



Walsall Council

You are hereby summoned to attend a meeting of the Council of the Metropolitan Borough of Walsall to be held on **MONDAY the 29th day of September 2025 at 6.00 p.m.** at the Council House, Walsall.

Public access via: www.WalsallCouncilWebcasts.com

Dated this 19th day of September, 2025.

Yours sincerely,

Chief Executive.

The business to be transacted is as follows:

1. To elect a person to preside if the Mayor and Deputy Mayor are not present.
2. Apologies.
3. To approve as a correct record and sign the minutes of the meetings of the Council held on 30th July, 2025– (**Enclosed - Pages 8 to 28**)
4. Declarations of interest.
5. **Local Government (Access to Information) Act, 1985 (as amended):**
To agree that the public be excluded from the private session during consideration of the agenda items indicated for the reasons shown on the agenda.
6. Mayor's announcements.

7. To receive any petitions
8. To answer any questions in accordance with Council procedure rules:
 - (a) From the public:

C. Jeavons

Could the portfolio holder explain to me why there is such a lack of support, options, resources and information for parents with children who have additional needs.

I myself have dyslexia and was severely failed by the education system. My son who now shows very clear signs of autism and or adhd is having the same issues getting a diagnosis/ support and unfortunately my story isn't an uncommon one. I would like ask why this is the case and if there is anything they can do to improve or help this current situation.

- (b) From members of the Council:

Councillor Smith

With regard to the issue of "Mandatory Food waste", given that:

- a) Walsall Council's Cabinet made a unanimous decision on 16th April 2025 to adopt Option 1 which would consist of households being issued with two further waste bins.. a smaller one and a larger one, the latter for kerbside collection of food waste on a weekly basis....

and that

- b) Cllr. Pete Smith "called in" this Cabinet decision as there had been neither public consultation nor scrutiny of such prior to the decision

and that

- c) The Overview and Scrutiny Committee considered this issue and the "call in" on 13th May 2025 and unanimously recommended an alternative method for the disposal of food waste that should be considered alongside the options in the cabinet report.

and that subsequently

- d) Cabinet considered the Overview and Scrutiny Committee's recommendations at their meeting of 22 May 2025 and resolved to stick by its original decision of 16th April 2025, namely to approve the introduction of statutory weekly food waste collections from 31 March 2026 and also to

approve the standard food waste collection service to be one small kitchen caddy and one larger kerbside caddy per household, with the larger kerbside caddy being emptied weekly.

Will the appropriate Portfolio holder inform me, this Council and the public whether there is to be any further change to this Cabinet decision, especially given a recent refreshed Cabinet and a change of leadership of the Council and more importantly because Option 2 which would enable households to mix food waste with garden waste in their Brown Bin for weekly collection all the year round, would be much more viable and acceptable to the vast majority of households?

Councillor Ward

Despite the overgrowth along the Black Country Route being reported in April, and assurances that works would be undertaken in June/July, we are now in September, and the area remains severely overgrown. This continues to obscure road signs and is further blighted by fly-tipping.

Can the portfolio holder inform me when this key entrance to the borough will be properly addressed, as its current condition presents a poor image of Walsall and remains a disgrace?

Councillor Coulson

I like to think of myself as one of the last people who would need to have it explained to them the value of trees, to human life. However, during my year as a Councillor, I have now had several residents come to me experiencing major issues with massively overgrown trees in their gardens. The Turnberry Estate in Bloxwich started to be built roughly 40 years ago, and so a number of these trees have had that many years of further growth. I have been to visit a number of residents and seen the devastating effects that allowing these trees to continue to grow bigger and bigger, is having on their lives. And yet when entirely reasonable requests to have these trees cut back to manageable levels have been made, they have been rejected, and these trees have continued to grow, blocking out more and more light, and severely hampering my resident's enjoyments of their houses and their gardens.

How much more agony are these residents supposed to endure before a reasonable compromise can be reached between the understandable desire to protect trees, but my resident's need for reasonable levels of light?

Councillor Smith

At the Council Meeting of 6th November 2023 I asked a question about the under-utilisation of our Town Hall in Leicester Street and in particular why this beautiful building is standing unused most of the time and what plans there are for ensuring that our Town Hall has a future as the town centre's Number One community asset, owned by the Council and vibrant with activities and events as it has been for most of the past 120 years prior to Covid?

In response the appropriate Portfolio holder at the time, Cllr. Ferguson stated that “In order to expand the scale and number of events in the Town Hall, there would be a need for capital investment in the ancillary facilities such as the bar and toilet facilities. It is proposed to seek advice from external consultants to understand the scope of facilities required and the likely opportunities for larger events and revenue generation to assess the viability of the Town Hall as a venue.”

Given that this was 22 months ago, can the Portfolio holder now give me, the Council and the public an update on whatever progress has been made since I asked and received the response to my question?

Councillor Smith

There is a marked under-utilisation and inefficient use of the Council’s key town centre physical assets, namely the Civic Centre, Council House and Town Hall, mainly due to a combination of factors, including too many staff working from home for too long; the public being effectively shut out of the Civic Centre since the closure of the One Stop Shop and a lack of sufficient investment in our Town Hall to attract the kind of venues and activities that Walsall folk fondly remember in days gone by.

Given the above, can the Portfolio holder give me, the Council and the public an assurance that he will take back for further consideration, a re-opening of the One Stop Shop in the Civic Centre, and a full return of staff back to their town centre based offices and if he cannot give such assurances, will he take back for consideration the disposal and sale of the Civic Centre, with all proceeds used for re-investment in a serious upgrade of our Leicester Street Town Hall and an expansion of our Community Hubs to better and more effectively meet the needs of residents in our local neighbourhoods, now deprived of their previous town centre Council service Hub, namely the One Stop Shop?

Councillor Smith

Given that housing related issues are amongst the highest number of concerns that come to my attention as a local Councillor, (and no doubt many other Councillors) including issues related to homelessness, inadequate housing, requests for more suitable accommodation to meet particular needs, disrepairs, complaints against landlords etc.

Given also that there is a housing crisis in Walsall due to a severe mismatch between the Demand for and Supply of social housing at affordable rents, aggravated by the loss of thousands of properties from the rentable housing stock, due to mainly historic “Right to Buy” take ups and the massive lack of investment in new affordable rentable properties over several decades by successive Governments, as well as more recent demand factors, including some inward migration, can the Portfolio holder inform me, the Council and the public, of the numbers on the Council’s and whg’s housing waiting lists together with a realistic and frank assessment as to what this means for the majority of them, in terms of time before their needs can be met. Most

importantly what can, and will this Council realistically do to address this dire situation?

9. To note the result of the by-election for the Pelsall Ward held on 11th September 2025 as follows:

Names of candidates	No. of votes Polled	Candidate elected
Dan Barker	72	
Joe Belcher	127	
Lee Michael James Chapman	1176	
Graham Eardley	1231	Graham Eardley
Hannah Jones	125	

Turnout: 31.98%

10. Composition of Political Groups (Enclosed - Page 29 to 32)

11. Appointments to Committees

12. Independent Remuneration Panel (Enclosed - Page 33 to 39)

13. To confirm the following recommendation of **Audit Committee**:

Annual Audit Report 2024/25

- 1.1 That Audit Committee review and provide feedback on the proposed Annual Report.
- 1.2 That, subject to any changes arising from recommendation 3.1, the Annual Report of the Audit Committee 2024/25 be approved and that the Chair of the Audit Committee present the report to the next meeting of Council.

(Note: Report to Audit Committee held on 15 September, 2025 reproduced for this meeting (Enclosed - Page 40 to 54))

14. To receive a presentation from the following Portfolio Holder / Outside Body representatives:

- a) **Statutory Deputy Leader, Prosperous Places and Investment** - Councillor Andrew; (Enclosed - Page 55 to 64)
- b) **West Midlands Combined Authority – Audit, Risk and Assurance Committee** – Councillor Martin (Enclosed - Page 65 to 69)

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

15. To consider the following motion, notice of which has been duly given by **Councillors Bird and Statham**

High Needs Funding Pressures and the Dedicated Schools Grant

- This Council is committed to providing appropriate education support for children and young people with Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND). This support is mainly funded by the Dedicated Schools Grant (DSG).
- The high needs block (HNB) of the DSG pays for specialist provision, including special schools and services for those children with complex needs. Since the introduction of Education and Health Plans (EHCPs) in 2014, the number of children requiring support has risen sharply, putting significant financial pressure on local authorities, including Walsall. The growing demand has led to increasing deficits, threatening the financial stability of education services both locally and nationally.
- Nationally, the Local Government Association (LGA) estimates that the cumulative high needs deficit across local authorities now stands at £3.15 billion, around 33% higher than the national budget spend and with projections indicating this could rise to £5 billion by 2025/26.
- Demand continues to outpace funding. Many councils have been running deficits for several years due to the rising demand for EHCPs. In 2022/23, over 80% of councils had DSG deficits.
- Like many other Local Authorities Walsall is experiencing acute pressures. Since 2014, the borough's High Needs allocation has increased by £30 million. The number of children and young people with Education, Health and Care Plans (EHCPs) has surged from 1,200 to over 4,700. This growth in demand and complexity of need has significantly outstripped the annual increases in funding representing a real-term reduction in funding of 45%.
- This is not sustainable, and we are calling to the government to take action now.

Financial implications

- At the end of the 2024/25 financial year, Walsall Council was managing a DSG deficit of over £30 million, with projections indicating that this will rise to a cumulative balance of approximately £123.7m by close of 2028 unless systemic funding reform is introduced.
- The national statutory override currently allows local authorities to hold DSG deficits off their general fund balance sheets until March 2028. The override is not itself a solution to the problem and only delays the impact on councils.
- The financial implications of managing these deficits are profound. Councils are incurring borrowing costs to sustain services and cover shortfalls, diverting

resources from other essential services. In Walsall the interest costs incurred as a result of borrowing to date due to the DSG deficit is £1.8m with a further £12.4m projected by close of 2028.

- This is equivalent to increasing the council tax by 20% year on year. This would not only require an annual referendum but also greatly impact on our communities where many are already facing high deprivation.
- When the override ends based on current projections Walsall will need to find an ongoing mainstream budget of circa £30m a year to cover the shortfall in SEND funding alongside a one off cumulative deficit of circa £123.7m to find.
- The uncertainty surrounding the future of the statutory override exacerbates these pressures and undermines financial planning and stability. Many councils have warned that, without action by the Government, they will be forced to issue section 114 notices when the override ends.
- The 2025 Spending Review includes a commitment to reform the SEND system, at least in part through the new Transformation Fund. Details of these reforms will be set out in a Schools white paper in the autumn.
- The Government's upcoming reforms to the Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND) system must be bold enough to eliminate local authorities' deficits on the DSG going forwards before March 2028, while ensuring SEND children receive the support they need.

Therefore, this Council resolves to:

- Call on the government to provide a proportionate and sustainable increase in central funding to match the rising costs and demand for SEND services and High Needs Funding, so that Walsall Council can continue to meet its statutory responsibilities to vulnerable children and young people without undermining the sustainability of other essential local services.
- Request that the government permits councils to allocate interest costs from funding the DSG deficit to the DSG account and apply the statutory override retroactively to either 2014 or the first year a DSG deficit was incurred. This measure will prevent the national underfunding of SEND provision from affecting other council services funded by the local taxpayer.
- For a cross party letter to be sent to the Secretary of State for Education and the Secretary of State for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities, setting out this Council's concerns and requesting urgent action to address these funding pressures in the interests of Walsall's children, families, and communities including developing an approach to address historical cumulative DSG deficits, and to support local authorities handle them when the statutory override ends in 2028.
(or)
- Support the LGA's call for the write-off of DSG deficits, recognising that without such action, councils face unsustainable financial burdens.
- Engage with local MPs to raise awareness and seek parliamentary support for a long-term solution to DSG funding pressures.

