnership governance.
- Ensure every contact counts, with all services routinely considering GLD risk factors and opportunities for early intervention.

What difference is this going to make

- Resources will be focused where they have the greatest impact. By using data and locality insight to target investment, the system will more effectively close gaps for children affected by poverty, SEND, language and communication barriers and low engagement.
- Childcare sufficiency, wraparound care and inclusive provision will be strengthened in areas of greatest need, improving access for working families and those previously excluded.
- Proportionate universalism will ensure that targeted action strengthens—not replaces—universal services, helping reduce inequalities while improving outcomes for all children.

3.2.2 Cross cutting pillars

Cross cutting Pillar 1: Data and evidence led

These actions will focus on ensuring we understand need, make decision based on need, understand the collective impact we are making and make decision on local and national best practice ensuring we stay on targeted to ensure every child is thriving. This will enable the partnership to create a live feedback loop, allowing us to course-correct and sustain improvement over time. Our detailed BSiL action plan will make clear how every activity contributes directly to our 2028 milestone for Good Level of Development and our wider 2040 borough ambition.

- Development and implementation of a new best start in life Family Hub portal that enables families to easily register, access services, and provide real-time feedback. This portal will serve as a central platform to collect and analyse data on family engagement and outcomes, ensuring consistent and comprehensive tracking across all Family Hub activities.
- Develop a comprehensive outcome framework to systematically monitor and evaluate the impact of our collective efforts. This framework will set out clear, measurable indicators aligned with our GLD priorities and will be used by all partners to track progress, identify areas for improvement, and demonstrate the difference we are making for children and families.
- Monitor progress for priority cohorts, including FSM, SEND and disadvantaged children.
- Deliver a data-driven approach to early years sufficiency by align its Childcare Sufficiency Duty recommendations with the BSiL framework by introducing the following actions:
 - Develop a Locality-Level Childcare Sufficiency Dashboard, integrating live supply/demand metrics for Under-2s, 2-year-olds, and 3–4 cohort across the East, North, South and West, including the shortfalls identified in North Walsall and specifically the wards of Bloxwich East and Bloxwich West, which show the only ward-level deficits under the age of five.
 - Include wraparound care availability (school-based + PVI) within the Early Years dashboard,
 - Embed quarterly monitoring of sufficiency into the BSiL governance cycle, allowing for rapid identification of shortfalls and emerging pressures.
 - Map SEND prevalence by locality, recognising high numbers or proportions in Birchills-Leamore, Willenhall North, Bloxwich West, and use this to inform SEND inclusion planning.

What difference is this going to make

- Decision-making will be clearer, faster and more accountable. Improved data sharing, dashboards and outcome frameworks will allow partners to understand who is being missed, track progress in real time and adjust action quickly.
- The system will be able to demonstrate impact—linking activity to outcomes such as GLD, early identification, engagement and reduced inequalities—while creating a continuous learning loop that supports improvement over time.

Cross cutting Pillar 2: Engagement, participation and co-production with children, parents, carers.

At the core of our transformation efforts lies a commitment to meaningful engagement and co-production with children, parents, and carers. By actively involving these groups in shaping services and decisions, we ensure that their voices, experiences, and insights drive the changes that matter most. This collaborative approach is essential for creating solutions that are both effective and efficient, fostering a sense of ownership and partnership that strengthens our collective impact and supports every child's right to thrive.

- strengthen our Parent Carer Panel in developing the Best Start for Life Family Hub offer, ensuring ongoing engagement and decision-making reflects diverse perspectives. We will prioritise representation from fathers and other underrepresented groups, so the Family Hub solutions are shaped by a truly inclusive cross-section of our community.
- A refreshed best Start in life Family Hubs Communications and Engagement Strategy will be implemented to ensure all families can access and understand Walsall's Best Start in Life offer. This will include clear, consistent branding across all localities, multi-language materials, targeted outreach to under-represented communities, digital and social media campaigns, and proactive engagement through community connectors and partner agencies.
- Develop a Good Level of Development (GLD) campaign informed and driven by lived experience.. Parents will play a central role in shaping the campaign's messaging and activities, focusing especially on how they can support their children's early development at home and in the community.
- Engage with parents in the ongoing development of the Supported Waiting Programme, ensuring that families receive appropriate support and guidance while waiting for access to specialist health services.
- Develop and strengthen the relationship faith and community provision in areas identified through the 'where the silence is' work, aiming to overcome barriers and design services that effectively engage with these underserved communities. This will involve employing a test and learn methodology to ensure that our strategies are responsive and adaptive to the unique needs of these groups.

- develop peer-to-peer support networks, leveraging the experiences and knowledge within local communities. These networks will provide platforms for parents and carers to connect, share insights, and support one another, fostering resilience and a sense of belonging while amplifying the voices of those who are often underrepresented in service design and delivery.

What difference is this going to make

- Services will be shaped by lived experience, building trust and relevance. Parents, carers and communities—especially those least heard—will have meaningful influence over design, delivery and review of the Best Start in Life offer.
- This will increase confidence in services, improve uptake, and ensure support reflects the realities of families' lives. Stronger relationships and co-production will help create sustainable change, not just short-term engagement.

Cross cutting Pillar 3: System Changes

Actions will focus on addressing the system barriers that prevent early identification, joined-up working and timely support by establishing robust data sharing across partners, enabling earlier identification of needs, and tracking children's journeys effectively. To further drive innovation and continuous improvement, we will adopt a prototype approach that allows us to test and learn new strategies within everyday practice and across our locality delivery models. This approach will help us build a robust evidence base by capturing insights about what works for families, practitioners and partners. By working iteratively—trying new ideas, gathering feedback and refining delivery—we can respond more quickly to emerging needs and scale effective solutions with confidence, supporting meaningful whole-system change.

- Delivery of the Best Start in Life Plan will be supported by aligned investment across the system. This includes commissioned health services (Public Health, ICB and NHS providers), early years providers, Children's services provision, VCSE partners and community infrastructure. Investment decisions will be shaped through the Joint Commissioning Framework, ensuring that capacity growth, workforce development and service redesign are distributed across partners in line with their contribution to early identification, prevention and GLD outcomes.
- In response to the SEND inspection findings we will develop a Multi-Agency Early Years Information Sharing Improvement Plan. This will strengthen the flow of information within health services (neonatal, HV, paediatrics, SALT, CAMHS, maternity) and between health and education, Family Hubs and early years providers. The plan will establish clear protocols, consent processes, interoperability improvements and a standardised mechanism for sharing

- information related to developmental concerns, safeguarding risks and SEND needs.
- Create an integrated 'front door' for universal services, simplifying access for families, reducing delays and ensuring consistent messaging across the partnership.
 - Improve physical access by mapping assets and co-locating Family Hubs and community spaces to match local needs. Use a map of trusted spaces (VCSE and Faith) to connect with 'silent' family groups who may not use mainstream services, increasing accessibility and inclusion for underserved communities.
 - Maximise digital opportunities by developing integrated digital tools and platforms that enable seamless information-sharing, warm handovers, and consistent engagement with families. This includes expanding the Family Hub digital portal, introducing multi-language digital navigation pathways, and using SMS/app-based prompts to support early identification, service access and real-time feedback across the partnership.

What difference is this going to make

- Families will experience a simpler, more joined-up system. Improved information sharing, aligned commissioning and integrated pathways will reduce duplication, delays and confusion.
- Partners across health, education, early years and the community sector will work as one system, with shared priorities, clearer governance and better use of collective resources. This will create the conditions for sustained improvement in early childhood outcomes and school readiness across Walsall.

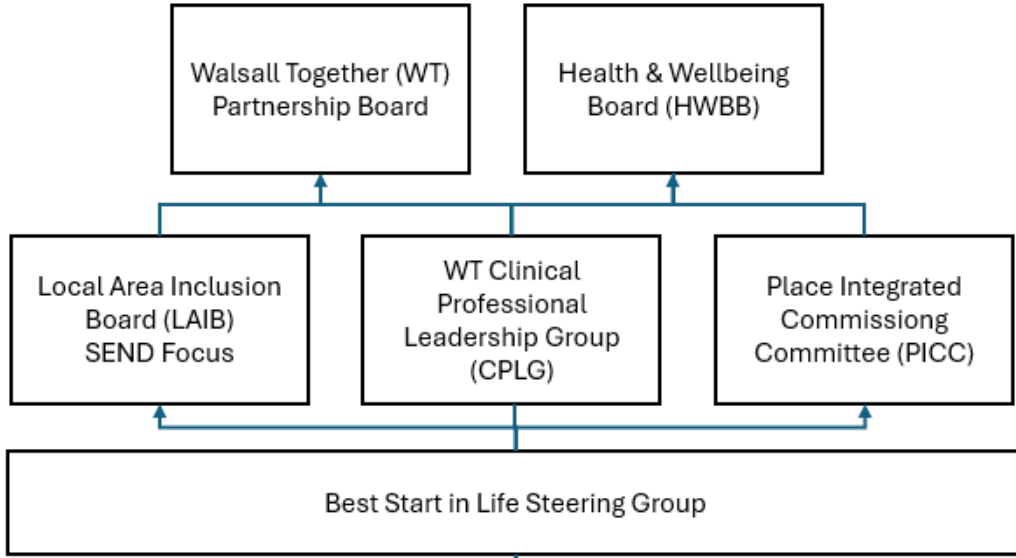
PART 4 Outcomes framework and governance

4.1 Family Hubs Best Start in Life Programme Governance Structure

We have established a Best Start in Life Steering Group, which will be responsible for providing robust oversight and strategic support to the Best Start in Life plan. The Steering Group's key responsibilities include:

- Ensuring integrated, accessible services for families from conception to age 19 (and up to 25 for SEND)
- Focusing on reducing inequalities, improving child health, and supporting school readiness
- Delivering the Best Start for Life offer and contributing to the national target of 75% of 5-year-olds reaching a Good Level of Development (GLD) by 2028
- Aligning local implementation with national policy, funding requirements, and sustainability planning

The Steering Group will feed into key strategic groups, including the Local Area Inclusion Board (SEND focus), Walsall Together Board, Place-Based Integrated Commissioning Board, and Health and Wellbeing Board.



