



# Walsall Council

## Education Overview and Scrutiny Committee

**19 November 2024 at 6:00PM**

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

### [Livestream Link](#)

#### **Membership:**

Councillor N. Latham (Chair)  
Councillor C. Towe (Vice-Chair)  
Councillor M. Bird  
Councillor S. Ditta  
Councillor L. Harrison  
Councillor A. Hicken  
Councillor S. Hussain  
Councillor N. Gultasib  
Councillor L. Rattigan  
Councillor W. Rasab  
Councillor E. Russell

#### **Non-Elected Voting Members:**

Vacancy (Archdiocese of Birmingham Representative)  
Vacancy (Diocese of Lichfield)

Vacancy (Parent Governor Representative – Primary)  
C. Pruden (Parent Governor Representative – Secondary)  
Vacancy (Parent Governor Representative – Special)

#### **Non-Elected Non-Voting Members:**

S. Guy (Primary Teacher Representative)  
W. Duffus (Secondary Teacher Representative)

#### **Portfolio Holder:**

Councillor P. Kaur – Education and Skills

#### **Quorum:**

4 Members

Democratic Services, The Council House, Walsall, WS1 1TW  
Contact name: Nikki Gough Telephone: 01922 654767 Email: [nikki.gough@walsall.gov.uk](mailto:nikki.gough@walsall.gov.uk)  
[Walsall Council Website](#)

**If you are disabled and require help to and from the meeting room,  
please contact the person above**

The Relevant Authorities (Disclosable Pecuniary Interests) Regulations 2012  
Specified pecuniary interests

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

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

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

Access to information: Exempt information

Part 1

Descriptions of exempt information: England

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

## Part 1 – Public Session

1. **Apologies**  
To receive apologies for absence from Members of the Committee.
2. **Substitutions**  
To receive notice of any substitutions for a Member of the Committee for the duration of the meeting.
3. **Minutes of the previous meeting**  
To approve and sign the minutes of the meeting held on 22 October 2024.  
*(Enclosed, Page 1 - 5)*
4. **Declarations of Interest and Party Whip**  
To receive declarations of interest or the party whip from Members in respect of items on the agenda.
5. **Local Government (Access to Information) Act, 1985 (as amended):**  
To agree that the public be excluded from the private session during consideration of the agenda items indicated for the reasons shown on the agenda.
6. **Corporate Financial Performance – Quarter 2 Financial Monitoring Position for 2024/25**  
To provide the budget monitoring position for period 6 2024/25.  
*(Enclosed, Pages 6 – 20)*
7. **Mainstream School Pupil Place Planning**  
To provide the Education Scrutiny and Overview Committee with an update on school place planning – Mainstream Primary and Secondary Schools and free school development.  
*(Enclosed, Pages 21 - 29)*
8. **Specialist Provision Plan**  
To provide an overview of the current position of Special Educational Needs and Disability (SEND) specialist provision planning within the Local Authority.
9. **School Admissions Update**  
An update on school admissions activities undertaken by the Admissions & Education Sufficiency Team.  
*(Enclosed, Pages 30 - 39)*
10. **SEND Developments including Dedicated Schools Grant (DSG)**  
To provide an overview of the developments and achievements by the SEND Service (Special Educational Needs) during the 2023/24 academic year.  
*(Enclosed, Pages 51 - 87)*
11. **Areas of Focus**  
To review the Committees work programme and the Forward Plans for Walsall Council and the Black Country Executive Committee.  
*(Enclosed, Pages 88 - 101)*
12. **Recommendations Tracker**  
To consider progress on recommendations from the previous meeting.  
*(Enclosed, Pages 102 - 103)*
13. **Date of next meeting**  
To note that the date of the next meeting will be on 9 January 2024.

# **Minutes of the Education Overview and Scrutiny Committee held in a Conference Room, Walsall Council House**

**Tuesday, 22 October 2024 at 6.00 PM**

## **Committee Members present:**

Councillor N. Latham (Chair)  
Councillor C. Towe (Vice-Chair)  
Councillor M. Bird  
Councillor S. Ditta  
Councillor L. Harrison  
Councillor S. Hussain  
Councillor E. Russell  
Councillor L. Rattigan

## **Portfolio Holder:**

Councillor P. Kaur – Education and Skills

## **Officers Present:**

S. Kelly – Director (Access and Inclusion)  
R. Beards – Head of Service (Inclusion)  
N. Perks – Quality Assurance Team Manager  
L. Thompson – Head of Virtual School  
R. Thomas – Head of Access  
L. Meredith – Lead Accountant  
N. Gough – Democratic Services Officer

The Chair gave welcome and introductions.

### **84. Apologies**

Apologies were received from Councillor A. Hicken.

### **85. Substitutions**

There were no substitutions for the duration of the meeting.

### **86. Declarations of Interest and Party Whip**

There were no declarations of interest or party whip.

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

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

88. **Minutes**

A copy of the Minutes of the meeting held on the 3 September 2024 were submitted [annexed].

**Resolved:**

**That the minutes of the meeting held on 3 September 2024 a copy having previously been circulated, be approved, and signed by the Chair as a true and accurate record subject to the inclusion of Councillor Rattigan's apologies.**

89. **Inclusion Hub**

The Head of the Virtual School introduced the report and highlighted the salient points. Further detail was provided to set out how the Council was supporting the education of all children in care, care leavers and children with a social worker. The following key points were highlighted to the Committee:

- Training was delivered to schools to raise awareness of the disadvantages that vulnerable children could experience by promoting engagement in education and narrowing the attainment gap.
- The aim of the inclusion hub was to improve the outcomes of these vulnerable children.
- It was noted that the remit of the inclusion hub had been extended to include children within the youth justice system, which had been highlighted as best practice.
- The role of the team was to reduce the number of exclusions for all children, with data indicating that Walsall was performing well – with the lowest number of exclusions (in the West Midlands) for children with Education Health Care Plans (EHCPs).

The Committee commended the work of the team, however it was noted that the Inclusion Hub was funded until July 2025 and questioned the sustainability after this date. The Head of the Virtual School stated that the Department of Education had indicated that the funding would continue, and that further vulnerable groups may be added to the remit of the Inclusion Hub. The Committee agreed that Cabinet should be requested to make provision in future budgets for the Inclusion Hub.

**Resolved**

- 1. That the 'Inclusion Hub' report be noted.**

2. **That Cabinet consider the sustainability of the service in consideration that government funding could cease in the future.**
3. **That Cabinet consider increasing the allocation of the budget to grow the service.**

90. **SEND Developments**

The SEND developments report was deferred until the next meeting, this was to ensure that the most recent data was available to the Committee.

**Resolved:**

**That the SEND developments report be deferred to the next meeting.**

91. **Home to School Transport**

The Head of Access presented the report and highlighted the salient points (annexed). The report informed Members how the service meets its statutory responsibilities regarding Home to School Transport. The eligibility criteria was described and it was noted that around 80% of service users were children with EHCP eligible for SEN transport. A significant growth in the number of EHCPs had led to increased costs in the service.

Actions taken to mitigate costs of the service were described, however it was stressed that further cost reductions were needed to operate within budget and manage cost and demand. To do so, a transformation plan had been developed – this had been done through engagement and consultation with other Local Authorities. The plan had commenced, and its impact was being monitored.

A discussion ensued and Members noted the importance of children arriving to school settled and the home to school transport was integral to this. In response to challenge from members, the Head of Access provided further detail on the school led bus model and the benefits that this produced for both schools and the Council. Concern was expressed that this model may create staffing issues and Members considered the suggestion that the Council discussed mutually beneficial plans with providers such as storage of vehicles for preferential rates.

Officers informed the Committee that the home to school transport service was a demand led service and the risks continued to be modelled and monitored monthly to ensure that savings were realised.

**Resolved:**

1. **That the Home to School Transport Report be noted.**
2. **That the transformation plan is considered at a future meeting of the Committee alongside the impact of the savings proposals.**

## 92. **Draft Revenue and Draft Capital Programme 2025/26 - 2028/29**

The Portfolio Holder presented the report and highlighted the salient points (annexed). The Lead Account provided informed the Committee that the report contained the draft budget, as reported to Cabinet on 16 October 2024, it included the draft revenue budget for 2025/26 to 2028/29, and the draft capital programme for 2025/26 to 2028/29. It was noted that the revenue budget for 2025/26 was not currently balanced with a gap of c£11m.

The Lead Account noted that growth and demand pressures relating to the remit of the Committee were detailed at appendix 1 of the report and totalled £6.47m over 4 years. Savings proposals relating to the remit of this Committee were shown at appendix 2 of the report and totalled £0.6m over 4 years. In addition, the council funded draft capital schemes relating to the remit of the Committee totalled £0.20m over 4 years, and were highlighted in appendix 3 of the report.

In response to challenge from the Committee, Officers confirmed that opportunities across the Council had been sought to provide savings proposals. Members expressed that it would be helpful for scrutiny committees to be provided with more detail to inform their deliberations of the budget.

In response to questions from Members, Officers confirmed that the controllable budget within the remit of the Education Committee was small due to the nature of funding to these services. The Committee agreed that there was little scope for further savings to the Education directorate.

### **Resolved:**

- 1. The Committee noted the draft revenue budget proposals and draft capital programme 2025/26 – 2028/29 to date that related to the remit of the committee.**
- 2. The Committee noted that the revenue budget for 2025/26 is currently not balanced, with a gap of c£11m.**
- 3. That the Education Overview and Scrutiny Committee considered that the finite resources available in the Education directorate would not stand any further reductions or savings without putting children at risk.**

## 93. **Areas of Focus**

### **Resolved:**

**That the areas of focus was noted.**

94. **Recommendation Tracker**

The Committee received the tracker of recommendations from previous meetings, including progress made and outstanding items.

[Annexed]

**Resolved:**

That the recommendation tracker be noted.

95. **Date of next meeting**

The date of the next meeting will be held on 19 November 2024.

There being no further business, the meeting terminated at 7.10 p.m.

Signed:

Date:

Education  
Overview and Scrutiny Committee

19 NOVEMBER 2024

**CORPORATE FINANCIAL PERFORMANCE – QUARTER 2 FINANCIAL MONITORING  
POSITION FOR 2024/25**

Ward(s) All

Portfolios: Cllr P Kaur – Education and Skills

**1. Aim**

- 1.1 To provide the budget monitoring position for Period 6 2024/25. The Chair requested that this item be considered by the Committee.

**2. Recommendations:**

The Committee are requested to:

- 2.1 Note the revenue and capital forecast for the financial year end 2024/25 for the services under the remit of the committee.

**3. Report detail - Know**

- 3.1 This report summarises the forecast revenue and capital financial position for 2024/25, based on the position to September 2024, for services within the remit of the Education Overview and Scrutiny Committee, as reported to Cabinet on 16 October 2024. The full Cabinet report can be accessed by the following link:

[Corporate Financial Performance 2024/25 - Cabinet 16 October 2024](#)

- 3.2 The forecast revenue outturn for 2024/25 for the services under the remit of the Education Overview and Scrutiny Committee is an overspend of £2.52m after the net use of reserves of £0.238m, as shown in **Table 1**. The forecast revenue outturn shown is based on actual information from the financial system as at the end of August 2024, and discussions with managers regarding year end forecast and achievement of approved savings.
- 3.3. For completeness, the forecast revenue overspend for services under the remit of the Children's Services Overview and Scrutiny Committee is an overspend of £2.59m. This gives a total forecast position of an overspend of £5.11m for Children's Services directorate as of 30 September 2024.

**Table 1: Forecast revenue analysis 2024/25 by Service**

Service	Annual Budget	Year End Forecast	Net Use of Reserves	Action Plan	Draft Outturn after use of and transfer to Earmarked Reserves	Variance to Budget
	£m	£m	£m	£m	£m	£m
Access & Inclusion	3.93	4.01	(0.17)	0.00	3.84	(0.09)
Home to School Transport	7.44	10.05	0.00	0.00	10.05	2.61
Education Funding - Accountable Body	(0.40)	(0.33)	(0.07)	0.00	(0.40)	0.00
<b>Total Services within remit of Committee</b>	<b>10.97</b>	<b>13.73</b>	<b>(0.24)</b>	<b>0.00</b>	<b>13.49</b>	<b>2.52</b>

3.4 The main variances are summarised in **Table 2** below.

**Table 2: Reasons for revenue outturn variance**

Service	Variance £m	Explanation of Year End Outturn
Access & Inclusion	(0.09)	In-year net underspend across Access & Inclusion due to staff underspends on vacancies and temporary staff recharges.
Home to School Transport	2.61	Due to impact of increased demand in 2023/24 over and above budget (28% increase v 14% budgeted).
Education Funding – Accountable Body	0.00	
<b>Total Services within remit of this Committee</b>	<b>2.52</b>	

### 3.5 Reasons for Movements

The June forecast position reported to Cabinet in July 2024 was an overspend of £2.55m therefore there is a net decrease in the overspend of (£0.03m) over the period. The key reasons for the movement include:

- **£0.06m** – Home to School Transport overspend increased due to higher than anticipated pupil numbers in September 2024 (1,266 vs 1,249) and the impact of this throughout the remainder of the financial year.
- **(£0.09m)** – Reduction in staffing costs due to vacant posts and use of external funding to support in year staffing costs.

### 3.6 Reserves

The total allocated reserves for 2024/25 for services under the remit of this committee are £2.70m, of which (£0.42m) has been used or committed to date and £0.18m will be transferred to reserves at the year-end, ringfenced for expected spend in 2025/26.

The use of reserves below is predominantly made up of grants carried forward from prior years to fund expenditure incurred in this financial year where grant conditions allow.

**Table 4** below details the use of and transfer to reserves across the services within the remit of this committee.

<b>Table 4: Summary of use of reserves and transfer to reserves</b>				
<b>Reserve Details</b>	<b>Allocated reserve</b>	<b>Use of reserve</b>	<b>Transfer to reserve</b>	<b>Balance of reserve</b>
	<b>£m</b>	<b>£m</b>	<b>£m</b>	<b>£m</b>
Access & Inclusion	0.63	(0.35)	0.18	0.46
Home to School Transport	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00
Education Funding – Accountable Body	2.07	(0.07)	0.00	2.00
<b>Total Reserves</b>	<b>2.70</b>	<b>(0.42)</b>	<b>0.18</b>	<b>2.46</b>

### 3.7 Risks

For the services under the remit of this committee, there are total risks of **£1.66m** which are not included in the above forecast. At this stage the risks are not a certainty and as such are not included in the monitoring position. There are high risks of £1.17m relating to Services within the remit of this committee. If any risks became a certainty, they would need to be included in the forecast position as an overspend, unless alternative action can be identified to mitigate these costs. A summary of the risk assessment is shown in **Table 5** below.

<b>Table 5: Revenue Risks 2024/25</b>				
<b>Risk</b>	<b>Value £m</b>	<b>Ongoing £m</b>	<b>One Off £m</b>	<b>Actions to manage risk</b>
High	1.17	1.17	0.00	Home to School Transport – review and monitor cost increases and impact of any changes regarding belonging regulations.
Medium	0.00	0.00	0.00	
Low	0.49	0.49	0.00	SEN Assessment - monitor EHCP growth and review capacity within team. Education Psychology – recruitment strategy.
<b>Total</b>	<b>1.66</b>	<b>1.66</b>	<b>0.00</b>	

### 3.8 Service Transformation Plan Benefits

Included within the budget for 2024/25 for services within the remit of this Committee are £0.56m of approved savings. **Table 6** gives an update on progress towards implementing these benefits:

**Table 6: Delivery of 2024/25 approved savings – services within the remit of this Committee**

Saving	Total savings £m	Delivered £m	To be delivered by 31/03/25 £m	Not fully guaranteed £m	At High risk of non-delivery £m
OP2 – Home to School Transport review of contracts and route	(0.30)	-	-	-	(0.30)
OP54 - Culture shift, training & workforce - payback of Education, Health and Care Plan investment	(0.05)	(0.05)	-	-	-
OP55 – reduce headcount	(0.06)	(0.06)	-	-	-
OP56 - reduction in home to school transport investment	(0.15)	-	-	-	(0.15)
<b>Total approved savings for services within remit of Committee</b>	<b>(0.56)</b>	<b>(0.11)</b>	-	-	<b>(0.45)</b>

Each benefit is “BRAG” categorised as follows:

- Blue (delivered);
- Green (on track to be delivered with no issues at year end of 2024/25);
- Amber (not guaranteed at this stage but no major issues expected, some management action needed to ensure delivery) or,
- Red - (at high risk of not being achieved either in part or in full and therefore either alternative actions are required or a plan to ensure delivery is put back on track).

### 3.9 Capital Forecast

The capital programme for the services under the remit of the Education Overview and Scrutiny Committee, as at the end of September 2024, is £23.32m. As at September, it was expected that £14.97m will be spent within the current financial year. A list of schemes within the remit of this committee is shown in **Table 7**.

**Table 7: Capital Outturn 2024/25 – Services within the remit of this Committee**

Scheme	Approved Budget £m	Actual year to date £m	Forecast Outturn £m	Year End Variance £m	Proposed Carry Forward to 2025/26 £m	Variance Over / (Under) £m
<b>Council Funded schemes</b>						
School Estate Condition Survey	0.25	0.00	0.05	(0.20)	(0.20)	0.00
School Temporary Classrooms	0.25	0.00	0.00	(0.25)	(0.25)	0.00
<b>Total Council Funded Schemes</b>	<b>0.50</b>	<b>0.00</b>	<b>0.05</b>	<b>(0.45)</b>	<b>(0.45)</b>	<b>(0.00)</b>
<b>Externally Funded Schemes</b>						
Devolved Formula Capital	1.77	0.19	1.77	0.00	0.00	0.00
Capital Maintenance	4.00	1.96	4.00	0.00	0.00	0.00

Basic Need	9.40	1.39	2.00	(7.40)	(7.40)	0.00
High Needs Provision Allocation	7.00	1.75	6.50	(0.50)	(0.50)	0.00
Academies	0.22	0.00	0.22	0.00	0.00	0.00
Childcare Expansion	0.43	0.00	0.43	0.00	0.00	0.00
<b>Total Externally Funded Schemes</b>	<b>22.82</b>	<b>5.29</b>	<b>14.92</b>	<b>(7.90)</b>	<b>(7.90)</b>	<b>0.00</b>
<b>Total Capital – Services within the remit of this Committee</b>	<b>23.32</b>	<b>5.29</b>	<b>14.97</b>	<b>(8.35)</b>	<b>(8.35)</b>	<b>(0.00)</b>

#### **4. Financial information**

4.1 The financial implications are as set out in the main body of this report. The council has a statutory responsibility to set a balanced budget and to ensure it has an adequate level of reserves. The council will take a medium-term policy led approach to all decisions on resource allocation.

#### **5. Reducing Inequalities**

5.1 Services consider and respond to equality issues in setting budgets and delivering services. Irrespective of budgetary pressures, the Council must fulfil equal opportunities obligations.

#### **6. Decide**

6.1 To note the recommendations as set out in this report.

#### **7. Respond**

7.1 The Executive Director for Children’s Services, with finance in support will be working with Directors and Heads of service to review the forecast, to continue to implement mitigating actions for any further forecast overspends and to consider these financial implications in line with the council’s budget setting process.

#### **8. Review**

8.1 Regular monitoring reports are presented to Cabinet to inform them of the financial forecast for 2024/25, including an update on risks and impact on the budget for 2025/26 and beyond.

**Background papers:** Various financial working papers

**Contact Officers:**

Ross Hutchinson, Head of Finance (Deputy 151 Officer) – Finance Business Partnering & ESS projects

☎ 01922 658411, ✉ [ross.hutchinson@walsall.gov.uk](mailto:ross.hutchinson@walsall.gov.uk)

Tanya Collier, Strategic Finance Business Partner – Children’s & Education Services

☎ 01922 652346, ✉ [tanya.collier@walsall.gov.uk](mailto:tanya.collier@walsall.gov.uk)

Colleen Male

Interim Executive Director, Children’s Services

# EDUCATION SERVICES OVERVIEW & SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

## Q2 FINANCIAL MONITORING POSITION FOR 2024/25

19<sup>th</sup> November 2024

Tanya Collier



Walsall Council

PROUD OF OUR PAST OUR PRESENT AND FOR OUR FUTURE

# Contents

- 1 Forecast Overview
- 2 Key Variances
- 3 Movement from previous month
- 4 Reserves
- 5 Risks
- 6 2024/25 STP Summary
- 7 Capital Forecast

# 1. Forecast Overview

The forecast revenue outturn for 2024/25 for the services under the remit of the Education Overview & Scrutiny Committee as at P6 (September 2024) is an overspend of **£2.52m**.

