



Walsall Council

Minutes of the **ORDINARY MEETING** of the Council of the Walsall Metropolitan Borough held on **Monday 12 January, 2026, at 6.00 p.m.** at the Council House, Walsall.

Present

Councillor L. Harrison (Mayor) in the Chair

Councillors:

A. Andrew	T. Jukes
B. Bains	P. Kaur
H. Bashir	N. Latham
M.A. Bird	E. Lee
C. Bott	R. K Mehmi
P. Bott	E. Morgan
J. Chapman	J. Murray
S. Cheema	L. Nahal
S.J. Cooper	S. Nasreen
M. Coulson	A.A. Nawaz
G. Eardley	A. Parkes
S. Elson	W. Rasab
K. Ferguson	L.J. Rattigan
G. Flint	E. Russell
M. Follows	K. Sears
N. Gandham	G. Singh Sohal
P. Gill	P. Smith
A. Harris	C.A. Statham
A.J. Hicken	M.A. Statham
I. Hussain	M. Ward
K. Hussain	V.J. Waters
S. Hussain	J. Whitehouse
	T. Wilson

70. **Apologies**

Apologies were received on behalf of Councillors A. Hussain, Samra, Towe, Burley, Larden, G. Ali, Ditta, Gultasib, Murphy, Martin, Margetts, Hassan, Pedley and Garcha.

71. **Minutes**

Resolved

That the minutes of the meeting held on 3 November 2025, a copy having been sent to each member of the Council, be approved as a correct record.

72. **Declarations of interest**

There were no declarations of interest.

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

Resolved

There were no items in private session.

74. **Mayor's announcements**

The Mayor congratulated Councillor Kenneth Sears on achieving 50 years of service with Walsall Council. Councillor Sears was first elected to represent Aldridge North and Walsall Wood on 1 May 1975, serving until 4 May 1979, and was reappointed on 1 May 1980. He subsequently served as Mayor from 1994 to 1995 and has chaired the Licensing and Safety Committee for several municipal years. He currently sits on the Scrutiny Overview and Governance Committee, the Standards Committee and Employment Appeals Sub-Committee A.

Councillors Bird, Bains, Ward, Nawaz, Smith, Eardley, Waters, Rasab, Hicken, Mehmi, Parkes and Harris each expressed their congratulations to Councillor Sears.

The Mayor invited Members and Councillor Sears' family to join her in the Mayor's Parlour following the meeting to celebrate his achievement.

75. **Petitions**

Received from:

Councillor Mehmi - Transit Site on Pleck Road

76. **Mayoralty 2026/27**

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

Resolved

That Councillor C. Bott be nominated as Mayor and Councillor L. Rattigan be nominated as Deputy Mayor of the Walsall Metropolitan Borough Council for the municipal year 2026/2027

77. **Questions**

(a) From the public:

Lee Jeavons

The following question was put by the Mayor in the absence of the questioner. It was noted that a response would be provided in writing to Mr Jeavons.

Given that next year is the 100th anniversary of the Supermarine company winning the Schneider Trophy (for the fastest seaplane) outright and that this seaplane was piloted by Group Captain Sidney Webster (Walsall's greatest aviator), and given that this project led to the development of the "Spitfire", does Walsall MBC have any plans to mark the 100th anniversary of this momentous event?

Elaine Williams

There are proposals in the draft Walsall Borough Local Plan to build thousands of homes including on green belt land in areas such as Bloxwich, Pelsall, Brownhills, Aldridge, Streetly, Pheasey and adjacent to the Arboretum, so why has a site in Reedswood been selected for a new school and not a site that in respect of the majority of these proposed locations/number of homes is within statutory walking distance (defined by section 444 (5) of the Education Act 1996) of any new housing that will create demand for school places?

Councillor Andrew gave the following response:

This project is nearly ten years old and has nothing to do with the Local Plan. I first had meetings regarding this in 2017, when I wasn't in my current role, about proposals for this school. The proposal is from the Department for Education (DfE), working with Windsor. It is a free school and was first dreamed up in 2017. An organisation called Located, a government organisation specifically set up to find sites for free schools, has been looking at sites in this borough for the last ten years. A site was found on Harden Road, as this school is to serve the Blakenall / Bloxwich area, however Located could not do a deal with the landowners. This site is now a housing development.