4.2 Development of an Outcomes framework

Walsall will focus on **six system-wide outcomes**:

Outcome 1: Children experience strong early development, particularly in communication and language

Children develop the foundational skills they need to be confident, curious and ready to learn.

Primary measures

- Good Level of Development (GLD) at end of Reception (overall and FSM)
- Early Learning Goals – Communication & Language and Personal, Social and Emotional Development
- ASQ completion and outcomes at 18 months and 2–2½ years (with focus on SLCN)

Equity focus

- FSM
- Boys
- Children with emerging SEND
- Priority localities and “where the silence is” cohorts

Outcome 2: Children are physically healthy and emotionally secure from pregnancy onwards

Children benefit from strong early health, attachment and wellbeing, reducing avoidable harm and escalation later.

Primary measures

- Uptake and timeliness of mandated health reviews (midwifery, new birth, 6–8 weeks, 9–12 months, 2–2½ years)
- Breastfeeding initiation and continuation
- Immunisation uptake (MMR and early childhood schedule)
- Healthy weight at Reception
- Early identification of perinatal and infant mental health needs

Equity focus

- Deprived wards
- Children born prematurely
- Families experiencing poverty, housing instability or parental mental health challenges

Outcome 3: Children are identified early and supported inclusively

Children’s additional needs are identified early and met through **strong universal inclusion**, reducing unnecessary escalation.

Primary measures

- Age at first identification of SEND/SLCN
- Uptake and timeliness of Early Years Inclusion and SEND pathways

- Proportion of children supported through graduated response before specialist referral
- Reduction in unmet need at school entry

Equity focus

- SEND
- EAL
- Boys from low-income families
- Ethnic groups with known under-identification risks

Outcome 4: Parents and carers feel confident, supported and able to help their children thrive

Families experience trusted, consistent support that strengthens the home learning environment and wellbeing.

Primary measures

- Family Hub engagement (reach, repeat engagement, outreach into silent communities)
- Uptake of parenting, HLE and early communication offers
- Parent-reported confidence in supporting development (via surveys / panels)
- Reduced “Was Not Brought” rates for key appointments

Equity focus

- Families least likely to engage with services
- Non-English speaking households
- Young parents and families experiencing digital exclusion

Outcome 5: Children are ready for school, with smoother transitions and fewer late surprises

Children experience continuity and support through early education and into Reception.

Primary measures

- Early education uptake (2-year-old, 3–4 entitlements, including working families)
- Transition information shared before school entry
- Reduction in children starting school with unidentified needs
- Attendance and engagement in school readiness activity

Equity focus

- FSM
- Summer-born children
- Children not previously known to early years services

Outcome 6: Inequalities in early childhood outcomes are narrowing

Improvement is fastest for children and communities currently furthest behind.

Primary measures

- Gap between FSM and non-FSM GLD
- Locality variation in uptake of health checks and early education
- Differential outcomes for SEND, EAL and priority ethnic groups

Equity focus

- 30% most deprived areas
- Wards identified through “Going Where the Silence Is”
- SEND cohort of children

Alongside headline outcome indicators, Walsall will use a combination of dip-sampling, audits and lived-experience feedback to understand whether practice is improving, becoming more consistent, and delivering better experiences for children and families.

Dip samples & audits

Dip samples are not about compliance, they are about:

- Understanding consistency of practice
- Testing whether agreed pathways are being used
- Identifying what’s working and what needs tightening

Family & parent survey feedback

Family and parent feedback will be a core part of the Outcomes Framework, ensuring that improvement is measured through the experiences of those using services.

Walsall will use a combination of:

- light-touch, recurring survey questions to understand trends in confidence, access and experience
- feedback gathered through Family Hubs, partner services and community delivery
- targeted engagement with groups least likely to engage with formal services

Annual Shaping Our Tomorrow conversations

Walsall’s annual *Shaping Our Tomorrow* conversations will provide in-depth qualitative insight into the lived experience of families with babies and young children.

These conversations will:

- capture what early childhood feels like for families in Walsall
- identify what is working well and where families continue to experience barriers
- highlight differences in experience across communities and localities
- inform priorities for service improvement and system change

Attachment 1 Best Start in Life plan KPI's

Walsall Best Start in Life KPI Table (Baselines & Targets)

Domain	Indicator	Baseline (latest stated in documents)	2028 Target	Notes / Source
Early learning & development	GLD – overall	66.5%	74.7%	Current GLD and 2028 target stated in plan. [best start...fe plan v2 Word] , [best start...fe plan v2 Word]
	GLD – FSM	54.1%	62.9%	Current FSM GLD and 2028 target stated in plan. [best start...fe plan v2 Word] , [best start...fe plan v2 Word]
	Additional children to reach GLD (overall)	294 children	—	Stated in plan as the volume associated with target. [best start...fe plan v2 Word]
	Additional children to reach GLD (FSM)	84 children	—	Stated in plan. [best start...fe plan v2 Word]
Health service contacts	2–2½ year review – timely attendance	68% average	<i>Insert target</i> (e.g., ≥ national / ≥80%)	Plan provides current average and notes areas <55%. [best start...fe plan v2 Word]
	2–2½ year review – lowest localities	<55% (e.g., Darlaston South, Palfrey)	<i>Insert locality target</i>	Plan flags locality lows; use for inequality gap

				tracking. [best start...fe plan v2 Word]
Inequalities / reach	% of lowest-uptake wards in bottom 3 deprivation deciles	74%	<i>Reduce year-on-year</i>	In plan needs analysis. [best start...fe plan v2 Word]
Infant mortality	Infant mortality rate	5.4 per 1,000 births (2020–22)	Below national average by 2030	From Infant Mortality Strategy draft referenced in enterprise files. [IM Strategy V3 clean Word]
Access / inclusion	Children from minority/low income underrepresented in early years provision	<i>Insert baseline %</i>	<i>Increase to match population share</i>	Issue described but no numeric baseline in plan extract. [best start...fe plan v2 Word]
Early identification	ASQ completion and outcomes (18m; 2–2½)	<i>Insert baseline</i>	<i>Insert targets</i>	Listed as core measures in plan Outcomes section. [best start...fe plan v2 Word]
Immunisations	MMR / schedule uptake	<i>Insert baseline</i>	<i>Insert target (often ≥95% for herd protection)</i>	Plan includes immunisation uptake as a primary measure but no numeric baseline in the extract. [best start...fe plan v2 Word]
Healthy weight	Healthy weight at Reception	<i>Insert baseline</i>	<i>Insert target</i>	Plan lists as measure; baseline not stated in the extract. [best

				start...fe plan v2 Word]
Breastfeeding / infant feeding	Breastfeeding initiation/continuation	<i>Insert baseline</i>	<i>Insert target</i>	Plan lists breastfeeding metrics as primary measures. [best start...fe plan v2 Word]
Family Hub engagement	Family Hub engagement (reach, repeat, outreach)	<i>Insert baseline (reach & repeat)</i>	<i>Insert target</i>	Listed as primary measure in plan. [best start...fe plan v2 Word]
Was Not Brought	“Was Not Brought” rates for key appointments	<i>Insert baseline</i>	<i>Reduce year-on-year</i>	Plan makes WNB an explicit measure. [best start...fe plan v2 Word]
School readiness / transitions	Early education uptake (2YO; 3–4; working entitlements)	<i>Insert baseline</i>	<i>Insert targets</i>	Listed as primary measures; baseline not stated in the extract. [best start...fe plan v2 Word]
Equity	GLD gap: FSM vs non-FSM	<i>(66.5 – 54.1)=12.4pp</i>	<i>Reduce gap by 2028</i>	Gap derived from two stated baselines; if you’d prefer not to compute, we can leave as “baseline gap to calculate”. [best start...fe plan v2 Word]