For completeness, the forecast revenue overspend for services under the remit of the Children's Services Overview and Scrutiny Committee is an overspend of £2.59m. This gives a total forecast position of an overspend of £5.11m for Children's Services directorate as of 30 September 2024.

This is broken down further in Table 1 of the report.

## 2. Key Variances

The key variances contributing to the services overspend of **£2.52m** are:

- **£2.61m** Home to school transport due to the impact of increased demand in 2023/24 over and above budget (28% increase vs 14% budgeted) and increase in average costs linked to market pressures.
- **(£0.09m)** Other in-year net underspend on Access & Inclusion due to staff underspends from vacancies and temporary staff recharges.

The above is detailed in Table 2 of the report.

### 3. Movement from Jun 24 (P3) to Sep 24 (P6)

The forecast outturn position as at Period 3 (Jun 24) was an overspend of £2.55m therefore there is a net decrease in the forecast overspend of **(£0.03m)**. The main reasons for this movement are:

- **£0.06m** – Home to School Transport overspend increased due to higher than anticipated pupil numbers in September 2024 (1,266 vs 1,249) and the impact of this throughout the remainder of the financial year.
- **(£0.09m)** – Reduction in staffing costs due to vacant posts and use of external funding to support in year staffing costs.

The above is detailed in Section 3.5 of the report.

## 4. Reserves

The total allocated reserves for 2024/25 for services under the remit of this committee are £2.70m, of which (£0.42m) has been used or committed to date and £0.18m will be transferred to reserves at the year-end, ringfenced for expected spend in 2025/26.

Further information around the reserves can be found in section 3.6 and Table 4 of the report.

# 5. Risks

Low Impact (Green) **£0.49m**    Medium Impact (Amber) **£0.00m**    High Impact (Red) **£1.17m**

For the services under the remit of this committee, there are total risks of **£1.66m** which are not included in the above forecast. At this stage the risks are not a certainty and as such are not included in the monitoring position.

If any risks became a certainty, they would need to be included in the forecast position as an overspend, unless alternative action can be identified to mitigate these costs.

Further information around the risks can be found in section 3.7 and Tables 5 of the report.

## 6. 2024/25 STP Summary

Included within the budget for 2024/25 for services within the remit of this Committee are £0.56m of approved savings of which:

- £0.11m has been fully achieved to date;
- £0.45m is not expected to be achieved in this financial year.

Further information around the risks can be found in section 3.8 and Table 6 of the report.

# 7. Capital Forecast

The capital programme for the services under the remit of the Education Overview and Scrutiny Committee, as at the end of September 2024, is £23.32m. As at September, it was expected that £14.97m will be fully spent within the current financial year and the remaining £8.35m will be carried forward into 2025/26.

Further information around the risks can be found in section 3.9 and Table 7 of the report.

## **Education Overview and Scrutiny Committee**

### **Mainstream School Pupil Place Planning**

<b>Wards</b>	All
<b>Service:</b>	Admissions & Education Sufficiency Team, Access Service
<b>Portfolio:</b>	Councillor Kaur

#### **1. Aim**

The aim of this report is to provide the Education Scrutiny and Overview Committee with an update on:

- School Place Planning – Mainstream Primary and Secondary Schools
- Free School Development

#### **2. Recommendations**

That the Education Overview and Scrutiny Committee:

- notes falling birth rates impacting on surplus places in primary schools which will mean a requirement for conversations with schools about possibly reducing their Published Admission Number (PAN), or alternatives, to ensure a school does not become financially unsustainable.
- may require a further report on primary places in Spring or Summer term.
- notes the positive working to meet the forecasted demand for places with our secondary schools.
- considers the contents of this report and decides whether any further information or updates are required.

#### **3. Report detail**

The Council has a statutory duty to ensure there are sufficient school places for resident children who want a school place. A local authority has a general duty, under section 14 of the Education Act 1996, to ensure that there are available, in its area, sufficient schools 'in number, character and equipment to provide for all pupils the opportunity of appropriate education'.

To meet its statutory responsibilities Walsall Council needs to ensure it understands where the pressures on school places will come from. These pressures include changes in the population, housing developments, and cross border migration.

The projections of future demand for school places are based on birth data sourced from the Office of National Statistics, historical pupil retention data from the school census, pupil yield from housing developments obtained from the council's planning department and inward and outward migration data.

For mainstream pupil place planning purposes, the borough has been divided into planning areas. There are 11 primary planning areas and 4 secondary planning areas. These areas were drawn up taking account of ward boundaries, geographical features (such as major roads and housing developments), and patterns from historical school admissions data. (See Appendix A & B)

In order to plan pupil places effectively the Council must be open and transparent in communicating the details on the pressures on school places in each planning area. The Council must also manage expectations and avoid any adverse impact on schools regarding school development proposals. When new capacity is needed, it is important to establish guidelines to ensure that this new capacity is provided appropriately and in the right place:

- We should seek to meet demand locally to allow children a school place within a reasonable walking distance from their home.
- Our planning of school places should reflect our school improvement strategy: we should work to make all schools good or outstanding. When seeking to expand schools, we should favour the expansion of schools where there is proven demand and well-established and successful leadership and management at a good or outstanding school.
- We should consider the impact of any changes on the viability and standards at existing schools. Where necessary we should work with schools to provide optimum forms of entry appropriate to the capacity of the school site and the level of demand for that school. On occasions, over time, it may be appropriate to reduce the capacity of some schools as others grow in size.
- The guidelines set out above will need to be balanced against the need to make best use of scarce capital resources and the physical practicalities of available sites.

The Local Authority adopts an annual cycle to school organisation and place planning, linked to the Department for Education School Capacity (SCAP) survey for mainstream schools. This survey is submitted in July each year and comprises four parts:

- capacity of schools
- forecasts of pupil numbers per national curriculum year group by planning area
- additional places due to be created by planning area
- place planning commentary by planning area of local circumstances e.g. migration, changes of school category

The school place planning service prepares and submits this survey and its component parts, and during the yearly planning cycle updates its core data including changes to school capacity data following alterations and expansion of the school estate, planning department data on housing completions in each planning area, school census numbers and school admission application numbers and preferences.

The outcome of the validated and moderated submission by the DfE is an allocation of funding known as basic need funding. This capital grant is allocated

to all LAs who have a forecasted demand for places above their existing capacity to help in meeting the statutory duty in making sure there are enough school places for children in our area.

### 3.1 Primary Sufficiency

School place planning forecasts must be agile and robust and will need to align to the Council’s wider housing and regeneration plans and those of our neighbouring local authorities to ensure the impacts of new housing developments and cross border movement of pupils continues to be sufficiently planned for.

The table below shows the projected number of Reception places required against the capacity in terms of Published Admission Number (PAN) for Walsall as a whole.

Measure	Sep-25	Sep-26	Sep-27	Sep-28
<b>PAN</b>	3937	3937	3937	3937
<b>Projected Intake</b>	3465	3433	3447	3433
<b>Surplus/(Shortfall)</b>	472	504	490	504
<b>Surplus %</b>	12%	12.8%	12.4%	12.8%

Planning a sufficiency of school places requires a balance between two conflicting objectives. The first is to provide enough places to meet need along with a margin to allow some exercise of parental preference; the second is to ensure that there is not an excess of places overall or in any school or planning area. A working surplus across the whole borough however is necessary to ensure there are sufficient places for in-year admissions and an ability to meet parental preference.

Falling birth rates suggest that there will be a requirement for conversations with schools about possibly reducing their Published Admission Number, or alternatives, to ensure a school does not become financially unsustainable.

Work within the school place planning team is ongoing to develop a plan to ensure that schools remain financially sustainable during the years that this reduction is showing. This work has been communicated to primary schools through the Primary, Nursery and Special (PNS) head teachers’ group and further conversations are being communicated with schools at planning area level.

A further report on the outcome of the conversations with primary schools and any proposed changes to admissions numbers for future years can be brought back to the committee in the Spring or Summer term if requested.

### 3.3 Secondary Sufficiency

As part of the SCAP submission this summer, the school place planning team has revised the forecasted model based on the variances in the in/out of borough demands. The submitted SCAP model, therefore shows a forecasted shortfall of 315 Year 7 places against the schools published admission numbers for September 2025.

The current forecasting model for secondary pupil places for Year 7 intakes shows the following:

Measure	Sep-25	Sep-26	Sep-27	Sep-28	Sep-29	Sep-30
<b>PAN</b>	3743	3743	3743	3743	3743	3743
<b>Projected Intake</b>	4058	4051	4138	4151	3946	4160
<b>Surplus/Shortfall</b>	-315	-308	-395	-408	-203	-417
<b>Surplus %</b>	-8.40%	-8.20%	-10.60%	-10.90%	-5.40%	-11.10%

Future projections are reviewed regularly based on the October census information, and on-time applications for school places to ensure the forecasted model is as accurate as possible with known information.

The expected shortfall of places across the Local Authority over the coming years is significant, therefore additional capacity is needed across the borough to ensure sufficient places are available.

Through ongoing conversations with schools and academy trusts/governing bodies, additional places have been secured for September 2025.

To date, 10 schools (shown in green in the table below) have offered an additional 169 places without requiring any works to be undertaken at the site.

Agreed PAN uplifts – No capital works required					
Planning Area	School	Base PAN	Uplift	Total Admission Number	Offering uplifts with no capital works since
1	Brownhills School	150	17	167	Pre-September 2019
	Shire Oak Academy	270	30	300	Pre-September 2019
	<b>TOTAL PA1</b>	<b>420</b>	<b>47</b>	<b>467</b>	
2	Aldridge School - An Academy	270	15	285	September 2022
	St Francis of Assisi Catholic Technology College	180	15	195	Pre-September 2019
	The Streetly Academy	260	10	270	Pre-September 2019
	Barr Beacon School	252	9	261	September 2021
<b>TOTAL PA2</b>	<b>962</b>	<b>49</b>	<b>1011</b>		
3	Joseph Leckie Academy	240	20	260	Pre-September 2019
	Blue Coat Church of England Academy	150	10	160	September 2022
	Grace Academy Darlaston	180	40	220	September 2022
	<b>TOTAL PA3</b>	<b>570</b>	<b>70</b>	<b>640</b>	
4	Bloxwich Academy	180	3	183	Pre-September 2019
	<b>TOTAL PA4</b>	<b>180</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>183</b>	
<b>GRAND TOTAL</b>		<b>2132</b>	<b>169</b>	<b>2301</b>	

Following the Cabinet paper in September 2024, both Pool Hayes Academy and West Walsall Academy are currently in the process of completing the works at their schools to provide a combined 80 places per year.

In addition, the September Cabinet paper approved design feasibility studies for expansions at Willenhall EACT (up to 90 places per year) and Ormiston Sheffield Academy (30 places per year). Based on this approval, following conversations with both schools, they have agreed to support the demand for places for September 2025 whilst the feasibility study works are completed.

A total of up to 339 additional places have therefore been secured for September 2025.

It is positive that the forecasted demand for places has been secured with the support of several secondary schools. It would be beneficial to secure a 'planning' tolerance to allow for some additional migration impacts of in/out of borough preferences.

Officers in the school place planning team are continuing to engage with secondary schools to secure additional places if they are needed for allocation of school places on 01 March 2025.

Schools will exceed the Published Admission Number (PAN) for September 2025 to admit additional pupils into the cohort – the additional places offered will allow more pupils to secure one of their preferences for school admission and lead to less pupils being offered a non-preference school which will reduce admission appeals and home to school transport assistance for those pupils offered a place at alternative schools.

### **Secondary Free School**

The Windsor Trust applied to the DfE to open a new secondary school in Walsall as part of Wave 12 round of applications and was approved to open by the Secretary of State in April 2017. At that time the project, the 'Swift Free School' moved to 'pre-opening stage'.

Windsor Academy Trust currently has fifteen schools – seven primary schools and eight secondary schools. Two of the primary schools are in Walsall (Goldsmith Primary and Rivers Primary); the remaining schools are in Dudley, Staffordshire and Sandwell. The Trust has recently opened a new Free School in Sandwell, the Windsor Olympus Academy.

The approved DfE application is for a mainstream secondary phase school with a proposed capacity of 1150 pupils (900 secondary places in years 7-11, plus 250 places in post 16)

As part of the pre-opening stage the DfE had to find an appropriate site within the Walsall North area to meet the forecasted demand for additional places.

Despite DfE and its associated organisation, 'Located' attempting to find an appropriate private sector site in Walsall, none were found. At this stage, the Swift project was at risk of being removed due to site un-availability.

Given the forecasted demand for school places, dialogue between the DfE and LA, led to a number of LA owned sites being put forward for consideration to the DfE.

The DfE delivery unit carried out a range of desk top due diligence on the LA sites and due to a range of factors including location, site size, highway/access issues, overhead cables, etc the DfE have focussed their work on a preferred site – known locally as the ‘former Reedswood Golf Course site’

The project is currently scheduled to deliver the new school in its permanent accommodation in time for September 2027 intake.

The free school delivery team have a licence from the LA (corporate landlord) to undertake surveys on the site including:

- Air Quality
- Arboriculture
- Archaeology
- Asbestos
- Ecological
- Flood Risk
- Heritage
- Intrusive Geotechnical
- Noise and Acoustics
- Topographical and underground utilities
- Transport

The DfE delivery team advise the high-level programme they are working to as follows:

- Feasibility complete and approved by DFE – end December 2024
- Decision to proceed from feasibility to design solution – February 2025
- Start of procurement – March 2025
- Contractor appointed – May 2025
- Planning submission – June 2025
- Start on site – November 2025
- Completion – June/July 2027

Officers continue to engage the DfE (delivery team and regional directorate team) on a two weekly basis to discuss a range of delivery and operational processes, timescales and issues arising.

Working alongside the delivery of the permanent school, all parties (LA, DfE and Windsor Academy Trust) are aware of the wider sufficiency implications the

delayed delivery of the Free School has in Walsall. All parties are keen to ensure that the Free School can open for the 2027 academic year and the ongoing engagement meetings have a focussed agenda item on this.

The next stage is to wait for the feasibility report on the permanent site, due end of December 2025

**4. Financial information**

Any capital costs arising from works required will be funded from DfE grant funding Basic Need.

**5. Reducing Inequalities**

It is of crucial importance to the Council's strategic objectives that the young People of Walsall can access the right provision to meet their need to achieve the appropriate qualifications, progressing to employment and / or training and to make a positive contribution within the Borough in the future.

**6. Decide**

The Committee may decide to note the current position and request further information or assurance if necessary.

**7. Respond**

Any recommendations made by the Committee will be assessed against the Access planned work and performance board programmes.

**8. Review**

The work of the Admissions & Education Sufficiency Team is subject to constant monitoring and assessment via the Children's Services Performance Board process.

**Contact Officer(s)**

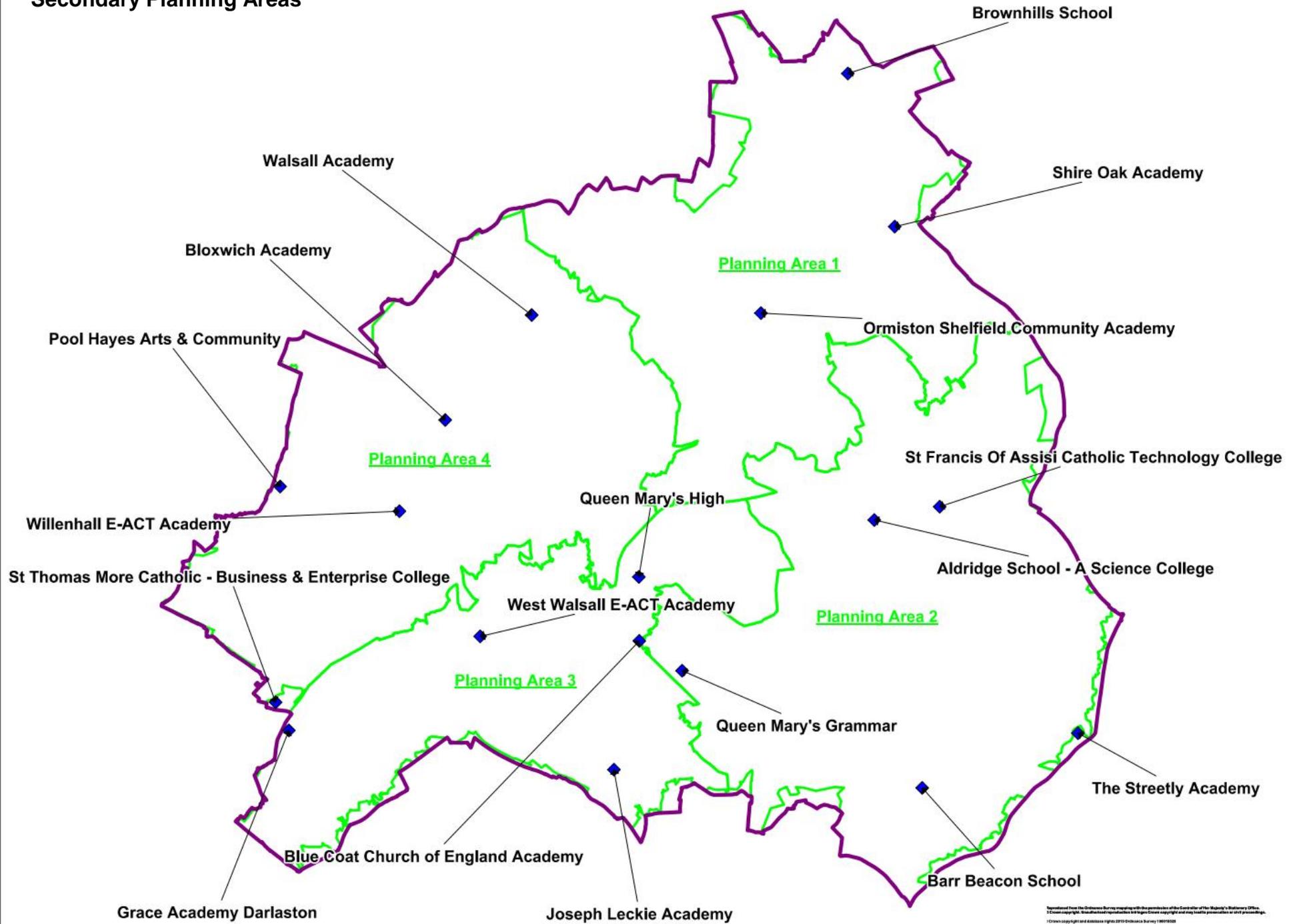
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# Secondary Planning Areas



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**Specialist Provision Plan**

<b>Wards</b>	All
<b>Service:</b>	Admissions & Education Sufficiency, Access Service
<b>Portfolio:</b>	Councillor Kaur

**1. Aim**

- 1.1 The aim of this report is to provide an overview of the current position of Special Educational Needs and Disability (SEND) specialist provision planning within the Local Authority.
- 1.2 A local authority has a general duty, under section 14 of the Education Act 1996, to ensure there are sufficient school places, in its area, sufficient schools 'in number, character and equipment to provide for all pupils the opportunity of appropriate education'.
- 1.3 The aim of this report is to provide an overview of the current position and options to support the development of education provision for our most vulnerable children.

**2. Recommendations**

- 2.1 That the Education Overview and Scrutiny Committee considers the contents of this report and decides whether there should be further information or updates.
- 2.2 That the Education Overview and Scrutiny Committee notes the number of places we currently have in Walsall, the number of places we require in the borough and the recommendations on how to meet the requirement of places. Walsall currently have 1,264 commissioned places across the borough, with 215 additional places approved to be provided through Specialist Resourced Provision expansion and the conversion of the former Rowley Robins building. A potential 266-500 places are required to meet projected demand over the next five years.

**3. Know**

Following on from the paper brought to the Education Overview and Scrutiny Committee in November 2023, this report provides an update on the ongoing work surrounding pupil place planning for SEND.

The ongoing focus of the school organisation service is to review the requirement for SEND places across the borough in terms of pupil place planning and future proofing our place requirement. Working closely with the

Inclusion Service, a five-year plan has been created to ensure our statutory responsibility for having sufficient school places is met.

### **3.1 Our vision**

Our vision is that all children and young people in Walsall will, irrespective of their learning needs or abilities, gain the skills and confidence to live well in their community. They will be supported and nurtured through an educational system that responds to their circumstances and prepares them for adulthood. Our ambition is to create a culture where there is effective, high quality learning provision, combined with meaningful and purposeful school partnerships, focused on the direct pursuit of improved outcomes for all Walsall's children and young people.