On the basis of size and location, the former Reedswood golf course was determined to be the preferred site; whilst Harden Road was considered, the DfE did not pursue it. The Reedswood site remains within the area of pupil demand and aligns with the council's sufficiency planning for secondary school places across Walsall.

Current forecasts show a deficit of secondary school places in 2027 and 2028. The Free School is planned to admit 150 pupils from 2027, and, together with Council capital investment to expand other local secondary schools, including Ormiston Shelfield and Pool Hayes Academy, it will address the forecast shortfall and ensure the local authority can meet its statutory duty to provide sufficient school places for Walsall residents.

The process of identifying a site for the Free School commenced well before work on the Walsall Borough Local Plan. Whilst the Local Plan includes workstreams that consider education needs alongside other community infrastructure such as health and community facilities, that activity is from the Free School process described above.

If you look at the Walsall Plan, on some of the proposals that have been put forward by developers and landowners, there are in certain areas provisions for educational establishments. Of course, should any of these proposals become planning permissions, seeing what is happening with planning applications across the borough, there will be Section 106 agreements with developers to provide improved school facilities.

Elaine Williams asked the following supplementary question:

The new school in Reedswood is to be built on a greenspace, as are many other significantly sized new housing sites proposed in the Walsall Borough Local Plan. Many of these new housing locations were proposed by the Conservatives, as part of the Andy Street led Black Country Plan, back in 2021. Are there any other green sites that are planned to be built on? You mentioned public services such as health centres and schools, but we need to know whether any extra land is going to be used and how the residents are going to be serviced, with those public health centres because people cannot get doctors appointments.

Councillor Andrew gave the following response:

It shows now who have been criticising our Councillor from Brownhills of their Facebook page, regarding Andy Street's Black Country Plan. It was never Andy Street's Black Country Plan; in fact, it was never a plan as it was never passed. It never saw the light of day with any politicians within the Black Country. Nothing was ever allocated and that is why we are having to do the Walsall Borough Local Plan again, as the Black Country Plan fell apart. We have concluded the consultation process with what is called the Regulation 18 and will be moving to Regulation 19 later in the year. The plan is under consultation and review and has not yet been approved.

It is not this Council that is putting planning application in across the greenbelt. It is landowners and developers chancing their arm because of the Labour Government changing the planning regulations and creating a situation where we have planning by appeal. We have seen the battery

storage facility, in Chaple Lane, refused by this Council and approved at appeal. This Council took it to the high court twice and it was thrown out. This Council rejected an application on Longwood Lane, for an outlying permission for 150 houses, which is currently in the appeal process as we speak. An application is coming forward in Pheasey for 850 houses, which I can ensure you I am already fighting. We are seeing applications across Aldridge/Brownhills on greenbelt land, because the national planning policy framework has been changed by the Government has been relaxed to make it easier to build on the greenbelt.

(b) From members of the Council:

Councillor Ward

In light of the Government's recently announced Social and Affordable Homes Programme 2026–2036, which allocates £1.7 billion to the West Midlands region, could the Leader outline what specific steps Walsall Council is taking to ensure that we are well positioned to secure a fair and proportionate share of this funding — particularly to deliver new social rent homes, support estate regeneration, and address areas of acute housing need within the borough.

Councillor Bird gave the following response:

The Government's new Social and Affordable Homes Programme represents a significant opportunity for areas like Walsall, with an indicative £1.7 billion allocated to guide bids across the West Midlands. The programme will be delivered by Homes England outside London, with bidding expected to open in February 2026. Importantly, it provides two routes:

- Strategic Partnerships for larger providers entering long term funding arrangements, and
- Continuous Market Engagement, allowing flexible, rolling bids for individual schemes.

While the primary focus is on delivering new affordable homes, particularly social rent, the programme also supports regeneration schemes that increase affordable housing supply.

To ensure Walsall is well positioned to secure a fair and proportionate share of this funding, we are taking a number of proactive steps.

First, the programme aligns closely with the emerging Walsall Housing Strategy, which is now being finalised and will be presented to Cabinet in the coming months. This strategy, together with the Walsall Borough Local Plan and the West Midlands Combined Authority's Spatial Development Strategy, provides the evidence base we need to clearly articulate our housing requirements, identify suitable sites, and demonstrate local need, key considerations in the assessment of bids.