This Council reaffirms its commitment to championing the rights and aspirations of children and young people with SEND, and to securing the funding and system reform required to enable every child in Walsall to achieve their full potential, now and for generations to come.



Walsall Council

AMENDED Minutes of the **ORDINARY MEETING** of the Council of the Walsall Metropolitan Borough held on **Wednesday 30 July, 2025, at 6.00 p.m.** at the Council House, Walsall.

Present

Councillor L. Harrison (Mayor) in the Chair

Councillors:

A. Andrew	K. Margetts
B. Bains	R. K Mehmi
H. Bashir	E. Morgan
M.A. Bird	J. Murray
C. Bott	L. Nahal
P. Bott	S. Nasreen
R. Burley	A.A. Nawaz
S. Cheema	A. Parkes
S.J. Cooper	K. Pedley
M. Coulson	W. Rasab
S. Elson	L.J. Rattigan
K. Ferguson	E. Russell
G. Flint	S. Samra
M. Follows	K. Sears
A. Garcha	G. Singh Sohal
P. Gill	P. Smith
A.J. Hicken	C.A. Statham
A. Hussain	M.A. Statham
I. Hussain	V.J. Waters
T. Jukes	J. Whitehouse
R. Larden	T. Wilson

24. **Apologies**

Apologies were received on behalf of Councillors Ditta, K. Hussain, Perry, Murphy, Martin, Towe, Ward, Lee, Gandham, Harris, Ali, S. Hussain, Kaur, Gultasib, Latham, Hassan and Chapman.

25. **Minutes**

Resolved

That the minutes of the meetings held on 19 May, 2025 and Extra Ordinary meeting held on 10 June, 2025, a copy having been sent to each member of the Council, be approved as a correct record subject to the following amendment:-

- Correct the name of the Mayor's chosen charity to 'The Local Hub (Bloxwich West),'

26. **Declarations of interest**

There were no declarations of interest.

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

Resolved

There were no items in private session.

28. **Mayor's announcements**

Death of John O'Hare

The Mayor referred to the death of former member, Mr John O'Hare, who served as a Member of Walsall Metropolitan Borough Council from October 1988 to March 2011. Mr O'Hare served as Leader of the Council from 2007 to 2009 and Mayor from 2009 to 2010. Councillors Bird, Smith, Margetts, Murray, Jukes, Nawaz, Andrew and Wilson paid tribute to former Councillor John O'Hare, following which it was moved by the Mayor, duly seconded and:

Resolved:

That this Council have heard with deep regret of the death of former Councillor John O'Hare, a member of Walsall Metropolitan Borough Council from October 1988 to March 2011 and places on record their appreciation of his services to the borough and expresses its condolences to his family at this sad time.

29. **Petitions**

Received from:

Councillor I. Hussain – Local petition for the lollypop lady at the Butts Crossing.

Councillor Wilson – Retain the flying of model aircrafts at Aldridge Airport.

30. **Questions**

(a) From the public: None.

(b) From members of the Council:

Councillor Smith

Having received several complaints over a period of time about some shops & traders (especially in our town centres) who expand the display of their goods for sale on to footpaths and pedestrianised walk ways outside their shops, can I ask the appropriate Portfolio holder to respond to the three sub sections of my question (a,b,c) with regard to this growing practice:

- a) Is the Council aware of this issue and practice by some shop keepers/traders?
- b) Does the Council have a “policy” with regard to this practice? If not, should it have?
- c) If the Council has a policy on this, how does it or will it, go about encouraging compliance and if necessary, enforcement of its policy?

Councillor Hicken gave the following response:

The council is aware of the issues described.

As I am sure you are aware a great many businesses have over the years laid their products outside the front of their shop to attract passers-by.

It is understandable that following economic difficulties in the post covid world that businesses are trying different methods to encourage shoppers to spend money with them. A vibrant economy is something we all wish to see for Walsall but clearly this should not be at the cost of public safety.

The issue described is generally one of the public highway being obstructed and pursuant to section 137 of the Highways Act 1980:

If a person, without lawful authority or excuse in any way wilfully obstructs the free passage along the highway, he is guilty of an offence and liable to a fine not exceeding £1000.

There is a code of practice with regard to ‘Shop Displays and A Boards on the Highway’ and as part of the process of prioritisation the code of practice will be reviewed to ensure it is still appropriate and is useful as part of the management of our towns and shopping centres and most importantly aids in the enforcement process..

Since approximately October 2024 the community protection team have identified eleven regular and repeat offenders in Walsall Town Centre and initiated action to reduce or negate the impact of their activities. All premises were dealt with using the standard enforcement approach enshrined in the services enforcement policy. That is to say visits were made where verbal advice was given, this was followed by written warnings and finally escalated to legal enforcement notices issued by the council under the Highways Act 1980.

Many of the businesses complied with the notices - that is not to say they do not exhibit their products at all, but they have largely complied with allowing free passage along the highway. All businesses but particularly those who push the limits of acceptability are routinely monitored to ensure the matter doesn't deteriorate again.

We are aware that there are other sites in the borough where these issues occur and the process used in the Town Centre can be rolled out to those sites too.

As part of a review of enforcement functions across the council the level of priority and resource given to issues such as this compared to for example unauthorised encampments, fly tipping, litter or anti-social behaviour is being considered so that Walsall is a safe, vibrant and clean place for residents to live.

Councillor Smith asked the following supplementary:

If someone who is visually impaired, falls over the stuff that is stocked outside the shops and has an accident, who is responsible / legally viable, the Council or the shop keeper?

Councillor Hicken gave the following response:

If you have had report of this, or any members of the public have experiences this, I urge you to get in touch. I will take legal advice and get back to you in writing.

Councillor Cheema

Can the portfolio holder provide an update on the rollout of electric vehicle charging points across the borough, including: how many charging points have been installed to date; any available statistics on their usage; and the income generated from these charging points over the past 12 months?

Councillor Andrew gave the following response:

We know there is a big opportunity to provide electric vehicle charge points on our streets and in our car parks and parking bays. The council

has an Electric Vehicle Charge Point Strategy in place, setting out ambitious targets for 2030.

So far, 14 electric vehicle charge point sockets have been installed at 7 locations as part of the on-street residential charge point scheme.

Usage data is currently available for 6 of these sockets, which have been operational since September 2024. The early signs are encouraging. These chargers are averaging around 4 charging sessions per week, and usage is steadily increasing.

At present, we don't yet have usage data for the 8 most recently installed sockets, as they only went live on 4 July. However, experience shows that as the number of charge points grows, overall usage increases significantly. We're also seeing a steady flow of requests through the Black Country Charge Point Suggestion Tool from Walsall residents. This clearly indicates strong and growing demand for on-street electric vehicle charging for households without off-street parking and we want to make sure we can continue to meet this need.

Of course, there are practical challenges. Some residents have raised concerns about charge point locations and the use of street space. These are real issues, and we are working carefully to address them through engagement and careful site selection.

The West Midlands Combined Authority is playing a key role in supporting regional EV infrastructure through funding and strategy. While there have been some challenges, the responsibility for creating a comprehensive charging network is shared between local councils, regional bodies, and the private sector.

National planning regulations have also changed so that most new homes and major developments must now include EV charging points as standard. Over time, this will make a big difference by reducing pressure on on-street charging. We're already seeing this within the borough. For example, at the new affordable housing development in Bloxwich, which includes EV charging as part of the scheme.

The private sector is also investing heavily in EV charging across the country, with supermarkets, petrol retailers, and specialist companies installing rapid chargers to meet growing demand. We want Walsall to benefit from these developments alongside our own plans.

What's clear is that delivering a reliable and accessible EV charging network will require partnership between the public sector, private operators, developers, and local communities. Together, we can make sure Walsall is ready for the EV transition.

By 2026, we aim to deliver 250 standard on street EV charging sockets, 10 rapid EV charging sockets, 20 EV charging sockets across Council

owned car parks, 10 charge points across broad Council facilities and 10 charging sockets at pay and display bays.

Councillor Cheema asked the following supplementary:

Is there an appetite for this Council to look at different ways to bring in EV charging, such as using lampposts?

Councillor Andrew gave the following response:

Yes.

Councillor Coulson

The former Bloxwich Hospital site continues to hold significant importance for the local community. Although it no longer operates as a hospital, it is evident that a new purpose for the premises must be identified. Correspondence and conversations with residents have made it clear that there are strong opinions regarding its future use.

I would like to express my appreciation to Councillor Flint for his assistance with my inquiries on this matter. Nonetheless, considerable concerns persist about what lies ahead for the site, which brings me to my question this evening:

Could you please confirm who currently owns the site and advise what information Walsall Council holds concerning any future plans for the Bloxwich Hospital site?

Councillor Andrew gave the following response:

Thank you for your question, which gives the opportunity to highlight it isn't just this Council that needs to communicate with the public.

The building of the former Bloxwich Hospital site is still owned by the NHS Trust.

The sale of the site is part of an agreement that allowed the Trust to secure funding for the new Older Peoples' Inpatient Unit at Dorothy Pattison Hospital. A formal decision was only taken by the Trust Board (in private) earlier this month (June 2025) to dispose of the site.

There are no existing planning permissions for the site and no live planning applications under assessment by the Local Planning Authority for an alternative use. The Trust, after interventions with officers, myself and Councillor Flint, are committed to ensuring that any future use of the site aligns with the needs of our community and are working closely with us now to support the disposal and deliver a scheme that will need local need. Any forthcoming proposal will be subject to a planning application and associated formal statutory consultation process.

In the interim, the Trust are carrying out works on site currently to secure the building and grounds and prevent any unauthorised activity whilst it is unoccupied.

A really important point here is that other public organisations that own public property in this borough, need to ensure that they are secure and are not causing a problem to the communities we represent and other parts of the public sector, resulting in enforcement action.

I have contacted the Chief Executive of the Health Trust about their responsibilities as a public sector organisation, to the people we represent.

Councillor Cheema

Businesses in Walsall are increasingly concerned about the lack of economic growth and support, with recent figures showing the town is performing below average on nearly every economic indicator. In Willenhall, ongoing roadworks are further impacting local trade. Can the portfolio holder set out what targeted support is being offered to help affected businesses—particularly in Willenhall—and what wider measures the council is taking to stimulate and sustain local economic recovery across Walsall?

Councillor Andrew gave the following response:

Thank you for your question, it gives me an opportunity to tell you what we are doing to help businesses across the borough.

We to engage directly with businesses affected by road closures to understand their needs and provide tailored support. This includes practical guidance, access to funding opportunities, and promotional assistance to help mitigate disruption.

Beyond this, the Council has delivered a wide-ranging and impactful programme of business support and engagement, including:

Direct Business Engagement

- Held over 750 businesses engagements across the borough over the past three years, offering tailored advice and support resulting in outcomes such as increased investment, turnover, and employment growth.
- Provided dedicated one-to-one assistance through business-facing officers, with a focus on growth, workforce expansion, and navigating challenges.
- Delivered over 14 days of direct outreach engagement in industrial areas of Aldridge, Walsall, Willenhall and Darlaston.

Business Grants and Financial Support

- Distributed over £1.36 million in grants during 2023/24 and 2024/25 to support business resilience, innovation, and recovery.
- Built on the earlier £720,000 AIM for GOLD programme (2022/23), bringing total direct business grant funding to over £2 million in three years.
- Secured and is deploying an additional £500,000 from the WMCA to support local growth, job creation, and business process adaptation in the current financial year.
- Supported businesses in accessing external funding, including regional and national schemes focused on sustainability, innovation, and digital transformation.

Events and Recognition

- Hosted the Walsall Business Awards at Calderfields Golf Club, celebrating enterprise and recognising contributions to the borough's economic growth.
- Delivered a WMCA Business Road Show at Bescot Stadium, connecting local businesses with regional funders, advisors, and support services.
- Partnered with Business Insider to host the Midlands Property Lunch: Revitalising the High Street at Walsall College (July 2025), bringing together regional leaders to explore town centre transformation.
- Delivered themed business workshops, including a recent session on AI and digitisation, with future events planned on sustainability, funding, and innovation.