We must ensure that Walsall's Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND) offer continues to improve the experience and outcomes for children and young people. We know that good provision requires a strong and effective culture of inclusion that supports all children and young people to thrive. All children and young people deserve the support they need to be confident, resilient individuals with their own ambitions and aspirations as they develop into adulthood irrespective of their learning needs or abilities.

We hold a strong commitment towards enhancing special educational provision. Our objective is to ensure that every child and young person in Walsall with an Education, Health and Care (EHC) plan receives outstanding support within their local community. We firmly believe that the needs of most pupils with an EHC plan can be met through local mainstream provision which aligns with the legal presumption and SEND Code of Practice. However, we acknowledge that some learners may require additional support, and for this, we aim to create a tiered system of provision, growing in specialism and support. We are committed to ongoing identification of new settings that can provide the best outcomes and ensure adequate specialist placements are available for all pupils in Walsall, thus reducing the need for independent specialist provision. Our goal is to make the best use of our own resources and skills to provide quality services to all children and young people who require support. Our special schools will become centres that share their skills and knowledge to our mainstream schools. We are committed to ensuring that appropriate provision is available for children and young people between 0 and 25 years, supporting them through carefully planned key transitions.

### **3.2 Our approach to SEN placements**

This report provides an update on the ongoing work surrounding our specialist provision and pupil place planning for SEND. The ongoing focus of the team is to review the requirement for SEND places across the borough in terms of pupil place planning and future proofing our place requirement. Working closely with the SEN and inclusion service, a five-year plan has been created to ensure our statutory responsibility for having sufficient school places is met, this will be continually reviewed to ensure it is accurate.

This report also looks at the need for specialist school places in Walsall over the next 3 years. These are places in Special schools and in Specialist Resourced Provisions (SRPs) that are attached to mainstream schools for children and young people with Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND).

We want to ensure that all our children and young people achieve the best possible outcomes, and the aims of our placement strategy are:

- Mainstream first - We want all our children and young people to be able to access a mainstream setting if this is the best option for them. We want to have a fully inclusive approach within our schools, colleges and early years settings, and for every mainstream setting to make their best endeavours to meet children and young people's special educational needs.
- All ages, all types - We are committed to offering appropriate educational places for children and young people including early years and Post 16. Our settings will be equipped to ensure carefully planned transitions take place and that all children are prepared for adulthood. We will look to widen our Primary Need boundaries in terms of our Special Schools to develop 'multi-need' provision to assist in placing complex learners.
- Locality based learning - We believe that where possible, children should be educated within their local community, bringing a sense of belonging and value. We want our families of children with SEND to be supported and welcome to local schools. We want to reduce the amount of time children spend in transport. We will open SRPs and Hubs across the borough that can meet a range of needs.
- Shared skills - We recognise that our specialist settings and hubs have skills and resources that can be widely shared to enhance the support of children in mainstream settings.
- Graduated placements - Our model of placements includes four main types that increase in specialism and support. These are wholly mainstream, SRPs, Specialist Hubs and wholly special school. These settings give children opportunities to continue with elements of mainstream learning which will enhance their specialist support.

### **3.3 Pupil Place Requirements**

The number of Walsall children and young people with an EHC plan is approximately 4,745 (end October 2024) and has increased by 59% over the last 3 years.

Of those pupils aged 5 to 16 with an EHC plan 56.4% are currently accommodated in a mainstream school place, with 41.6% requiring a specialist place in a special school or SRP with the remaining 2% in Elective Home Education (EHE) / Education Other Than At School (EOTAS).

Significant work has been undertaken to review the additional specialist places needed for the next 3-5 years.

Modelling work has been undertaken to forecast the numbers of EHC plans that are expected to be issued in the coming years, and to estimate the number of these pupils who will require a specialist place.

This modelling estimates the need for provision for complex needs across the four broad types of SEND:

- Cognition & Learning
- Communication & Interaction including Autism
- Social, Emotional and Mental Health (SEMH)
- Sensory and physical needs

The latest forecast modelling suggested that a potential of an initial 1,985 pupils with ECH plans will require a specialist school place in the 2027/28 academic year

These places are for both special schools and specialist places within mainstream.

Currently, our special schools have specific designations for the type of need they meet – we will address this over time, aiming to have generic provisions where appropriate (whilst avoiding dilution of specialisms).

### 3.4 Current Pupil Place Availability

The number of commissioned places available across special schools, specialist resourced provisions (SRPs) and the medical PRU in Walsall at the start of the 2023/24 academic year was 1,121 as set out in a paper taken to Cabinet in March 2024.

Following Cabinet approval for the expansion of SEND places, the number of commissioned places at the start of the 2024/25 academic year has increased by 143 to 1,264 as set out in the tables below.

*Table 1 Commissioned Numbers: Special Schools*

SPECIAL SCHOOLS						
SCHOOL NAME	COMMISSIONED PLACE NUMBER					
	Sep-19	Sep-20	Sep-21	Sep-22	Sep-23	Sep-24
Castle	178	189	204	222	222	231
Elmwood	67	72	72	77	77	82
Jane Lane	120	120	136	166	175	186
Mary Elliot	127	127	137	140	140	140
Oakwood	85	100	130	150	208	239
Old Hall	98	98	103	103	103	103
Phoenix	41	41	41	41	47	49
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>716</b>	<b>747</b>	<b>823</b>	<b>899</b>	<b>972</b>	<b>1,030</b>

Table 2 Commissioned Numbers: ARP/SRP

ARP/SRP IN MAINSTREAM						
SCHOOL NAME	COMMISSIONED PLACE NUMBER					
	Sep-19	Sep-20	Sep-21	Sep-22	Sep-23	Sep-24
Bentley West Primary	10	10	10	10	10	10
Rushall Primary	15	15	16	23	24	24
Lindens Primary	10	10	10	10	10	10
St Francis of Assisi Secondary	13	13	11	11	0	0
Shire Oak Academy	10	10	10	10	10	10
Pool Hayes Academy	10	10	10	10	10	10
New Invention Infant	0	0	0	8	8	8
Christ Church CE Primary	0	0	0	8	8	16
Short Heath Junior	0	0	0	8	8	8
Meadow View Primary	0	0	0	0	8	8
St James Primary	0	0	0	0	0	16
Moorcroft Wood Primary	0	0	0	0	0	8
Rosedale CE Infant	0	0	0	0	0	8
Ogley Hay Nursery	0	0	0	0	0	8
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>68</b>	<b>68</b>	<b>67</b>	<b>98</b>	<b>96</b>	<b>144</b>

Table 3 Commissioned Numbers: Medical PRU

Medical PRU						
SCHOOL NAME	COMMISSIONED PLACE NUMBER					
	Sep-19	Sep-20	Sep-21	Sep-22	Sep-23	Sep-24
Shepwell	60	60	60	60	70	90
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>60</b>	<b>60</b>	<b>60</b>	<b>60</b>	<b>70</b>	<b>90</b>

As the tables show, significant work has been undertaken over the last five years to meet the growing need for specialist places through a 43% increase in commissioned numbers across Walsall special schools and an 82% increase in places across SRPs in mainstream schools and the medical PRU.

As part of plans to meet additional demand, Cabinet in December 2022 and March 2024 approved funding of £7.2m to increase the number of places in SRPs in mainstream schools by 224.

56 of these SRP places have been delivered with a further 62 places to follow as shown below.

Table 4 Planned SRP Places

PLANNED SRPs		
SCHOOL NAME	PLACES	POTENTIAL OPENING
Blue Coat Junior	16	Jan-25
Walsall Studio School (Shepwell satellite)	30	Jan-25
Ormiston Shelfield Academy	16	Sep-26
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>62</b>	

The local authority is engaged in conversations with several schools regarding the development of the remaining 106 SRP places previously approved.

Cabinet in March 2024 also approved funding of £1.14m to convert the former Rowley Robins nursery site to provide 47 pupil places for SEND. Works have commenced on this scheme and are due for completion in January 2025. This provision will operate as a satellite site of Old Hall Special School and cater for children with complex SEN needs.

### **3.5 Forecast shortfall of places**

The model forecasted a need for an initial 1,985 specialist places in the 2027/28 academic year, with an existing 1,121 specialist places at that time, suggesting a requirement for an additional 740 places.

Over recent months the SEN service has developed a more rigorous approach to its decision-making process for EHCP, therefore reducing the rate of EHCP growth.

The forecasted impact potentially reduces the initial required places from 1,985 to 1,745.

The LA currently has 1,264 commissioned specialist places.

The current agreed SRP expansion schemes and the Old Hall satellite provision at Rowley Robins is programmed to deliver 109 places, taking the number of commissioned places to 1,373.

The balance of the SRP programme aims to provide a further 106 places, which would take the total commissioned places to 1,479.

This leaves an estimated requirement for an additional 266-506 specialist places to the 2027/28 academic year depending on the potential reduction of EHCP demand growth.

These forecasts are an indicative need for places based on a historical trend model of requests for EHCP assessments and actual EHCPs that are issued. We will be revisiting the model, monitoring the impact of the work above, and redefining the place needs on a 6 monthly interval.

The local authority will continue to look at meeting demand across the 4 key areas:

- LA commissioned special schools
- Resourced provision in mainstream schools
- Alternate Provision
- Independent special schools

As part of work to meet the estimated shortfall of places, the local authority is continuing conversations with Independent Special Schools to commission

places with these providers where pupil's complex needs cannot be reasonably met through 'in-house' provision. The current forecasting model accounts for this through an assumption that a proportion of all pupils with EHC plans will require independent provision. The level of this assumption is kept under constant review.

### 3.6 Potential Schemes

In assessing the options for place creation, the school organisation team and corporate landlord considered the potential for the permanent expansion of existing special schools, within site constraints, along with opportunities within the council property portfolio to repurpose buildings to create new provision. Following the production of initial desktop studies, Head Teachers of all special schools were consulted regarding their views on the scheme options produced, appetite and organisational capacity for expansion. Heads indicated their desire to support the process and engaged with teams to create proposed options at their schools to undertake the works required.

In March 2024, cabinet approved £3.95m to progress detailed feasibility studies and design work for the expansion of the special schools to allow for a more accurate cost estimate and procurement exercise to be undertaken.

The table below sets out all schemes that are progressing with feasibility works to address the remaining forecast shortfall of places.

The schemes identified currently over-provide for the estimated number of places required as these figures are based on initial studies. The scope of schemes may reduce through the detailed design process, whilst schemes may not proceed for various reasons.

As described above the range of forecasted places is between 266-506 therefore a flexible approach to programming and delivery will be taken to respond to future variations in forecast need for places as the model is refined, and the impact on EHCP growth is monitored.

*Table 5 Potential Schemes*

Site	Scheme	Total Places	Indicative Cost	Cost per place
Phoenix Academy	Provision of KS1 block with two/three classrooms, breakout space and toilets. Internal alterations to existing to improve educational environment	33	£3,300,000	£100,000
Elmwood School	New teaching block linked to existing circulation space to include 6 classrooms, breakout spaces, toilets. Internal remodelling of building to include 4 classrooms, toilets and admin.	56	£3,900,000	£69,643
Castle School	Provision of 14 additional classrooms, a DT room, dining hall and servery, toilets, storage and admin space in new build accommodation. Internal refurbishment of 9 rooms to ensure	100	£8,800,000	£88,000

	subject adjacencies (DT, Food Tech, Science)			
Jane Lane School	Provision of 5 additional classrooms, behaviour support area, admin and storage in new build accommodation. Provision of sports hall including changing and toilets. Internal refurbishment/remodelling of 2 classrooms, hygiene room/toilets, admin area	45	£4,200,000	£93,333
Shepwell School	Standalone block to include 6 classrooms, intervention and group room, toilets.	70	£3,000,000	£42,857
Old Hall School	Two storey extension to provide 11 classrooms, breakout space, toilets. Internal alterations to create two larger classrooms, extension to hall and staff facilities	96	£9,900,000	£103,125
Mary Elliot School	Extension to existing building to provide 4 additional classrooms, 2 hygiene rooms and storage. Dining hall extension.	30	£3,500,000	£116,667
Oakwood School (EDC Phase 6)	Two storey extension to existing building to provide 22 classrooms, toilets and cleaners cupboards.	176	£19,800,000	£112,500
<b>Total</b>		<b>606</b>	<b>£56,400,000</b>	<b>£93,069*</b>

The figures in this table are the initial estimated costs which include, construction cost, planning/building control fees, fees to statutory providers such as gas and electricity, professional fees and 20% contingency.

The figures in this table also include increases for indicative inflation expected over the estimated delivery period.

The indicative costs presented above are broadly in line with the most recent Educational Building and Development Officers Group (EBDOG) National School Delivery Cost Benchmarking report dated November 2023. In this report, the average cost per pupil place through re-build and extension of SEN Schools is calculated at £96,806. We therefore use £96,806 as the benchmark to identify Value for Money (VFM).

\* Our indicative program cost per pupil place of £93,069 shows a positive VFM position.

The schemes outlined represent a mix of expansions across the special school estate, within the constraints of the individual sites and with a view to manageable increases in pupil numbers following conversations with individual school leadership teams. The schemes taken forward will be based on outcome

of feasibility studies that consider site constraints, building solutions and value for money of the proposed project costs.

### **Specialist Free School**

A new Special School in Walsall Local Authority has been approved by the DfE. The school will offer 304 full time places plus 8 FTE nursery places – totalling 312 places across the school.

The school will cater for complex needs - autistic spectrum disorder, severe learning difficulties, social, emotional, and mental health, speech and language communication needs, moderate learning difficulties, profound and multiple difficulties.

The introduction of the Free School will relieve pressure on Walsall special schools, through creation of places and for capital funding.

There will additionally be a reduction in the displacement of children who current travel outside of the area for school places, as more places will be available within the borough. Currently 527 children from Walsall Local Authority travel to a special school outside of the area.

It is suggested presently that the Free School is to open in September 2027 but is subject to the DfE carrying out feasibility studies and proceeding with a design solution, procurement strategy and agreement on construction processes.

If Free School is approved, the capital programme for expansion projects will be reviewed in line with review of forecasted need for places.

## **4. Financial**

Cabinet has committed a capital budgetary provision of £13.74m to provide 197 places through the expansion of Oakwood Special School at the EDC, Rowley Robins and improvements to Oakwood Special School, along with additional SRP places.

To make up the potential shortfall of 266-506 special places over the next five years, current estimated cost for the pipeline is £56.4m.

Cabinet approved 7.5% of the pipeline's estimated build cost was approved to deal with the remaining gap in circa £3.96m to progress the feasibility studies to RIBA stage 4, detailed design, to allow for a more accurate cost estimate and a procurement exercise to be undertaken.

HNPCA (High Needs Provision Capital Allocations) and Basic Needs are non-ringfenced grant given under Section 31 of the Local Government Act 2003, by the Department for Education (DfE) to Local Authorities (LAs) to support the expansion of school places. On completion of the feasibility work for all projects

and when further information is known on the Free School, a further report will be taken to Cabinet for approval of funding to deliver the projects in Walsall.

## **5. Decide**

That the Education Overview and Scrutiny Committee note the current position and agrees that the increase of places at specialist provision is necessary for the Local authority to meet its statutory duties of providing sufficient school places for all Walsall residents.

The committee may decide to ask that a further briefing on place planning be offered to members.

## **6. Respond**

Consultants have been commissioned to undertake detailed designs and costings for the special schools based on current feasibility study options.

Work will continue with mainstream schools to identify and secure capacity for expanded SRP places.

The committee may decide to request further information as pertains to individual planning area and school expansions.

## **7. Review**

Continued development into the review of SEND place requirement across the borough to future proof SEND provision for Walsall will continue through the special provision group and annual reviews of the pupil projections are due to be included in the annual School Capacity (SCAP) survey which is submitted every July for mainstream places.

The SEN Modeler will also be reviewed on a bi-annual basis to ensure that the requirements of places are aligned with the projections. Updated forecasts will be reported through School Estate Strategy Group, Children's Capital and Assets Board and Children's DMT. The forecast numbers will also be reflected in future reports to Cabinet regarding SEND Sufficiency.

Capital needs will be taken to Capital board.

### **Contact Officer(s)**

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## **Education Overview and Scrutiny Committee –**

### **School Admissions Update**

<b>Wards</b>	All
<b>Service:</b>	Admissions & Education Sufficiency, Access Service
<b>Portfolio:</b>	Councillor Kaur

#### **1. Aim**

The aim of this report is to provide the Education Scrutiny and Overview Committee with an update on school admissions activities undertaken by the Admissions & Education Sufficiency Team.

#### **2. Recommendations**

That the Education Overview and Scrutiny Committee

- considers the contents of this report and notes that all children who submitted an on-time application to Walsall for a secondary place in 2024 were made an offer of a school place even though the demand had also increased.
- considers the contents of this report and notes that all children who submitted an on-time application to Walsall for a primary place in 2024 were made an offer of a school place
- decides whether any further information or updates are required.

#### **4. Report detail**

Following on from the paper brought to the Education Overview and Scrutiny Committee in November 2023, this report provides an update on the current work being undertaken by the Admissions & Education Sufficiency Team.

##### **4.1. Background**

Walsall Council carries out a number of school admission activities for its residents in accordance with the provisions of the School Admissions Code (2021) including determination of admission arrangements for community and voluntary controlled schools, coordination of phased admission rounds for all schools, ensuring that parents have access to midyear admission processes, admission appeals for community and voluntary controlled schools and ensuring that fair access arrangements are in place for all children in Walsall.

##### **4.2 Phased Admission Rounds**

The Council works in conjunction with its neighbouring local authorities including Birmingham, Wolverhampton, Sandwell, and Dudley to co-ordinate the phased admissions rounds.

Phased admission rounds involve:

- **Reception Transfer Round** - admission to reception class at age 4.
- **Junior Transfer Round** - transfer from Year 2 to Year 3, for those children that are on roll at an infant school and need to transfer to a junior school to continue their primary education.
- **Secondary Transfer Round** – admission to Year 7, age 11.

Applicants can express up to three preferences for Reception and Junior transfer rounds and up to five for Secondary transfer rounds.

Applicants can express preferences for schools outside their home local authority and the purpose of the co-ordinated arrangements between local authorities is to ensure that all parents who submit applications receive a **single** offer of a school place from the local authority at the highest preference school at which a place is available.

Offers are sent to parents who submit an on-time application on National Offer Day from their home local authority – this is 1 March for secondary schools and 16 April for primary schools (or the next working day where 1 March or 16 April fall on a weekend or bank holiday), in the year in which the child will be admitted.

#### 4.3 Phased Admissions - Secondary Round – September 2024

The number of children requiring a school place in Year 7 at a secondary school in September 2024 matched September 2023, as the highest requirement of places needed.

Table below show a comparison of data for September 2024 and September 2023

	September 2024 data		September 2023 data	
	Offers	%*	Offers	%*
Offered 1st preference	3026	77.0	3112	79.2
Offered 2nd preference	388	9.9	399	10.2
Offered 3rd preference	146	3.7	138	3.5
Offered one of their top three preferences	3560	90.6	3649	92.9
Offered a preference	3649	92.9	3713	94.5
Not offered preference school and allocated an alternative	280	7.1	216	5.5
Total Walsall on-time applications	3929		3929	

All children who submitted an on-time application to Walsall were made an offer of a school place for September 2024.

There were 178 late application that were processed following National Offer Day, and all the applications received by the end of summer term were also offered places within a Walsall school. This was a reduction from last year when 220 late applications were received following closing day.

#### 4.4 Phased Admissions – Secondary – September 2025

National Offer Day for children starting Secondary School 2025 is on 3 March 2025.

The portal for submitting applications opened on Monday 2 September 2024. The closing date for on time applications is 31 October 2024.

At the time of writing this report, applications were being received for school places daily, with submitted applications currently being at over 3620. It is expected that there will be approximately 4000 applications into the authority.

In advance of closing date, officers are contacting primary schools in Walsall and neighbouring authorities where Walsall children are currently on roll in year 6 to prompt schools to remind parents of their requirements to apply prior to the closing date.

In addition, officers are liaising with all Walsall primary schools and gaining contact logs for parents/guardians of children who had yet to apply and contacting parents to support them in making applications.

Files are shared between authorities to ensure contact can also be made with any children who are Walsall residents but attend a school not in the borough of Walsall.

Officers have arranged drop-in sessions in areas across the borough where applications in previous years have been reduced to support applications being submitted. These sessions took place on:

**Willenhall Library:** Tuesday 15 October 9:30am – 12:30pm

**Darlaston Library:** Tuesday 15 October 1 – 4pm

**Lichfield Street Hub:** Wednesday 16 October 9am – 5pm

**Blakenall Village Centre:** Thursday 17 October 1 - 4pm

The service has worked with our colleagues in the Communications Team of Walsall Council and regular updates and reminders have been shared on social media, on Walsall Council's intranet as well as on the external Walsall Council website, to encourage and remind of the need to submit applications.