Second, we are working closely with our partners, in particular Registered Providers, to support them in bringing forward strong, evidence-led funding

applications. Our role is to help partners shape proposals that align with their long-term business and supply plans while ensuring Walsall secures a justified share of regional investment.

These partnerships are already delivering tangible progress:

- In September 2025, the Council and whg signed a Planning Performance Agreement to accelerate the delivery of new affordable homes. This agreement is designed to streamline the planning process so that high-quality schemes can come forward more efficiently.
- We have worked closely with whg on major developments such as Primrose Lodge on Goscote Lane, delivered with Keepmoat. This was completed in November 2025, the scheme has transformed 29 acres into a thriving new community of 407 homes, including 126 affordable homes for rent, the majority being social rent, and providing large family accommodation, bungalows for older residents, and wheelchair adapted homes.
- More broadly, we continue to encourage Registered Providers to maximise the delivery of social rent within any grant funded developments. This priority is reflected in our recently approved Planning Obligations Supplementary Planning Document and is underpinned by the latest Strategic Housing Market Assessment.
- On regeneration, the Willenhall Framework Plan continues to demonstrate how we can bring derelict or underused land back into productive use. Phase 1 alone will deliver over 100 homes, with 25% affordable, supporting the creation of mixed, sustainable neighbourhoods.

By strengthening these partnerships and ensuring our strategic frameworks are robust, evidence-based and aligned with the requirements of the new programme, we are putting Walsall in the strongest possible position to make successful bids. This will support our Council Plan objective of ensuring the right homes are delivered in the right places, with a good supply of high-quality affordable and social rent homes across the borough.

Councillor Ward asked the following supplementary question:

How much of the 1.7billion do you expect to come into Walsall?

Councillor Bird gave the following response:

That depends on the bids and the attitude of Homes England and everyone else within the partner organisations. It certainly seems to me that in certain areas when money is allocated, we seem to be at the back of the queue. I sincerely hope we will be lucky to get to the front of the queue, but it is a matter of those applications being robust, evidence led and in line with our plans.

Councillor Eardley

What is the overall cost of keeping Merchants Way Household Waste Recycling Centre open. While the new Household waste recycling centre in Middlemore Lane lies dormant waiting licences from the Environment Agency?

Councillor Bird gave the following response:

The Council was always aware that the environmental permitting process for Middlemore Lane would take approximately 18 months. Household Waste Recycling Centres and associated waste transfer facilities are complex sites, and it is not uncommon for the Environment Agency permitting process to extend over this timeframe or longer.

The Council could not submit the permit application until all necessary technical and operational information was available. As Middlemore Lane was delivered through a design-and-build contract, the required level of detailed design information was not finalised until June 2024. Only at that point could a complete and robust permit application be made.

The construction phase of the Middlemore Lane site was scheduled to last approximately 12 months and was completed on time. The construction contract was completed in August 2025, at which point the site was formally handed over to the Council. Prior to this date, Middlemore Lane was an active construction site and access was strictly controlled.

Following handover, the project programme allowed for a mobilisation period of approximately three to four months. During this time, the site has not been dormant. Mobilisation activity has included the development of essential operational documentation such as risk assessments, safe operating procedures, fire safety arrangements, and evacuation plans, all of which sit outside the construction phase but are critical to the safe operation of the facility.

In addition, a number of items not included within the construction contract have been installed during mobilisation. These include shop fittings, site signage, road markings, fire safety equipment, and protection measures to safeguard operational areas of the Household Waste Recycling Centre from damage caused by heavy plant, machinery, and vehicle movements.

Alongside this physical and procedural mobilisation, new staff have been recruited and trained. Over 200 staff have completed site inductions, and machinery operators have received training on the new equipment installed at the site. Other statutory consents required for operation, including permission to discharge trade effluent to the sewer network, have also been secured.

Based on the anticipated 18-month permitting period, the earliest planned opening date for Middlemore Lane was November 2025. It was always recognised that opening a new and unfamiliar site to public immediately before

or during the Christmas period would present operational risks. Christmas is not only a peak period for public visits to Household Waste Recycling Centres but also a particularly busy time for operational crews using the waste transfer station.