Appendix 2 Pillars → Outcomes → Indicators

Pillar	What this Pillar Delivers	Shared Outcome	Key Indicators (examples)
1. Workforce Development	Confident, consistent 0–5 workforce	Children’s needs identified earlier and addressed well	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Age of SEND/SLCN identification • ASQ outcomes (18m, 2–2½y) • % workforce completing core training
2. Parent & Carer Learning Pathways	Clear, joined-up support for families	Parents confident to support development at home	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Family Hub reach & repeat engagement • Uptake of parenting/HLE offers • Parent confidence feedback
3. Consistent Practice & Guidance	Same expectations, wherever families go	Fewer children missed; less variation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • “Was Not Brought” rates • Timely mandated checks • Use of shared pathways
4. Collaborative Working & Warm Handovers	Joined-up support at key moments	Smooth transitions; no late surprises	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Joint check coverage • Transition information shared • School entry with needs already known
5. Targeting Resources & Sufficiency	Investment focused where it matters most	Inequalities reduce fastest for those furthest behind	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • GLD overall & FSM • Early education uptake • Sufficiency gaps by locality

Cross-cutting: Data, Engagement & System Change	Strong infrastructure & feedback loops	System improves over time, not just once	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Live outcomes dashboard• Quarterly review & action cycles• Changes driven by insight
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Appendix X: Glossary of Terms and Abbreviations

Term	Definition
Best Start in Life (BSiL)	Walsall’s whole-system approach to improving outcomes for children from pregnancy to age five, aligned to Family Hubs, SEND reform and the ambition to improve Good Level of Development (GLD).
Good Level of Development (GLD)	A national measure of children’s development at the end of Reception. A child achieves GLD if they meet the expected standard in the prime areas (Communication and Language; Physical Development; Personal, Social and Emotional Development) and the specific areas of Literacy and Mathematics. GLD includes all children, including those with SEND.
Early Learning Goals (ELGs)	National expectations describing what children should know, understand and be able to do by the end of the Reception year.
FSM (Free School Meals)	An indicator of economic disadvantage used in data and outcomes analysis. FSM is a key equity group within the Best Start in Life Plan.
0–5 Workforce	All professionals and volunteers working with children from pregnancy to age five and their families across health, early years, education, Family Hubs, Children’s Services and the VCSE.
Family Hubs	Welcoming, community-based places that bring together support for families from pregnancy through childhood and adolescence. Family Hubs are a core delivery vehicle for Best Start in Life in Walsall.
Spokes / Community Spokes	Commissioned community-based settings and organisations that extend the Family Hub offer into neighbourhoods, trusted spaces and voluntary sector provision.
Silent Communities / “Going where the silence is”	Children and families who are persistently under-represented in universal and preventative services. This may relate to language barriers, cultural mistrust, poverty, mobility, digital exclusion, fear of services or not meeting thresholds for targeted support. This term does not imply parental disengagement or poor parenting.
Proportionate Universalism	An approach where services are available to all families, with additional outreach, intensity or support provided in proportion to need, without creating parallel systems.

Term	Definition
Mandated Health Reviews / Checks	Statutory child health reviews delivered by Health Visiting services, including the new birth visit, 6–8 week review, 9–12 month review and the 2–2½ year review.
ASQ (Ages and Stages Questionnaire)	A validated developmental screening tool used at key stages (including 18 months and 2–2½ years) to support early identification of developmental delay and SEND.
18-Month Developmental Check	A proposed earlier developmental check delivered jointly across health and early years to identify emerging needs sooner, subject to feasibility, workforce capacity and system readiness.
Infant Mental Health	The emotional wellbeing and mental health of babies and very young children, shaped by early relationships, attachment, parental wellbeing and early experiences.
SEND (Special Educational Needs and Disabilities)	Children whose learning or development differs from what is expected for their age and who may need additional support.
SLCN (Speech, Language and Communication Needs)	Difficulties with speech, understanding language, expressing language or social communication. SLCN may be standalone or part of wider SEND.
Graduated Response	A step-by-step approach to identifying and supporting children’s additional needs within universal services before escalation to specialist provision.
Universal Inclusion	An approach that ensures early years settings and services are equipped to meet most children’s needs through high-quality universal practice.
Early Years Settings	All registered early education and childcare providers for children aged 0–5, including maintained nurseries, school-based nursery classes, childminders and PVI settings.
PVI (Private, Voluntary and Independent)	A collective term for non-maintained early years providers, including nurseries, pre-schools and playgroups.
Early Learning for 2-Year-Olds (EL2)	Targeted funded early education entitlement for eligible 2-year-olds, aimed at supporting early development and reducing inequalities.
Funded Early Education Entitlements	Government-funded childcare places for eligible 2-year-olds and all 3–4-year-olds, including entitlements for working families.

Term	Definition
Sufficiency	The statutory duty on local authorities to ensure there are enough childcare places to meet local need, considering location, affordability, flexibility and inclusion.
Supported Waiting Offer	Support provided to families while waiting for specialist services, ensuring children continue to receive help and do not deteriorate during waiting periods.
Was Not Brought (WNB)	A safeguarding-informed term replacing “Did Not Attend (DNA)”, recognising that children rely on adults to bring them to appointments and emphasising professional responsibility to follow up.
Warm Handover	A planned, relational transfer of information and responsibility between professionals or services, ensuring continuity and reducing the need for families to repeat their story.
Every Contact Counts	An approach recognising every interaction with a family as an opportunity to support development, wellbeing, engagement and early identification.
Multi-Agency	Working across more than one organisation or sector (e.g. health, early years, education, Family Hubs, VCSE) with shared goals and responsibility.
ICB (Integrated Care Board)	The NHS body responsible for planning and commissioning health services across the local system.
VCSE (Voluntary, Community and Social Enterprise)	Local voluntary and community organisations that play a vital role in engagement, delivery and trust-building with families.
Joint Commissioning	A coordinated approach to planning, funding and delivering services across organisations to improve outcomes and reduce duplication.

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.

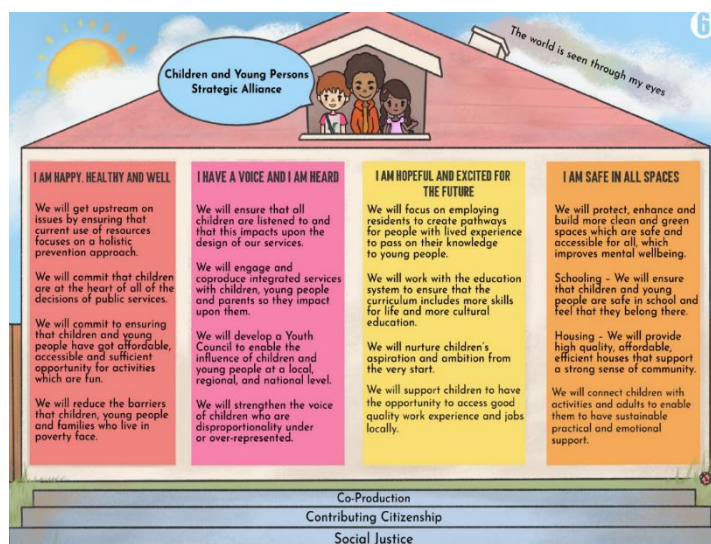
3.2 Walsall Adolescent steering group

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:

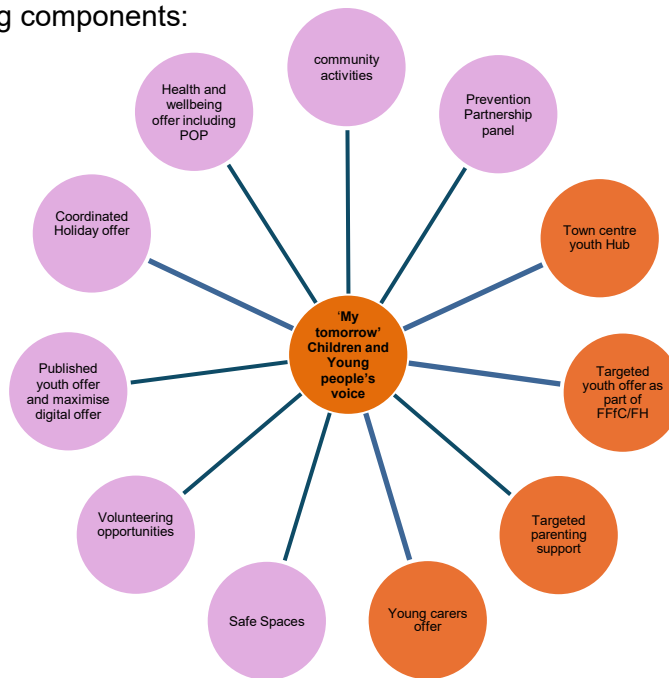
- Develop a wide range of activities which young people want to take part in
- Identify vulnerable young people at the earliest stage possible and provide support
- Encourage young people to volunteer and become involved in their communities
- Work with all sectors to develop services to meet the needs 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.