Where applications are not received on time, it is likely to result in children not receiving one of their preferred schools and an allocation of a school place being made.

In line with the School Admissions Code 2021, local authorities must allocate all Walsall children a school place for the start of their secondary school career. If a preferred school is already at capacity, the closest school to the home address with spaces remaining will be allocated to the child. This could result in a place being allocated at a school further away from the home address than wanted.

Parents will have a right to refuse an allocated school place, they will be advised that in doing so this could result in their child not having a school setting to start in September 2025; subsequently the child becoming a Child Missing Education and referred to the Fair Access Panel for placement at an alternative school.

#### **4.5 Phased Admissions – Reception – September 2024**

The number of children who were due to start school in September 2024 has reduced due to the continue falling birth rate across Walsall and nationally. This reduction however led to an increase in the number of children being offered their first preference in a Walsall school.

<b>Reception Offers</b>	<b>September 2024</b>	<b>September 2023</b>
Total Walsall on-time applications	3319	3417
Offered 1st preference	3170 (95.5%)	3154 (92.3%)
Offered 2nd preference	107 (3.2%)	136 (4%)
Offered 3rd preference	7 (0.2%)	40 (1.2%)
Offered one of their top three preferences	3285 (99.0%)	3330 (97.5%)
Not offered any preferred school and allocated an alternative	35 (1.1%)	87 (2.5%)

Of the **35** children in Walsall not offered one of their preferred schools, **29** of these applicants had expressed a preference for only one school - rather than using all of the three preferences that is available to every applicant. Walsall Council always advises applicants to utilise all three preferences and recommends that all families contact their preferred schools before applying.

#### **4.6 Phased Admissions – Reception/Junior Round – September 2025**

The portal for submitting applications will open on Monday 4 November 2024 closing on Wednesday 15 January 2025.

National Offer Day for children starting Reception and moving to a Junior school in September 2025 is on Wednesday 16 April 2024.

Officers will be holding drop-in sessions across the borough focusing on areas where in previous years there have been higher volumes of late applications submitted. The following primary drop-in sessions have been scheduled.

**Location: Willenhall Library**

Date: Tuesday, 3 December 2024

Time: 9:30am - 12:30pm

Address: 1 Walsall St, Willenhall, WV13 2EX

**Location: Darlaston Library**

Date: Tuesday, 3 December 2024

Time: 1pm - 4pm

Address: 1 King Street, Darlaston WS10 8DE

**Location: Lichfield Street Hub**

Date: Wednesday, 4 December 2024

Time: 9am - 5pm

Address: Lichfield St, Walsall, WS1 1TR

**Location: Blakenall Village Centre**

Date: Thursday, 5 December 2024

Time: 1pm - 4pm

Address: 79 Thames Rd, Bloxwich, Walsall, WS3 1LZ

Close work with early years settings and promotion of the application window will be undertaken with services working with families with young children including health visitors, school nursing service, early help, GPs and other educational practitioners to increase the number of applications received for Reception places.

#### **4.7 Mid-Year Admissions Process in Walsall.**

Parents and carers need to follow the mid-year admissions application process if they move into Walsall or wish to apply to change schools outside of the year groups and timescales that are covered by the phased admission rounds.

In Walsall, the process for making a mid-year admission application is as follows:

#### **4.8 Primary Mid-Year Admission Application Process:**

The Local Authority co-ordinates the mid-year admissions applications for most primary schools in Walsall so applications for these schools need to be made directly to the Local Authority via the School Admissions and Appeals Team.

In line with School Admission Code in 2021, several own admission authority schools have informed the Local Authority that they wish to co-ordinate their own mid-year admissions and for these schools' parents and carers need to make applications directly to them.

As there are different processes for applications to some primary schools, parents and carers are encouraged to review the school admissions webpages on the Council's website for more information about the correct application process for each school.

All primary schools submit return a weekly data return that advise the admissions service where they have vacancies in any year groups – this allows the school admissions to make offers of school places to families in a timely manner and ensures the Council are discharging their statutory duties more effectively in accordance with the School Admissions Code.

This data also assists the Local Authority to monitor pupils in accordance with the following statutory guidance (Children Missing Education (2016) and Keeping Children Safe in Education (2021).

This data is also used to inform the decisions of the Primary Fair Access Panel. The Panel meets every four weeks to consider referrals and make school placement allocations for pupils without school places in accordance with the Walsall Primary Fair Access Protocol.

#### **4.9 Secondary Mid-Year Admission Application Process:**

In line with the School Admissions Code, all secondary schools in Walsall have opted to co-ordinate their own mid-year admissions application process as they are their own admission authority. The Council is not the admission authority of any secondary school. Therefore, parents need to approach each school directly to make an application for a secondary school place.

As set out in the School Admissions Code, all admissions authorities should aim to notify applicants of the outcome of their mid-year application within 10 school days and they must notify applicants of the outcome of their application in writing within 15 school days.

Applicants must be informed in writing of the reason for refusal and their right to appeal the decision of the admission authority. Applicants must not be refused the opportunity to make an application or be advised that they can be placed on a school's waiting list instead of making a formal application.

Whilst secondary schools coordinate their own midyear admissions, they still have a statutory duty to return information to the Local Authority on any vacancies they have in schools across the years groups as well as advising of any applications they receive and whether the children are being offered a place or advised on their right to appeal. Schools must additionally advise the Local Authority of any child that has been removed from the school's roll and give reasons for this.

Similarly to the primary process, the secondary Fair Access Panel meets every 4 weeks to consider referrals and make school placement allocations for pupils without school places in accordance with the secondary Fair Access Protocol.

#### **4.10 Oversubscription Criteria**

In community and voluntary controlled schools in Walsall, if there are more applications than there are places available, places will be allocated using the oversubscription criteria in the following order of priority:

##### **1. Children and Young People in Care & previous Children and Young People in Care**

Children and young people in care are children who at the time of application are:

- In the care of the Local Authority
- Being provided with accommodation by a Local Authority in the exercise of the social services functions.

Previous children and young people in care are children who

- were looked after but ceased to be so due to adoption (or became subject to child arrangements order or special guardianship order) immediately following having been looked after.
- Children who appear to a Local Authority to have been in state care outside of England and ceased to be in state care because of being adopted.

##### **2. Children who have a sibling in attendance at the school or paired junior school when the application is submitted and who will still be attending the school at the proposed admission date.**

A sibling is a child who resides at the same address as the child for whom a place is being requested and is one of the following:

- A brother or sister sharing the same parents.
- A half-brother or sister sharing one common parent.
- A stepbrother or sister (i.e. related by their parent's marriage).
- Any other child for whom it can be demonstrated that he or she is residing permanently at the same address (e.g. under the terms of a residence order).

##### **3. Pupils for whom a place at the school is essential on medical or social grounds as supported in writing by a medical practitioner or a social worker. (Applications will be subject to verification by the Admissions & Education Sufficiency Manager)**

If parents believe there are specific medical or social reasons for claiming priority for a child to attend a particular school, the relevant part of the application must be completed and evidence to support the claim must be submitted to the Local Authority.

Requests for such consideration will be subject to verification by the service. This is necessary because parents will be asking the Authority to assess the child as having a stronger case than many other children, some of whom may live closer to the school.

### **Medical Evidence**

Medical evidence must be submitted in writing from a medical practitioner and should state why the preferred school is **the only school that can meet the child's needs**. This must relate to either the child or the parents, for example where the parent(s) or the child has a disability that may make travel to a school further away more difficult. Medical evidence, which relates to parent, will be considered in the following circumstances:

- Where the child lives with a single parent who has a medical condition or disability that may make travel to a school further away more difficult.
- Where the child lives with both parents and both parents have a medical condition or disability that may make travel to a school further away more difficult.
- Where a child lives with both parents and one parent has a medical condition or disability that may make travel to a school further away more difficult medical evidence may be considered if the other parent is unable to accompany the child on the journey to and from school because they are the sole carer for the other parent.

### **Social Evidence**

Social evidence must be submitted in writing from an appropriate professional and should state why the preferred school is **the only school that can meet the child's needs**.

*Please note that preferences are only given priority under the medical/social criterion in very exceptional cases where medical or social evidence clearly demonstrates that the preferred school is the only school which can meet the child's needs.*

#### **4. For applications to junior schools only. Attendance by the child at the relevant paired infant school when the application is made.**

The paired infant and junior schools are:

Alumwell Infant	paired with	Alumwell Junior
Delves Infant	paired with	Delves Junior
New Invention Infant	paired with	New Invention Junior
Palfrey Infant	paired with	Palfrey Junior
Rosedale CE (C) Infant	paired with	Short Heath Junior
Sunshine Infant and Nursery	paired with	Blakenall Heath Junior
Whitehall Nursery and Infant	paired with	Whitehall Junior Community

#### **5. For applications to voluntary controlled Church of England primary schools only. Up to 25% of places may be allocated as 'Church Places' to children, regardless of distance between home and school, whose parents are regular**

**worshippers at a Christian church and whose application is supported in writing by the minister of the church where they worship.**

The following voluntary controlled Church of England primary schools have 'Church Places':

- Christ Church CE (C) JMI
- Holy Trinity CE Primary
- Little Bloxwich CE (VC)Primary
- Old Church CE (C) Primary
- Rosedale CE (C) Infant
- St Giles CE Primary
- St John's CE Primary
- St Michael's CE (C) Primary

The number of church places available is determined by the Admission Number of the school. Voluntary controlled Church of England primary schools:

- with an admission number of 30 will offer a maximum of 7 church places.
- with an admission number of 45 will offer a maximum of 11 church places.
- with an admission number of 60 will offer a maximum of 15 church places.
- with an admission number of 90 will offer a maximum of 22 church places.

If there is over-subscription for church places, priority will be given to those living closest to the school as measured in a straight line.

'Regular worshipper' is defined as attending a place of worship on at least one occasion per month over the past twelve months.

**6. Distance between the home address and the school as measured in a straight line with those living closer to the school receiving the higher priority.**

Distance will be measured in a straight line from the centre point of the home address to the centre point of the school address using the Local Authority's computerised measuring system with those living closer to the school receiving the higher priority.

#### **4.11 Admission Arrangements**

When changes are proposed to admission arrangements, all admission authorities must consult on their admission arrangements (including any supplementary information forms) that will apply for admission applications the following school year.

Where the admission arrangements have not changed from the previous year there is no requirement to consult, subject to the requirement that admission authorities must consult on their admission arrangements at least once every 7 years, even if there have been no changes during that period.

Consultation must last for a minimum of 6 weeks and must take place between 1 October and 31 January in the determination year.

Admission authorities must consult with:

- a) parents of children between the ages of two and eighteen.
- b) other persons in the relevant area who in the opinion of the admission authority have an interest in the proposed admissions.

- c) all other admission authorities within the relevant area (except that primary schools need not consult secondary schools).
- d) whichever of the governing body and the local authority is not the admission authority.
- e) any adjoining neighbouring local authorities where the admission authority is the local authority.
- f) in the case of schools designated with a religious character, the body or person representing the religion or religious denomination.

For the duration of the consultation period, the admission authority must publish a copy of their full proposed admission arrangements (including the proposed Published Admission Number - PAN) on the school's website or its own website (in the case of a local authority) together with details of where comments may be sent and the areas on which comments are not sought.

Admission authorities must also send, upon request, a copy of the proposed admission arrangements to any of the persons or bodies listed above inviting comment. Failure to consult effectively may be grounds for subsequent complaints and appeals.

In Walsall, officers are preparing consultation documents to look at the reduction in some admission numbers in primary schools for the 2026/27 academic year due to the reduction in birth rates over recent years. The outcome of the consultation will be considered by Cabinet at its meeting In February 2025.

### **Determination**

All admission authorities must determine their admission arrangements, including their PAN, every year, even if they have not changed from previous years and a consultation has not been required by 28 February in the determination year

Once admission authorities have determined their admission arrangements, they must notify the appropriate bodies and must publish a copy of the determined arrangements on the school's website or their own website (in the case of a local authority) by 15 March in the determination year and continue displaying them for the whole offer year (the school year in which offers for places are made). Admission authorities must also send a copy of their full, determined arrangements to the local authority as soon as possible before 15 March in the determination year. Admission authorities for schools designated with a religious character must also send a copy of their arrangements to the body or person representing their religion or religious denomination.

Our current determined admission arrangements can be found at this link:

<https://go.walsall.gov.uk/schools-and-learning/schools-in-walsall/school-admissions/school-admissions-policies>

Where an admission authority has determined a PAN that is higher than in previous years, they must notify the local authority that they have done so and make specific reference to the change on their website.

Local authorities must publish on their website the proposed admission arrangements for any new school or academy which is intended to open in their area within the determination year, details of where the determined arrangements for all schools, including academies, can be viewed, and information on how to refer objections to the Schools Adjudicator. Local authorities must publish these details by 15 March in the determination year.

Following determination of arrangements, any objections to those arrangements must be made to the Schools Adjudicator. Objections to admission arrangements must be referred to the Schools Adjudicator by 15 May in the determination year.

Admission authorities that are not the local authority must provide all the information that the local authority needs to compile the composite prospectus no later than 8 August, unless agreed otherwise.

#### **4.9.3 Fair Access Protocol**

The Fair Access Protocol (FAP) is a mechanism developed by the local authority in partnership with all schools in their area. Its aim is to ensure that vulnerable children, and those who are having difficulty in securing a school place in-year, are allocated a school place as quickly as possible. Every local authority must have a FAP in place.

The School Admissions Code 2021 makes it clear that local authorities must ensure that no school, including those with places available, is asked to take a disproportionate number of children and young people who have been excluded from other schools, or who have challenging behaviour, under the Fair Access Protocol.

Where possible, children should be placed in school through the usual in-year admissions process in the first instance. FAPs should provide a fair and transparent system to ensure that all schools share the collective responsibility of helping the most vulnerable, by admitting their fair share of children being placed via the FAP. This includes supporting those children who have been permanently excluded from other schools and those who display challenging behaviour.

#### **Main Principles of Walsall's Fair Access Protocol**

This protocol applies to all mainstream primary and secondary schools and academies in Walsall. The protocol should not be used to circumvent the mid-year admissions process.

Schools will exceed their published admission number where necessary in order to admit pupils under the protocol. The infant class size legislation allows for children to be admitted over number following the exceptions rule.

Pupils identified for placement under the Fair Access Protocol will be given priority over those on waiting lists for the same school.

#### **Fair Access Data**

The numbers of children referred to the FAP has slightly increased since last year:

2024 Total: Primary: 368 Secondary: 413

2023 Total: Primary: 328 Secondary: 319

Most in-year applications that are submitted to Walsall continues to remain the highest from people 'New to the LA' or 'New to the country'

#### **5.0 Decide**

The Committee may decide to note the current position and request further information or assurance in respect of the progress of the processes.

#### **6.0. Respond**

Any recommendations made by the Committee will be assessed against the Access and Inclusion planned work and performance board programmes.

## **7.0 Review**

The work of the Admissions & Education Sufficiency Team is subject to constant monitoring and assessment via the Children's Services Performance Board process.

### **Background papers**

School Admissions Code (2021)

### **Contact Officer(s)**

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19<sup>th</sup> November 2024

**SEND Developments including Dedicated Schools Grant (DSG)**

**Ward(s): All**

**Portfolios:** Education and Skills - Councillor Kaur

**1. Aim**

This report will provide an overview of the developments and achievements by the SEND Service (Special Educational Needs) during the 2023/24 academic year.

**2. Recommendations**

For the committee to note the progress made and the impact of the work carried out by the SEND Service.

For the committee to recognise the growing demand for Education, Health and Care Plans (EHCPs) which subsequently increases the pressure on the costs and capacity.

**3. Report detail**

**3.1 What do we know?**

Walsall Council's SEND Services have been on a significant journey of improvement in recent years. Following Ofsted and CQC's Local area SEND inspections in June 2019 and June 2022, an Accelerated Progress Plan (APP) was agreed by the Council, NHS England and the Department for Education in October 2022. The APP set out key areas where the Council needed to make progress, and identified actions on how the plan would be achieved. The APP focused on the outstanding key areas for improvement from the 2022 Inspection:

- The poor-quality EHC plans, which do not accurately reflect children's and young people's special educational needs, and do not adhere to the statutory timescales for completion.
- The poor quality of the local offer, which does not meet the requirements of the code of practice.

In November 2023, a review of these outstanding areas for improvement took place which concluded that formal monitoring was no longer required, due to the positive progress that had been made.

The inspectors stated we had made clear and sustained progress against the activity in our APP and that there was evidence that our work is having a positive impact. The evidence provided, alongside the feedback from partners, demonstrated the range of actions in place to continue and accelerate improvement. These included:

- The local area redesigned processes which has resulted in improved EHCP timeliness.
- Development of a new Quality Assurance (QA) framework
- A plan in place to monitor and improve the quality of annual reviews. Parent representatives told them that the quality of annual reviews has improved since the SEND revisit in June 2022 and have felt heard and valued throughout the process although this was still an area for further improvement.
- A Walsall-focused Local Offer which has been co-produced with children, young people and their families. FACE representatives reported that parents and carers find the Local Offer accessible, easy to navigate and appreciate the use of jargon free language.

The APP review also highlighted the strong relationship between the Council and our Parent/Carer Forum, the relationships being built with our SENCOs and Inclusion Leads and the close collaboration with our health partners.

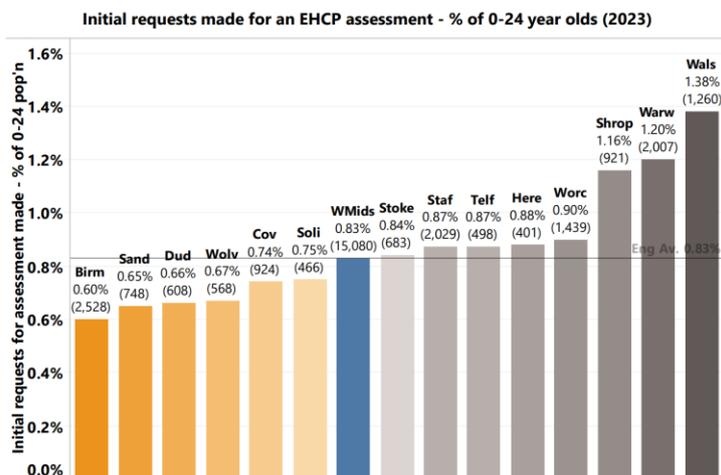
As stated, we have made significant strides in ensuring that the needs of children and young people with Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND) are identified and assessed in a timely and effective manner. For example, the average number of weeks to complete the full EHCP assessment and issue process is 20 weeks currently and has consistently been within statutory timeframes for 80% of applications on a month-on-month basis. Although it is recognised, we have further work to do, including improvements within the annual review process.

### **3.2 EHCP demand and growth**

We continue to receive high numbers of requests for assessment. In 2023 Walsall received significantly more requests for assessment than other Local Authorities in the West Midlands and Nationally. The peak of growth for EHCP's was at the latter end of 2022 and the beginning of 2023 due to the large backlog of requests that had not been processed prior to this time. 300 of the EHCP's agreed in 2023 were due to the backlog. This means that out of the 1260 total plans, 960 were not due to the backlog. This was still significantly higher than the West Midlands in general and the England average.

This is partly due to significant improvements in identifying and assessing the needs of children and young people with Special Educational Needs and Disabilities in Walsall. However, a large proportion of requests are from parents suggesting that there is further work to do with schools and ensuring they are following the graduated approach prior to application and working with families to understand and meet the needs of their child through Ordinarily Available Provision.

The request rate for an EHCP across the West Midlands is in line with the England average. However, there is marked variation across the region, with the request rate in Walsall over double that of Birmingham.