Business Support Programmes

- Delivered a suite of tailored programmes, including:
 - Start-Up Walsall – supported over 80 new entrepreneurs with mentoring, workshops, and access to finance.
 - High Growth Business Support – helping established businesses scale through strategic planning and investment readiness advice.
 - Walsall Works – providing recruitment support, apprenticeships, and workforce development services.
- Promoted and facilitated access to regionally delivered programmes via WMCA and Business Growth West Midlands, such as:

- Business Energy Advice Service (BEAS)
- Export Support Programme
- AI Maturity Assessment
- Skills for Growth
- Peer-to-Peer Groups

Strategic Partnerships and Investment

- The Walsall Economic Forum continues to play a central role in strengthening collaboration between the Council and the business community.
- Worked with the WMCA, Walsall Economic Forum, and local partners to align business support with regional strategies and contribute to the emerging Walsall Growth Plan and West Midlands growth plan.
- Initiated work on the Black Country Innovation Strategy, aimed at improving access to public funding for businesses engaged in research, development and innovation.

Councillor Cheema asked the following supplementary:

Thank you for your very thorough reply. However, speaking to the businesses on the ground, as I do on a weekly basis, this is not being felt by them. One business I have spoken with have lost £250,000 due to roadworks from the cycle lane.

Will you meet with me and affected business to discuss further how this Council can support them?

Councillor Andrew gave the following response:

I am happy to meet with you, but will you get the Government Minister there too, to defend their actions and what they have done to businesses over the last 12 months?

Councillor Coulson

Fly tipping continues to blight areas of Bloxwich, and other parts of Walsall, but getting the evidence to prosecute the awful people who carry out these offences is not easy. CCTV seems to be the most effective weapon in the battle against these people, but there is a particular part of my ward where I can't understand how it is not met the threshold for getting a CCTV camera to target fly tippers, for at least a few weeks.

Can I be given the statistics for how many CCTV cameras are in each ward in Walsall, specifically targeting fly tipping?

Councillor Hicken gave the following response:

Fly tipping is an absolute scourge on our communities and a significant cost to the council and indeed any landowner who has had material fly tipped on their land, because of costs incurred cleaning it up. It is something that harms our area and that residents do not want to see and is an absolute menace. So, any effort to try and tackle fly tipping has my full support.

CCTV whether council, private or from a partner agency is certainly a key component in the councils bid to tackle fly tipping and other waste crimes. It is also important that everyone in Walsall remains vigilant and where they have information or evidence of someone who has fly tipped or a fly tipping 'hot spot' to come forward to council staff to make them aware.

We are constantly reviewing our use of CCTV and enforcement policies, and I would urge every member to report fly tipping.

I am not going to go into details with numbers, as some of the cameras are covert and I do not want to give the game away. However, I am willing to have the conversation with you, or any Councillor, if there is a hot spot. We need to make sure that the best cameras are in the right locations and have the best capabilities. This is something we are working on going forward.

If you know of any hot spots that do need additional surveillance, please let us know.

Councillor Coulson asked the following supplementary:

As you cannot give us an idea on the ward breakdown of cameras, can you share the total number of cameras in Walsall, targeted towards fly tipping.

Councillor Hicken gave the following response:

There are around 200 CCTV cameras. Some get deployed every so often, whilst some get redeployed regularly. They are redeployed based on what we believe is the priority in specific areas at the time.

Councillor Smith

I am sure that all Members of the Council recognise that volunteer litter pickers such as the "Bloxwich Busters" and many other groups and individuals across the Borough are doing a sterling job in helping to keep our streets clear of litter and fly tipped rubbish. However, I have gauged from speaking to some of them that the feeling is that litter dropping and fly tripping is actually getting worse and not better.

Given the above, can the Portfolio holder inform me, this Council, the volunteer litter pickers and the general public, whether

- a) he is satisfied with Walsall Council's record of enforcement action regarding fly tipping and litter dropping, and
- b) if he will commit to further increasing preventative and enforcement efforts and action so that Councillors, the litter pickers, the fly tippers and the general public can see much more evidence that the Council "means business" when it comes to enforcement action against the anti-social litter louts and fly tippers who are a scourge on our local environment and neighbourhoods.

Councillor Hicken gave the following response:

Thank you, Councillor Smith, for your question. I really value the work of our litter pickers and have for many years. I have been out on numerous occasions, as many have, with their community litter pickers. They do sterling work and care about their communities, which is an absolute delight to me.

I am unable to give full details at the moment, but I can assure you that enforcement will increase across a range of areas. Between June 2022 and May 2025, we have issued 2,131 fixed penalty notices (FPN's). We did a trial, which doubled the rate of FPN's being issued. We are taking that forward as part of a review and are aiming to fine more of the people who ruin our neighbourhoods.

So, in answer to your specific questions the litter pickers, street cleansing staff and enforcement staff have worked incredibly hard to ensure we have a clean and green borough. The number of enforcement actions is increasing, and I am absolutely committed to ensuring this trend continues at pace.

I am not satisfied that despite our best endeavours residents, businesses and visitors to the town still feel they are able to litter and fly tip at will and so we will take more enforcement action to drive the message home that being irresponsible with your waste is totally unacceptable in this borough and will be met with punishment. As the leader previously said, "we are putting the force back in enforcement." Education is a part of this, and we will continue to enforce preventative measures. However, some people cannot be educated and need to feel it where it hurts, which is usually their pocket.

I am happy to meet with any litter pickers, having already met with some, and if you have any further issues to bring to my attention, I am happy to meet with you as well.

Councillor Smith

Given that The Express & Star reported on July 9th 2025 that on July 2nd, 2025, and I quote:

“West Midlands Police teamed with Walsall Council's Trading Standards team to seize around £365,000 of tobacco products from retail premises around the borough.

Walsall Neighbourhood teams supported the Trading Standards-led operation on Wednesday, July 2, where four retail premises, a vehicle and a storage unit were all raided.

The operation uncovered approximately 100 kilograms of illegal hand-rolling tobacco, 287,000 illicit cigarette, and 350 illegal disposable vapes worth £365,000.

Some of the counterfeit cigarettes were even found to be concealed inside boxes labelled as barbecues. Sergeant David Woods, from the West Midlands Police St Matthew's Team 2, said: "It is great to support our partners at Walsall Council Trading Standards, and this operation was a huge success as a large amount of illegal goods were taken off our streets". unquote,

I would like the Portfolio to inform me, this Council and the general public what happened next that seems not to have been reported? And in particular:

- a) Are these businesses on these premises still trading?
- b) Have criminal proceedings been taken against the owners of these businesses? and
- c) Why has the Council so far not named the premises raided in order that the public can make more informative choices about whether or not to patronise these businesses in future?

Councillor Hicken gave the following response:

Walsall Council Trading Standards team are incredibly active in the disruption of the illicit tobacco trade and the removal of illegal or dangerous vapes from the marketplace.

The team work with HMRC, Immigration, professional sniffer dog services and Walsall Police to ensure each organised raid is as successful as possible as well as carrying out surveillance and disruption as they conduct their own day to day visits. Much of the work is extremely discreetly organised so as not to 'tip off' the criminals involved in the sale of these products.

All visits are organised based on the intelligence received from partner agencies, residents and other businesses. Intelligence from national agencies which identifies new techniques used to hide illegal products as they are smuggled into the country and across the region is shared via a network of professional operating groups within the Trading Standards profession of which Walsall is a key member.

To answer the questions posed:

1. Many of the businesses will continue to trade after a visit by the service as there are very few legal remedies to close premises down. Those remedies that do exist allow closure for a maximum period of three months following a court hearing. The service regularly reviews whether this is an appropriate course of action as well as considering reviews for those premises that may have a premises licence issued under the Licensing Act 2003. The service has had some success in convincing the landlords of these premises to terminate their lease and remove the trader from their premises.

2. The service operates on two levels:-

A. Disruption - whereby the intention is solely to remove as much illegal stock as possible to dent the profits of organised crime groups and traders and gather intelligence. It is unlikely a trader caught selling illicit tobacco would be fined in the region of £300,000 but losing that amount of stock would be significant to them.

B. Prosecution - where products are seized and evidence that meets the criminal threshold for action is gathered then the service will always seek to prosecute. To bring a criminal case to court can take over 12 months depending on the cooperation of the defendant and the availability of the Courts themselves, therefore any cases from the last few weeks will still be in the process of evidence preparation.

The most recent prosecutions include a resident of Marigold Crescent, Dudley, was sentenced following a jury trial at Wolverhampton Crown Court to 44 weeks in prison. There were also prosecutions in Walsall town centre, Darlaston and Pelsall.

Several other cases are currently being prepared for court and results will be published once a verdict is reached.

In terms of naming and shaming businesses or individuals the service must ensure the legal process is followed correctly and there is no complaint of adverse publicity prejudicing the outcome of a case the details are treated discreetly until a court verdict is reached in open court.

It is understandable that people would wish to know if premises are acting unlawfully and we hope by publicising the results of seizures it will make people think twice about purchasing illegal products and to ensure their

children are not purchasing illegal products underage restrictions from any shop they visit.

When I became aware of the seizure you referred to, of goods worth £365,000, I ensured this was publicised by the communications team. I believe it is important we do publicise incidents like this, as it gives residents the confidence that we are doing the right thing by them. We should be proud that this work is taking place to keep the borough safer, as Councillors, but equally so should residents, that we are doing the right thing.

In terms of the court cases, one of the issues we are having is the time it is taking for these incidents to appear in court, you may be looking at several years. We need to see quicker action in that area.

Councillor Smith asked the following supplementary:

Is it possible that innocent customers may be using these very premises to buy these sorts of products, or other products, at this very moment?

Councillor Hicken gave the following response:

We are limited by legal powers, but I will send you the full brief. There are incidences where we do speak with landlords, and it is unlikely that landlords would want their tenants selling illegal goods.

31. **Senior Management Restructure**

A report was submitted [annexed].

Resolved

That the changes to the senior structure, as set out in the report, be noted.

32. **Pay and Grading**

A report was submitted [annexed].

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

Resolved:

3.1 That overlapping grades between Spinal Column Point (SCP) 002 Grade 1 and SCP 058 Grade 14 within the National Joint Council for Local Government Terms and Conditions (NJC) pay spine are removed.

3.2 That a Head of Service Grade is created between SCP 059 to SCP 063 replacing the previously locally agreed SCP values with new ones and to a consistent 5-point scale. The bottom value and the top value are the same as the existing SCP 059 and SCP 062.

3.3 That a new grade for Deputy Director is created with new locally agreed points of SCP 064 to SCP 068 on the NJC pay spine. The role of Deputy Director is a new role created as part of the Senior Management Review.

3.4 Noting that the creation of the Deputy Director grade has changed the upper limit of the NJC scale therefore it is necessary to create a new salary range for Directors on the Joint National Council for Chief Officers pay spine.

3.5 That the new pay scales are introduced from 1st October 2025 and when the senior management review is completed that G15 and G16 are removed from the NJC pay spine and that the existing directors pay range is removed from the JNC pay spine.

3.6 That the allowances paid to the Section 151 Officer and the Monitoring Officer are removed from these posts. Given the removal of allowances paid to statutory officers it is recommended that the Director of Finance and Procurement is placed at the top of the new Director scale. The Monitoring Officer post is not currently filled by a permanent postholder, so no one is affected.

3.7 That the Director of HR, OD and ABS (in consultation with the Head of Paid Service) is delegated authority to make changes to the current Pay Policy Statement and other related policies in line with changes being made to the pay and grading structure to deliver an efficient and smooth transition to the new arrangements.

Upon the conclusion of the item and with the consent of Council, the meeting was adjourned at 7.43 p.m.

The meeting re-convened at 7.51 p.m.