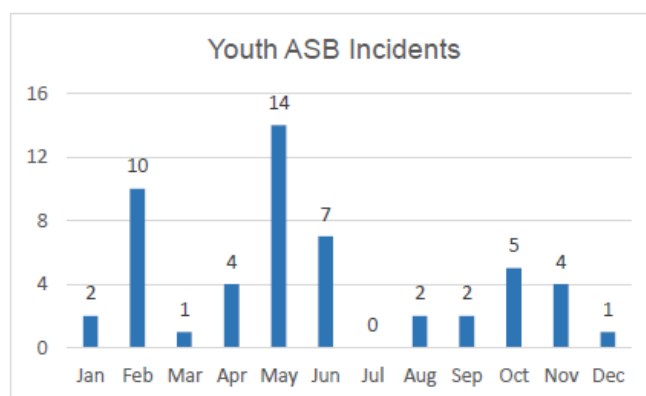
5. Development and delivery of the Town centre Youth Hub – 'Our Place'

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.

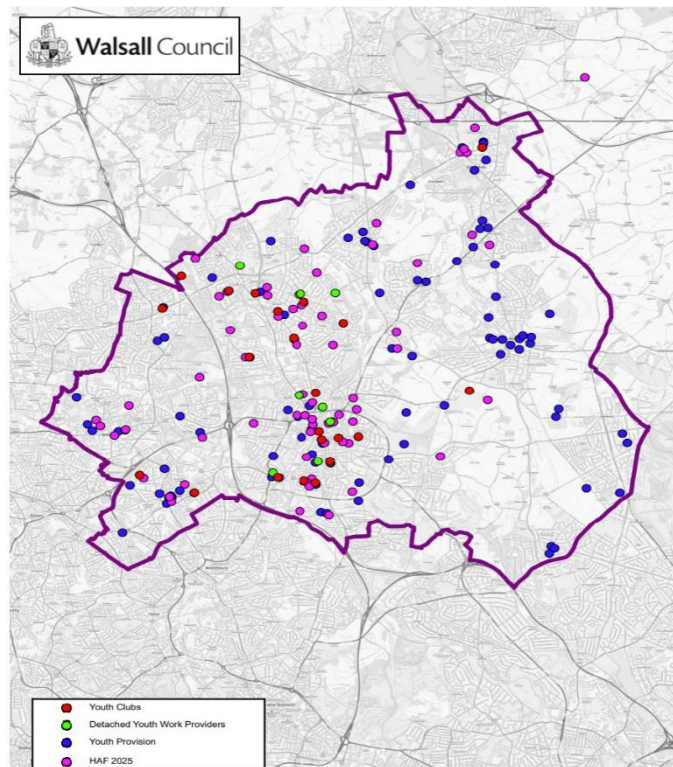
Alongside high levels of participation, data indicates a sustained reduction in youth antisocial behaviour (ASB) in the immediate town centre area since the hub opened. Feedback from partners, including businesses and security staff, highlights fewer incidents involving young people and improved relationships 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.

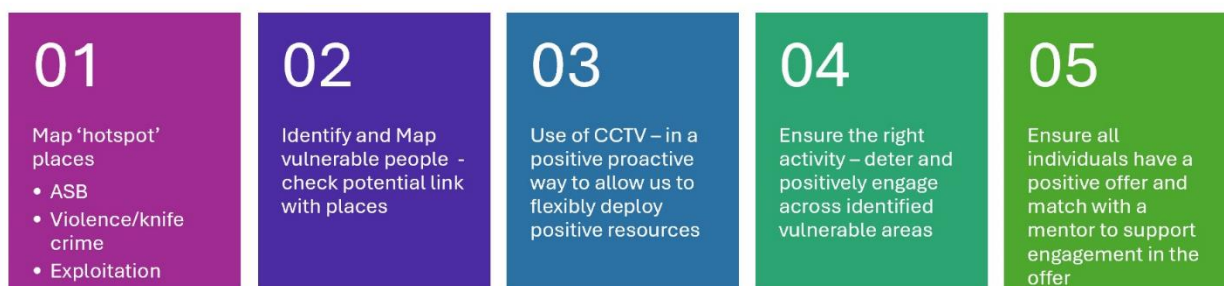
Holiday Coordinated offer

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



Adolescents%20Proje
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Appendix B - NYA report



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Walsall Youth Service

Peer Consultancy Visit Report



Walsall
Council



Walsall Peer Consultancy

Visit Report

Summary

The We Are Walsall 2040 (WAW2040) strategy was informed by an extensive programme of engagement, analysis and consultation with residents, youth & community groups and businesses across the borough and sets out a number of ambitious and transformative aims. Walsall Children & Young People's Alliance (WCYPA) is a themed partnership that delivers elements of that vision specifically for children, young people and families and which identifies themes of safety and access to trusted adults as priorities for children and young people.

In 2025, the Council announced a new youth hub in Walsall town centre, converting a retail unit into a youth-space offering free Wi-Fi, gaming, arts and crafts, a chill-out area and staffed by youth workers. The new hub is part of a larger regeneration package for Walsall town centre, with stated aims including tackling crime and providing "safe, welcoming spaces" for children and young people (Express & Star, 4/3/25).

The Walsall Youth Offer and Participation Team (WYOPT) consists of six full-time Youth Workers (including two JNC-qualified), a Senior Practitioner, two Youth Support Apprentices and a Parenting Practitioner, led by a JNC-qualified Team Manager. The team is based across Family Hubs in all four localities across the Walsall borough, the Town Centre Open Access Provision, and also delivers detached services. It also positions experienced youth & community development officers in co-ordinating roles within Family Help, Young Carers and Youth Justice functions.

Since 2024, targeted investment has strengthened the Walsall Youth Offer and Participation Team, increasing their capacity to engage with children and young people meaningfully, respond to their needs, and ensure they have a clear voice in shaping services and opportunities within the borough, but there are challenges as well as areas of good practice.

Peer Support Process

WYOPT accepted an invitation to be part of a collaborative process, facilitated by the National Youth Agency (NYA), with colleagues from Havering Youth Service and Lewisham Youth Service. Together these representatives are in a community of practice offering peer consultancy as part of the DCMS funded Peer Review project. This "light touch" collaborative offer, distinct from the more formal and intense full

Peer Review, is designed to facilitate co-exploration of key matters of interest each local authority brings to the group. It seeks to enable engaged professionals to find responses to key matters in their own locality through peer support and discussion.

The visit to Walsall by the NYA team is part of this process. The function of this element is to create this report, which in turn aims to support Walsall colleagues in their understanding of the areas of interest they have highlighted; the development of an adolescent outcomes' framework to measure progress, and on the inclusion of children and young people with Special Educational Needs and Disabilities, and to support their further work within the Peer Consultancy group and process.

Key messages

WYOPT are well positioned within the wider functions of the Local Authority.

WYOPT receives referrals from a range of internal as well as external stakeholders, most notably schools and the 'Building a Safer Tomorrow Today' Prevention Panel (Home Office funded pathfinder in Walsall funded to 31/03/27). These relationships are founded on an evidence-based approach to targeted intervention and support the early identification of need, particularly for children and young people at risk of exclusion, exploitation or offending. Reporting via Sentinel and the MOSAIC Management Information system allow Youth Workers to effectively record and share impact with key partners.

WYOPT are relatively agile and able to respond/adapt quickly.

The positioning of the Open Access offer in the Town Centre between 3.30 – 6 pm and on a short term let basis allows flexibility, to move according to the needs, particularly as the Town centre undergoes its planned regeneration. The long-term plan is that this open access offer will continue as the new, longer-term youth hub is opened towards the end of 2026 and fits neatly with a Contextual Safeguarding model. While currently limited in scope this presents a great opportunity for growth if WYOPT can continue to invest in the leadership roles of the Youth Work Apprentices, Youth Council members, and the children and young people who attend services.

At the time of the visit WYOPT were planning a full needs assessment, which we understand is now being developed and will enable the service to better respond, with this flexibility. Equally, it will fit with and feed into the developing draft youth offer.

WYOPT staff offer insight, experience and quality resources to support children and young people

The creative use of HAF has enabled the service to respond effectively to an increased demand from children and young people who may otherwise experience social isolation and declining mental health and wellbeing. This demand has been influenced by wider economic pressures, including delays within Education, Health and Care needs assessment processes.

Walsall is a forward-looking authority

Walsall has used recent Families First for Children Pathfinder funding to research and test innovative and creative methods to develop its Youth & Community Offer. The use of a range evidenced-based programmes was a strong model, offering clear options of what the team can provide. The team would recommend that to consolidate the approach, continue maintaining a good balance of trainee staff working alongside senior workers to share experiences and support, ensuring trainees develop the crucial relational practice that is unique to youth work. This will help to evidence that youth work practices are vital to delivering outcomes for young people.

Another example of forward-looking innovations can be seen in the team linking into wider initiatives such as Families First. The programme has aimed to integrate Children's Social Care and Family Help functions for more effective safeguarding.

Use of relevant Adolescent Outcomes Frameworks

WYOPT appears to be forward thinking in its approach to measuring outcomes, and as such is ahead of many other areas in this regard.

There is a need for further exploration of tools such as the [Framework of Outcomes](#) and approaches to linking outcome measures with council priorities, including demonstrating impact on hard outcomes (e.g., reductions in antisocial behaviour) and help safeguard the service from budget cuts.

The offer sits well with the aspirations of the current Government

The recently published 10-year strategy document Youth Matters emphasises efforts to reduce barriers to trusted adults in safe spaces as a way of improving support for transitions into adulthood. Early delivery outputs include investment in Workforce Development, Youth Hubs and Open Access Youth Spaces. These align well with Walsall's work and ambitions. The team saw evidence of strong partnerships (within what was possible to observe) and would encourage Walsall to continue developing this and engaging with a wide range of partners to ensure representation of volunteers and workforce going forward.

Developing the voice of children and young people with SEN/D

The visit team welcomed developing approaches to identifying and embedding SEN/D needs within youth voice structures, including plans to develop the Walsall Youth Collaborative. The team didn't get a full sense of where specific needs for young people with SEN/D were being identified, but this could be owing to the limited scope of the short visit.

Accessibility audits and adaptations to facilities (inc. associated Safe Spaces)

In particular, the plan around developing safer spaces for children and children and young people in Walsall is a valuable approach, though similar programmes struggle with the challenge of this, e.g. personnel turnover in venues. They also recommend ensuring that this is co-produced with children and young people so they can input where they believe is safe to go and what changes would make other places safer.

It is recognised that these strengths position WYOPT well to develop an Adolescent Outcomes Framework, enabling the service to measure progress effectively and ensure the inclusion of children and young people with Special Educational Needs and Disabilities.

Next Steps

This report offers observations gained through discussions with Walsall colleagues, their partners and some of the volunteers and children and young people who attended the Youth Hub during the site visit (27.11.25). It is limited in scope and does not represent all the observations found during the visit or through accompanying documentation. The aim of the visit and reporting process is to support Walsall colleagues with their engagement with the Peer Consultancy community of practice and in understanding their current position.

Walsall colleagues are invited to explore their areas of interest with others in the Peer Consultancy group to support the development of their plans.

National Youth Agency

9 Newarke Street, Leicester LE1 5SN

nya.org.uk

Company registration no. 2912597

Register charity in England and Wales no. 1035804

Youth Offer and Participation Team: Our Offer

This document provides a comprehensive overview of the services delivered by the Youth Offer and Participation Team for professionals working with young people supported by:

- **Family Help**
- **Building a Safer Tomorrow Today Prevention Panel**
- **Aspiring Futures**

Background

Local councils are legally required, as set out in Section 507B of the Education and Inspections Act (2006), to secure access to sufficient youth services for all qualifying young people, as far as is reasonably practicable. The term 'youth services' encompasses a variety of educational and recreational activities, as well as associated facilities, all designed to enhance young people's physical, emotional, and mental well-being. These services are particularly focused on those that are free or subsidised and are accessed voluntarily. The range of youth services available within a local authority area includes, but is not limited to:

- Sports and informal physical activities
- Cultural activities
- Outdoor, residential, weekend, or holiday-time activities
- Special interest clubs
- Volunteering activities

Anna Freud, in partnership with organisations such as the National Youth Agency, has explored the benefits of integrating a youth offer within the family hub provision. The findings indicate that this integration presents three significant opportunities:

- Creating more points of connection and engagement with parents, carers, and entire families
- Increasing opportunities for early intervention
- Enabling workforce development, ensuring consistent and effective support for both young people and their families

Requirements of Family Hub Framework 2025 – 2026

Minimum expectations for service available face-to-face at a Family Hub:

- Staff in the family hub are aware of and able to refer young people to universal youth services, such as youth clubs, sports and other specific activity clubs, homework clubs and uniformed youth groups (for example, Scouts/Guides).
- Where appropriate, staff in family hubs should connect families to available targeted youth services such as prevention sessions or support for young people not in education, employment or training (NEET) or specialist support for young people at risk of abuse or exploitation.
- Qualified youth workers are co-located in family hubs and able to provide immediate and specialist intervention, where this is best for the family, as well as signposting to positive activities/youth services in the community. Service available through the family hub but received elsewhere in the network
- Staff in the family hub are able to refer to appropriate youth services within the network. Virtual services available through the family hub, including static online information and/or interactive virtual services

- Online family hub presence offers universal materials and information about how to book on to services.

Access to Our Place youth centre

Our Place Youth Centre is currently located on the top floor of Walsall Saddlers Centre and operates from 15:00 to 18:30 on weekdays during school term times. Alternative opening hours are advertised to young people for school holidays. The centre is divided into zones offering activities such as gaming, pool, table tennis, crafts, a chill-out area, and Wi-Fi. There is a dedicated study area equipped with GCSE and A-level resources to support homework.

If a young person wishes to attend, supporting staff are welcome to accompany them. A staff member is always present at reception to greet attendees, and reasonable adjustments can be arranged in advance if required. While Our Place is a universal youth centre, its primary purpose is to create a safe environment, offer positive activities, and most importantly, help reduce youth anti-social behaviour (ASB), exploitation, and offending, particularly for young people who frequent the town centre.

For further information or to make a booking, please email youthofferparticipation@walsall.gov.uk

Level up Lounge (Digital youth bus)

The Level Up Lounge is a digital bus equipped with music and podcasting facilities. It serves as a mobile outreach resource or can attend events where young people are present. The current criteria for booking the Level Up Lounge include:

- Targeting areas within the community where young people are active, to help reduce the risk of ASB
- Attending community-based activities delivered by partner organisations

Only staff members who have completed the necessary driver training are permitted to operate the bus, and a trained driver must be present for all bookings. Each locality should have at least one named driver.

Please complete the link to booking form for access to youth bus:

<https://forms.office.com/e/BWGvaPu1NR>

Email enquiries: youthbusbooking@walsall.gov.uk

Our Voice - young person group

Our Voice provides young people with opportunities to participate in decision making, social action, and advocacy regarding the delivery of services and activities at Our Place Youth Centre. The group convenes on the second Tuesday of each month from 17:30 to 18:30 at Our Place Youth Centre. Upcoming dates:

- Tuesday 13th January 2026
- Tuesday 10th February 2026
- Tuesday 10th March 2026
- Tuesday 14th April 2026

For more information email youthofferparticipation@walsall.gov.uk

Supporting Aspiring Futures and Low-Level Exploitation

Youth workers conduct Return Home Conversations (RHC) for any child or young person who does not have a lead professional in place. They also provide targeted support for young people identified as experiencing low-level exploitation through exploitation triage (facilitated by Aspiring Futures), where no other support is available via Family Help or the Building a Safer Tomorrow Today Prevention Panel.

Targeted youth work

A dedicated team of six youth workers provides direct support to young people with the aim to:

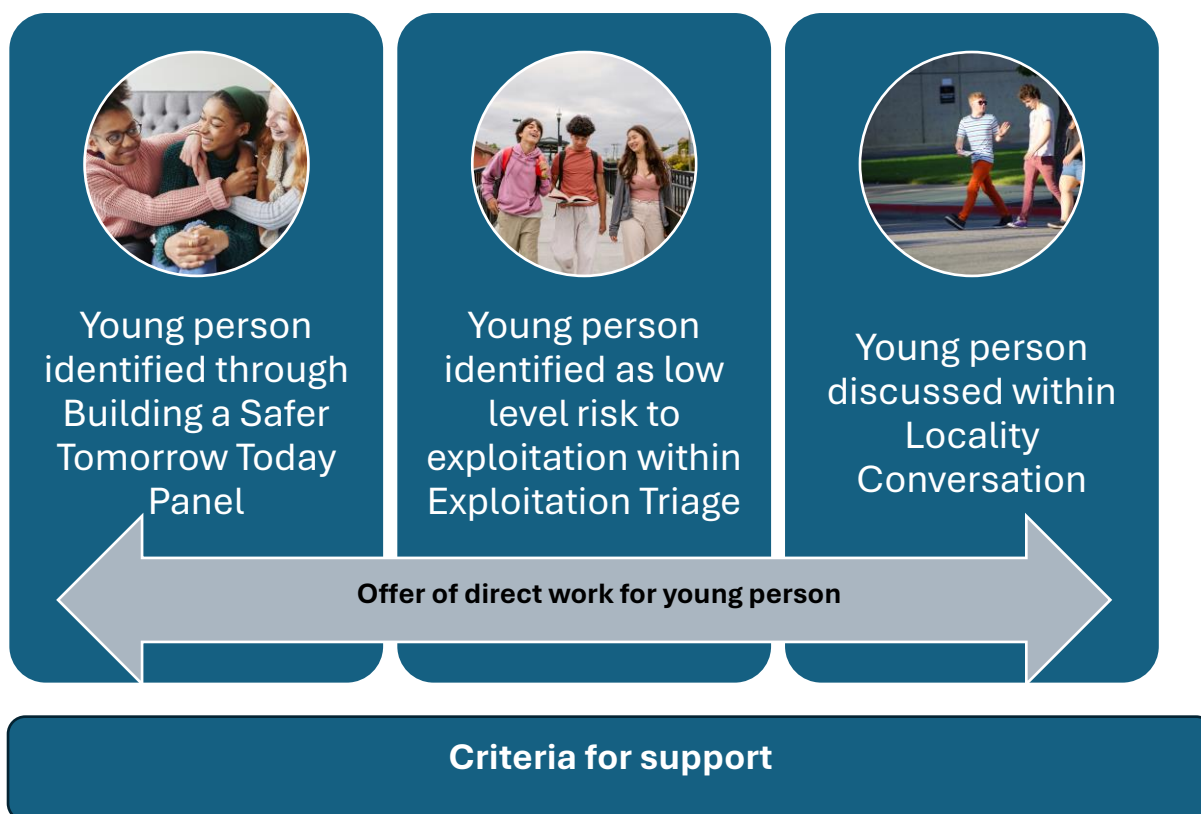
- Prevent risk and escalation of contextual safeguarding concerns
- Offer informal education and support for an agreed period


Targeted youth workers coordinate and deliver evidence-based group work and one-to-one programmes for children and young people. These may be run independently or in partnership with other professionals and agencies, such as school health teams.

If a child/young person is already in receipt of support via a multi-agency assessment and plan with a Lead Professional, we will review the existing plan and offer additional support where the plan has been in place for a period of **over 3 months**. If the plan is **under 3 months**, this will be reviewed on an individual basis dependent upon need through a locality conversation (facilitated by Family Help).

Youth work support can be accessed by:

- Requesting a youth worker to attend your locality conversation
- Complete a Building a Safer Tomorrow Today Panel application (criteria applies)
- Complete an exploitation screening tool



Building a Safer Tomorrow Today Prevention Panel (fortnightly triage and panel meetings)	Missing and Exploitation daily triage	Locality unit meetings and Locality Conversations
<p>Please see Building a Safer Tomorrow Today Prevention Panel criteria:</p>  <p>Prevention%20Panel %20Criteria.docx</p>	<p>Youth workers will complete direct work with young people assessed as low level within an exploitation screening tool.</p> <p>Youth workers will complete return home conversations with young people if:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • known to Our Place youth centre • already being supported by youth workers • there is no lead professional 	<p>Each locality has access to a youth worker offering information, advice and guidance and provide signposting to services within each locality.</p> <p>Youth workers will attend locality conversations for young people following 3 months or more of multi agency intervention and a minimum of 1 review</p> <p><i>*(If the plan is under 3 months, this will be reviewed on an individual basis dependent upon need through a locality conversation, facilitated by Family Help).</i></p>
<p>Complete Prevention Panel referral</p> <p>Building a Safer Tomorrow Today Panel - Referral Form – Fill out form</p>	<p>Complete Exploitation screening tool</p> <p>https://walsallsp.co.uk/children/professionals/professionals-working-with-children/exploitation/</p>	<p>Request Locality Conversation</p>
<p>The Youth offer and Participation Team will complete a Mosaic workflow shown as ‘Youth offer and participation targeted work request’ to show the direct work complete and outcomes.</p>		

Locality support

Youth Offer and Participation staff participate in Locality unit meetings within their designated areas to share updates, discuss the youth and participation offer across Walsall, highlight seasonal activities, and address local trends affecting young people. Youth workers are also available to attend locality conversations as required.

Youth Support Worker Apprentices

The youth offer and participation team apprentices can offer support to complete young person consultations and participation work, support with interview panels and take part in locality events.

Please email youth Voice and participation apprentices on the contact details below.

Staff member	Locality	Contact Information
Jerome Patterson	North Locality	jerome.patterson@walsall.gov.uk 07500809291
Jawanza Dennis	Central and South Locality	Jawanza.Dennis@walsall.gov.uk 07500553764
Paul Dennis	East Locality	Paul.Dennis@walsall.gov.uk 07834499382
Keiron Atkinson	West Locality	Keiron.atkinson@walsall.gov.uk 07867908351
Natasha Hudson	Targeted intervention and RHC North Locality Monday and Thursday	natasha.hudson@walsall.gov.uk 07706 715315
Holly Richards	Targeted intervention and RHC	Holly.Richards@walsall.gov.uk 07341121988
Emmanuel Boamah	Youth voice and participation	Emmanuel.Boamah@walsall.gov.uk Godsent.Lucky@walsall.gov.uk
Godsent lucky	Youth voice and participation	

Interventions available for children and young people via locality conversations and Building a safer tomorrow today panel:

Needs identified among children and young people aged 10 to 18 include emotional wellbeing, educational issues, and general behaviour concerns. In response, the youth offer and participation team has developed several programmes, including Togetherness (previously the Understanding My Brain Solihull programme for teenagers) and Understanding Emotion Solihull programme for teenagers.

- **Understanding Your Brain:** A nine-stage intervention delivered over approximately two or three sessions.
- **Understanding Your Feelings:** An eight-stage intervention delivered over approximately two or three sessions.
- **Understanding Exploitation:** One-to-one direct work for young people at risk of harm outside the home. This two-hour session provides information, advice, and guidance on exploitation, the factors involved, internet safety, safety planning, healthy relationships, and accessible services.
- **Evolve (ENHANCE - Brain HQ) Mentoring:** Young people receive 12 weeks of one-to-one mentoring and complete weekly Brain HQ exercises to enhance cognitive functions such as attention, memory, and processing speed. The programme includes daily training (15 minutes per day) and weekly check-ins with a mentor, focusing on training, learning, and coaching.
- **Progressive Masculinity:** Delivered through the Building a Safer Tomorrow Today Prevention Panel referral, this intervention supports boys and young men in exploring and redefining masculinity, challenging stereotypes, promoting emotional literacy, and fostering healthier gender norms through workshops and mentoring.
- **Anti-Social Awareness:** Offered as a one-to-one or group session (approximately 1 hour), this intervention covers anti-social behaviour, the definition of harassment, alarm, and distress, and helps young people understand the risks and impacts of Anti-Social Behaviour (ASB) while encouraging pro-social choices.
- **Young Women’s Group:** Preventative group work supporting young women in healthy relationships, sexual health, and confidence building. Sessions take place at Our Place Youth Centre on Wednesdays from 14:00 to 15:00 for six week periods.

- **Young Men's Group:** Preventative group work focusing on creative arts, music, sport, and positive male role models. Held at Our Place Youth Centre, Wednesdays from 14:00 to 15:00 for six week periods.

Interventions available for children and young people via Building a Safer Tomorrow Today Prevention Panel interventions from partners:

A variety of partner organisations provide additional targeted interventions for children and young people, including:

- **Community Activities Reducing Exploitation (CARE):** A 12-week mentoring programme for young people with undiagnosed SEN needs, offering access to sports-based positive activities.
- **Inpower Academy CIC:** One-to-one mentoring, access to martial arts clubs, and wellness and resilience programmes for young people.
- **Powered by CAN:** Group and one-to-one mentoring sessions for boys and young men aged 10–19 from ethnic minority groups, as well as girls of all ages. Aims to help young people develop commitment, challenge, confidence, and control.
- **Vision for All:** Offers mentoring, group sessions, community mentoring, mindset coaching, counselling, sports, emotional wellbeing and mental health support, women's and girls-only provisions, conflict resolution, and creative therapy sessions (such as Lego therapy). Supports young people at risk of both low-level (ASB) and high-level crime (county lines, exploitation, violence).
- **Midland Langar Seva Society (MLSS):** Provides summer holiday mentoring and positive activities, including boxing and music, for young people in the Bloxwich area.
- **Project Labb:** Offers targeted group music projects and culture/gender-specific mentoring, with personalised support tailored to individual needs.
- **Youth Connect:** Targets young people in Central and South Walsall, providing a 16-week mentoring programme and ongoing support, including access to youth club provision.
- **The Inspire Group:** Works with young people in East Walsall, offering weekly one-to-one mentoring and access to a Tuesday multi-sports session.
- **James Brindley Foundation:** Delivers weekly one-to-one support through The Full Circle Programme, including outreach mentoring to minimise risk of anti-social or criminal behaviour, specifically knife crime.
- **FNB (Forwards Not Backwards) Mentoring:** Focuses on promoting good mental health, life skills, developing protective factors, and providing positive role models around race and culture.

Interventions available for Parents:

To refer for a parenting intervention please complete the following link [Parenting Support Request Form \(Teenagers\) – Fill out form](#)

- **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 learning for parents:** Delivered in community libraries and connected services throughout Walsall. Supporting individual parents to access Togetherness training online within community venues. Parents have access to further online training.