Source: Education, health and care plans: England 2024.  
<https://www.gov.uk/government/collections/statistics-special-educational-needs-sen>

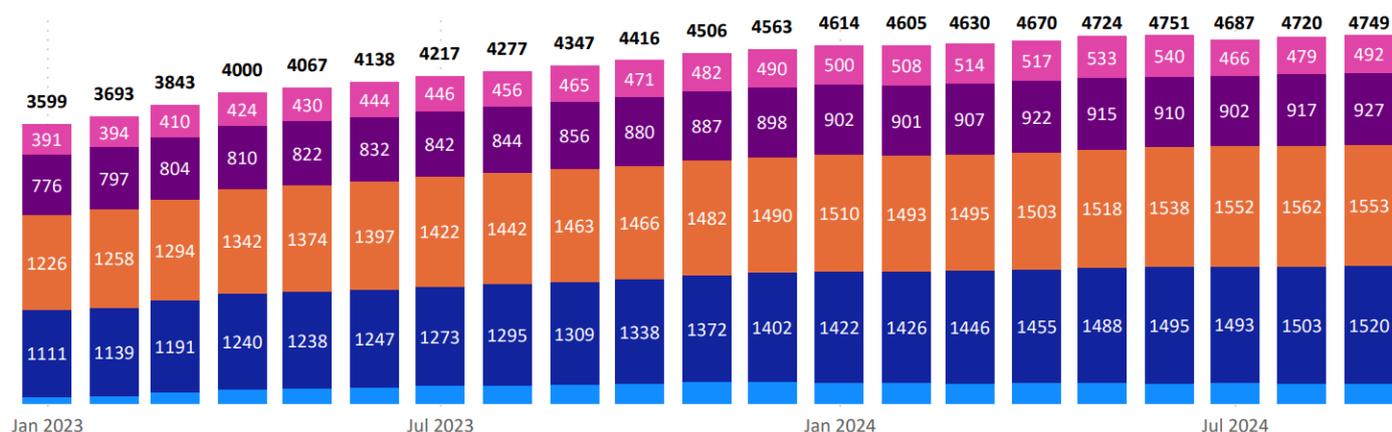
**Key Findings**

- **Walsall's** request rate **continues to increase** and remains the highest across the region
- The request rate in **Shropshire** has almost doubled from 2022 to 2023
- **Dudley** was the only local authority that saw a **fall** in their request rate

We are now maintaining 4745 Education Health and Care Plans (October 2024), the growth of plans has now plateaued, primarily due to the activities associated with the Dedicated Schools Grant (DSG) management plan. This includes more robust decision making processes, having a multi-disciplinary approach to decision making, including SENCO's, health partners, social care partners, Virtual School and Educational Psychologists. The funding for Walsall EHCP's comes from the High Needs Funding Block of the DSG. This is used to provide additional funding for mainstream schools to ensure the provision in the EHCP can be met and it is also used to fund school places in specialist settings. Obviously, as the number of EHCP's has increased the financial pressure has increased on the DSG. This is monitored regularly at the DSG Board meetings.

Number of CYP for whom the local authority maintains an EHC Plan by Month & Age Group

● (Blank) ● Under 5 ● Age 5 to 10 ● Age 11 to 15 ● Age 16 to 19 ● Age 20 to 25 — Total

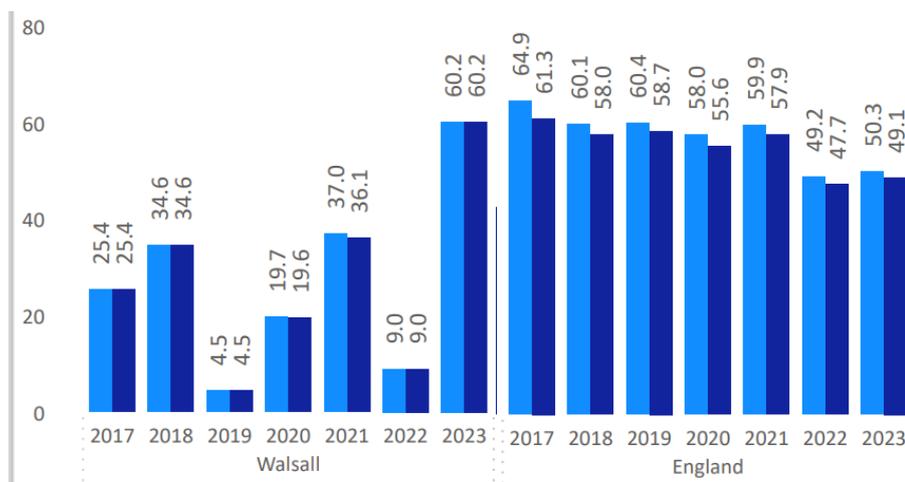


Although our requests for assessment are high, we are still able to adhere to statutory time scales for assessing and issuing plans. The significant progress that has been made is being sustained, the timeliness (new EHCP's assessed and issued within the statutory timescale of 20 weeks) has improved from 9% at the end of 2022, to 50% at the end of

2023, to a rolling 12 month average today of 78%, with a consistent monthly attainment of circa 80%. This is well above the national average of 50%.

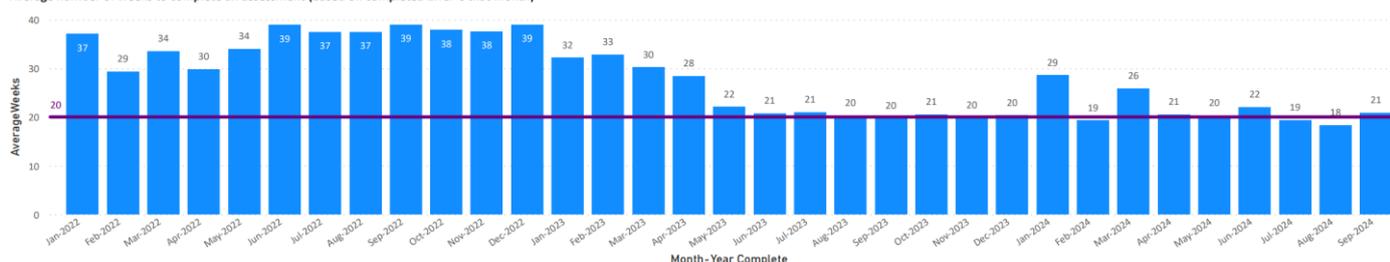
% of new EHCP's issued within 20 weeks (SEN2 published data)

● Percentage of new EHCPs issued within 20 weeks (excluding exception cases) ● Percentage of new EHCPs issued within 20 weeks (including exception cases)



Average number of weeks to complete an assessment (based on completed EHCP's that month)

Average number of weeks to complete an assessment (based on completed EHCP's that month)



### 3.3 What have we done?

The following report will now demonstrate some of the improvements that have been made, how they have been sustained over the past 12 months, followed by the further areas for improvement identified for 2024/5 and onwards.

#### Statutory Timescales for EHC Needs Assessments

- In the calendar year 2024, 78% of new EHCPs have been issued within 20 weeks. The average number of weeks to complete an assessment continues to improve, with assessments taking on average 20 weeks.
- We have identified the timeliness of annual reviews is still an area for improvement and the 'The Annual Review' project started in September 2023. This includes a weekly meeting to identify individual children who require actions and tasks called the 'Weekly Orders'. EHC officer training has taken place focusing on annual reviews. This includes clarity about timelines, the legislation, what their role and what decisions can be made. Schools are being alerted to which annual reviews are due and when they will be required to submit their paperwork. The EHC team have completed online learning modules on Annual Reviews.

## **Recruitment and retention of staff**

- We have a valued permanent EHC team. 80% of colleagues have now been with us for over a year.
- We have successfully restructured the EHC team to enhance our service delivery. We now have three annual review teams assigned to specific wards in Walsall, each consisting of three casework officers and a senior casework officer. In addition, we have established a new assessment team comprising four casework officers and a senior casework officer.
- To further strengthen our support, we have appointed a senior complaints and compliance officer, (IPSEA Law Level 3 qualified) supported by a casework officer (IPSEA(Independent Provider of Special Education Advice) Law level 1 qualified) and administrative staff, who focus on managing our tribunals and complaints.

## **Induction and training programme**

- All recently recruited staff have participated in a comprehensive 12-week induction and training programme.
- This programme included engaging guest speakers, featuring internal colleagues from SEN Finance and SEN Transport, as well as external partners such as the Designated Clinical Officer, who emphasize the vital connections within our work.
- All staff have received IPSEA training in basic SEND law.

## **Additionally Vulnerable Learners**

- We have a dedicated Additionally Vulnerable Senior Casework Officer who oversees all children and young people within this category, ensuring that their unique needs are addressed effectively. He works closely with our Inclusion Hub, Youth Justice Teams and our Designate Social Care Officer to support the most vulnerable children and young people in Walsall.
- Within the additionally vulnerable team we also have a dedicated caseworker that works within the virtual school and a caseworker that works solely with young people that are NEET (Not in Education, Employment or training) with a plan.

## **Walsall's Local Offer**

- We have recently appointed a Local Offer and Engagement Lead to further strengthen our outreach efforts and enhance the support services we provide to the community and to continue to develop our Local Offer

## **SENCO Engagement and Inclusion resource development**

- In January 2023, we established the Inclusion Steering Group, comprising 18 Special Educational Needs Coordinators from various educational settings across the borough.
- In April 2023 we appointed an Inclusion Development Lead, a key role dedicated to the development, co-production, and implementation of Walsall's New Graduated Approach and Early Inclusion Framework.
- Walsall's Early Inclusion Framework offers a range of resources, tools, and training to all settings to ensure the effective and consistent implementation of the New Graduated Approach.
- The Inclusion Development Lead has ensured that settings and schools across the borough have access to the tools, resources, advice, and guidance needed to create more inclusive and supportive learning environments and pathways for all children and young people.
- The Walsall SENCO Forum is now an established and integral part of our approach to strengthening inclusive practices across the borough. At our most recent forum, over 100

SENCOs, Inclusion Leads, and setting-based SEN Support Staff attended, demonstrating a high level of engagement and commitment to professional development.

- The forum has become a vital platform for collaboration, where staff can share best practices, address emerging challenges, and work together to improve the quality and consistency of SEND provision. Feedback from attendees has consistently highlighted the positive impact of these sessions in supporting inclusive education across schools and settings.

### **Educational Psychology Service (EPS) development**

- EPS recruitment continues to improve. The EPS team has grown from a workforce of 2.8 FTEs in Sept 2022 to 9.8 FTE in Nov 2024.
- The EPS continue to develop our traded relationships with schools. We currently trade with 52% of state funded settings with Walsall. The demand for our service remains high with settings increasing the number of sessions they wish to purchase.
- Emotional Literacy Support Assistant (ELSA) programme, Social Communication, Emotional Regulation and Transactional Support (SCERTS) and Emotionally Based School Avoidance (EBSA) training delivered by the EPS to support schools meet the needs of their students as part of their graduated response is highly rated.
- 81% of Education Psychology reports are submitted within 6 weeks of allocation and 93% within 7 weeks (this financial year to date).
- A high level of parental satisfaction with EP statutory work. 93% of responses indicated high levels (strongly agree or agree) of overall parental confidence and satisfaction in EP practice, assessment and reports.
- Specialist Educational Psychologists recruited to support Children in Care through the Virtual School and young people involved with the Youth Justice Service.

### **Co-production with all partners**

- Our Self Evaluation Framework (SEF), SEND & AP Strategy and SEND & AP 12 Month Plan has been co-produced with parents, carers and families (including FACE, Walsall's Parent Carer Forum); children and young people who have lived experience; early years settings; schools; colleges; frontline practitioners; the voluntary and community sector; our Local Area Inclusion Board (LAIB) and the NHS Black Country Integrated Care Board.
- Our Working together for better SEND and Alternative Provision strategy, Appendix A, sets out our ambitions over the next five years. Our aims are centered on providing effective, high-quality learning provisions and fostering strong joined-up partnerships to improve outcomes.



# Working together for better SEND and Alternative Provision (AP)

Special Educational Needs, Disability and Alternative Provision Strategy 2023-2028



## Health and Social Care SEND Developments

- Children and Young People's (CYP) voice is heard and captured within EHCP health advice and within community and acute projects such as our award winning 'Little Voices' project.
- Co-production of resources and strategic plans with both the parent carer forum (FACE) and with wider parent participation.
- Multidisciplinary Autism Strategic group was set up to shape the diagnostic pathway and pre and post diagnostic support off to our CYP and their families in Walsall.
- Support programme in place for our educational colleagues to support CYP and their families by attending and offering bitesize health training via the SENCO forum.
- All health advice quality assured by the Designated Clinical Officer.
- Designated Social Care Officer (DSCO) in post from July '24 this has significantly benefitted children and young people up to the age of 25. Commissioned by Children's Services, the DSCO is effectively collaborating across Children and Adult Services to establish a robust Education, Health, and Care Needs Assessment (EHCNA) pathway, ensuring comprehensive contributions to statutory assessments.
- A new generic social care form has been designed, developed, and implemented across the workforce. This initiative ensures a consistent and clear approach to providing high-quality advice focusing on EHCP Sections D, H1, and H2. All submissions are now returned within the statutory six-week timeframe, enhancing compliance and service quality.
- Weekly SEND surgeries are now offered across all social care services. The DSCO provides practitioners with up-to-date information on legislation and guidance, enhancing their knowledge and skills around Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND). This initiative leads to better support and outcomes for children and young people.
- An essential training programme titled "How to Write Good Social Care Advice" has been produced and delivered by the DSCO across services. This guidance is designed to improve the quality of advice and outcomes for children and young people, ensuring practitioners are equipped with the necessary skills and knowledge.

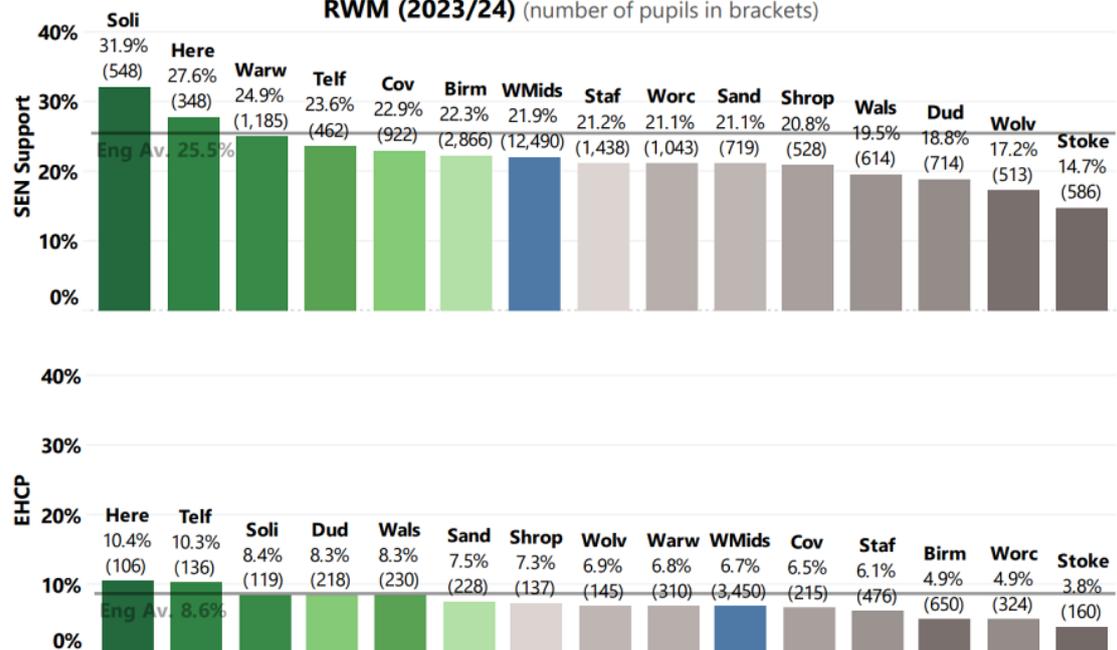
## 3.4 What difference have we made?

Through our Early Inclusion Framework, collaborative multi-agency approach and innovative service delivery models, we have successfully enhanced outcomes. Our

commitment to continuous improvement and responsiveness to the needs of our community ensures that we continue in our fast-paced improvement journey in supporting children and young people with SEND.

3.4.1 Key Stage 2 outcomes for children with an EHCP are in line with the England average and are higher than the majority of other Local Authorities in the West Midlands. The outcomes for children that are SEN support are below that of the majority of our West Midlands counterparts. and below the England average. This is an ongoing area for development with our schools and settings.

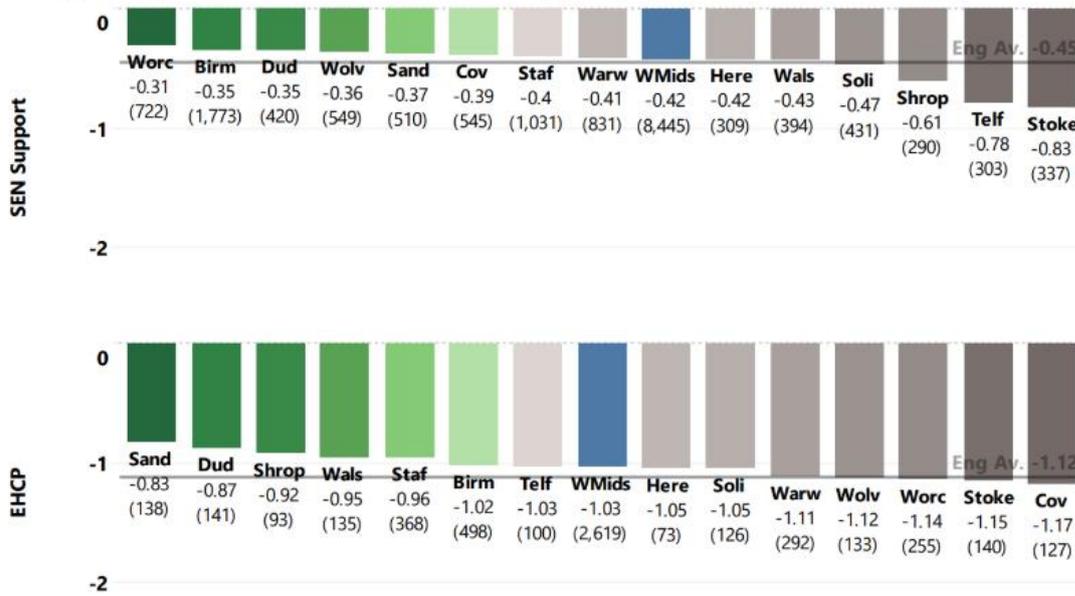
**Percentages of EHCP and SEN Support pupils achieving the expected or higher standard at KS2 RWM (2023/24) (number of pupils in brackets)**



Key stage 2 attainment (provisional), including pupil characteristics:  
<https://www.gov.uk/government/collections/statistics-key-stage-2>

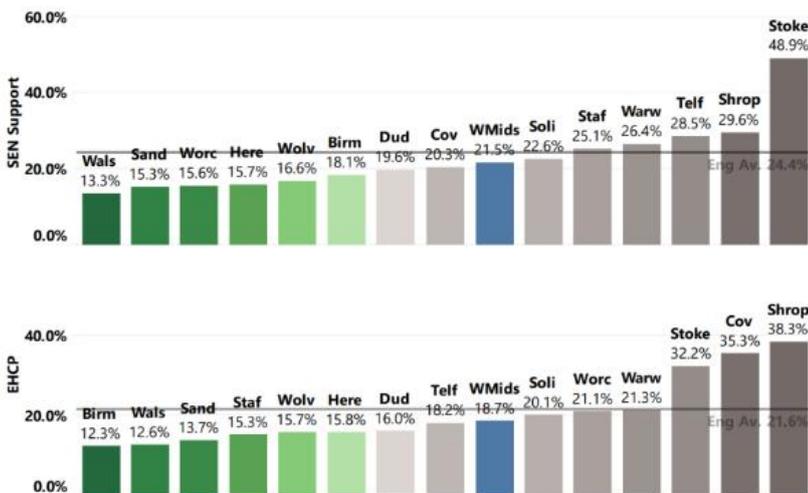
3.4.2 At Key Stage 4 it is a similar picture, the progress made by Walsall children with an EHCP is better than the England average. Children with SEN support although in line with the England average, are generally achieving less progress than our West Midlands counterparts.

**Average Progress 8 scores of EHCP and SEN Support pupils (2022/23)** (number of pupils in brackets)



3.4.3 Our Additionally Vulnerable Senior Casework Officer due to the work he does alongside the inclusion hub has had a significant impact on the number of exclusions and suspensions of children with an EHCP in Walsall.

**Suspension rate of EHCP and SEN Support pupils (2022/23)**

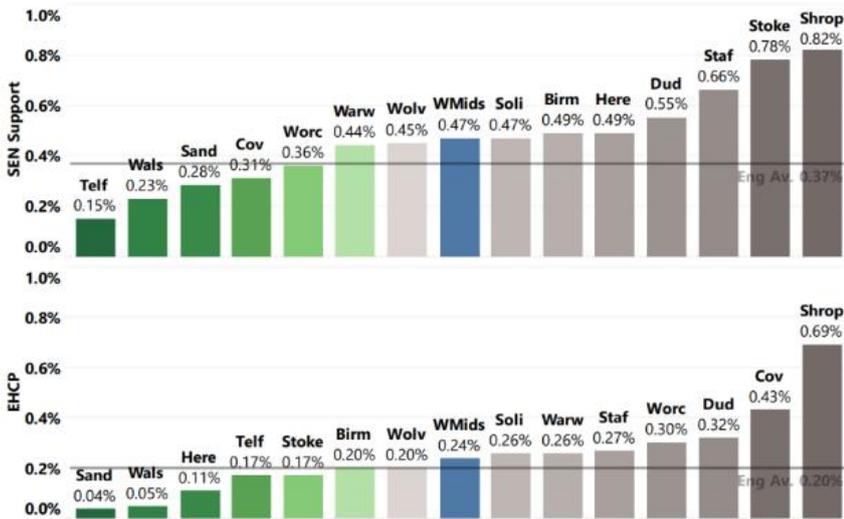


**Key Findings**

- **Walsall** had the lowest suspension rate for SEN Support pupils, and the second lowest rate for EHCP pupils in the region, with both rates well below the England averages.
- **Stoke** had a particularly high suspension rate for SEN Support pupils, at more than double the England average.

Permanent and fixed period exclusions in England 2022 to 2023: <https://www.gov.uk/government/collections/statistics-exclusions>

Permanent exclusion rate of EHCP and SEN Support pupils (2022/23)



**Key Findings**

- As with suspensions, **Walsall** had a relatively low rate of permanent exclusions, with the second lowest exclusion rates for both EHCP and SEN Support pupils in the region.
- For both EHCP and SEN Support pupils, **Shropshire** had the highest exclusion rate in the region across all phases in 2022/23, at more than double the England average in both cases.

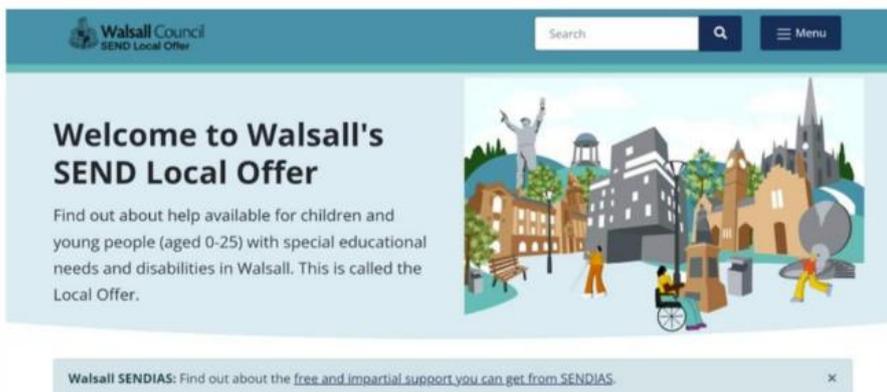
Permanent and fixed period exclusions in England 2022 to 2023: <https://www.gov.uk/government/collections/statistics-exclusions>

3.4.4 Walsall’s Local Offer has been extensively re-developed since the 2019 inspection and work continues, in partnership with parents and carers to ensure that it is accessible, is in line with the Code of Practice and meets the needs of our families and professionals in providing key information about services and support for children and young people with SEND.

## Local Offer for Special Educational Needs and Disability

**Discover all you need to know about education, health and care services in Walsall.**

On the Local Offer website you can find information and advice about services, support and activities for children and young people aged 0-25 with special educational needs and disabilities all in one place.



[www.send.walsall.gov.uk](http://www.send.walsall.gov.uk)



3.4.5 The lived experience of children, young people and their families with SEND is central to our developments and co- production is fundamental within our continuing work. We value and will continue to listen to our SEND community. We will continue to learn from what they tell us and ensure their voices influence our work and developments. By working together in partnership, we will provide the right support at the right time, for all children and young people with SEND across our community and ensure we deliver the very best outcomes based on their needs. Our Parent Carer Forum produced the Working Together Charter which is at the heart of everything that we do in Walsall.

# Walsall SEND – Working Together Charter

**Actively listen** at the first opportunity to ensure families receive the correct support.

**Use Language that cares!**

**OPEN Communication**

Be **TRANSPARENT** and **CLEAR**

**Be OPEN** HONEST and RESPECTFUL in ALL communications

**FEEDBACK...**

**YOU SAID... ...WE DID!**

Invest **TIME** for working together

feel welcomed and cared for

**ACCOUNTABLE**

ALL partners are involved and

**Working in partnership**

A shared understanding

**COOPERATION**

**COLLABORATION**

**CELEBRATE** children and young people as they are

Prioritise children and young people's aspirations!

Prepare children and young people for adulthood

**CARE** for and about families lived experiences

Feel Valued and Included

**AGREE** outcomes **TOGETHER**

Involve Include

Early intervention and support

**Walsall SEND, Working Together**

**Our Promise To You!**

Make you feel important

**AND** are a part of your own journey

**HEAR** what **YOU** have to say

Listen to you with kindness and care right away!

Decide what will happen **TOGETHER**

Make sure you are included in any decision

Focus on what you want to do **AND** what makes you **HAPPY**

Tell the truth, be clear and share everything you need to know

Prepare you for for the future

Make you feel welcomed and cared for

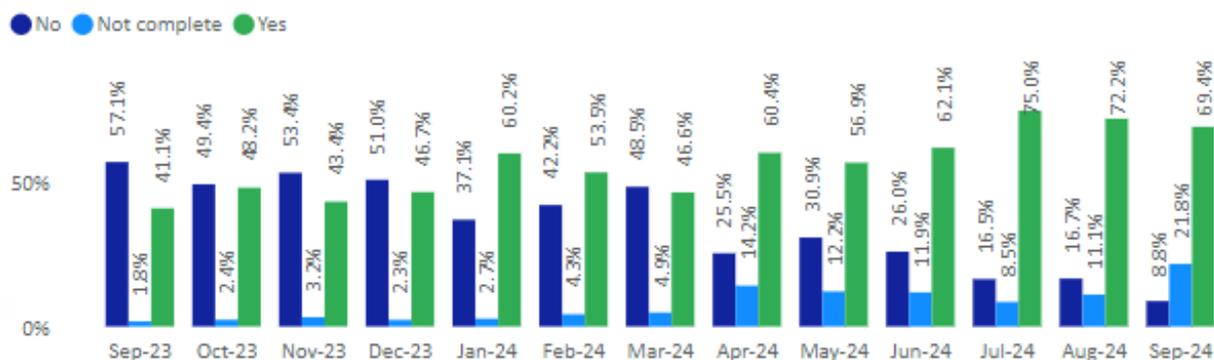
Spend **TIME** working together as a team

Make sure **EVERYONE'S VOICE** IS HEARD

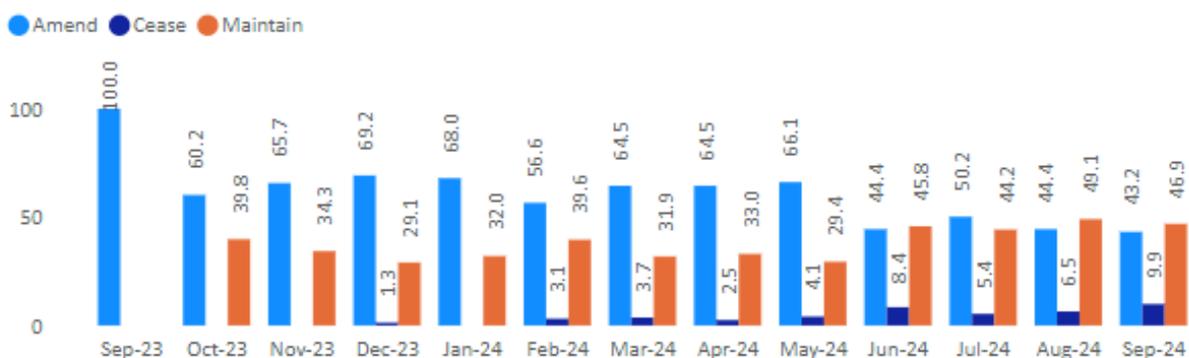
**Celebrate BEING YOU!**  
**YOU ARE AMAZING!**

3.4.6 The improvement journey that we are on with regards to our annual reviews mean that EHCP reviews the timeliness of decisions has improved from an average of 45% to an average of 70% in the last 12 months. Unfortunately, prior to September 2023 data was not accurately recorded and monitored and therefore we are unable to make a comparison before this point. Please note that statutory decisions that are being made are robust and appropriate, this means that the EHCP's are current and the right provision will be in place according to the EHCP.

Percentage of Annual Review Confirmed Meeting Dates that Met the 4 week deadline - Monthly



Percentage of Annual Review Responses by LA Outcome - Monthly



### 3.5 What are we going to do?

Our vision for children and young people with Special Educational Needs and Disabilities is based on high expectations, inclusivity, and personalised support. Our aims are centred on providing effective, high-quality learning provisions and fostering strong joined-up partnerships to improve outcomes for all children and young people with SEND. Currently our children with SEN support are not achieving where they should be and this continue to be a focus moving forward.

We have co-produced priorities that shape and develop the progress of the service over the coming years. The issues highlighted within the report above will be addressed through the strategy and the 12 month plan that sits alongside it. The strategy has been formed around these priorities, highlights from the strategy follow, the full document provided as Appendix A.

#### 3.5.1 Priority 1: Localised high-quality provision

- Continue to support schools and settings with following the graduated approach through training and support with a robust professional development program that

includes meeting all needs. This will impact on the progress and outcomes of children with SEN support.

- Develop the decision making processes to ensure that the correct support is going to the right child at the appropriate time.
- Develop additional high quality specialist places in line with the capital plan to meet growing need.

### 3.5.2 Priority 2: Early identification and help

- Ensure all plans are reviewed annually and that decisions are made in a timely fashion to maintain, amend or cease the plan.
- Ensure that our Local Offer website continues to help children and young people and their families find the local information and support from across Walsall.
- Implement a consistent Graduated Approach that will 'assess, plan, do and review' the support that has been put in place to meet the needs of each child and young person with SEND focussing on early intervention and recognition to get the provision right for children with SEN support.. Continue to manage requests for Education Health and Care plans, keeping within the statutory timescales.

### 3.5.3 Priority 3: Participate in decisions

Facilitate regular workshops with parents and carers and our children and young people, seeking their views to help us shape services.

- Continue to develop and improve the Local Offer website, to make it more accessible for children, young people and their families.
- Seek to use evidence of lessons learned from compliments and complaints to make continuous improvements to our services.

### 3.5.4 Priority 4: Supportive alternative provision offer

- Expand the range of alternative provision options available, including in-house provision, external providers, and specialist interventions, to ensure that every child and young person has access to appropriate placement.
- Implement rigorous quality assurance mechanisms to monitor and evaluate the effectiveness of alternative provision and drive continuous improvement.
- Support smooth transitions into and out of alternative provision, providing comprehensive support to facilitate successful reintegration into mainstream education or other pathways.

### 3.5.5 Priority 5: Children and young people feel valued and visible in their community

- Work with all our schools, early years settings, post 16 providers, social care providers, health providers and partners to be welcoming and ensure that children and young people have a sense of belonging regardless of their gender, ethnicity, socio-economic background or educational need.
- Further enhance our offer and support for children and young people to prepare for adulthood.

## 4. Financial information

4.1 The Dedicated Schools Grant is paid to Local Authorities to support the school's budget. The funding for resources for children and young people with EHCP's is through the High Needs Block of the DSG. The grant is split out into 4 funding blocks as detailed below.

The 2023/24 budget and forecast spend and the 2024/25 budget for each funding block is included within the table below.

<b>Funding Block</b>	<b>2023/24 Budget £m</b>	<b>2023/24 Forecast £m</b>	<b>2023/24 Variance £m</b>	<b>2024/25 Budget £m</b>
Schools Block*	109.032	108.101	(0.931)	114.224
CSSB	1.768	1.768	0.000	1.891
Early Years Block**	22.804	22.804	0.000	33.869
High Needs Block	54.518	60.977	6.459	58.059
<b>Total</b>	<b>188.122</b>	<b>193.650</b>	<b>5.528</b>	<b>208.043</b>

\*This is shown after the academy recoupment as the DfE recoups this at source and pays to academies directly.

\*\* The increase in the Early Years Funding in 2024/25 is due to the additional free childcare to be provided from April and September 2024.

**4.2 High Needs Block** - This block is to fund provision for pupils assessed as having high needs generally accessing provision through special schools, specialist resource provision (SRP) and additionally resourced provision (ARP) based within a mainstream school, pupil referral unit or independent and private residential settings. Funding is allocated to the LA based on a National Funding Formula and is then passed onto providers using a local funding formula.

#### 4.3 Dedicated Schools Grant Outturn position

The table below details the Dedicated Schools Grant (DSG) budget and spend as at the end of the 2023/24 financial year.

<b>Funding Block</b>	<b>2023/24 Budget £m</b>	<b>2023/24 Outturn £m</b>	<b>2023/24 Variance £m</b>
Schools Block*	109.032	108.058	-0.974
CSSB	1.768	1.763	-0.005
Early Years Block**	22.814	22.271	-0.543
High Needs Block	54.518	62.915	8.397
<b>Total</b>	<b>188.132</b>	<b>195.007</b>	<b>6.875</b>

As at the end of 2022/23 there was a deficit balance on the DSG of £0.525m. Therefore, the cumulative deficit at the end of 2023/24 was £7.400m.

The underspend on the schools block funding was linked to growth funding to be allocated in 2024/25 in line with the agreed growth policy.

The underspend on the Early Years Block is due to changes in actual pupil numbers paid for compared to the numbers of pupils when the funding was allocated.

The overspend on the High Needs block is linked to a number of pressures including increase demand on the service in line with increased EHCP numbers and increased costs of provision. The table below breaks the budget and spend for High Needs down further.

<b>High Needs 2023/24 Outturn</b>			
<b>High Needs Expenditure 2023/24</b>	<b>Budget</b>	<b>Outturn</b>	<b>Variance over/ (underspend)</b>
	<b>(£m)</b>	<b>(£m)</b>	<b>(£m)</b>
Place funding - Specialist Provision	9.284	9.584	0.300
Top-up funding - Mainstream Provision plus Specialist Units in Mainstream	11.629	14.202	2.573
Top-up funding - Out of Borough Schools	1.550	2.240	0.690
Top-up funding – Specialist Provision	15.442	14.729	<b>(0.713)</b>
Placements fees – Independent Special Schools/Colleges & Top-up funding Post 16 Provision	9.900	16.302	6.402
SEN Support Services	3.104	2.596	<b>(0.508)</b>
Alternative Provision incl. home & hospital tuition & outreach	1.800	2.108	0.308
Other provision	1.147	0.00	<b>(1.147)</b>
Tuition Costs	0.500	0.784	0.284
Personal Budgets	0.150	0.176	0.026
Therapies & other health related services	0.012	0.194	0.182
<b>Total Budget / Expenditure</b>	<b>54.518</b>	<b>62.915</b>	<b>8.397</b>

4.4 The High Needs Block outturn for 2023/24 set out in the table above, provides a breakdown of the £8.397m overspend by expenditure type. Additional information regarding the main reasons for the variances are set out below:

- Place Funding – increase in commissioned specialist places from September 2023 across various schools £0.300m.
- Top-up funding (mainstream) – EHCP growth and higher band rates in mainstream provision £2.573m.
- Top-up funding (out of borough schools) – combination of commissioned specialist places to meet need and demand and an increase in parents choosing out of borough mainstream schools £0.690m.
- Top-up funding (specialist) – budget set based on the total number of commissioned places in special schools, but a proportion of places are taken by out of borough pupils who are responsible for paying the top-up funding **(£0.713m)**.
- Independent Schools / Post 16 – combination of commissioned specialist places in the independent sector to meet need due to a lack of available places in and out of borough and an increase in the number of post 16 places in colleges £6.402m.
- SEN Support Services – realignment of the cost of central support services provided by the local authority **(£0.508m)**.

- Alternative Provision / Home & Hospital Tuition / Outreach – increase in the number of permanently excluded pupils requiring alternative provision in KS4 £0.308m.
- Other Provision – nil cost, this budget was initially unallocated and then used to support other pressures across the high needs funding block (£1.147m).
- Tuition costs – increased use of private tuition to support pupils not in provision full-time £0.284m.
- Personal Budgets – increased number of personal budget requests to fund agreed costs to support pupil needs £0.026m.
- Therapies & other health related services – increased provision of other types of support for pupils with additional needs, for example, behaviour, motivational therapy, etc. £0.182m.

4.5 As the High Needs block continues to forecast an increasing deficit position, the LA have developed a DSG Management Plan to outline the current trajectory of EHCP growth and expenditure as well as mitigating actions to reduce the deficit position in future years. This is a requirement of the DSG grant conditions. Schools Forum agreed an initial plan which was presented to Schools Forum in March 2023.

4.6 Following this, it has become apparent that the increase in EHCP numbers seen in recent years and increased costs have meant that the DSG position has significantly changed. The LA are working together alongside the Schools Forum High Needs working group to implement a reviewed DSG management plan to manage future costs and demands. The LA are also working with the ESFA to gain advice on best practice and gain reassurance that the actions put in place are appropriate and maximised. Work continues on an updated DSG Management Plan which will be presented to Schools Forum in 2025

4.7 The high needs working group has been established to support a full review of high needs funding and processes in Walsall and to support the implementation of the DSG management plan. Updates on the progress of the group are provided to Schools Forum on a regular basis.

4.8 Currently, DSG deficit balances are not included within the local authorities final accounts. Instead, they are held on a balance sheet and carried forward each year in line with current legislation. However, the DfE have confirmed that the statutory override will be removed at the end of the 2026/27 financial year. This means that any deficits at this point will then be included in the local authorities accounts and would need to be offset against other internal resources.

## **5. Reducing Inequalities**

### **5.1 We are Walsall 2040**

We want to create a Walsall where all children, irrespective of background or ability, have access to good education and can lead fun, safe and healthy lives. We want to ensure services are there now and, in the future, to support children and families and that they can access a range of activities to have fun, grow, learn, and thrive locally. Resilient children and thriving families are key to ensure Walsall's children can achieve their potential become successful adults from 2040 and beyond. As partners, we will focus on supporting the first one thousand days in a child's life to give them the best start. We will work together to close

the gap in child poverty and educational inequalities and create a borough of opportunity for children and young people.

## **6. Decide**

6.1 The committee may decide to request further information on the work the EHC team is doing with our vulnerable groups.

The committee may decide to request further information on the progress made after 12 months of the strategy being in place.

The committee may require further updates if the National picture of SEND changes over the coming months.

## **7. Respond**

7.1 Any recommendations made by the committee will be responded to by the appropriate service area.

## **8. Review**

8.1 The actions and outcomes within this report are monitored by Access & Inclusion SMT and Children's Services DMT and through a monthly performance board. Highlight reports are also provided to the Transformation project board.

## **Background papers**

Appendix A Walsall SEND and AP strategy 2023-26

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Walsall Council

# Working together for better SEND and Alternative Provision (AP)

Special Educational Needs, Disability and Alternative  
Provision Strategy **2023-2028**



# Walsall SEND - Working Together Charter

 **Actively listen**  
at the first opportunity to ensure families receive the correct support.

**Use Language that cares!**

**OPEN Communication**  
Be Transparent and CLEAR

"ENSURE everyone's **VOICE IS HEARD**"

 Prepare children and young people for adulthood

**Prioritise children and young people's aspirations!**

**Celebrate** children and young people as they are

 **Feel Valued and Included**

Early intervention and support

**FEEDBACK...**  
**YOU SAID...  
...WE DID!**

**Be OPEN**  
HONEST and RESPECTFUL  
in ALL communications

ALL partners are involved and **ACCOUNTABLE**

Invest **TIME** for working together



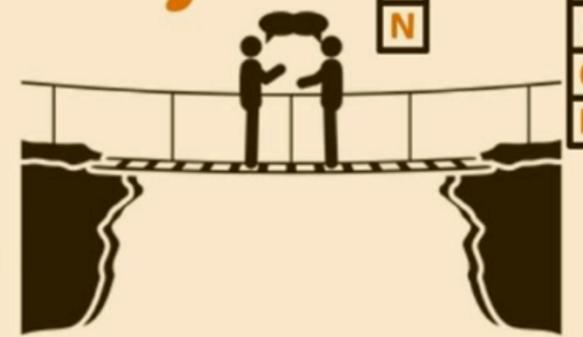
Feel welcomed and cared for

A shared understanding

Working in partnership



Involve Include **AGREE**  
outcomes **TOGETHER**



# Forward

As an area partnership we believe supporting children and young people with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND) is everyone's business and we are committed to providing excellent alternative provision for those who need it.

We are determined to do everything we can to provide better experiences and outcomes for all our children and young people with SEND and those who attend Alternative Provision.