33. Scrutiny Annual Report

The Scrutiny Annual Report was presented to Council.

Councillor Murray highlighted the work of Democratic Services for their support during the year. Councillor Murray informed Members of a Scrutiny training session on 16 July, 2024, and welcomed all Members to attend.

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

Resolved

That the Scrutiny Annual Report be noted.

34. **Corporate Parenting Board Annual Report**

The Scrutiny Annual Report was presented to Council.

Councillor Rattigan congratulated the Officers, Children's Services partner teams, Senior Leaders, including political and corporate leaders, Members on Children's Services, the Corporate Parenting Board, Education and Overview scrutiny's, children in care and care leavers, involved in the successful Ofsted result of 'Overall Outstanding' for Children's Services. Councillor Rattigan referred to the achievements of the Corporate Parenting Board, providing a summary of the report, and requested that all Members, as Corporate Parents, attend Total Respect Training

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

Resolved

That the Corporate Parenting Board Annual Report be noted.

35. **Outside Body Appointments**

A report was submitted [annexed].

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

Resolved that:-

Councillor I. Hussain be appointed the substitute member on the West Midlands Combined Authority – Overview and Scrutiny Committee.

Councillor W. Rasab be appointed the substitute member on the West Midlands Police and Crime Panel.

Councillor G. Flint be appointed the member to the Black Country NHS Foundation Trust.

Councillor A. Andrew be appointed the member to Sherbourne Recycling Ltd.

Councillor T. Jukes be appointed as the member to the Walsall Society for the Blind.

Council noted the:

Disestablishment of the following Boards by the West Midlands Combined Authority: -

- Economic Growth Board
- Environment & Energy Board

- Housing & Land Delivery Board
- Wellbeing Board
- West Midlands Combined Authority Investment Zone Joint Committee

36. **Appointment to Committees**

A report was submitted [annexed].

The Mayor advised that the nomination to the Health and Wellbeing Board was no longer required as the original nomination stood.

It was **moved** by the Mayor, seconded by Councillor Bird and:

Resolved that:-

Councillor Jukes be appointed Vice-Chair of Corporate Parent Board.

Councillor Ward be appointed to the Planning Committee.

Councillor Rattigan be appointed to Social Care and Health Overview and Scrutiny Committee.

37. **Recommendations from the Standing Advisory Committee on Religious Education (SACRE)**

A report was submitted [annexed].

It was **moved** by the Mayor, seconded by Councillor Bird and:

Resolved:

2.1 That Mr J. Hart be appointed to SACRE to fill the vacancy for the Jewish faith.

2.2 That Mrs R. Rai be appointed to SACRE as a replacement for Mr J. Singh Bachra on behalf of the Sikh faith.

2.3 That Council delegate authority to the Director – Access & Inclusion, to make appointments to SACRE for Groups A, B and C.

38. To confirm the following recommendations of **Cabinet**:

a. **Treasury management Annual Report**

The report to Cabinet held on 16 July, 2025 was submitted.

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

Resolved

That in line with the requirements of the Treasury Management Code of Practice (2021)), the Annual Treasury Management Report 2024/25 including prudential and local indicators (Appendix A) be noted.

39. Portfolio Holder and Outside Body briefings

a. Leader of the Council

Councillor Bird gave a presentation.

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

b. West Midlands Combined Authority Overview and Scrutiny Committee - Councillor Waters

Councillor Waters gave a presentation.

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

40. Notice of Motion – Victory in Japan Day (VJ Day)

The following notice of motion was **moved** by Councillor M. Statham and seconded by Councillor Hicken that:-

This Council notes that 15 August 2025 marks the 80th Anniversary of Victory over Japan Day (VJ Day) signifying the end of the Second World War and the final chapter of one of the most challenging periods in modern history.

This Council recognises the immense sacrifice, endurance, and courage of the Armed Forces personnel, including those who served in the Far East campaign, and acknowledges the suffering and resilience of prisoners of war and civilians affected by the conflict.

This Council therefore resolves to:

1. Mark the 80th Anniversary of VJ Day with appropriate commemorative events within the community, in collaboration with local veterans' association, community organisation, and schools.
2. Encourage reflection, remembrance, and education about the contributions of all those who served, ensuring that the legacy of VJ Day continues to be recognised by future generations.

3. Express its gratitude and deep respect to all those who contributed to the conclusion of the Second World War and reaffirm our commitment to peace and international cooperation.

The following Amendment was moved by Councillor Nawaz (additional wording in bold), and seconded by Councillor Smith that:-

This Council notes that 15 August 2025 marks the 80th Anniversary of Victory over Japan Day (VJ Day) signifying the end of the Second World War and the final chapter of one of the most challenging periods in modern history.

This Council recognises the immense sacrifice, endurance, and courage of the Armed Forces personnel, ~~including~~ **particularly** those who served in the Far East campaign, **including those from the commonwealth countries that made up the British Empire at the time**, and acknowledges the suffering and resilience of prisoners of war and civilians affected by the conflict.

This Council therefore resolves to:

1. Mark the 80th Anniversary of VJ Day with appropriate commemorative events within **our diverse** ~~the~~ communities, in collaboration with local veterans' association, community organisation, and schools.
2. Encourage reflection, remembrance, and education about the contributions of all those who served, ensuring that the legacy of VJ Day continues to be recognised by future generations.
3. Express its gratitude and deep respect to all those who contributed to the conclusion of the Second World War and reaffirm our commitment to peace and international cooperation.

On being put to the vote, **the amendment** was declared **lost** (14 in favour and 16 against)

The following Amendment was moved by Councillor Andrew (additional wording in bold), and seconded by Councillor Bird that:-

This Council notes that 15 August 2025 marks the 80th Anniversary of Victory over Japan Day (VJ Day) signifying the end of the Second World War and the final chapter of one of the most challenging periods in modern history.

This Council recognises the immense sacrifice, endurance, and courage of the Armed Forces personnel, **particularly** those who served in the Far East campaign, **including those from the commonwealth countries that made up the British Empire at the time**, and acknowledges the suffering and resilience of prisoners of war and civilians affected by the conflict.

This Council therefore resolves to:

1. Mark the 80th Anniversary of VJ Day with appropriate commemorative events within the community, in collaboration with local veterans' association, community organisation, and schools.
2. Encourage reflection, remembrance, and education about the contributions of all those who served, ensuring that the legacy of VJ Day continues to be recognised by future generations.
3. Express its gratitude and deep respect to all those who contributed to the conclusion of the Second World War and reaffirm our commitment to peace and international cooperation.

On being put to the vote, **the amendment** was declared **carried**.

There being no further amendments, the Mayor put the **substantive motion** to the vote which was declared **carried**.

Resolved that:-

This Council notes that 15 August 2025 marks the 80th Anniversary of Victory over Japan Day (VJ Day) signifying the end of the Second World War and the final chapter of one of the most challenging periods in modern history.

This Council recognises the immense sacrifice, endurance, and courage of the Armed Forces personnel, particularly those who served in the Far East campaign, including those from the commonwealth countries that made up the British Empire at the time, and acknowledges the suffering and resilience of prisoners of war and civilians affected by the conflict.

This Council therefore resolves to:

1. Mark the 80th Anniversary of VJ Day with appropriate commemorative events within the community, in collaboration with local veterans' association, community organisation, and schools.
2. Encourage reflection, remembrance, and education about the contributions of all those who served, ensuring that the legacy of VJ Day continues to be recognised by future generations.
3. Express its gratitude and deep respect to all those who contributed to the conclusion of the Second World War and reaffirm our commitment to peace and international cooperation.

41. **Notice of Motion – Planning Committee**

The following notice of motion was **moved** by Councillor Smith and seconded by Councillor Nawaz that:-

This Council supports and upholds the general principle that “Officers recommend and Elected Members decide” with regard to reports before Council and Committees both generally and particularly with regard to Planning applications that come before the Planning Committee and this Council furthermore rejects any suggestion, insinuation or innuendo that members of the Planning Committee are anything less than “beyond reproach” when they vote on planning applications before them.

The following Amendment was moved by Councillor Bird (additional wording in bold), and seconded by Councillor Andrew that:-

This Council supports and upholds the general principle that “Officer recommend and Elected Members decide” with regard to Reports before Council and Committees both generally and particularly with regard to Planning applications that come before the Planning Committee and this Council **commends the Planning Committee members for supporting the democratic process of decision making and their duty to challenge officers recommendations in support of the residents and communities who elect them as their representatives. We also welcome the Peer Review which we look forward to debating its content in the near future, ~~furthermore rejects any suggestion, insinuation or innuendo that members of the Planning committee are anything less than “beyond reproach” when they vote on Planning applications before them.~~**

On being put to the vote, **the amendment** was declared **carried**.

There being no further amendments, the Mayor put the **substantive motion** to the vote which was declared **carried**.

Resolved:-

This Council supports and upholds the general principle that “Officer recommend and Elected Members decide” with regard to Reports before Council and Committees both generally and particularly with regard to Planning applications that come before the Planning Committee and this Council commends the Planning Committee members for supporting the democratic process of decision making and their duty to challenge officers recommendations in support of the residents and communities who elect them as their representatives. We also welcome the Peer Review which we look forward to debating its content in the near future.

The meeting terminated at 9.36 p.m.

Mayor:

Date:

Council – 29th September, 2025

Composition of political groups

1. Summary of report

Further to the by election held on 11th September, 2025, the composition of the Council has changed. This report clarifies the composition of political groups making up the Council and explains the political balance on Council Committees consistent with the provisions of the Local Government (Committees and Political Groups) Regulations 1990 (as amended).

2. Recommendations

That the Council notes the receipt of returns from the political groups.

3. Political Groups

3.1 Returns have been received in accordance with the provisions of the Local Government (Committees and Political Groups) Regulations, 1990 (as amended) as follows:

(a) Conservative Group (35)

Group Leader:	Councillor M. Bird
Deputy Leader (Statutory):	Councillor A. Andrew
Deputy Leader (Non-statutory):	Councillor M. Statham

Councillor G. Ali
Councillor B. Bains
Councillor S. Cooper
Councillor K. Ferguson
Councillor G. Flint
Councillor M. Follows
Councillor N. Gandham
Councillor A. Garcha
Councillor P. Gill
Councillor A. Harris
Councillor L. Harrison
Councillor A. Hicken
Councillor A. Hussain
Councillor I. Hussain
Councillor P. Kaur
Councillor R. Larden
Councillor E. Lee
Councillor R. Martin
Councillor K. Murphy

Councillor J. Murray
Councillor A. Parkes
Councillor K. Pedley
Councillor W. Rasab
Councillor L. Rattigan
Councillor S. Samra
Councillor K. Sears
Councillor G. S. Sohal
Councillor C. Statham
Councillor C. Towe
Councillor V. Waters
Councillor J. Whitehouse
Councillor T. Wilson

(b) Labour Group (13)

Group Leader: Councillor M. Ward
Deputy Leader: Councillor K. Margetts

Councillor T. Jukes
Councillor C. Bott
Councillor P. Bott
Councillor R. Burley
Councillor S. Cheema
Councillor M. Coulson
Councillor N. Latham
Councillor R. Mehmi
Councillor E. Morgan
Councillor L. Nahal
Councillor E. Russell

(c) Independent Group (8)

Group Leader: Councillor A. Nawaz
Deputy Leader: Councillor K. Hussain

Councillor N. Gultasib
Councillor F. Hassan
Councillor S. Nasreen
Councillor H. Bashir
Councillor S. Ditta
Councillor P. Smith

Other Members (4)

The following members are not in a political group as described by the Local Government (Committee and Political Groups) Regulations 1990 (as amended).