When it became clear that the environmental permit would not be issued in time to support an early December opening, the decision was taken to delay opening until the new year in order to manage operational risk and ensure a safe and effective transition. The Environmental Permit was issued by the Environment Agency, and the site is now fully ready to open. I am pleased to report that the Waste Transfer Station opened on 5 January 2026, and the Household Waste Recycling Centre will open on 2 February 2026.

In respect of costs, a budget for mobilisation at Middlemore Lane was already included within the overall construction project costs. The additional cost associated with the site being complete but not operational during November and December has been minimal. Staffing on site during this period has been limited to those required to oversee mobilisation and service readiness, and energy costs have been kept low as the site is powered by on-site solar panels.

Accordingly, the continued operation of Merchants Way during this period represents a planned and managed element of the overall programme, rather than an unforeseen or avoidable additional cost.

For the period of August to December 2025 inclusive, expenditure has been as follows:

- Mobilising Middlemore Lane WTS and HWRC **£292,139**
- Operating Merchants Way HWRC **£268,185**

These are in line with expected/ budgeted costs.

Councillor Ferguson

Given that the Labour government are instructing Walsall Borough Council to deliver 1,200 houses per year, which is considerably more than the average built over the past years, could the Portfolio Holder tell me, this council and residents, what would be the consequences for residents and this Council, should the Council say no to delivering this number of units and protecting our Green belt, by only including brown field in the borough plan.

Councillor Andrew gave the following response:

The Government expects every local authority to have an up-to-date local plan that identifies sufficient land to meet its needs for homes and other land uses, such as employment. Since 2018, the Government has required local housing need to be calculated in accordance with the standard method. This method was revised, by the current government, in December 2024. In the

case of Walsall and the majority of other authorities around the country, the revised method has resulted in a substantial increase in the number of homes required per annum compared with previous versions and historic completion rates. The Government argues that there has been a failure to deliver sufficient homes in recent years, which has resulted in a shortage of homes for families and in particular a lack of affordable housing.

For several decades Walsall has been able to provide for its housing needs almost entirely by using brownfield land. Most of this land became available as a result of the decline in heavy industry in the 1970's and 1980's. Thanks to the success of the council in regenerating its area, the supply of land from this source has now been almost used up. We estimate that the remaining capacity of brownfield land would be sufficient for approximately 5,000 homes. Our housing need, according to the Government, however, is currently 1,172 homes per year, which equates to nearly 20,000 homes, in connect two electoral wards, over the intended local plan period to 2042. 5,000 homes would only be sufficient to last approximately four years. As we know, from our own experience in this Council, it is incredibly expensive to develop on brownfield sites, hence the Government relaxing the national planning framework to make it easier to develop on greenfield sites.

For our new local plan to be found sound at examination we need to demonstrate that we have sought to meet our objectively assessed needs. There is therefore a significant risk of our plan being rejected by Government Inspectors should we seek to progress our plan using a brownfield only strategy, and therefore in us not having an up-to-date local plan. It is likely, in my opinion, that the Government would force a plan on this Council and the residents we represent.

Without an up-to-date local plan and/or continuing not being able to demonstrate a 5-year housing land supply, leaves us at risk of "planning by appeal", or unplanned growth on potentially large sites within the Green Belt in unsustainable locations, with consequent significant adverse impacts on existing infrastructure within the borough. Regarding "planning by appeal", we are seeing with all the applications coming in for greenfield sites. We are not seeing many applications for brownfield sites because the Government is not putting enough support out there to develop brownfield sites. It was the previous Government that funded the work that we done in Willenhall, Spark Development and other brownfield sites.

Indeed, this is already happening in applications for development on large Green Belt sites which are not draft site allocations within our local plan, such as land off Longwood Lane, and do not accord with our preferred strategy of brownfield first and sustainable urban extensions and, for instance, do not provide sufficient affordable and other housing to meet the needs of Walsall families.

Saying no to the Government's targets and relying solely on brownfield only sites is therefore considered ineffective and undesirable plan-making and place-shaping and comes with a considerable risk of harmful development in

inappropriate locations being allowed, adversely impacting on our communities.