We are proud of the existing support available for children and young people in Walsall. This strategy sets out our ambitions over the next five years to continue to develop services and make continuous improvements. It demonstrates our commitment to ensure that we work closely with and listen to children, young people and their families.

We want all our children and young people with SEND and those attending Alternative Provision to be valued, visible and included within their local community, providing them with the opportunity to achieve their aspirations and outcomes, leading to a happy, healthy and fulfilling life.

We will provide access to services that will make a difference to families. These services will work effectively because they work together, are inclusive, easy to access, close to home, are adaptable for individual needs and aspirations whilst respecting the rights of children, young people and their families.

This work is supported by sharing information, innovative ideas and best practice to support children and young people to achieve. The area partnership holds a shared accountability for wellbeing, fairness and equity for all.

# Our vision

We believe that every child and young person deserves, and should receive, an excellent education and the chance to fulfil their potential. This includes having a clear focus on providing the right support, in the right place, at the right time.

The area partnership sets out Walsall's strategy to continually develop and improve services for children and young people aged 0-25 years with special educational needs and disabilities (SEND) and those using alternative provision (AP).

A child or young person has special educational needs and disabilities (SEND) if they have a learning difficulty and/or a disability that means they need special education, care and health support.

Alternative Provision supports children who need extra help to stay in and enjoy learning at their mainstream school, or provides specialist places and support for those who would benefit from spending time away from their school.

We recognise that many of the young people who use Alternative Provision will have SEND which is why we have unified our approach in this strategy.

We want to ensure that all children and young people have a sense of belonging and that they feel safe in their identity. We hold the ambition that every child and young person will have a sense of belonging in their education setting, when they attend health services for appointments, access Social Care support or join in activities and events in their local community.

This strategy has been co-produced with parents, carers and families (including FACE, Walsall's Parent Carer Forum); children and young people who have lived experience; early years settings; schools; colleges; frontline practitioners; the voluntary and community sector; and the NHS Black Country Integrated Care Board.



**Walsall Council**

SEN and Disability  
Information, Advice  
and Support

**Walsall  
sendias**



FACE Walsall Parent Carer Forum

- Families and Carers Empowered -



**Black Country  
Integrated Care Board**

# Working together

The lived experience of children, young people and their families with SEND is central to our developments and co-production is fundamental within our continuing work. We value and will continue to listen to our SEND community. We will continue to learn from what they tell us and ensure their voices influence our work and developments. By working together in partnership, we will provide the right support at the right time, for all children and young people with SEND across our community and ensure we deliver the very best outcomes based on their needs. Our co-produced SEND Co-production and Engagement Agreement and In Our Hands Engagement and Participation Strategy will provide the basis of our work in this area.



# Context

In Walsall, the overall population size has increased by 5.5%, from around 269,300 in 2011 to 284,100 in 2021. This is lower than the overall increase for England (6.6%), and for the West Midlands (6.2%).

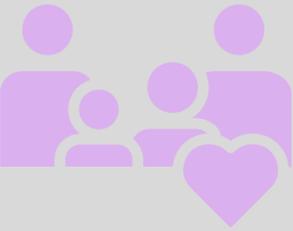
**73,344**  
Children  
and young people



**53,863**  
In schools



**9,366**  
SEND children



**6,703**  
SEN support  
school age



**3.7%**  
of children with SEN  
support known to social care



**6.9%**  
of children with an  
EHCP known to social care



**4,532**  
EHCP's aged 0-25



**2.7%**  
of school aged children  
have SEMH needs



# Priority 1: Localised high-quality provision

## **Our aspiration...**

Is to provide a continuum of high quality, local provision in Walsall across education, health and social care; to better meet the needs of young people with SEND and those requiring Alternative Provision.

## **We will...**

- Develop a continuum of provision to support young people that will better meet their needs to be successful in their local mainstream school or setting.
- Ensure that every child and young person can access a positive learning environment where they have a sense of belonging to support their self-esteem leading to increased aspirations and a successful life.
- Continue to develop and implement training and awareness for SEND for all staff across the partnership.
- Have an integrated training and education offer for education settings to support reasonable adjustments and increase their understanding of needs.
- Support schools and settings to meet the medical needs of children young people with identified health conditions, with access to support and training from local health providers.
- Have appropriate local health care provision that is easy to access by children, young people and their families.
- Ensure good practice is shared and celebrated from high-quality schools, settings and services.
- Expand the range of alternative provision options available, including in-house provision, external providers and specialist interventions, to ensure that every child and young person has access to appropriate placement.

## How we know we have made a difference...

The majority of children and young people with SEND will successfully attend their local mainstream school or setting.

Those in need of additional support from Alternative Provision will be supported to return to, and be successful in, their local mainstream provision.

All children and young people will have their education, health and care needs met locally, fewer children and young people will have to travel outside of Walsall for their needs to be met.

Quality first teaching and access to an inclusive curriculum will meet the needs of children and young people with SEND, whatever education or early years setting they attend.

There will be an increase in young people successfully transitioning across education, health and care to the next stage of their journey.

There will be an increase in young people accessing higher education, apprenticeships, traineeships and supported internships leading to successful employment.



# Priority 2: Early identification and help

## **Our aspiration...**

We will work in partnership across education, health and care to deliver the right support, in the right place and at the right time to meet the needs of children and young people earlier.

## **We will...**

- Ensure that our Local Offer website continues to help children and young people and their families find the local information and support from across Walsall.
- Develop a skilled, confident and resilient workforce, able to meet the educational, social and emotional needs of all children and young people.
- Provide a high-quality professional development offer for our workforce across the SEND local area.
- Celebrate and share good practice from a range of high-quality schools, settings and services.
- Implement a consistent Graduated Approach that will 'assess, plan, do and review' the support that has been put in place to meet the needs of each child and young person with SEND.
- Continue to manage requests for Education Health and Care plans, keeping within the statutory timescales.
- Develop robust processes for identifying children and young people who may benefit from alternative provision and conducting comprehensive assessments of their needs.

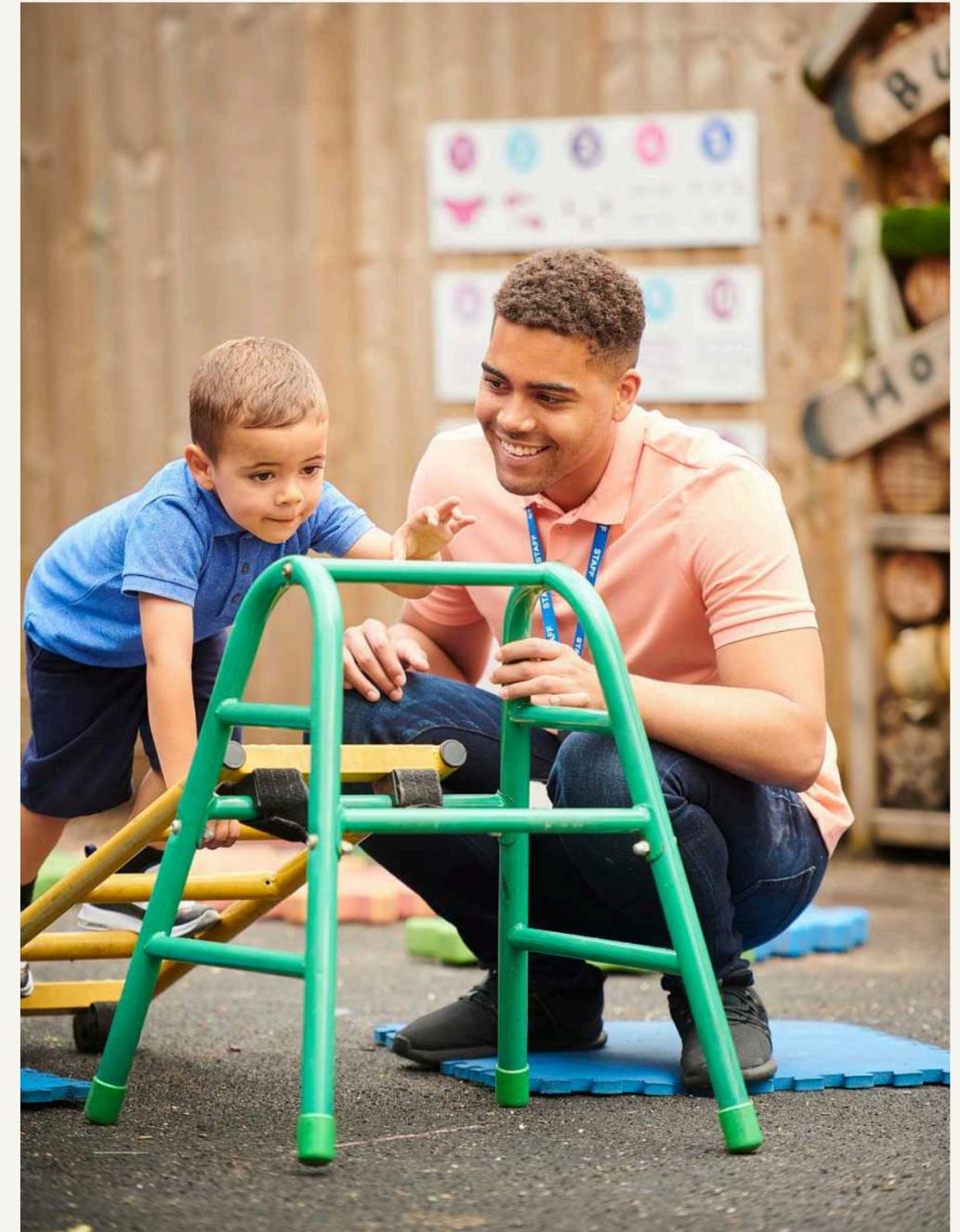
## How we know we have made a difference...

There will be an increase in the numbers of staff who are confident they can meet the presenting needs of children with SEND.

There will be an increase in parental and professional confidence that early intervention is providing relevant and appropriate support for children and young people.

More families and children with SEND will be able to find and engage with local offer services through better online advice and guidance.

There will be increased confidence from young people that they are prepared to transition to adulthood.



# Priority 3: Participate in decisions

## **Our aspiration...**

We will build trust, listen to lived experience, welcome innovative ideas from children, families and partners to shape and improve long term outcomes for children and young people with SEND across Walsall.

## **We will...**

- Consider the best options for children, young people and their families and place them at the centre of any decision making process.
- Embed the SEND Working Together Charter to ensure children, young people and their families are empowered to actively participate in decisions.
- Use innovative approaches to capture and listen to the voice of children and young people, to know if we are making a difference.
- Emphasise and amplify the importance of the voice of the child or young person as well as their parents and carers in our work.
- Facilitate regular workshops with parents and carers and our children and young people, seeking their views to help us shape services.
- Continue to develop and improve the Local Offer website, to make it more accessible for children, young people and their families.
- Ensure open communication by publishing regular newsletters for professionals, parents, carers and families.
- Seek to use evidence of lessons learned from compliments and complaints to make continuous improvements to our services.

## How we know we have made a difference...

There will be an increase in families who tell us they are feeling respected and valued.

There will be evidence of children and young people involvement in strategic developments.

Children, young people and their families will be involved in strategic meetings to help shape service improvements and developments.

We will see a reduction in conflict and tribunal action with families via dispute resolution, mediation and tribunals.

Improved feedback mechanisms will demonstrate an increase in satisfaction rates for how we communicate with families.

We will be able to demonstrate increased engagement with families through a range of forums across the system.

All practitioners will know for each child and young person their preference on how they communicate.



# Priority 4: Supportive alternative provision offer

## **Our aspiration...**

We will develop a continuum of support, including outreach and local Alternative Provision, as well as intervention placements, to enable those young people to be successful in mainstream schools.

## **We will...**

- Expand the range of alternative provision options available, including in-house provision, external providers, and specialist interventions, to ensure that every child and young person has access to appropriate placement.
- Implement rigorous quality assurance mechanisms to monitor and evaluate the effectiveness of alternative provision and drive continuous improvement.
- Support smooth transitions into and out of alternative provision, providing comprehensive support to facilitate successful reintegration into mainstream education or other pathways.
- Prioritise the safeguarding and wellbeing of children and young people in alternative provision settings, providing access to appropriate support services and interventions as needed.
- Foster strong partnerships with schools, colleges, providers, local authorities, and other agencies to coordinate support and resources for children and young people in alternative provision.
- Promote active engagement and participation of children and young people, families, and communities in the design, delivery, and evaluation of alternative provision services. This will enable children and young people to be valued within their local communities and develop positive relationships.

## How we know we have made a difference...

We will have a clear system of consistent and easy to access support services across education, health and care for AP and SEND.

Schools, children, young people and their families will tell us that they have been able to access AP at the right time.

Schools will tell us they feel supported and confident in their commissioning processes for AP.

We will identify good practice and areas for improvement to ensure quality throughout our AP providers.

Children and families will tell us that their experiences in our alternative provision are positive that they feel they are included, belong, and listened to.

We will see a rise in attainment levels for children and young people attending AP and a reduction in permanent exclusions, suspensions, and placement breakdowns.

Achievements in AP will be celebrated by children and young people, parents, schools, and providers.

We will see an increase in children and young people re-engaging with mainstream schools and a reduction in reduced timetables.

There will be an increase in young people successfully transitioning to the next stage of their journey or into post-16.



# Priority 5: Children and young people feel valued and visible in their community

## **Our aspiration...**

We want all children and young people with SEND and those in Alternative Provision settings to feel welcomed and to live well in their communities.

## **We will...**

- Work with all our schools, early years settings, post 16 providers, social care providers, health providers and partners to be welcoming and ensure that children and young people have a sense of belonging regardless of their gender, ethnicity, socio-economic background or educational need.
- Ensure children and young people are supported to communicate in the way or method they choose and feel most comfortable with.
- Always consider the needs of children with SEND in local initiatives.
- Continue to work with community teams to raise awareness of SEND to promote inclusivity for all.
- Develop our work with charities and organisations, to ensure there is a vibrant range of high-quality specialist activities and facilities in the community.
- Further enhance our offer and support for children and young people to prepare for adulthood.
- Use images and articles in our mainstream corporate communications celebrating inclusivity, equality and diversity.

## How we know we have made a difference...

Children, young people and families will tell us that their experiences in our local mainstream schools with SEND are positive that they feel they are included, belong and are listened to.

There will be an increase in SEND young people who progress to higher education, apprenticeships, traineeships, supported internships and employment.

There will be a reduction in the number of children and young people who have to travel out of their local community for their education, health and care needs.

There will be increase in positive feedback from children, young people and their families telling us that they learn, contribute to, and take part in all aspects of setting/school/college life.

There will be an increase in children and young people with SEND accessing community based activities and initiatives.



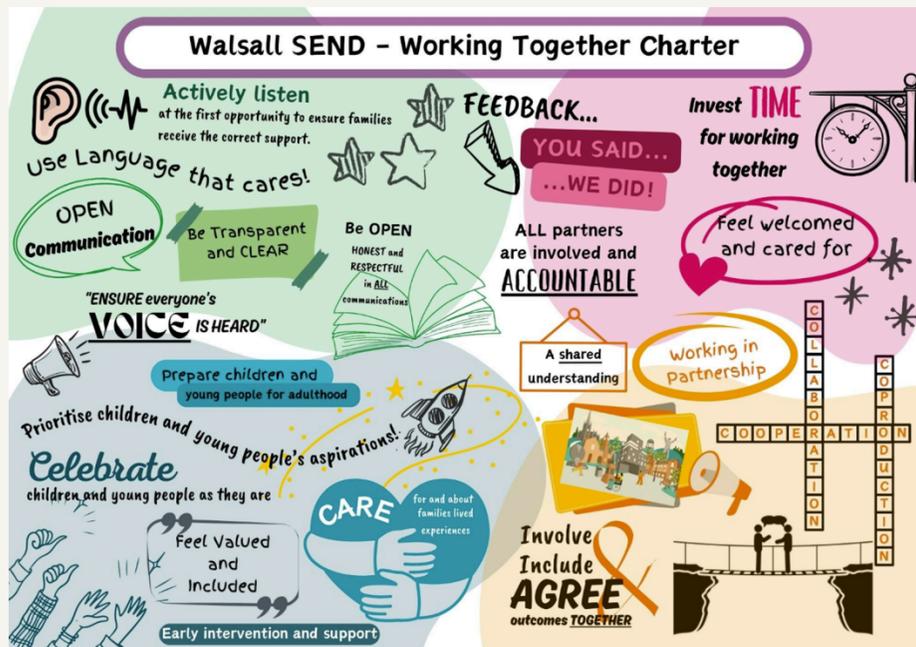
# Working together for better outcomes

## Priorities

- Localised high-quality provision.
- Early Identification & help.
- Participate in decisions.
- Supportive AP offer.
- Children & young people feel valued & visible in their community.

## Outcomes

- Needs are identified accurately and assessed in a timely and effective way.
- Children, young people and their families participate in decision-making about their plans and support.
- Children and young people receive the right help at the right time. Children and young people are well prepared for their next steps, and achieve strong outcomes.
- Children and young people are valued, visible and included in their communities.



**Using the voice of the child and young person to continually improve...**

# How we will deliver our priorities

## **Strategic Delivery**

Professionals across Walsall understand that for us to deliver cohesive, holistic support to our children and families we must work together with the child's or young person's aspirations and needs at the centre of our efforts. To enable this we are dedicated to working together for better outcomes, through embedding the priorities in this strategy into service and delivery plans.

## **Local Area Partnership Governance**

The SEND Partnership Operational Group, with parent/carer, local authority, school and other education setting representation, will formally oversee the effective delivery of this strategy.



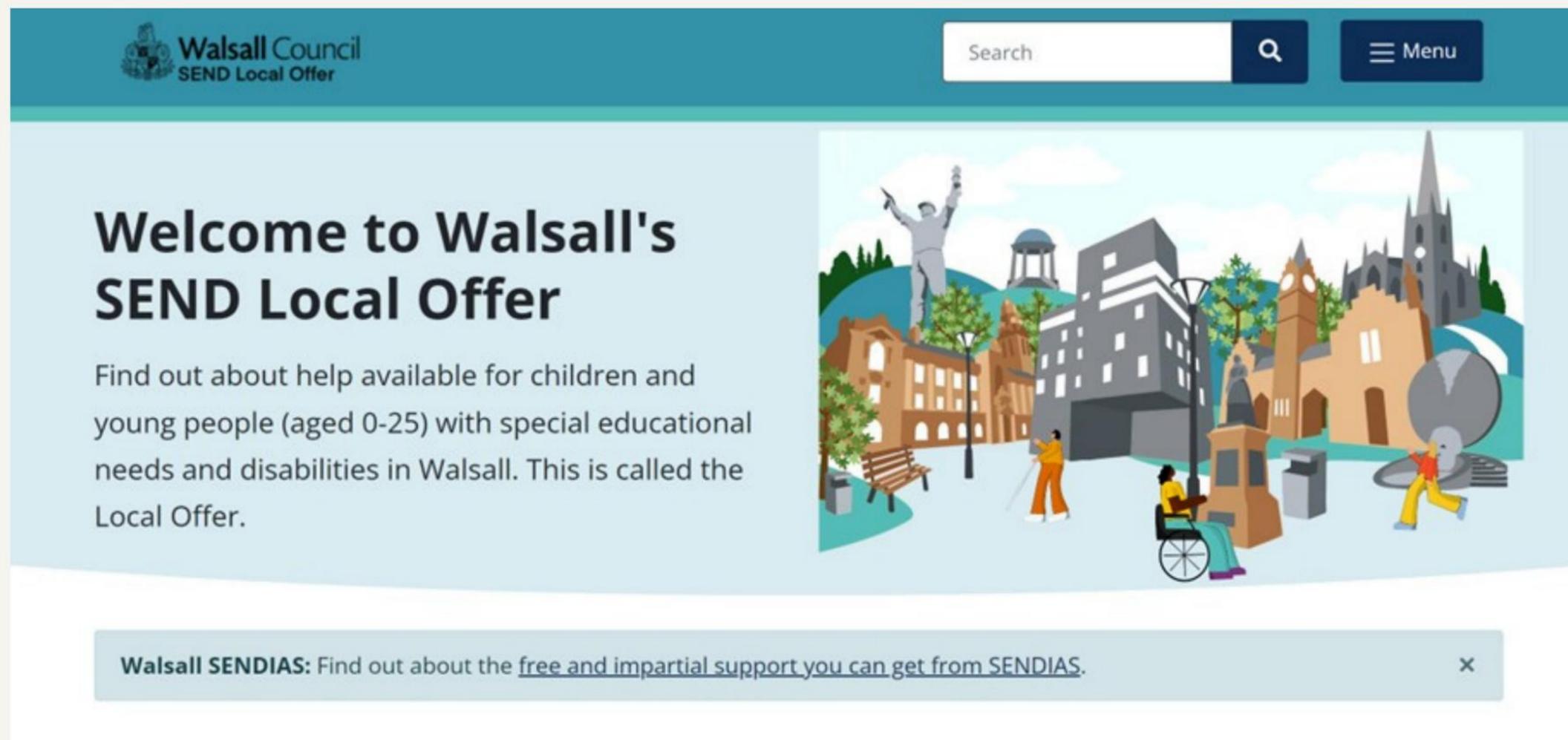
## **Reviewing and monitoring our strategy**

The SEND Partnership Operational Group will track and monitor projects that support the implementation and development of this strategy. The action plan is regularly updated, presented to the Local Authority Inclusion Board and published on the SEND Local Offer. The Strategy and Action Plan will sit alongside our local area SEND and Alternative Provision self-evaluation framework which supports our continuous journey of self-improvement. We have the ambition to continually ensure that the area partnership has arrangements that lead to positive experiences and outcomes for children and young people and that we are taking action where improvements are needed. We will ensure to maintain open communication across the partnership, to continually feedback through the 'you said, we did' approach, being honest and transparent about the improvements we are able to implement and the challenges we may face.