Councillor J. Chapman
Councillor G. Eardley (**Reform**)
Councillor S. Elson
Councillor S. Hussain

Ratio for allocation of Committee seats

4. The allocation of Council Committee places must be made in accordance with the provisions of the Local Government and Housing Act, 1989. Achieving political balance is a complex process which requires a compromise to be made between sets of calculations. This can result in marginal differences which may be significant to Committee representation of individual political groups. The required “balance” has to be achieved by the Council allocating seats on individual Committees to properly constituted political groups based on the size of each group in relation to the size of the Council and so far as is reasonably practicable at the same time the total number of seats allocated to each group across all Committees must be in the same proportion.
5. These calculations are rarely exact, but in seeking to ensure that all political groups are dealt with fairly, this report implements the requirements of the relevant legislation.
6. The Council is open to legal challenge if it was thought not to have used its best endeavours to achieve “so far as reasonably practicable” a position where the allocation of seats reflects the political make-up of the Council. The final decision necessary to achieve political balance lies with the Council and officers have worked to bring forward to Council clear recommendations to achieve the intentions of the legislation.
7. On the basis of the political groups the allocation of seats on Committees must be calculated in the ratio of 36:13:8:1:1:1:1 reflecting the size of the groups on the Council.
8. The declared political groups have been asked for nominations to the allocated places in accordance with their numerical strength as recorded in their returns to the Chief Executive.

Background papers

Local Government (Committees and Political Groups) Regulations 1990 (as amended)
Papers returned by Group Leaders to the Chief Executive.

Signed:

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Anne Barrett".

Chief Executive

Date: 18 September, 2025

Council – 29 September 2025

Members Allowances 2025

1. Aim

To consider the findings and recommendations of the Independent Remuneration Panel.

2. Summary

A review of Members Allowances Scheme has been undertaken by an Independent Remuneration Panel. The findings of the review, along with recommendations, are provided in detail, to enable Council to make a determination on changes to the existing Scheme.

3. Recommendations

- 3.1 That, Council note and thank, the work of the Independent Remuneration Panel in producing their report.
- 3.2 That, Council consider each recommendation as set out in 4.7 and resolve to accept or reject any of the proposals.
- 3.3 That, subject to 3.2 above, the Interim Director of Governance be authorised to amend the Council's Constitution in respect of Part 6, Members Allowances and publish the new scheme in accordance with Local Authorities (Member Allowances) (England) Regulations 2003.

4. Report Detail - Know

- 4.1 The current Member Allowances Scheme was originally adopted by Council on 25th February 2021.
- 4.2 Following, a subsequent review in 2024, a revised Member Allowance Scheme was adopted by Council on 15 April 2025.
- 4.2 In November 2023, February and March 2025, Council agreed to formally appoint independent members to the Independent Remuneration Panel (IRP) to consider the entire Member Allowances Scheme.
- 4.2 The Independent Remuneration Panel consists of three members who are entirely independent of the Council. They are Richard Hood, Ruth Harrison and Gary Timmins. The IRP were provided with full information concerning the Elected Members Allowance Scheme and met all of the current group prior to finalising their report.

- 4.3 Representations were also invited from all Members of the Council, either by e-mail to the Chair. All political leaders were invited to attend the panel and made representations in relation to the scheme. The Panel concluded their analysis with substantial comparator information and drafted their findings report as set out at **Appendix 1** herewith.
- 4.4 The Panel's terms of reference allow for unfettered discretion to make recommendations upon the scheme of allowances for Elected Members. The Council has discretion as to whether or not to accept the recommendations made in whole or in part.
- 4.5 In undertaking their review the Independent Remuneration Panel were given full details of the Council's current political arrangements, provided with elected member job descriptions and provided with tabulated analysis of members allowance schemes for authorities in the Black Country, West Midlands, and those of our relevant CIPFA family of authorities.
- 4.7 The summary recommendations of the Panel are as follows:
- 1. That there be no change to the structure of the existing allowances as set out in appendix 1;*
 - 2. The annual updating of member allowances should remain linked to the NJC employees' award except where council staff agree a lower percentage rise, freeze or reduction. In years where the pay award is a fixed value (rather than a percentage) the annual updating of Members Allowances will be the actual percentage of increase received at scale point 44.*

5. Legal implications

- 5.1 The power to have a Members Allowance Scheme is conferred by the Local Authorities (Members Allowances) (England) Regulations 2003 made under the Local Government and Housing Act 1989 and the Local Government Act 2000.
- 5.2 Under Part 4 of the above regulations the Council has to have regard to the recommendations made in relation to its Members Allowance Scheme by an Independent Remuneration Panel.
- 5.3 The Independent Remuneration Panel must produce a report making recommendations as to the responsibilities and duties in respect of the items contained between Section 21 (1) (a) to (g) of the said regulations.
- 5.4 There is a requirement for the local authority to publicise the recommendations made by the Independent Remuneration Panel as soon as reasonably practicable after receiving a report from the Panel setting out the panel's recommendations.

6. Consultation

- 6.1 In accordance with statute, the Council is required to consult with and receive recommendations from the Independent Remuneration Panel, who have substantial information concerning Councillors allowances, on which they base their recommendations.
- 6.2 All the political group leaders of the Council were invited to provide comments to the Independent Remuneration Panel for them to be considered as part of their deliberations in reviewing the current scheme of allowances. Individual Elected Members were also invited to make representations to the Independent Remuneration Panel.

7. Internal Financial Implications

- 7.1 The cost of the various proposals put forward by the Independent Remuneration Panel are set out in **Appendix 1**.

8. Property implications

- 8.1 There are no property implications to consider.

9. Health and wellbeing implications

- 9.1 There are no known health and wellbeing implications.

10. Reducing Inequalities

- 10.1 The Members Allowance scheme provides encouragement for wider and more inclusive political representation.

11. Staffing implications

- 11.1 There are no staffing implications to consider.

12. Climate Impact

- 12.1 There are no climate impact implications to consider.

13. Decide

- 13.1 That, the Council decide whether to accept, amend or reject the recommendations of the Independent Remuneration Panel as set out in Appendix 1.

14. Respond

- 14.1 For Council to consider, approve, and implement the recommendations of the Independent Remuneration Panel.

15. Review

- 15.1 The Council is obliged to adopt a new Members Allowance Scheme every year. However, where an index is applied to the scheme, the Council can rely upon that index for up to 4 years without the need to review the scheme.

If the Council fails to adopt a new scheme (even if it is to re-adopt the existing scheme) before the existing one expires, then the Council will be unable to pay its members allowances thereafter until a new scheme is adopted. The Council will follow the legislative guidance as set out in reviewing the Members Allowance Scheme.

Appendices

Appendix 1 - Report of the Independent Remuneration Panel – July 2025

Author:

Edwina Adefehinti

Interim Director – Governance

Edwina.Adefehinti@walsall.gov.uk

REPORT OF THE INDEPENDENT REMUNERATION PANEL (THE PANEL)

MEETING ON 18 JULY 2025

1. BACKGROUND AND PURPOSE

- 1.1 This report is the product of a full, periodic review undertaken into Walsall MBC's Remuneration Scheme. This considered all parts of the Scheme, taking a comprehensive oversight over all matters in relation to the operation of the Scheme.
- 1.2 The last time the Scheme had been considered was an interim review undertaken in February 2024 in which the Panel had been asked to look at specific proposals.
- 1.2 The role of the Panel is as the name suggests to offer an independent assessment of the levels of allowances payable to elected members/Councillors (and co-opted and independent persons) serving the democratic process at the Council. The three Panel Members have no direct connection with the Council and are volunteers.

2. METHODOLOGY

- 2.1 The Panel met on Friday 18 July 2025 receiving briefing papers from the officers on the Scheme and scope to be considered.
- 2.2 Detailed benchmarking information was provided on allowances paid by other comparator local authorities, including constituent councils within the West Midlands.
- 2.3 The Panel received oral representations in person from three group leaders:
Councillors:
 - Mike Bird,
 - Aftab Nawaz and
 - Matt Ward.
- 2.4 One written representation was received from a Councillor.
- 2.5 The Panel carefully considered all of these inputs before determining what recommendation(s) it would make.
- 2.6 The Panel was unanimous in its decision making in its recommendation to the Council.

3. PANEL MEMBERS

- 3.1 The IRP currently comprises the following members
 - Ruth Harrison,
 - Richard Hood and
 - Gary Timmins.

- 3.2 Richard is a longstanding member who has served on the Panel since 2007 and serves to provide continuity and background on how the Scheme has evolved and developed. Ruth and Gary are recent appointments, bringing with them different and new perspectives, and fresh challenge.
- 3.3 The Panel wishes to record its thanks and gratefulness in particular to Craig Goodall and Matthew Powis for their work in supporting the review.
- 3.4 The Panel commends this report to the Councillors.

4. ISSUES

- 4.1 The Panel was mindful of the most recent changes made to the Scheme in 2024.
- 4.2 Amongst other specific things, was the inclusion an adjustment mechanism linking the annual increase Members Allowances to the award to staff in line with the National Joint Council (NJC). In years where the pay award is a fixed value (rather than a percentage) the annual updating of Members Allowances will be the actual percentage of increase received at scale point 43. However, the Panel were advised that scale point 44 was more appropriate as this fell outside of maximum NJC scale point. This mechanism sought to maintain the value of the allowance in real terms in the light of general cost of living increases. At the time of the Review it was noted that agreement on the NJC increase for 2025 had not yet been reached. However, this was subsequently agreed as 3.2%.
- 4.3 In relation to the **Basic Allowance**, the Panel considered the comparative data and noted that Walsall's current payment of £13,456 remained close to the average paid in respect of statistical and neighbouring authorities which was £13,621. Therefore, it appeared to the Panel to be no justification for increasing the level of the current allowance.
- 4.4 The Panel was mindful that this was an allowance paid to all Councillors irrespective of their individual Council workload and effort, and reflected the remuneration appropriate for the 'average' councillor. For heavily active Members, this amount may not accurately reflect their efforts, whereas the amount paid may over-reward those who are less active. However, there is no flexibility in law in the way that the Basic Allowance can be applied and matters over individual workload and performance is, therefore, best addressed by group leaders.
- 4.5 Similarly, in relation to **Special Responsibility Allowances**, the level of allowances paid at Walsall was aligned to the comparator averages.
- 4.6 During the discussion with Group Leaders, the issue of the workload of the Licensing and Safety Committee was raised but it was noted that this may change following the appointment of a new chair and a different approach. Accordingly, the Panel determined to make no change to that specific chair's allowance but to revisit this particular issue at the next review.
- 4.7 No representations were made, or causes for change identified, in relation to any other part of the Scheme.
- 4.8 In conclusion and having carefully deliberated carefully, the Panel found no reason to adjust the existing Scheme and, accordingly, made the following recommendations.

5. Recommendations

1. That there be no change to the structure of the existing allowances as set out in Appendix 1.

2. That annual updating of member allowances should remain linked to the NJC employees' award except where council staff agree a lower percentage rise, freeze or reduction. In years where the pay award is a fixed value (rather than a percentage) the annual updating of Members Allowances will be the actual percentage of increase received at scale point 44.

The Panel

23 July 2025

Appendix 1 – 2025 Walsall MBC Remuneration Scheme for agreement

Basic Allowance	£13,886
Special Responsibility Allowances	
Leader of the Council	£40,880
Deputy Leader of the Council	£23,979
Other Group Leaders (Group threshold at a minimum of 6 seats or 10% whichever is greater of the Council Membership)	£12,979
Cabinet Members	£19,528
Regulatory Committees Chairs and Scrutiny Chairs:	
Audit Committee	£9,947
Appointments Panel	£6,221
Planning Committee	£12,802
Employment Appeals Subs	£6,221
Licensing & Safety Committee	£12,187
Taxi Licensing Sub-Committees	£6,221
Standards Committee	£6,221
Health and Wellbeing Board	£6,221
Corporate Parenting Board	£6,221
Scrutiny Committee Chairs	£12,586
Independent Members	£774
Independent Chair of the Audit Committee	£6,070
Cabinet Support Assistant	£1,952
Other Allowances	
Carers Allowance	£1100 a year
Travel & Subsistence	Officer rates outside West Midlands

15 SEPTEMBER 2025

Annual Report of the Audit Committee to Council for 2024/25

Ward(s): All

Portfolios: All

Purpose: Approve

1. Aim

- 1.1 To provide Council with oversight of the work of the Audit Committee during 2024/25 in accordance with good practice.
- 1.2 To provide assurance that the Audit Committee continues to provide robust and effective challenge to the council's governance arrangements and internal control framework.
- 1.3 To confirm that the Audit Committee complies with the CIPFA Position Statement 2022 and provide the outcome of the Audit Committee's review of its effectiveness.
- 1.4 To provide an opportunity for Council members to provide feedback or query the work of the Committee.