Quick look up of children and young person’s interventions:

Provision	Group	1 to 1	From Building a Safer Tomorrow Today Panel	From Locality Conversation	From Exploitation Triage	Additional cost
Understanding your brain	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	
Understanding your feelings	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	
Understanding exploitation		✓			✓	
Evolve		✓	✓	✓		
Progressive masculinity	✓	✓	✓	✓		
Anti-social awareness	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	
Girls group	✓		✓	✓	✓	
Boys group	✓		✓	✓	✓	
CARE		✓	✓	✓		
InPower academy		✓	✓			✓
Powered by CAN		✓	✓			✓
Vision for all		✓	✓			✓
MLSS		✓	✓			✓
Project Labb		✓	✓			✓
Youth Connect		✓	✓			✓
The Inspire Group		✓	✓			✓
James Brindley		✓	✓			✓
FNB		✓	✓			✓
Our Place youth hub	✓		✓	✓	✓	
Level up Lounge	✓		✓	✓	✓	✓
Our voice	✓		✓	✓	✓	

***PLEASE NOTE** Some of the interventions listed are specifically accessed and funded through the Building a Safer Tomorrow Today Prevention Panel via Home Office funding to 31/03/26, as Walsall is a pathfinder panel area. We are awaiting confirmation of further funding for 26/27.*

Children, Families and Education Overview and Scrutiny Committee – Recommendation Tracker 2025/26

Committee Meeting Date	Agenda Item	Action/Recommendation	Officer responsible	Status	Target Completion Date	Notes
23.9.25	Inspection of Walsall LA Children's Services	An update on action plans be provided at a future meeting.	Colleen Male	In progress		Neglect scheduled for 9 March 2026. To be added to work programme for next municipal year.
4.11.25	Safeguarding Partnership Annual Report	That the template for referral be shared with the Committee.	Hannah Thomson	In progress		December 2025
4.11.25	Co-opted Member Arrangements	An 'other faiths' co-opted member be included on the Committee membership (with nominations for this position sought from SACRE).	Nikki Gough	In progress		SACRE nominated a representative, which will be considered for approval by Council on 13 April 2023.
2.12.25	Child Adolescent Mental Health Services (CAMHS) Update	An update on the map of support services be circulated to Members of the Committee.	M. Courts	Complete		E-mailed to members
2.12.25	Areas of Focus	A workshop on Elective home education be organised for Members of the Committee.	N. Gough	In progress		To be organised for the new municipal year.

Children, Families and Education Overview and Scrutiny Committee – Area of Focus – 2025/26

24 June 2025	23 September 2025	4 November 2025	2 December 2025	27 January 2026	9 March 2026	7 April 2026
Prioritisation of work programme.	<p>ILAC Ofsted report and action plan (including neglect).</p> <p>Youth Justice Strategic Plan.</p> <p>Independent Reviewing Officer Annual Report</p>	<p>Budget and Quarter 2 financial monitoring.</p> <p>Safeguarding Partnership Annual report</p> <p>Update on Child Sexual Abuse in the family environment</p>	<p>SEND White paper (invite health partners and Parent Carer Group).</p> <p>CAMHS.</p> <p>Home to School Transport</p>	<p>Attainment & Outcomes</p> <p>Pupil Place Planning and Sufficiency</p> <p>Families First for Children Pathfinder Update</p>	<p>Exploitation</p> <p>Ofsted update on Neglect.</p>	<p>Best Start Plan</p> <p>Adolescence Prevention Offer</p> <p><i>SEND AP local area inspection and reform (deferred to next municipal year)</i></p>

*Quarter 1 and Quarter 3 Financial reports will be circulated via e-mail to Members of the Committee and will not form part of the Committee's Agenda unless specially requested by the Committee.

Children, Families and Education Overview and Scrutiny Committee – Area of Focus – 2025/26

Recommendation Monitoring and Outstanding Items	Notes
<p>Still to be scheduled:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Spotlight on Children in Care	

*Quarter 1 and Quarter 3 Financial reports will be circulated via e-mail to Members of the Committee and will not form part of the Committee's Agenda unless specially requested by the Committee.



Walsall Council

FORWARD PLAN OF KEY DECISIONS

**Council House,
Lichfield Street,
Walsall, WS1 1TW**
www.walsall.gov.uk

2 March 2026

FORWARD PLAN

The forward plan sets out decisions that are termed as “key decisions” at least 28 calendar days before they are due to be taken by the Executive (Cabinet). Also included on the plan are other decisions to be taken by the Cabinet (“non-key decisions”). Preparation of the forward plan helps the Council to programme its work. The purpose of the forward plan is to give plenty of notice and an opportunity for consultation on the issues to be discussed. The plan is updated each month with the period of the plan being rolled forward by one month and republished. Copies of the plan can be obtained from Democratic Services, Walsall MBC, Council House, Walsall, WS1 1TW Edward.Cook@walsall.gov.uk and can also be accessed from the Council’s website at www.walsall.gov.uk. The Cabinet is allowed to make urgent decisions which do not appear in the forward plan, however, a notice will be included on the agenda for the relevant Cabinet meeting which explains the reasons why.

Please note that the decision dates are indicative and are subject to change. Please contact the above addressee if you wish to check the date for a particular item.

The Cabinet agenda and reports are available for inspection by the public 7 days prior to the meeting of the Cabinet on the Council’s website. Background papers are listed on each report submitted to the Cabinet and members of the public are entitled to see these documents unless they are confidential. The report also contains the name and telephone number of a contact officer. These details can also be found in the forward plan.

Meetings of the Cabinet are open to the public. Occasionally there are items included on the agenda which are confidential and for those items the public will be asked to leave the meeting. The forward plan will show where this is intended and the reason why the reports are confidential. Enquiries regarding these reasons should be directed to Democratic Services (Edward.Cook@walsall.gov.uk).

“Key decisions” are those decisions which have a significant effect within the community or which involve considerable expenditure or savings. With regard to key decisions the Council’s Constitution states:

- (1) A key decision is:
 - (i) any decision in relation to an executive function which results in the Council incurring expenditure which is, or the making of savings which are, significant, having regard to the Council’s budget for the service or function to which the decision relates or
 - (ii) any decision that is likely to have significant impact on two or more wards within the borough.
- (2) The threshold for “significant” expenditure/savings is £500,000.
- (3) A decision taker may only make a key decision in accordance with the requirements of the Executive Procedure Rules set out in Part 4 of this Constitution.

**FORWARD PLAN OF KEY DECISIONS
APRIL 2026 TO JULY 2026 (02.03.2026)**

1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Reference No./ Date first entered in Plan	Decision to be considered (to provide adequate details for those both in and outside the Council)	Decision maker	Background papers (if any) and Contact Officer	Main consultees	Contact Member (All Members can be written to at Civic Centre, Walsall)	Date item to be considered
4/26 (5.1.26)	Council Plan Performance 2025/26 – Quarter 3: To provide Cabinet with a performance update for Quarter 3 regarding the Council Plan.	Cabinet Non-key Decision	Judith Greenhalgh Judith.Greenhalgh@walsall.gov	Internal Services	Cllr Bird	18 March 2026
15/26 (2.2.26)	Resolution and Grievance Policies: To approve the Resolution and Grievance Policies.	Cabinet Key Decision	Michele Leith Michele.Leith@walsall.gov	Internal Services	Cllr Bird	18 March 2026
67/25 (6.10.25)	Walsall Business Growth Strategy: To approve the Walsall Business Growth Strategy.	Cabinet Key Decision	Simon Tranter Simon.Tranter@walsall.gov	Internal Services	Cllr Andrew	18 March 2026
68/25 (6.10.25)	Walsall Economic Framework: To approve the Walsall Economic Framework.	Cabinet Key Decision	Simon Tranter Simon.Tranter@walsall.gov	Internal Services	Cllr Andrew	18 March 2026
64/25 (6.10.25)	Walsall Housing Strategy: To approve the Walsall Housing Strategy 2025-2040.	Cabinet Key Decision	Simon Tranter Simon.Tranter@walsall.gov	Internal Services	Cllr Andrew	18 March 2026

<p>5/26 (5.1.26)</p>	<p>Gasholders - Black Country Enterprise Zone/Growth Zone: To approve the delivery approach, project funding and next steps to bring forward the Gasholders site for the development of employment uses. <i>This will be a private session report containing commercially sensitive information.</i></p>	<p>Cabinet Key Decision</p>	<p>Simon Tranter Simon.Tranter@walsall.gov.uk</p>	<p>Internal Services</p>	<p>Cllr Andrew</p>	<p>18 March 2026</p>
<p>6/26 (5.1.26)</p>	<p>Blakenall Pride in Place Programme: To approve that the Council act as Accountable Body for the Blakenall Pride in Place Programme, and delegate authority to appoint the Board.</p>	<p>Cabinet Key Decision</p>	<p>Dave Brown Dave.Brown@walsall.gov.uk</p>	<p>Internal Services</p>	<p>Cllr Andrew</p>	<p>18 March 2026</p>
<p>7/26 (5.1.26)</p>	<p>West Midlands Local Transport Plan Settlement and Transport Capital Programme 2026/27: To approve the West Midlands Local Transport Plan Settlement and Transport Capital Programme 2026/27.</p>	<p>Cabinet Key Decision</p>	<p>Kathryn Moreton Kathryn.Moreton@walsall.gov.uk</p>	<p>Internal Services</p>	<p>Cllr Andrew</p>	<p>18 March 2026</p>

1/26 (5.1.26)	<p>Procurement of a Contractor for Construction of a Residential Provision for Children:</p> <p>To procure a contractor and award a contract to construct a new residential provision for children.</p> <p><i>This will be a private session report, containing exempt information.</i></p>	Cabinet Key Decision	Simon Tranter Simon.Tranter@walsall.gov.uk	Internal Services	Cllr Andrew	18 March 2026
18/26 (17.2.26)	<p>Grant of renewal lease of 62 Wolverhampton Street, Walsall:</p> <p>To approve the grant of a lease renewal for 62 Wolverhampton Street, Walsall.</p> <p><i>This will include a private session report containing commercially sensitive information.</i></p>	Cabinet Key Decision	Simon Tranter Simon.Tranter@walsall.gov.uk	Internal Services	Cllr Andrew	18 March 2026
20/26 (17.2.26)	<p>Revised Natural Environment Supplementary Planning Document (SPD):</p> <p>To approve the undertaking of public consultation on a revised Natural Environment SPD and delegate authority to subsequently approve the adoption of the SPD, subject to consultation responses.</p>	Cabinet Key Decision	Simon Tranter Simon.Tranter@walsall.gov.uk	Internal Services	Cllr Andrew	18 March 2026

21/26 (17.2.26)	Purchase of Ravenscourt Shopping Centre, Brownhills: To approve the purchase of Ravenscourt Shopping Centre, Brownhills. <i>This will include a private session report containing commercially sensitive information.</i>	Cabinet Key Decision	Simon Tranter Simon.Tranter@walsall.gov.uk	Internal Services	Cllr Andrew	18 March 2026
74/25 (3.11.25)	High Needs Funding Formula 2026/27: To approve the High Needs Funding Formula 2026/27 including proposed top-up rates.	Cabinet Key Decision	Sharon Kelly Sharon.Kelly@walsall.gov.uk	Internal Services Schools Forum	Cllr M. Statham	18 March 2026
83/25 (1.12.25)	Walsall Agreed Syllabus for Religious Education: To approve the Walsall Agreed Syllabus for Religious Education 2026-2031.	Cabinet Non-key Decision	Sharon Kelly Sharon.Kelly@walsall.gov.uk	Internal Services Walsall Agreed Syllabus Conference	Cllr M. Statham	18 March 2206
19/26 (17.2.26)	Safer Walsall Partnership Community Safety Plan 2026-29: To approve the adoption of the Safer Walsall Partnership (SWP) Community Safety Plan 2026 - 29	Cabinet Key Decision	Paul Gordon Paul.Gordon@walsall.gov.uk	Internal Services Safer Walsall Partnership including West Midlands Police, Fire Service, Probation Services, ICB and others.	Cllr Hicken	18 March 2026

12/26 (13.1.26)	Putting Communities First: To launch a new way of engaging and working with communities, ensuring Council services put our communities' views at the heart of decision making, and to realign internal funding accordingly.	Cabinet Key Decision	Paul Gordon Paul.Gordon@walsall.gov.uk	Internal Services	Cllr Hicken	18 March 2026
79/25 (3.11.25)	Walsall Housing Renewal Assistance Policy 2026-30: To approve an updated policy governing delivery of capital housing improvement funds.	Cabinet Key Decision	Elise Hopkins Elise.Hopkins@walsall.gov.uk	Internal Services	Cllr Kaur	18 March 2026
8/26 (5.1.26)	Tackling Long Term Empty Dwellings: To delegate authority to identify and commit resources to be used to bring long-term empty dwellings into use through way of acquiring them, either by agreement or compulsory purchase.	Cabinet Key Decision	Elise Hopkins Elise.Hopkins@walsall.gov.uk	Internal Services	Cllr Kaur	18 March 2026
22/26 (2.3.26)	Employment Policy Revisions: To approve updates to the Family Friendly Policy, Leave and Time Off Policy and Annual Leave Purchase Scheme to reflect legislative changes required by the Employment Act.	Cabinet Key Decision	Michele Leith Michele.Leith@walsall.gov.uk	Internal Services	Cllr Bird	22 April 2026

3/26 (5.1.26)	<p>Delegation of powers regarding major transport schemes to the Black Country Joint Executive Committee:</p> <p>To delegate authority to the Black Country Joint Executive (BCJEC) for the approval and delivery of transport and highways infrastructure schemes identified as strategic Black Country infrastructure priorities and to agree amended Terms of Reference for the BJEC.</p>	Cabinet Key Decision	Kathryn Moreton Kathryn.Moreton@walsall.gov.uk	Internal Services Black Country Joint Executive Committee	Cllr Andrew	22 April 2026
23/26 (2.3.26)	<p>Willenhall Framework Plan: Phase 1 Moat Street and Villiers Street – use of the council's appropriation powers:</p> <p>To approve the appropriation of the Moat Street and Villiers Street site for planning purposes.</p>	Cabinet Key Decision	Simon Tranter Simon.Tranter@walsall.gov.uk	Internal Services	Cllr Andrew	22 April 2026
24/26 (2.3.26)	<p>Special Educational Needs Disability Information, Advice and Support Service (SENDIASS) Contract Award:</p> <p>To delegate authority to award a contract for delivery of the SENDIASS from September 2026.</p>	Cabinet Key Decision	Sharon Kelly Sharon.Kelly@walsall.gov.uk	Internal Services	Cllr M. Statham	22 April 2026
9/26 (5.1.26)	<p>Community and Intermediate Care Service (Pathway 1) Reablement:</p> <p>To delegate authority to award a contract for provision of Community</p>	Cabinet Key Decision	Kerrie Allward Kerrie.Allward@Walsall.gov.uk	Internal Services.	Cllr Pedley	22 April 2026

	and Intermediate Care Service (pathway 1) Reablement.					
25/26 (2.3.26)	Better Care Fund Section 75 Agreement: To approve the signing of a Section 75 Agreement with regards to the Better Care Fund, between the Local Authority and Integrated Care Board.	Cabinet Key Decision	Kerrie Allward Kerrie.Allward@Walsall.gov.uk	Internal Services Integrated Care Board	Cllr Pedley	22 April 2026
16/26 (2.2.26)	Residual Waste Disposal: To award a contract for the disposal of residual waste.	Cabinet Key Decision	Kathryn Moreton Kathryn.Moreton@walsall.gov.uk	Internal Services	Cllr Samra	22 April 2026
17/26 (2.2.26)	Council Plan Performance 2025/26 – Quarter 4: To provide Cabinet with a performance update for Quarter 4 regarding the Council Plan.	Cabinet Non-key Decision	Judith Greenhalgh Judith.Greenhalgh@walsall.gov.uk	Internal Services	Cllr Bird	June 2026
26/26 (2.3.26)	Walsall Housing Enforcement Policy: To approve an updated and consolidated enforcement policy (including financial penalties). This policy incorporates all the new enforcement elements of the Renters Rights Act 2025.	Cabinet Key Decision	Elise Hopkins Elise.Hopkins@walsall.gov.uk	Internal Services	Cllr Kaur	June 2026



West Midlands Combined Authority

WMCA Board Forward Plan

Forthcoming key decisions

Title of key decision:	Decision to be taken by and date:	Open or Exempt:	Executive Director:
Appointment of WMCA Boards/Committees etc 2026/27	WMCA Board 12 June 2026	Open	Chief Officer (Law, Governance & Audit) (Helen Edwards)
Bus Franchising Fleet Full Business Case	WMCA Board 12 June 2026	Open	Executive Director of Transport for West Midlands (Sandeep Shingadia)
WMCA Air Quality 'Stretch Targets' To consider options for 'stretch targets' for air quality in the WMCA area that go above and beyond national targets.	WMCA Board 16 October 2026	Open	Chief Executive (Ed Cox)

The Forward Plan

This document sets out known 'key decisions' that will be taken by the West Midlands Combined Authority (WMCA) over the coming months.

Forthcoming key decisions are published online to meet the statutory 28 day notification rule for each meeting where a key decision will be taken. Where it has not been possible to meet the 28 day rule for publication of notice of a key decision or an intention to meet in private, the relevant notices will be published as required by legislation as soon as possible.

What is a key decision?

A 'key decision' means a decision of the Mayor, WMCA or officer which is likely:

- (a) to result in the WMCA incurring expenditure, making savings or generating income amounting to £1m or more; or
- (b) to be significant in terms of its effects on communities living or working in an area comprising two or more wards in the area of the WMCA.

The report relating to a decision, together with any other documents being considered, will be available five clear working days before the decision is to be taken (unless the documentation contains exempt information).

The forward plan also provides notice of when the WMCA may decide to exclude the press and public during consideration of a particular matter due to the potential for disclosure of confidential or exempt information. The grounds upon which local authorities can exclude the press and public are specified by law and details of the exempt categories are available on request from the Governance & Scrutiny team (governance.scrutiny@wmca.org.uk).

Councillors or members of the public wishing to:

- make a representation about why a matter should be heard in public, or
- submit information to the decision-making body about an item in the forward plan, or
- request details of relevant documents, or
- seek advice about the WMCA's decision-making arrangements,

should contact the Governance & Scrutiny team: governance.scrutiny@wmca.org.uk