Councillor Ferguson asked the following supplementary question:

As we are already suffering planning by appeal, would the Portfolio Holder consider writing to the Minister and ask for a review of the numbers using locally provided information and ask what is in place to make brownfield sites more attractive to developers?

Councillor Andrew gave the following response:

I certainly will write to the Minister and hopefully get cross party support in asking for a review the numbers we have got in Walsall and for a reduction in the figures we are expected to deliver, because the impact it is going to have on our communities and greenbelt in Walsall should this plan be passed.

Councillor Smith

Given that the volunteer litter pickers across our Borough do a tremendous job in helping to keep some of our streets, car parks and green spaces as litter free as possible, complementing the work that the council's Clean and green staff do and further given that, in the main they remain dedicated and committed despite the ever increasing challenges due to the seemingly ever increasing littering and fly tipping, can you as Portfolio holder outline to this Council and the wider public:

- a. the extent to which the volunteer litter pickers have made and are making a difference and
- b. How this Council plans to increase its efforts in the "war" against fly tippers and litterbugs?

Councillor Hicken gave the following response:

I absolutely do value the work of the litter pickers, and I think it is great to see how that model has evolved over the last few years. When I first got elected, there was a separation. The Council treated community litter pickers as an outside entity, with no dialog or support. What we have seen over the last eight or, so years is how the Council have moved towards the dialog, established groups, supported them with equipment and partook in events taking place, which has been good and resulted in more volunteers getting involved.

In 2025, volunteers across the Borough collected 20,780 bags of litter and contributed 10,837 volunteer hours — a substantial increase compared to the previous years. Every year, other than the pandemic, this statistic has increased. During the Great British Spring Clean 2025, 540 volunteers took part in 33 organised events, collecting 1,750 bags in just over two weeks and giving almost 1000 volunteer hours. In my opinion, litter pickers are the eyes and ears of our community. They are out their day after day, week after week and they

do sterling work and take immense pride in their communities. As a Council, we should support them as much as we can. They will have their frustrations, the same as everyone else, when they see that litter has been dropped, things have been fly tipped and things are in a bad way. What is important is to identify what we can do to tackle those individuals who are dumping things.

The investment plan, which was approved about six months ago, has increased the amount of enforcement which takes place over the next four years. We have already begun, and regular dialog is taking place between the litter pickers and Council staff. We also have Community Protection going out with Clean and Green, so that they can go through the evidence and identify sites where there is regular fly tipping, identified by our volunteer litter pickers, and trace perpetrators involved. This work will continue to increase over the next few months, and years, as we have more staff and support available, not just for litter pickers but all areas of the community.

Councillor Smith asked the following supplementary question:

Are you listening to the litter pickers and the peer leaders amongst them, when they say three things:

1. Will you look at educating people, particularly the kids, about litter?
2. Can we see an increase in enforcement, to give encouragement to the litter pickers to carry on doing what they do for us?
3. Can you look into the accusation that the litter pickers are having to wait a long time when they ask for equipment, so they can get on doing the voluntary work they are doing?

Councillor Hicken gave the following response:

The way the portfolios are structured, the engagement with the litter picking groups sits predominantly with Councillor Samra. I am sure he will be keen to see those issues resolved and tackle to lack of equipment.

In terms of education in schools, that education already takes place and has done for many decades. One of the things I like to see is local schools getting involved in the litter picks. When this takes place, we will go to the area the day before to ensure there is nothing dangerous and then the kids come out and take part, and equipment is provided if the school does not have it. It is good as one of the top priorities we get from children is about the environment. Children particularly want to see more bins, cleaner streets and things like that. I think it is great that they take that interest, just as our volunteer litter pickers and communities across the borough do.

In terms of tackling fly tipping, we have some more cameras on the way, some being deployed imminently and some being covert cameras. These covert cameras will be hidden in areas where traditionally we were struggling to get the power supplies. They will be able to operate independently, bring back the footage to us and hopefully capture those people that think that they

won't get caught down dark allies and little lanes. Hopefully, we will see more of this taking place over the next few months.