2. Summary

- 2.1 This report presents the proposed Annual Report of the Audit Committee 2024/25 and seeks approval for the Chair of Audit Committee for that year to present this report to full Council.

3. Recommendations

- 3.1 That Audit, Risk and Assurance Committee review and provide feedback on the proposed Annual Report.
- 3.2 That, subject to any changes arising from recommendation 3.1, the Annual Report of the Audit Committee 2024/25 be approved and that the Chair of the Audit Committee present the report to the next meeting of Council.

4. Report detail – know

- 4.1 The Council is not obliged by law to appoint an Audit Committee; however, this has been done in line with good governance practice and guidance from the Chartered Institute of Public Finance & Accountancy (Audit Committees: Practical Guidance for Local Authorities and Police).

- 4.2 The report complies with the CIPFA Position Statement 2022 (the “Statement”) on Audit Committees which sets out the key principles that CIPFA recommends for Audit Committees operating in local government. In that the Committee should *“report annually on how the Committee has complied with the Statement, discharged its responsibilities, and include an assessment of its performance.”*
- 4.3 The draft annual report is included as appendix 1 and outlines the responsibilities of Audit Committee and summarises the work completed in 2024/25.

Control Environment

- 4.4 Audit Committee’s work is a major aspect of the council's corporate governance and internal control framework. Its wide-ranging remit includes providing independent assurance on the adequacy of the internal control environment. It provides an independent review of governance, risk management, financial reporting and other governance processes, as well as overseeing the work of internal and external audit. This provides assurance to local taxpayers and other stakeholders on the adequacy of the council's arrangements in these regards.

Assurance of Controls

- 4.5 The production of an Annual Report to Council on Audit Committee’s work strengthens assurance reporting and governance. This is further strengthened by the Chair of the Audit Committee reporting to Council on the activities of the Committee.

Strategic Risks

- 4.6 The role of the Audit Committee in reviewing the adequacy of internal controls is an existing control in the management of Strategic Risk 12 *“Significant Failure of Governance – a breakdown in governance to merit formal external intervention either from auditors or central government”*.

Annual Statements

- 4.7 This report is to present the Annual Report of the Audit Committee for 2024/25 prior to it being presented at the next meeting of Council.

5. Financial information

- 5.1 There are no direct financial implications arising from this report.

6. Reducing Inequalities

- 6.1 Effective governance arrangements ensure a focus on delivering of Council Plan objectives, a key driver of which is reducing inequalities.

7. Decide

- 7.1 The Committee can approve the Annual Report as set out or make suggestions for improvement.

8. Respond

8.1 Following consideration of this report, it will be presented to Council at the next available meeting.

9. Review

9.1 Any feedback received from Council members will be utilised in further Annual Reports going forward.

Background papers –

Chartered Institute of Public Finance & Accountancy (CIPFA) Position Statement: Audit Committees in Local Authorities and Police 2022

CIPFA Audit Committees: Practical Guidance for Local Authorities and Police – The Audit Committee Member in a Local Authority

Guiding the Audit Committee - Supplement to Audit Committee Member in a Local Authority guidance (CIPFA)

Audit Committee agendas, minutes and reports for the municipal year 2024/25.

Report Author:

Helen Dudson, Assurance Manager

☎ 653732, ✉ helen.dudson@walsall.gov.uk

Walsall Council Annual Report of the Audit Committee Municipal Year 2024/25



Walsall Council

PROUD OF OUR PAST OUR PRESENT AND FOR OUR FUTURE

1. Introduction from the Chair of the Audit Committee

This is the Annual Report of the Audit Committee and relates to its work programme for the 2024/25 municipal year.

Like all other public sector services, the Council in 2024/25 continued to face significant challenges, not least the imperative to meet existing, and in most services increased demand, within constrained resources impacted by inflationary and cost of living pressures.

Indeed, within the wider local authority sector, there have been more instances of Councils struggling to address such matters but also many have been cited as needing to improve their governance arrangements, a recognition of the importance of strong organisational governance arrangements.

It is pleasing therefore that the Council has continued to demonstrate unwavering support for the Audit Committee recognising the positive contribution the committee makes to the Council's overall governance and accountability arrangements.

The Committee is mindful that its role is integral to the Council's governance arrangements and that the work it conducts is for the benefit of residents, other stakeholders and the Council itself.

It is encouraging that again Group Leaders recognised the benefit for the Audit Committee of having a consistency in the membership and there were minimal changes to the membership during 2024/25. This consistency in memberships enables the Committee to more effectively fulfil its delegated duties.

In 2024/25 the committee membership was enhanced by the recruitment of a second Independent Member and the remaining Independent Member vacancy is currently being recruited to.

I hope that the summary of the work undertaken will reassure Council as to the comprehensive level of oversight of governance arrangements the Audit Committee has provided during 2024/25.

During the year the Committee continued to utilise the CIPFA guidance on Audit Committees and the associated self-evaluation tool to consider its overall effectiveness. An evaluation was completed in April 2024, and it was recognised that some of the actions identified in the previous review had been delivered and that the Committee is considered to be effective overall remaining substantially compliant with the CIPFA guidance. The Committee identified additional actions it wishes to make as part of its continuous improvement and development plan.

The Committee has approved an extensive work programme for 2025/26 which has been assessed against and is in accordance with the CIPFA Position Statement for Audit Committees. This work programme includes additional scrutiny of strategic risks, reflecting the new title of "Audit Risk and Assurance Committee" made at Annual Council.

In concluding, I would like to take this opportunity to thank all those members and officers for their invaluable contributions to, and support of the work of the Audit Committee in the past year and for the support and confidence Full Council have shown me personally with my reappointment as the Independent Chair of the Committee.

**Mr Andy Green,
Independent Chair of the Audit Committee 2024/25**

15 September 2025

2. Terms of Reference

The terms of reference within which the Committee operated in the 2024/25 municipal year are detailed at the following link:

Audit Committee Role and Remit 2024/25

Congruent to the important principle of transparency in governance, Audit Committee meetings are open to members of the public and continued to be streamed live. It has been encouraging to see the public continue to follow meetings remotely and viewing figures have been consistent with the previous year.

3. Member and Officer Attendance

The Audit Committee met 5 times during the 2024/25 Municipal Year.

Membership of the Audit Committee during 2024/25 and their attendance is detailed at Appendix A.

As with previous years, several Audit Committee members held positions on other Council Committees. There were no matters debated at Audit Committee during the year that created a conflict of interest and necessitated members absenting themselves from meetings.

Committee members that also fulfil a role on Overview and Scrutiny Committees remain conscientious of the potential for conflict of interest. Members felt that the simple matter of exempting themselves from any item under discussion, which had or was being considered by a Scrutiny Committee of which they were a member, was sufficient to manage any conflict. There was only one declaration of interest during the year.

The Audit Committee is intended to be “a-political” in nature and members are expected to be independent in mind and thought when present. This important concept, as recognised by the Council is further strengthened by the appointment of Independent Members on the Audit Committee. Independent Members bring a mixture of experience and expertise that supports the Committee in the fulfilment of its responsibilities. At the start of the Municipal year there were two Independent Member vacancies on the Committee. One of these vacancies was filled part way through the year and recruitment to the remaining vacancy is currently underway.

Senior officers from the Council also attended the Audit Committee as required, including the Chief Executive, the S151 Officer and his deputies, the Monitoring Officer, Executive Directors and Directors/ Heads of Service. Both the Head of Internal Audit to the Council and appointed External Auditor also attend each meeting and in accordance with good practice may be required to meet the Committee without other officers being present.

4. Training and Effectiveness

Training sessions are arranged before each meeting for Members of the Audit Committee and additional individual support is provided if requested. The training relates to the roles and responsibilities of the Committee.

During 2024/25 the training provided covered statement of accounts, the internal audit process, risk management, counter fraud and corruption, and updates to accounting policies. A process for Committee Members feedback and evaluation of training was introduced during the year and is being used to inform future training sessions.

The Committee also completed a detailed review of their effectiveness in relation to the CIPFA Position Statement on Audit Committees. This recognised that the Committee remains effective overall and is substantially compliant with this guidance. Some previously identified improvement actions have been delivered and additional ones identified, for example introduction of an attendee evaluation feedback process and widening the training offer to all Council members. The Committee will continue to annually assess its effectiveness to ensure it continues to comply with CIPFA guidance and continuously improve.

5. The Work of the Audit Committee during 2024/25

In fulfilling its terms of reference, a summary of the business conducted by the Audit Committee during 2024/25 is detailed at Appendix B, and covers the following broad themes that are sources of assurance:

- Internal Audit.
- External Audit (and Inspection).
- Financial Reporting.
- Risk Management.
- Corporate Governance.

These are discussed in more detail below:

5.1 Internal Audit

Internal Audit remains the prime source of assurance for the Committee.

In respect of the 2024/25 financial year, the following Head of Internal Audit Opinion has been given:

“On the basis of our audit work, our opinion on the framework of governance, risk management, and control is Moderate in its overall adequacy and effectiveness. Some improvements are required to enhance the adequacy and effectiveness of the framework of governance, risk management and control. Whilst certain weaknesses and exceptions were highlighted by our audit work, none of our reviews concluded with unsatisfactory assurance. Of the 36 reviews for which an assurance opinion was provided, 11 provided substantial assurance, 17 moderate assurance and 8 limited assurance. We have raised 8 high priority recommendations, 92 medium priority recommendations and 54 low priority recommendations during the period. These matters have been discussed with management, to whom we have made several recommendations. All of these have been, or are in the process of being addressed, as detailed in our individual reports.

Our Follow up work confirmed that good progress has been made on implementing outstanding high priority recommendations. These will continue to be followed up as part of the follow up programme for 2025/26”.

During 2024/25, the outcome of all Internal Audit reports was provided to the Audit Committee. Those reports that were afforded a limited assurance opinion were submitted to Audit Committee for consideration.

The Committee also received reports on the performance of the Internal Audit function which indicated that the service performed well against the majority of the key performance indicators in terms of the timely completion of audits. Notably, all key financial systems and high priority audits were completed within the plan.

The Audit Committee was also consulted on and ultimately endorsed Internal Audit's work plan for 2025/26.

5.2 External Audit / Inspection

The main responsibilities of the External Auditor are to obtain and report on whether the Council's financial statements have been properly prepared and are free from material misstatement, and whether the council has made proper arrangements for securing economy, efficiency and effectiveness in its use of resources.

Grant Thornton LLP, the Council's appointed Auditor. Their Audit Findings Report related to the council's 2023/24 financial statements was issued in November 2024 and provided an unqualified opinion, stating that the accounts:

- Give a true and fair view of the financial position of the Authority as at 31 March 2024 and of its expenditure and income for the year then ended.
- Have been properly prepared in accordance with the CIPFA/LASAAC Code of Practice on local authority accounting and have been prepared in accordance with the requirements of the Local Audit and Accountability Act 2014.

In addition, Audit Committee and subsequently Council received the fourth Annual Audit Report (2023/24) on the council's value for money arrangements in relation to:

- Improving economy, efficiency and effectiveness.
- Governance.
- Financial sustainability.

No significant weaknesses were identified by the Auditor for all three criteria and there were four improvement recommendations made and accepted by the Council. The Committee will continue to oversee the progress made on implementing recommendations made by the External Auditors as it has done previously.

5.3 Financial Reporting

During 2024/25 the Committee scrutinised the 2023/24 statement of accounts and also received reports on accounting policies adopted by the Council.

The Committee also received and reviewed progress against recommendations of the External Auditor contained in its Annual Audit Findings Report; the Committee's oversight of the council's governance arrangements to support the External Auditor's annual risk assessment for financial reporting; received an update in relation to the Overview of Local Audit and Transparency of Local Authority Reporting (Redmond Review) and a summary regarding the recent UK Government consultation regarding Local Audit Reform.

5.4 Risk management

Audit Committee received reports on risk management and reviewed the full Strategic Risk Register at its meetings in September 2024 and February 2025. This Committee selected four specific strategic risks to review and consider in more detail, with relevant accountable officers attending Committee meetings to provide re-assurance that actions were being taken to manage and mitigate the identified risks.

5.5 Corporate governance

The Annual Governance Statement (AGS) and the Review of Effectiveness of the Council's System of Internal Control for the 2023/24 financial year was presented to the Audit Committee by the Chief Executive (Head of Paid Service) and Leader of the Council. This included reference to the opinion of the Head of Internal Audit, and the work of the Audit Committee and concluded that the effectiveness of the systems of internal control was adequate overall.

Reports on progress in relation to the Counter Fraud Response Plan and Counter Fraud and Corruption Policy were considered in February 2025 and will be reported to Committee again during 2025/26.

The Committee received the draft revised Whistleblowing Policy in December 2024, prior to its approval by Standards Committee and implementation from April 2025.

As reported last year, the Committee requested and received an update in relation to the effectiveness of implementation of Elections Act 2022 for Assurance that appropriate action was being taken to ensure residents were not disenfranchised by the changes the legislation made to the election process.

Assurance was sought regarding the governance of partnership arrangements (reported to Committee in December 2024) and recognise this area has been added to the Internal Audit Work Plan for 2025/26.

The Committee Decision Tracking Report has continued to be used to assist the Committee in ensuring all decisions that require a follow-up or response are tracked and delivered to the Committees satisfaction. This continues to enable Committee members to monitor any outstanding actions and seek updates at future meetings where applicable.

6. Conclusion

The Audit Committee is an important element of a strong governance system and as reflected in this report, the Committee has delivered a comprehensive work programme aligned with its role and remit as included in the Council's Constitution. This ensures there has been appropriate oversight of the Council's control systems and that they have been satisfactorily applied.

Moving forward the Committee will continue to utilise the CIPFA's guidance to consider its effectiveness to identify and deliver any improvements to ensure it continues to comply with recognised best practice and fulfils its delegated responsibilities and functions. By providing this independent assurance regarding the adequacy of the risk management framework and internal control environment the Committee will continue to support the Council to demonstrate strong corporate governance.

Appendix A

Audit Committee Meetings and Member Attendance 2024/25

Meeting Date	Mr A Green Independent Member(Chair)	Councillor G Singh-Sohal (Vice-Chair)	Councillor R Larden	Councillor R Mehmi	Councillor A Nawaz	Councillor A Parkes	Councillor V Waters	Mr D Walsh Independent Member
24.06.24	✓	✓	✓	✓	Apologies	Apologies	✓	N/A
25.09.24	✓	✓	✓	✓	Apologies	Apologies	✓	N/A
04.12.24	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	Apologies	✓	Apologies
17.02.25	✓	✓	✓	Apologies	✓	Apologies	✓	✓
30.04.25	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	Apologies	Apologies	✓
% Attendance	100%	100%	100%	80%	60%	0%	80%	67%

Appendix B

Summary of Audit Committee Work Plan 2024/25

Meeting Date	Report Subject	Assurance Theme				
		Internal Audit	External Audit / Inspection	Financial Reporting	Risk Management	Corporate Governance
24 June 2024	Committee Decision Tracking Chart					✓
	Audit Committee role, remit and work programme 2024/25					✓
	Risk Management Update – Strategic Risk Register (SRR2)				✓	✓
	Pre-Audit draft Statement of Accounts 2023/24			✓		✓
	Internal Audit Annual Report and Head of Internal Audit Opinion 2023/24	✓				
	Annual Review of Effectiveness of the System of Internal Control 2023/24	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
	Annual Governance Statement 2023/24	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
	Internal Audit Key Performance Indicators (KPI) 2023/24	✓				✓
	Internal Audit Progress Report 2024/25	✓				
	Follow Up of High Priority Recommendations (Private)	✓				
25 September 2024	Committee Decision Tracking Chart					✓
	Annual Review of the Effectiveness of the System Internal Control and Annual Governance Statement 2023/24	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
	Post Audit Statement of Accounts and Audit Findings Report 2023/24		✓	✓		
	Risk Management Update – Strategic Risk Register (SRR) and Assurance Map				✓	
	Internal Audi Key Performance Indicators (KPI) Quarter 1 2024/25	✓				✓
	Internal Audit Progress Report 2024/25	✓				

Appendix B

Summary of Audit Committee Work Plan 2024/25

Meeting Date	Report Subject	Assurance Theme				
		Internal Audit	External Audit / Inspection	Financial Reporting	Risk Management	Corporate Governance
25 September 2024 (continued)	Review of the Effectiveness of the Audit Committee – Action Plan Update					✓
	Annual Report of the Audit Committee 2023/24	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
	Appointment of an Independent Member to Audit Committee (Private)					✓
	Follow Up of High Priority Recommendations (Private)	✓				
04 December 2024	Committee Decision Tracking Chart					✓
	Post Audit Statement of Accounts 2023/24 – Annual Governance Statement and Audit Findings Report		✓	✓		✓
	Auditors Annual Report 2023/24		✓			✓
	Walsall Partnerships Overview					✓
	Elections Act 2022 Implementation Tranche 2					✓
	Risk Management Update - Strategic Risk Register (SRR15 - Workforce)				✓	
	Whistleblowing Policy Update					✓
	Internal Audit Progress Report 2024/25	✓				
	Internal Audit Key Performance Indicators (KPI) Quarter 2 2024/25	✓				✓
Follow Up of High Priority Recommendations (Private)	✓					
17 February 2025	Committee Decision Tracking Chart					✓
	Risk Management Update - Strategic Risk Register (SRR14 – Inability to improve health outcomes)				✓	
	Risk Management Update - Strategic Risk Register and Assurance Map				✓	
	Updated Counter Fraud and Corruption Policy			✓	✓	✓

Appendix B

Summary of Audit Committee Work Plan 2024/25

Meeting Date	Report Subject	Assurance Theme				
		Internal Audit	External Audit / Inspection	Financial Reporting	Risk Management	Corporate Governance
17 February 2025 (continued)	Internal Audit Progress Report 2024/25	✓				
	Internal Audit Key Performance Indicators (KPI) Quarter 3 2024/25	✓				✓
	External Audit - Informing the Audit Risk Assessment 2023/24 Accounts		✓	✓	✓	✓
	Internal Audit Draft Work Plan and Charter 2025/26	✓				
	Follow Up of High Priority Recommendations (Private)	✓				
30 April 2025	Committee Decision Tracking Chart					✓
	Risk Management Update - Strategic Risk Register (SRR11– Climate Change)				✓	
	Review of Effectiveness of the Audit Committee – Action Plan Update					✓
	Internal Audit Work Progress Report 2024/25	✓				✓
	Internal Audit Work Plan and Internal Audit Charter 2025/26	✓				
	Accounting Policies 2024/25			✓		✓
	Overview of Local Audit & Transparency of Local Authority Reporting (“Redmond Review”) Update		✓	✓		
	Auditor’s Annual Report 2022/23 – Progress on implementation and recommendations			✓		✓
	External Audit – Informing the audit risk assessment 2024/25		✓			
	External Audit – Audit Planning Reports for Year Ending 31 March 2025		✓			
	Independent Committee Member – Term of Office Expiry					✓
	Follow Up of High Priority Recommendations (Private)	✓				

Assurance Team

Walsall Council
Civic Centre, Darwall Street
Walsall,
WS1 1TW

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Portfolio Holder Briefing



Walsall Council

Areas of Responsibility	Lead Executive Director
Economic development and delivery through strategic assets, strategic and public transport and planning policy (inc. Walsall Borough Local Plan), Strategic Housing. Managing Council assets. Markets. Town Centre and District Centre Car Parks. Development of new HWRC	Economy, Environment and Communities – Dave Brown

Partnership Board Membership

Walsall Economic Forum, Town Deal Board
WMCA: Board & Employment Committee
West Midlands Employers Shareholder Board
Sherbourne Recycling Ltd – Stakeholder Board

Agenda Item: 14a
Council – 29 September 2025

Portfolio Holder Report
Statutory Deputy Leader – Prosperous Places & Investment

1. Foreword

This year's annual report for the Prosperous Places and Investment portfolio is a testament to the remarkable progress Walsall has made. Our ambitious £1.5 billion investment programme is not just a figure, it is a catalyst for transformation, revitalising the town centre and district hubs, enhancing transport links, infrastructure, and public spaces. These efforts have already generated over 4,000 new jobs and delivered 1,000 new homes, providing tangible benefits to our residents and businesses. These achievements are crucial milestones on our journey to becoming "the most improved borough in the region by 2040," where every resident, regardless of neighbourhood, enjoys equal opportunities and a strong sense of pride in their community.

Our progress is the result of robust partnerships. Local business owners, residents, and investors have played a pivotal role, from shaping a shared vision for Walsall to taking practical action towards its realisation. Their commitment and collaboration have been instrumental in turning our ambitions into reality.

2. Strategic Context

Following comprehensive borough-wide consultation, the We Are Walsall 2040 strategy was approved by Walsall Council's Cabinet on 21 June 2023. This strategy provides a clear framework for partnership working, enabling all stakeholders to prioritise resources and deliver shared ambitions. The central aims are to support economic growth, improve health and wellbeing, address housing needs, develop infrastructure, and drive place-based transformation.

In March 2025, the Government announced a £20.25 million allocation to Walsall's Community Regeneration Partnership (CRP), in collaboration with the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government. Formerly known as the Healthy Levelling Up Partnership, the CRP aligns with the Government's five missions, focusing particularly on:

- Kick-starting economic growth
- Taking back our streets
- Breaking down barriers to opportunity
- Building an NHS fit for the future

The funding supports fifteen projects, primarily targeting strategic acquisitions to bolster economic growth in the town centre, as well as a range of initiatives to improve health, wellbeing, and community safety.

3. Key achievements, impact and ongoing work

Strategy Development

- The Walsall Borough Local Plan (WBLP) is being developed to support the delivery of new homes, jobs, sustainable travel, and active lifestyles. Consultation is due to complete in autumn 2025.

- The Housing Strategy sets out our ambition for all residents to live in decent homes that meet their needs and aspirations. A new Housing Strategy and Delivery Plan is in development, aiming for a whole-council approach to housing.
- The Walsall Town Centre Masterplan, first published in 2019, set a 20-year vision and helped secure public funding for capital projects. A new Town Centre Framework is being developed to refresh the vision and objectives.

Housing Development

- Collaboration with the West Midlands Combined Authority and key developers has enabled the transformation of brownfield sites into thriving residential areas, adding to the 1,000 new homes completed at Hollyhedge Lane, Goscote Lodge Crescent, Goscote Lane, and the former Caparo site.
- The council-led scheme for Moat Street/Villiers Street in Willenhall is progressing following the CPO of key sites. Demolition work is set to commence on the first phase, enabling the delivery of over 100 new homes.

Employment site Development

- Construction has begun at SPARK, the largest employment site in the borough, transforming it into a 620,000sqft manufacturing and logistics hub. The first two units will be complete in late 2025, with further units to follow.



- Planning permission for Total Park at Bentley Lane will provide 422,000sqft of new employment floorspace, contributing to circa 2m sqft of new high-quality employment floorspace, bringing jobs and investment to Walsall.

Town Centre Development

- The Connected Gateway scheme, using £11.4m of Government funding, is improving connections across the town centre, especially between St Paul's bus station and Walsall train station, alongside improvements to the Saddlers Centre.



- Works at the Saddlers Centre include new stairs, flooring, ceilings, and shop fronts, with completion expected by October 2025. The “Three Men in a Boat” automaton is being repaired and will return to the Saddlers Centre before Christmas.



- The Creative Industries Enterprise Centre, in the former Guildhall building, is under development, overcoming heritage challenges and expected to complete by May/June 2026.



- The Adult Learning Centre, being built in the former Marks and Spencer, will bring skills and learning back into the town centre, with over 800 adult learners expected. The new facility is due to open by September 2027.



- The Active Public Spaces project includes a new Canal Bridge, improvements to the Canal Basin, and enhancements to the area around the New Art Gallery and Park Street.



Bloxwich Town Deal Schemes

- The Bloxwich Launchpad opened in September 2025, bringing together services from multiple organisations and providing digital guidance for residents and tailored support for local businesses.
- The Active Travel and Connectivity project has delivered 5km of new cycleways and 7.9km of improved pedestrian paths with solar lighting along canal towpaths.
- The Construction Skills through Regeneration programme has delivered ten affordable, sustainable homes with EV charging, transforming disused garage sites into thriving communities and supporting local skills development.

Community Regeneration Partnership

- The Council has secured £20.25m in capital funding to support 15 projects, including site acquisitions, a Youth Hub, market development, and support for community-led projects such as Alumwell Resource Centre and A'ina Hub.

Middlemore Lane HWRC & WTS

- The new Household Waste Recycling Centre and Waste Transfer Station in Aldridge was completed in August 2025, providing a modern facility to increase recycling and operational efficiency, supporting environmental targets and delivering significant social value. Over £1 million was generated in social value, 42 jobs created, 386 apprenticeship weeks delivered, and more than 99% of construction waste diverted from landfill.



Transport Development

- New train stations at Willenhall and Darlaston are under construction, due to open in early 2026. The footbridge and lift shafts have been installed at Willenhall, and at Darlaston the footbridge is now in place. The project also includes improved cycle and walking infrastructure around the new Willenhall Station.



- Construction is ongoing at the new Fingerpost Bridge in Pelsall, due to complete later this year.



- The corridor from Moxley to Walsall town centre is being developed to improve access to key employment sites and the new rail station.
- Major improvements to junction 10 of the M6 were completed in spring 2024, improving capacity and resilience for local people and businesses.
- Electric vehicle charge points are being installed in residential streets.
- The road safety team continues to deliver engineering measures and education initiatives to reduce personal injury collisions.

Planning and Development

- The planning team continues to deliver timely and robust decision-making, exceeding national targets. Key achievements include 940 planning permissions issued, an 85% approval rate, 77% of appeal decisions in our favour, £617k in planning application fees generated, 482 enforcement cases closed, and a 48% market share of all building control works.

- The team is embedding new ways of working to deliver decisions in record-breaking timeframes, with all 189 decisions in the last quarter of 24/25 issued on time at rates between 92% and 97%.



Business Growth West Midlands

- Business support initiatives, backed by the West Midlands Combined Authority, are delivering advice, skills development, and access to finance. We are on track to engage with 426 businesses, with 156 engagements completed, creating jobs, improving productivity, and enhancing business processes.
- Over £1.36 million has been distributed to local businesses across 2023/24 and 2024/25, with a further £500,000 in grant funding now being deployed.

Walsall Borough Economic Forum (WBEF)

- The Forum continues to serve as a key platform for collaboration between strategic businesses and the public sector, supporting inclusive growth, investment, and long-term economic resilience. Engagement with partners ensures business voices are central to the borough's transformation.

Employment Support Programmes

- Walsall Works delivers impactful employment support from 28 co-located sites, providing tailored guidance and job readiness support. The Walsall Works EXPO hosted over 65 exhibitors and more than 1,000 attendees.
- The Youth Trailblazer programme, with £435,000 allocated, focuses on paid work placements and transition support for young people at risk of becoming NEET.
- WorkWell, launched in April 2025, supports residents with health-related barriers to employment, with over 100 referrals received in the first few months.
- Connect to Work, launching in October, will help residents with significant health barriers into sustainable work.
- The Restart Scheme supported 880 participants, with 353 entering work and 215 sustaining employment.

Corporate Landlord

- The Corporate Landlord team is reviewing the council's property portfolio, supporting regeneration projects and efficient service delivery. Notable acquisitions include Jubilee House in Leamore and Midland Hotel in the town centre, supporting SEND school places and temporary accommodation.
- The team has generated over £1.4m in capital receipts, with contracts exchanged on a further £3.1m of sales. Decarbonisation projects are underway, including a new solar panel array at Oak Park Active Living Centre.

Markets

- Markets are growing, with a 24% increase in stalls let in 2024/25 compared to the previous year. Improvements to Bloxwich Market and new layouts for Willenhall and Walsall Markets are underway.

Tackling poor property standards and support for residents

- Since 2018, over £24 million in external grants has been secured to tackle fuel poverty and assist over 7,696 households.
- The Warm Homes Local Grant and National Grid funding support energy efficiency and carbon reduction, with projects in schools winning three prestigious awards.
- The Housing Standards and Improvement Service has addressed over 1,000 enquiries, with enforcement action taken where necessary, resulting in £60,000 in fines to support further enforcement work.

- The Supported Housing Improvement Programme has improved accommodation quality for residents in supported housing.

4. Future Priorities and Plans

Looking ahead, our focus will remain on delivering the projects supported by the CRP and maximising the impact of our investment. Key priorities include accelerating the delivery of new homes, continuing to improve transport and digital infrastructure, and fostering innovation in business and service delivery.

We will continue to strengthen our partnerships, building on the collaborative approach that has underpinned our success to date. Ongoing engagement with residents and stakeholders will ensure that our strategies remain responsive to local needs and aspirations.

5. Conclusion

Walsall is at an exciting point in its development. Our investment programme is already delivering real benefits for residents, businesses, and visitors. By working together, we are laying the foundations for sustained growth, improved wellbeing, and greater prosperity for all. We look forward to continuing this journey, with the support of our partners and the community, as we strive to make Walsall the most improved borough in the region by 2040.

All this does not happen without experienced and professional officers who work tirelessly to deliver the political priorities set by the council's Cabinet and Members. The successes we demonstrate in this report owe much to the dedication of our elected Councillors, our officers and to local businesses, but also to genuine partnership working at a Black Country and wider regional level as well as at a national level. I'd like to pass on my thanks to all those who have contributed to the activities outlined in this report and ultimately to making Walsall a more prosperous and investible place.



A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'A. H. H. H.', written over a white background.

Statutory Deputy Leader and
Portfolio Holder for Prosperous Places & Investment

Outside Body Briefing



Walsall Council

West Midlands Combined Authority (WMCA) - Audit, Risk & Assurance Committee (ARAC)

1. Role and Function

The role of the WMCA ARAC is to provide an independent and high-level focus on the audit, assurance and reporting arrangements that underpin good governance and financial standards, providing independent assurance to the WMCA on the adequacy of the risk management framework and the internal control environment that flows into the financial reporting and annual governance processes.

As Walsall's representative undertaking this important role on this committee, it's essential that I provide necessary and relevant challenge in relation to the committee's remit and agendas and seek any relevant advice when needed.

2. Progress Overview

Having attended 6 out of the 7 meetings since April 2024 and considering the key assurances being sought from the committee, the key focus areas are deemed as being:

Financial Oversight – Reviewing the WMCA's budget for 2024/25 and ensuring robust financial management practices

Statutory Accounts – Providing updates and oversight on the preparation and publication of statutory accounts

Internal Audit – Overseeing internal audit activities including reviewing audit plans, reports and recommendations

Risk Management – Updating and monitoring the strategic risk register to identify and mitigate key risks

Treasury Management – Implementing and reviewing the treasury management policy, strategy and practices

Information Governance – Reviewing the information governance annual report to ensure compliance with data protection and information security regulations

Programme Assurance – Providing oversight on various programmes to ensure they are delivered effectively and meet their objectives

3. Key Achievements, impact and ongoing work

I personally take my role on the committee very seriously and always compare the key relevant documents to Walsall's as a benchmark and raise relevant points in the committee regarding accounting entries and ensuring the right due diligence and that we can determine value for money has been achieved, key assurances on the implementation of high audit recommendations that have missed their initial deadline as well as testing the key risks, business continuity issues and good governance in how the WMCA operate.

The committee have supported the following key achievements during the period:

Information Governance

The committee reviewed and endorsed the Information Governance Annual Report, ensuring that our data protection and information security practices were up to date and compliant with relevant regulations. This commitment to safeguarding information highlighted our dedication to maintaining the highest standards of data integrity and security.

Health and Safety Initiatives

Through the committee's review and endorsement of several health and safety updates, members were ensuring that the WMCA's practices were current and compliant with regulations. This included implementing new safety protocols and training programs, demonstrating its proactive approach to help create a safe and secure environment for everyone.

Programme and Assurance Updates

The committee provided oversight on various programmes, ensuring they were delivered effectively and met their objectives. By reviewing the progress of key initiatives and providing assurance on their outcomes, the committee reinforced its commitment to excellence and accountability in all its projects.

These efforts reflect members ongoing dedication to transparency, safety and effective governance, ensuring that the WMCA continued to serve the community with integrity and efficiency.

Publishing of the Annual Accounts 2024

The WMCA ARAC was pleased with the prompt publication of its annual accounts 2023/24, highlighting the dedication of committee members, local authority leaders and the finance team to transparency and accountability. By approving and publishing these financial statements, they ensured that stakeholders and the public had access to crucial financial information, reinforcing trust and openness in the WMCA's operations.

Risk Management Improvements

Through reviewing the Strategic Risk Register, identifying and mitigating key risks that could impact the authority's operations, members proactive approach and recommendations has strengthened the overall risk management framework.

Internal Audit Advancements

The engagement of the committee was fundamental to the significant improvements in internal audit processes, including the establishment of a new Internal Audit team at the WMCA, enhancing methodologies and the implementation of recommendations from previous audits, which has led to more efficient and effective internal controls.

4. Looking Ahead

The committee will maintain its commitment to upholding strong governance and effective controls, ensuring that audit recommendations are implemented promptly. This approach aims to drive continuous improvement in systems and processes, and to maximise the value for money delivered by WMCA for the region.

Specifically, some key future work includes:

English Devolution White Paper: What does this mean for Audit?

The WMCA ARAC will work with the WMCA on the implications and further detail on the English Devolution White Paper and what this means for the audit functions of the WMCA.

External Audit Plan 2024/25 and 2025/26

Audit will review the external audit plans prepared by Grant Thornton for the fiscal years 2024/25 and 2025/26. This includes assessing the scope, methodology and timelines for the audits to ensure they align with WMCA's objectives and regulatory requirements.

Internal Audit Plan

An evaluation of the internal audit plans for 2025/26 and 2026/27 will be undertaken, as well as receiving regular update reports for review and discussion. These documents will outline the internal audit strategy, key areas of focus, and progress on ongoing audits, helping the committee monitor internal controls and risk management practices.

Annual Governance Statement

A review of the draft Annual Governance Statement will be undertaken, which provides an overview of WMCA's governance framework and effectiveness.

Approval of Annual Accounts 2024/25

ARAC members will review and approve the annual accounts for the fiscal year 2024/25. This process includes examining the External Audit Findings Report and the External Auditor’s Annual Report prepared by Grant Thornton.

Appointment of New Independent Chair

The WMCA have appointed Cecile Booth, who was formerly Peterborough's s151 officer, to chair the Audit, Risk & Assurance Committee for the next term.



Councillor Martin