# Local Offer for Special Educational Needs and Disability

**Discover all you need to know about education, health and care services in Walsall.**

On the Local Offer website you can find information and advice about services, support and activities for children and young people aged 0-25 with special educational needs and disabilities all in one place.



**[www.send.walsall.gov.uk](http://www.send.walsall.gov.uk)**



## Education Overview and Scrutiny Committee – Area of Focus – 2024/25

03 September 2024	22 October 2024	19 November 2024	09 January 2025	13 February 2025	25 March 2025
Children not in School	Inclusion	School Place Planning	Outcomes	Skills and development	Early years
Attendance and Elective Home Education (EHE). Children Missing Education (CME). Exclusion and Suspensions.	Home to School Transport (H2ST) Inclusion Hub Budget Setting 2024/25	Specialist Provision Plan (inc. SEN school places) and Mainstream Pupil Place Planning and Capital Strategy  Quarter 2 financial monitoring  Fair Access Protocol (inc. School Admissions).  Special Education needs developments inc. designated schools grant (DSG)	School Attainment Data and Priority Education Investment Areas and Ofsted Data and Outcomes.  Family of Schools Development and Schools Causing Concern.	Skills Strategy and Development including Employment pathways.  Post 16 inc. Not in Education Employment Training (NEETS) and vulnerable groups.  Alternative Provision including SEND.	School Readiness and EYFS (Early Year Foundation Stage) Outcomes including phonics.  Early Years Special Educational Needs (SEN) Development.  Childcare Sufficiency and Wraparound Programs.

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

## Education Overview and Scrutiny Committee – Area of Focus – 2024/25

Items to be scheduled	Notes

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

## Black Country Executive Joint Committee - Forward Plan of Key Decisions

### Published up to March 2025

Date Created	Key Decision	Contact Officer	Main consultee	Date of meeting
<b>Black Country Enterprise Zone</b>				
05/08/2024	<p>Gasholders</p> <p>Approval of the Gasholders project (Walsall Council) for grant funding from the Black Country Enterprise Zone (BCEZ) business rate surpluses.</p> <p>Approval for the City of Wolverhampton Council and Walsall Council to proceed to enter into a separate Grant Agreement which will set out the terms and conditions of the funding.</p>	<p>Simon Tranter  <a href="mailto:simon.tranter@walsall.gov.uk">simon.tranter@walsall.gov.uk</a></p>	Walsall Council	13/01/2025
<b>Land and Property Investment Fund (LPIF)</b>				
02/09/2024	<p>Approval for the remaining LPIF programme funds to be awarded, either on an equal grant sum split or on a full grant sum award to a single project basis; with the projects being Alfred Gunn House (Sandwell Metropolitan Borough Council) and Oxley Health &amp; Wellbeing Facility (Wolverhampton City Council).</p>	<p>Tammy Stokes  <a href="mailto:tammy_stokes@sandwell.gov.uk">tammy_stokes@sandwell.gov.uk</a></p> <p>Simon Tranter  <a href="mailto:simon.tranter@walsall.gov.uk">simon.tranter@walsall.gov.uk</a></p> <p>Richard Lawrence  <a href="mailto:Richard.Lawrence@wolverhampton.gov.uk">Richard.Lawrence@wolverhampton.gov.uk</a></p>	<p>Sandwell Council</p> <p>Walsall Council</p> <p>Wolverhampton City Council</p>	13/01/2025

	<p>Approval for the Accountable Body (Walsall Council) for the LPIF programme to proceed to enter into grant agreement with the Alfred Gunn House project (Sandwell Metropolitan Borough Council) if funding recommendation is agreed.</p> <p>Approval for the Accountable Body (Walsall Council) for the LPIF programme to proceed to enter into grant agreement with the Oxley Health &amp; Wellbeing Facility project (Wolverhampton City Council) if funding recommendation is agreed.</p>			
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## **FORWARD PLAN OF KEY DECISIONS**

**Council House,  
Lichfield Street,  
Walsall, WS1 1TW**  
[www.walsall.gov.uk](http://www.walsall.gov.uk)

**4 November 2024**

## FORWARD PLAN

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

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

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

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

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

- (1) A key decision is:
  - (i) any decision in relation to an executive function which results in the Council incurring expenditure which is, or the making of savings which are, significant, having regard to the Council’s budget for the service or function to which the decision relates or
  - (ii) any decision that is likely to have significant impact on two or more wards within the borough.
- (2) The threshold for “significant” expenditure/savings is £500,000.

- (3) A decision taker may only make a key decision in accordance with the requirements of the Executive Procedure Rules set out in Part 4 of this Constitution.

**FORWARD PLAN OF KEY DECISIONS  
DECEMBER 2024 TO MARCH 2025  
(04.11.2024)**

7 1	2	3	4	5	6	
Reference No./ Date first entered in Plan	Decision to be considered (to provide adequate details for those both in and outside the Council)	Decision maker	Background papers (if any) and Contact Officer	Main consultees	Contact Member (All Members can be written to at Civic Centre, Walsall)	Date item to be considered
47/24 (5.8.24)	<b>Council Plan 2025-2029:</b> To consider the final version of the Council Plan following consultation and recommend this to Council for approval.	Cabinet  Key Decision	Karen Griffiths <a href="mailto:Karen.Griffiths@walsall.gov.uk">Karen.Griffiths@walsall.gov.uk</a>  Elizabeth Connolly <a href="mailto:Elizabeth.Connolly@walsall.gov.uk">Elizabeth.Connolly@walsall.gov.uk</a>	Internal Services, external stakeholders, other interested parties (via Public Consultation exercise)	Cllr Perry	11 December 2024
61/24 (7.10.24)	<b>Making Connections Walsall:</b> To approve a contract extension for 1 year (April 2025 – March 2026) to enable collaboration and partnership discussions regarding a new social prescribing delivery model for Walsall residents.	Cabinet  Key Decision	Sarah Oakley <a href="mailto:Sarah.Oakley@walsall.gov.uk">Sarah.Oakley@walsall.gov.uk</a>	Internal Services	Cllr Perry	11 December 2024

<p>49/24 (5.8.24)</p>	<p><b>Treasury Management Mid-Year Position Statement 2024/25:</b></p> <p>To note and forward to Council, for consideration and noting (and in line with the requirements of the Treasury Management Code of Practice (2017), the mid-year report for treasury management activities 2024/25 including prudential and local indicators.</p>	<p>Cabinet Council Non-key Decision</p>	<p>Richard Walley <a href="mailto:Richard.Walley@walsall.gov.uk">Richard.Walley@walsall.gov.uk</a></p>	<p>Internal Services</p>	<p>Cllr Statham</p>	<p>11 December 2024</p>
<p>32/24 (4.6.24)</p>	<p><b>Appointment of Contractor for Civic Centre and Council House Decarbonisation Works:</b></p> <p>To appoint a contractor for decarbonisation works at the Civic Centre and Council House.</p> <p><i>This will be a private session report containing commercially sensitive information.</i></p>	<p>Cabinet Key Decision</p>	<p>Nick Ford <a href="mailto:Nick.Ford@walsall.gov.uk">Nick.Ford@walsall.gov.uk</a></p>	<p>Internal Services</p>	<p>Cllr Andrew</p>	<p>11 December 2024</p>
<p>63/24 (7.10.24)</p>	<p><b>The Walsall Borough Local Plan (WBLP) - revised Local Development Scheme (LDS):</b></p> <p>To approve the progression of the WBLP under a revised LDS, and the publication of the revised LDS, to include other development plan documents and planning policy documents.</p>	<p>Cabinet Key Decision</p>	<p>David Holloway <a href="mailto:David.Holloway@walsall.gov.uk">David.Holloway@walsall.gov.uk</a></p>	<p>Internal Services</p>	<p>Cllr Andrew</p>	<p>11 December 2024</p>

72/24 (4.11.24)	<b>Infrastructure Funding Statement (IFS) 2023-24:</b>  To update members, stakeholders/partners and communities about funds received and spent through Section 106 planning obligations and to approve for submission to government, the 2023-24 Infrastructure Funding Statement.	Cabinet  Key Decision	Andrew Tyrer  <a href="mailto:Andrew.Tyrer@walsall.gov.uk">Andrew.Tyrer@walsall.gov.uk</a>	Internal Services	Cllr Andrew	11 December 2024
62/24 (7.10.24)	<b>Adoption of the new Playing Pitch and Outdoor Sports Strategy:</b>  To approve the new Playing Pitch and Outdoor Sports Strategy and establish a council-led steering group to undertake ongoing monitoring.	Cabinet  Key Decision	Black Country PPOSS - Overarching Strategic Framework  Jaki Brunton-Douglas  <a href="mailto:Jaki.Brunton-Douglas@walsall.gov.uk">Jaki.Brunton-Douglas@walsall.gov.uk</a>	Internal Services	Cllr Flint	11 December 2024
71/24 (7.10.24)	<b>Net-Zero 2041 Strategy:</b>  To approve the draft Net-Zero 2041 Strategy and the establishment of a 'Walsall Net Zero Partnership' to deliver the borough-wide elements of the Strategy.	Cabinet  Key Decision	Kathryn Moreton  <a href="mailto:Kathryn.Moreton@walsall.gov.uk">Kathryn.Moreton@walsall.gov.uk</a>	Internal Services	Cllr Flint	11 December 2024
35/24 (4.6.24)	<b>Walsall Housing Allocations Policy:</b>  To approve Walsall's Housing Allocations Policy which details how the Council will prioritise applicants for nomination to housing association properties.	Cabinet  Key Decision	Neil Hollyhead  <a href="mailto:Neil.Hollyhead@walsall.gov.uk">Neil.Hollyhead@walsall.gov.uk</a>	Public Consultation  Internal Services  Housing Associations	Cllr Garcha	11 December 2024

39/24 (1.7.24)	<p><b>Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Strategy 2024-2029:</b></p> <p>To approve the final version of the Equality, Diversity and Inclusion (EDI) Strategy following consultation.</p>	Cabinet Key Decision	<p>Karen Griffiths <a href="mailto:Karen.Griffiths@walsall.gov.uk">Karen.Griffiths@walsall.gov.uk</a></p> <p>Elizabeth Connolly <a href="mailto:Elizabeth.Connolly@walsall.gov.uk">Elizabeth.Connolly@walsall.gov.uk</a></p>	Internal Services, external stakeholders, other interested parties (via Public Consultation exercise)	Cllr Lee	11 December 2024
57/24 (2.9.24)	<p><b>IT Goods, Software and Associated Services contract awards:</b></p> <p>To award a contract for the provision of IT Goods, Software and Associated Services.</p>	Cabinet Key Decision	<p>Sharon Worrall <a href="mailto:Sharon.Worrall@walsall.gov.uk">Sharon.Worrall@walsall.gov.uk</a></p>	Internal Services	Cllr Lee	11 December 2024
56/24 (2.9.24)	<p><b>Middlemore Lane Household Waste and Recycling Centre (HWRC) &amp; Waste Treatment Service Operational Arrangements:</b></p> <p>To approve a short-term service contract for the operational management of the new waste facility at Middlemore Lane and the existing HWRC at Fryers Road and approve a new finance lease agreement for the operational equipment, HWRC containers, and other physical resources at Middlemore Lane.</p> <p><i>This will be a private session report containing commercially sensitive information.</i></p>	Cabinet Key Decision	<p>Kathryn Moreton <a href="mailto:Kathryn.Moreton@walsall.gov.uk">Kathryn.Moreton@walsall.gov.uk</a></p>	Internal Services	Cllr Murphy	11 December 2024

<p>48/24 (5.8.24)</p>	<p><b>Draft Revenue Budget and Draft Capital Programme 2025/26 to 2028/29 – Update:</b></p> <p>To provide an updated medium term financial outlook, draft revenue budget and capital programme for 2025/26 to 2028/29, including update to savings proposals, impact of Autumn Statement, and progress on budget consultation to date including feedback from Overview and Scrutiny Committees on the draft revenue and capital budget.</p>	<p>Cabinet  Key Decision</p>	<p>Ross Hutchinson  <a href="mailto:Ross.Hutchinson@walsall.gov.uk">Ross.Hutchinson@walsall.gov.uk</a></p>	<p>Council tax payers, business rate payers, voluntary and community organisations  Internal Services</p>	<p>Cllr Statham</p>	<p>15 January 2025</p>
<p>46/24 (5.8.24)</p>	<p><b>Planning Obligations Supplementary Planning Document (SPD):</b></p> <p>To seek approval of a draft Planning Obligations SPD for consultation with key partners, stakeholders, infrastructure providers and the general public. The document will be consulted on a 6-week consultation.</p>	<p>Cabinet  Key Decision</p>	<p>David Holloway  <a href="mailto:David.Holloway@walsall.gov.uk">David.Holloway@walsall.gov.uk</a></p>	<p>Internal Services</p>	<p>Cllr Andrew</p>	<p>15 January 2025</p>
<p>64/24 (7.10.24)</p>	<p><b>Council Plan 2025-2029 Baseline Performance Report:</b></p> <p>To consider baseline performance data aligned to the corporate priorities as set out in the Council Plan 2024-2028.</p>	<p>Cabinet  Key Decision</p>	<p>Elizabeth Connolly  <a href="mailto:Elizabeth.Connolly@walsall.gov.uk">Elizabeth.Connolly@walsall.gov.uk</a></p>	<p>Internal Services</p>	<p>Cllr Perry</p>	<p>12 February 2025</p>

65/24 (7.10.24)	<b>Walsall Place Based Strategy:</b> That Cabinet approve the Walsall Place Based Strategy (PBS) that sets the vision and delivery plan for the Single Settlement.	Cabinet Key Decision	Simon Tranter <a href="mailto:Simon.Tranter@walsall.gov.uk">Simon.Tranter@walsall.gov.uk</a>	Internal Services	Cllr Perry	12 February 2025
70/24 (7.10.24)	<b>Gasholders - Black Country Enterprise Zone:</b> To approve entering a Funding Agreement with City of Wolverhampton Council for site preparation works and the approach to progressing project delivery.  <i>This will be a private session report containing commercially sensitive information.</i>	Cabinet Key Decision	Caroline Harper <a href="mailto:Caroline.Harper@walsall.gov.uk">Caroline.Harper@walsall.gov.uk</a>	Internal Services	Cllr Andrew	12 February 2025
66/24 (7.10.24)	<b>Corporate Budget Plan 2025/26 – 2028/29, incorporating the Capital Strategy and the Treasury Management and investment Strategy 2025/26:</b> To recommend the final budget and council tax for approval by Council.	Cabinet Council Key Decision	Ross Hutchinson <a href="mailto:Ross.Hutchinson@walsall.gov.uk">Ross.Hutchinson@walsall.gov.uk</a>	Council tax payers, business rate payers, voluntary and community organisations  Internal Services	Cllr Statham	Cabinet 12 February 2025 / Council 27 February 2025
67/24 (7.10.24)	<b>Corporate Financial Performance 2024/25:</b> To report the financial position based on 9 months to December 2024.	Cabinet Non-key Decision	Ross Hutchinson <a href="mailto:Ross.Hutchinson@walsall.gov.uk">Ross.Hutchinson@walsall.gov.uk</a>	Internal Services	Cllr Statham	12 February 2025

68/24 (7.10.24)	<b>Determination of School Admission Arrangements 2026-27:</b>  To determine school admission arrangements for the 2026-27 academic year.	Cabinet  Key Decision	Alex Groom  <a href="mailto:Alex.Groom@walsall.gov.uk">Alex.Groom@walsall.gov.uk</a>	Internal Services  Schools Forum	Cllr Kaur	12 February 2025
69/24 (7.10.24)	<b>Middlemore Lane and Fryers Road Household Waste and Recycling Centres (HWRC) &amp; Waste Treatment Service:</b>  To approve the new long-term service provision for the operational management of two new waste facilities at Middlemore Lane and Fryers Road and approve the pre-tender budget for the operational management of a waste transfer station and two household waste recycling centres.	Cabinet  Key Decision	Kathryn Moreton  <a href="mailto:Kathryn.Moreton@walsall.gov.uk">Kathryn.Moreton@walsall.gov.uk</a>  Stephen Johnson  <a href="mailto:Stephen.Johnson@walsall.gov.uk">Stephen.Johnson@walsall.gov.uk</a>	Internal Services	Cllr Murphy	12 February 2025
73/24 (4.11.24)	<b>Early Years Funding Formula 2025/26:</b>  To approve the proposed Early Year Funding Formula for 2025/26.	Cabinet  Decision	Tanya Collier  <a href="mailto:Tanya.Collier@walsall.gov.uk">Tanya.Collier@walsall.gov.uk</a>	Internal Services  Schools Forum	Cllr Kaur	19 March 2025
74/24 (4.11.24)	<b>High Needs Funding Formula 2025/26:</b>  To approve the proposed High Needs Funding Formula for 2025/26.	Cabinet  Decision	Tanya Collier  <a href="mailto:Tanya.Collier@walsall.gov.uk">Tanya.Collier@walsall.gov.uk</a>	Internal Services  Schools Forum	Cllr Kaur	19 March 2025

<p>75/24 (4.11.24)</p>	<p><b>Adult Social Care and Children’s Services Case Management System:</b></p> <p>To approve the renewal of the contract for Mosaic before the current contract ends on 31/07/2025.</p>	<p>Cabinet Key Decision</p>	<p>Anne Doyle <a href="mailto:Anne.Doyle@walsall.gov.uk">Anne.Doyle@walsall.gov.uk</a> Maxine Jones <a href="mailto:Maxine.Jones@walsal.gov.uk">Maxine.Jones@walsal.gov.uk</a></p>	<p>Internal Services External Stakeholders</p>	<p>Cllr Pedley</p>	<p>19 March 2025</p>
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## Education Overview and Scrutiny Committee – Recommendation Tracker (24/25)

Meeting date	Agenda item	Action/Recommendation	Officer	Status	Target date	Notes
23 July 2024	<b>Areas of focus report 2024-25.</b>	Performance report breakdown of good/outstanding, primary/secondary, academy and maintain schools to be provided to Scrutiny Members.	Sharon Kelly	In progress.	9 January 2025	
		Two workshops will be scheduled to focus on: 1. School Admissions (process/procedures/myth busting) – Prior to November 2. School Attainment Data, Ofsted data and outcomes.	Nikki Gough.	Workshop 1 arranged for 14th November 2024. Workshop 2 arranged for 11 <sup>th</sup> December 2024.	Workshop 1 - prior to 19 November 2024 Workshop 2 - prior to 9th January 2025.	
3 September 2024	<b>Attendance Update</b>	A further update on attendance be provided with updated data including data indicating the number of schools performing below the national average (in relation to school attendance) is circulated to the Committee.	Rob Thomas	In progress	April 2025	
22 October 2024	<b>Inclusion Hub</b>	1. That Cabinet are asked to consider the sustainability of the Inclusion Hub in consideration that government	Nikki Gough			

		<p>funding could cease in the future.</p> <p>2. That Cabinet are asked to consider increasing the allocation of the budget to grow the (Inclusion Hub) service.</p>				
22 October 2024	<b>Home to School Transport</b>	That the transformation plan is considered at a future meeting of the Committee alongside the impact of the savings proposals.	Rob Thomas	To be scheduled.		
22 October 2024	<b>Draft Revenue and Draft Capital Programme 2025/26 - 2028/29</b>	That the Committee's feedback is provided to Cabinet.	Nikki Gough	Scheduled for Jan 2025.		