In terms of engagement with the litter pickers, part of the £4.4 million investment we have secured has been allocated to; secure additional staff, including additional Community Protection officers and expand Operation Pheonix, so that we have more eyes and ears in our community areas, who can pick up on regular hot spots. Over the next few days, all Councillors will be contacted to see what areas you regularly see littering and fly tipping taking place. Whilst I cannot promise this will always result in a camera, but we are keen to see where those hot spots are. This communication will also go out to the volunteer litter pickers. I am keen to build a bridge (between the Council and litter picker volunteers.) One of the things in the investment package is another member of staff who will help to coordinate things.

My vision is, different teams across the Council, such as Clean and Green, Community Protection and Environmental Health, being coordinated together better to share dialog and intelligence. In addition, the litter pickers will have an additional point of contact, where they can feedback. This will work with the teams, to deliver that enforcement.

It is early days. We are only six months into a four-year plan, and it will probably take the full four years, but every year there should be an improvement, step, by step.

Councillor Ward

The Reform leader of Warwickshire County Council has recently called on the Government to increase the statutory walking distance to school from 3 miles to 5 miles.

This would have serious consequences for working families — particularly those without access to a car — forcing children to rely on multiple bus journeys or, in some cases, to walk unreasonable and unsafe distances.

Can the Portfolio Holder give a clear and unequivocal assurance that this council has no intention whatsoever of following Warwickshire's lead by lobbying the Government to increase the statutory school travel distance, and that we will continue to stand up for families and children in our borough?

Councillor M. Statham gave the following response:

Thank you, Councillor Ward for your question, I am happy to give Walsall's position on this as follows:

Walsall are not looking to lobby parliament for an increase in the walking distances to schools to 5 miles. For clarity, in accordance with the 2024 statutory travel guidance, the walking distance thresholds for home-to-school travel are set at 2 miles for children under the age of 8 and 3 miles for those

aged 8 and above. For those families eligible for assistance due to low income the threshold is 2 miles regardless of age.

This administration currently has no plans to advocate for an increase in these distances.

All eligible children residing within the Walsall borough continue to receive appropriate support for school travel pursuant to national policy. It is important to note that most pupils attending schools in Walsall do not require support from the Council to reach their nearest schools. For those who live beyond the threshold distance and meet the criteria, free school transport is provided. There are currently 406 pupils who receive support this way. For mainstream students, Walsall is supported by the Transport for West Midlands Network and therefore transport is more readily affordable and accessible than the larger more rural areas where in some cases the nearest school may be up to 20 miles away.

As part of our transport provision, we support families in the form of personal transport budgets. Schools also support through pupil premium, and the council offers a number of schemes including Independent Travel Training and cycling proficiency training, commonly referred to as bike ability.

I trust this response offers clear assurance, and I and officers are available to address any additional questions regarding our current policies or support measures for families and children in our borough.

Just a polite reminder, you may wish to look closer to home than Warwickshire for people who seek and are actively campaigning to see home to school transport distances increased for many hundreds of Walsall young people and the associated financial burden that provides.

78. Mayor's use of authority to waive call in process – Pride in Place Funding

Resolved (by assent):

That the Mayor's use of authority to waive call in process, as described in Part 4.5 of the Constitution be noted.

79. Auditor's Annual Report 2024/25

A report was submitted.

(See annexed)

The Mayor welcomed Laurelin Griffiths (Director, Public Sector Audit) from Grant Thornton to the meeting. Ms Griffiths provided an overview of the salient points within the annual report and responded to questions thereon from Members.

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

Resolved

That the 2024/2025 Annual Audit Report be received.

80. **Recommendations of Cabinet**

a. Treasury Management Mid-Year Position Statement 2025/26

A report was submitted.

(See annexed)

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

Resolved

That Cabinet notes and forward to Council, for consideration and noting (and in line with the requirements of the Treasury Management Code of Practice (2021)), the mid-year position statement for treasury management activities 2025/26 including prudential and local indicators (Appendix A).

81. **Portfolio Holder Briefings**

a. Portfolio Holder for Enforcement and Safe Communities - Councillor Hicken

Councillor Hicken gave a presentation.

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

b. Portfolio Holder for Internal Services - Councillor A. Hussain

In the absence of Councillor A. Hussian, Councillor Bird gave a presentation.

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

The meeting terminated at: 8:08pm

Mayor:

Date: