Walsall Council

Minutes of the **ORDINARY MEETING** of the Council of the Walsall Metropolitan Borough held on **Monday 29 September, 2025, at 6.00 p.m.** at the Council House, Walsall.

Present

Councillor L. Harrison (Mayor) in the Chair

Councillors: G. Ali
A. Andrew
B. Bains
H. Bashir
M.A. Bird
C. Bott
P. Bott
R. Burley
J. Chapman
S.J. Cooper
M. Coulson
S.K. Ditta
G. Eardley
S. Elson
K. Ferguson
G. Flint
M. Follows
N. Gandham
A. Garcha
P. Gill
N. Gultasib
A. Harris
F. Hassan
A.J. Hicken
A. Hussain
I. Hussain
K. Hussain
S. Hussain
T. Jukes
N. Latham
E. Lee
R. Martin
R. K Mehmi
E. Morgan
K. Murphy
J. Murray
L. Nahal
S. Nasreen
A.A. Nawaz
A. Parkes
L.J. Rattigan
E. Russell
S. Samra
K. Sears
G. Singh Sohal
P. Smith
C.A. Statham
M.A. Statham
M. Ward
J. Whitehouse
T. Wilson

42. **Apologies**

Apologies were received on behalf of Councillors Cheema, Kaur, Larden, Margetts, Pedley, Rasab, Towe and Waters.

43. **Minutes**

Resolved

That the minutes of the meeting held on 30 July, 2025 (as amended) a copy having been sent to each member of the Council, be approved as a correct record.

44. **Declarations of interest**

There were no declarations of interest.

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

Resolved

There were no items in private session.

46. **Mayor's announcements**

Mayor's Reception

The Mayor invited Members to join her in the Mayor's Parlour, following the meeting.

Death of Doreen Farrell-Evans

The Mayor referred to the death of former Member, Doreen Farrell-Evans, who served as a Member from May 1987 to June 2004, and served as Mayor from 1999 to 2000. Councillors Bird, Ward, Nawaz, Smith, Jukes and Andrew paid tribute to former Councillor Doreen Farrell-Evans, following which it was **moved** by the Mayor, duly seconded and:

Resolved

That this Council have heard with deep regret, of the death of former Councillor Doreen Farrell-Evans, a member from May 1987 to June 2004, and Mayor from 1999 to 2000, and places on record their appreciation of her services to the Borough and expresses its condolences to her family at this sad time.

47. **Petitions**

No petitions were submitted.

48. **Questions**

(a) From the public:

Claire Jeavons

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

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

Councillor M. Statham gave the following response:

Thank you for raising this important question and for sharing your personal experience. We recognise the challenges families face, and we are committed to improving support for children with special educational needs in Walsall.

Key areas of our work include:

- Working in true partnership with parents and carers through our Parent Carer Forum, (FACE) so that individual lived experience shapes services and decisions. We actively embrace a co-production approach, ensuring that parent and carer voices are represented in all strategic meetings and steering groups, which means that families are actively involved in decision-making and that service improvements and new initiatives are informed by lived experience.

- Improving access to clear information via our Local Offer website, which is co-produced with families, and through the SEND Information, Advice and Support Service (SENDIASS). This means that families can access comprehensive information on what support is available, as well as accessing free, impartial and confidential advice to parents and carers to help them navigate the system and make informed choices.

- Strengthening support in schools so that every child has access to help at the earliest stage, with every school having a SENCO and clear guidance for early inclusion and ordinarily available provision that has been coproduced with our parents and schools. Parents can request a meeting with the SENCO at any time to raise concerns about their child's progress or to review the support that is in place. Where a child has more complex needs we have in place a Graduated Approach to ensure that support is regularly reviewed and meets a child's individual needs.

- Addressing delays in diagnosis by working with health colleagues and Family Hubs to support families during waits through our Supported

Waiting Network, which offers practical advice and peer support. Monthly sessions are available that focus on practical themes such as sensory strategies, behaviour and communication, with guest speakers and professionals offering advice and guidance. Families also have the chance to meet other parents, share experiences and access signposting to further support. This ensures that while children are waiting to be seen by paediatric or specialist services, families are not left without help.

- Listening to feedback from families so we can continue to refine services, build trust and improve outcomes for children and young people with SEND.

Improving outcomes for children and young people with SEND is one of our top priorities in Walsall, and feedback from parents such as yourself is vital in helping us get this right.

If you would like to share your contact details with us, we would be very pleased to get in touch directly. We are always open to listening, learning, and hearing from families about what works well and what could be improved. Your feedback is invaluable and helps us to make meaningful changes and drive forward ongoing improvements to our SEND services in Walsall.

Claire Jeavons asked the following supplementary question:

Please may I receive a hard copy of your answer?

Councillor M. Statham gave the following response:

Yes of course, please leave your email details.

(b) From members of the Council:

Councillor Smith

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

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

and that

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

and that

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

and that subsequently

d) Cabinet considered the Overview and Scrutiny Committee's recommendations at their meeting of 22 May 2025 and resolved to stick by its original decision of 16th April 2025, namely to approve the introduction of statutory weekly food waste collections from 31 March 2026 and also to approve the standard food waste collection service to be one small kitchen caddy and one larger kerbside caddy per household, with the larger kerbside caddy being emptied weekly.

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

Councillor Samra gave the following response:

On 16 April, Cabinet approved the introduction of a separate food waste collection service. If implemented as agreed, this service will provide each household with one small kitchen caddy and one larger kerbside caddy, with the larger caddy collected weekly.

Prior to that decision, the council did not consult the public on whether they preferred separate food waste collections or a combined food-and-garden waste collection. This was for two reasons:

Firstly, the Local Government Act requires councils to "make arrangements to secure continuous improvement in the way in which their functions are exercised, having regard to a combination of economy, efficiency and effectiveness." Delivering a food waste service is therefore a statutory requirement. However, participation is entirely optional for residents, who may simply choose not to use the service if they wish.

While some government funding is available, the level of future government support remains uncertain. The officer recommendation therefore proposed the lowest-cost option, weekly separate food waste collections, avoiding a commitment to an additional £1m in annual expenditure.

Secondly, consultation with residents must be meaningful. It is not required on whether food waste collections should be introduced, since that decision has been set nationally. Nor would it have been appropriate to consult on

alternatives that were not financially viable at the time, as this could have been misleading.

That said, we have listened carefully to Members and to the concerns expressed about separate food waste collections. As a result, the council is now carrying out a public consultation to seek residents' views on how best to deliver this service.

Councillor Smith suggests that combining food and garden waste would be more viable and acceptable to most households. While this may be true for some, it is important to note that over 20% of households with a brown bin rarely present it for collection.

We have over 110,000 households, 90,000 of them have brown bins. On average, 24,000 do not present them on a current fortnightly collection.

Therefore, in areas with little or no garden, such as terraced streets, residents may find a small caddy more practical than a large bin they hardly use. Furthermore, separate food waste collections could bring additional benefits, such as free doorstep collection of small electrical items, which may be more attractive to some households than year-round garden waste collection.

Ultimately, the key point is that we need a clearer understanding of our residents' preferences. Their feedback will be carefully considered when Cabinet reviews this decision later in the year.

As of today, we have had over 600 online returned surveys, which is impressive as it only went live Friday. I would encourage all Members in the Chamber to relay the message to your residents, so their views on how we handle our future waste are taken into account when the decision is made.

Councillor Smith asked the following supplementary question:

Do you accept that if you go for option two, it will at least guarantee the residents of our borough that they won't be charged for garden waste, as that bin will be used for dual purpose?

Councillor Samra gave the following response:

Following on from the statistics provided, 20% of brown bins are not collected and 24000 are not regularly put out fortnightly, it would be wrong for me to say that, then charges would come in.

We need to wait for the survey to come back to see what residents ultimately want. If you look demographically, in some wards, like my own, all year-round garden waste may be appealing. However, in more town centre wards, it may not be.

We need to wait for the outcome of the survey before cabinet review feedback and make a decision.

Councillor Ward

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

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

Councillor Samra gave the following response:

Thank you for your question regarding the condition of the Black Country Route. As you know, I have personally raised this matter over the last 18 months and so have other elected Members and volunteers.

When Operation Restart was introduced last year, by the previous portfolio holder, I was very vocal and critical of how sites were prioritised. I fully understand the frustrations caused by the current state of the route. Thousands of drivers use the Black Country Route every day and in my view, we have fallen short of statutory duty to maintain this section of the highway to an acceptable standard. When I raised these questions as a backbencher, they were not treated as a priority and were disappointing left unresolved. As the current portfolio holder, I am determined to change this.

We fully acknowledge that maintenance on this key route has fallen behind, and that this has presented an unwelcoming impression of the borough. I want to assure you that a full commitment is now in place to ensure a more structured and consistent maintenance regime going forward, of all key routes that come into Walsall.

The Black Country Route is a high-speed road, and for the safety of operatives any maintenance requires extensive traffic management. Because of the route's close proximity to the M6, traffic management and road space bookings are subject to National Highways' controls. This means works are generally only permitted at night or on Sundays, outside of the Operations Team's normal working hours. Balancing this requirement with the need to maintain delivery of other frontline services is challenging.

Looking ahead, we have put in place a programme to address both the immediate issues and establish long-term regular maintenance. Routine visits will now be scheduled during the summer months to maximise available daylight and efficiency of operations. In the shorter term, an interim programme is scheduled to commence from 19 October, involving lane closures over seven consecutive Sundays. All relevant services – highways, grounds maintenance and street cleansing – will be working

together during these closures to ensure the most effective use of time on site, to bring the Black Country Route up to a high standard.

This approach will allow us to catch up on the backlog and ensure the Black Country Route is maintained to a standard that reflects positively on Walsall in the future. Going forward, a regular maintenance programme will be in place to ensure we do not end up in the current position.

Councillor Ward asked the following supplementary question:

This had been an issue for far too long. When we had the works on Junction 10, we were told that work couldn't be done on the Black Country Route at the same time. This work has been completed, and the road is open and operational. We have seen within other parts of the borough recently where we have gone out and cut the grass on the footpaths, but this is major routing, and it is overgrown to galore. Is it the reality that because this is within one side of the borough, it has been abandoned?

Councillor Samra gave the following response:

I do not know the history of why this was ignored, I think it goes back down to prioritising. It is a complete disgrace. We have had volunteers there the past two weeks, putting their lives in danger trying to litter pick and do some weeding. What I can say going forward is that there will be a maintenance programme and we will not get back to the state we are currently in. Works will start on the 19 October 2025.

Councillor Coulson

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

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

Councillor Bird gave the following response:

In the Turnberry Estate there are a number of trees which are subject to Tree Preservation Orders (TPOs). A TPO is a legal mechanism to protect specific trees, groups of trees or woodlands in the interests of amenity. This means that any work to prune, cut back, or remove these trees requires formal consent from the council. Once approved, the applicant is responsible for completing the work, with the owner's consent if the applicant and owner are different individuals.

The statutory application process for works to trees protected by a TPO is governed by national legislation. When an application is submitted, our officers undertake a thorough assessment. This includes a site visit and consideration of the tree's health, structural condition, contribution to the local environment, and the amenity value it provides. Material considerations also include the impact of the tree on neighbouring properties, issues such as subsidence or direct damage, and the degree of shading or obstruction. Residents are encouraged to provide supporting evidence, such as photographs or expert reports, to demonstrate the necessity and benefits of the proposed works.

The council's decision must balance the protection of the wider environment with the needs and reasonable enjoyment of residents' properties. Should an application for tree works be refused, there remains a statutory right of appeal. This appeal can be made to the Planning Inspectorate, an independent body which will review the case and make a decision based on the evidence and applicable law.

However, it is the case that when anyone buys a property, it will be on the deeds of the property that there is a TPO on a particular tree, or group of trees. The process in which owners would have to address this would be done by their solicitor, when the conveyance occurs.

However, you mentioned that some of your residents may have been there since the inception, some 40 years ago. Therefore, under The Prescription Act (1832), after 20 years residents get a prescribed right to invoke the ancient right of lights, previously titled the Royal Charter. If your residents believe their right of light is being affected, they do have a remedy in law.

The rule of thumb for trees is the three Ds: dead, dying or dangerous. If they are one of those, without a shadow of a doubt, the tree department would address the issue and give permission for pruning, raising the crown or demolition of the tree.

When someone looks to purchase a property and the TPO is clearly pointed out on the deeds of the property, my advice would be, don't buy it.

Councillor Coulson asked the following supplementary question:

You are not giving residents much hope; are they are going to have to continue to live without much light. Can you offer them any hope?

Councillor Bird gave the following response:

Under the Labour party, we are governing by Planning by appeal. The government down in Westminster have decided that the inspectorate, who are normally independent, have now become the architect of the government's policy. We turn it down, they approve it, and we have to cope with that.

The inspector is allegedly independent, much like the children's home in Blakenall, where the Officer's of the report said children's homes shouldn't be in an area with a high crime rate, so the committee unanimously refused it. However, the inspector in very short order passed it.

In my view, the inspectorate are doing the bidding of the government. If your resident is not happy with the decision of this Council, then they must go through law to the inspectorate down in Bristol. One of them will come up and cast a blind eye to what the problem is and no doubt the appeal will either be upheld by the applicant or indeed they'll side with the professional planning Officer. Under the new act coming in January, this will do away with Planning Committees and in my view, render us powerless and stop much development. The Labour party have forced this upon us.

Councillor Smith

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

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

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

Councillor Flint gave the following response:

The Town Hall is a significant heritage asset that has served a wide range of purposes over the years, including sporting events, dance competitions, and awards evenings. Notable hosted events also include being key a

venue for the 2025 Makerfest, BBC film screening, school awards ceremonies, mayoral functions, blood donation sessions, and various internal council events.

For a variety of reasons, use of the Town Hall has reduced, compounded by the pandemic lockdown and the lack of an events or programming team. There is no longer any regular hire of the venue and most current use is for internal and civic functions which do not generate income.

We are undertaking a feasibility study of the building based on:

- scoping potential future uses through engagement with council, arts, cultural and community stakeholders
- an appraisal of the building's physical condition
- projected costings for repair and renovations
- appraisal of the long-term financial viability of potential uses identified

Walsall Town Hall is an important heritage asset; architecturally, socially and culturally. Its retention and repurposing should be an essential component of the town centre's regeneration. Unlike some heritage assets in the town, most areas of the building are safe to use in their current condition, however, there has been some deterioration in both the external and internal fabric of the building, and as a Listed heritage asset, the local authority has a responsibility to keep it in a good state of repair. We are looking continuously for its future improvements.

Councillor Smith asked the following supplementary question:

When was the feasibility study started and how long do you expect it to last before you can consider a decision.

Councillor Flint gave the following response:

I will send you a complete timeline and scope of the project, with a deadline and when decisions are likely to come back to cabinet.

Councillor Smith

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

Given the above, can the Portfolio holder give me, the Council and the public an assurance that he will take back for further consideration, a re-opening of the One Stop Shop in the Civic Centre, and a full return of staff

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

Councillor Andrew gave the following response:

The council recognises your concern regarding the under-utilisation of key town centre assets, including the Civic Centre, Council House, and Town Hall. These buildings are central to our civic identity and public service delivery, and their future is being actively considered as part of our wider strategic asset plans.

Work is ongoing to ensure that the Civic Centre and Council House heating systems are fully operational and to ensure the buildings are fit for purpose, energy-efficient, and aligned with modern working practices.

Regarding staff occupancy, it is important to recognise, that many of the council's operational teams (including waste management, environmental services, our social work and housing teams) continued to work from Walsall bases throughout the Covid-19 pandemic and continue to do so today. The hybrid working model that operates in some teams, reflects national trends, and supports productivity, staff wellbeing, and recruitment. That said, we are actively reviewing our current building occupancy arrangements and exploring how to support all council officers, to be able to work a minimum of 3 days a week from Walsall from later this year.

On the matter of the One Stop Shop, there are no immediate plans to reopen it in its previous form, although the council is committed to continuing to improve access to local services. This includes expanding our Walsall Community Hubs network and exploring alternative service delivery models to meet the needs of residents across all neighbourhoods.

Since launching in 2022, over 37,000 residents have been supported to access council services within local communities, making services much more accessible to residents who would otherwise face barriers to travelling into the town centre.

The Walsall Connected network supports increased digital inclusion, offering free Wi-Fi, public computers, and trained staff to help assist residents with a range of online services. Over 72% of those who accessed Walsall Connected last year reported to have left with increased confidence to manage services themselves independently. This has helped to ease pressure on council Services, reducing waiting times, and given front-line teams more time to spend with those in the greatest need. 95% of those who accessed Walsall Connected last year stated they were satisfied or very satisfied.

A recent enhancement to our community offer is the development of community shops, that are able to offer local people discounted fresh food, household items, and wraparound support such as cookery projects and financial inclusion initiatives.

As for the potential disposal of the Civic Centre site, given your policy suggestion which I will give you credit for, let's see if we can look at it.

Councillor Smith asked the following supplementary question:

The police use a section of the Civic Centre. Does the Council receive revenue from the police budget for the use of the Civic Centre? If so, how much per year?

Councillor Andrew gave the following response:

That is commercially confidential, so we will share that with you in writing.

At this juncture, 30 minutes allocated for Member questions expired. As such, the Mayor confirmed that Councillor Smith's question regarding housing related issues would be responded to in writing by Councillor Kaur.

49. **By-election Results**

Resolved

That the by-election results be noted.

50. **Composition of Political Groups**

Resolved

That the composition of political groups report be noted.

51. **Appointments to Committees and Outside Bodies**

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

Resolved

That Councillor Eardley be appointed to:

Audit Committee

West Midlands Pension Fund Committee

52. **Independent Remuneration Panel**

A report was submitted.

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

Resolved that:

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

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

53. **Annual Audit Report 2024/25**

The report to Audit Committee held on 15th September, 2025 was submitted.

Further to a presentation from the Independent Chair Andy Green, it was moved by Councillor Bird seconded by Councillor Andrew and:

Resolved

That the Annual Report of the Audit Committee 2024/25 be approved.

Councillor Nawaz requested that his thanks to Mr Green, Grant Thornton, internal auditors and Council Officers be placed on record.

54. **Portfolio Holder and Outside Bodies Briefings**

a. Statutory Deputy Leader, Prosperous Places and Investment

Councillor Andrew gave a presentation.

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

b. West Midlands Combined Authority – Audit, Risk and Assurance Committee

Councillor Martin gave a presentation.

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

55. **Notice of Motion - High Needs Funding Pressures and the Dedicated Schools Grant**

The following Notice of Motion was **moved** by Councillor M. Statham and **seconded** by Councillor Bird that: -

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

Financial implications

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

costs incurred as a result of borrowing to date due to the DSG deficit is £1.8m with a further £12.4m projected by close of 2028.

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

Therefore, this Council resolves to:

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

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

On being put to the vote, the motion was declared **carried** (unanimously)

Resolved that:

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

Financial implications

- At the end of the 2024/25 financial year, Walsall Council was managing a DSG deficit of over £30 million, with projections indicating that this will rise to a cumulative balance of approximately £123.7m by close of 2028 unless systemic funding reform is introduced.
- The national statutory override currently allows local authorities to hold DSG deficits off their general fund balance sheets until March 2028. The override is not itself a solution to the problem and only delays the impact on councils.
- The financial implications of managing these deficits are profound. Councils are incurring borrowing costs to sustain services and cover shortfalls, diverting resources from other essential services. In Walsall the interest costs incurred as a result of borrowing to date due to the DSG deficit is £1.8m with a further £12.4m projected by close of 2028.
- This is equivalent to increasing the council tax by 20% year on year. This would not only require an annual referendum but also greatly impact on our communities where many are already facing high deprivation.

- When the override ends based on current projections Walsall will need to find an ongoing mainstream budget of circa £30m a year to cover the shortfall in SEND funding alongside a one off cumulative deficit of circa £123.7m to find.
- The uncertainty surrounding the future of the statutory override exacerbates these pressures and undermines financial planning and stability. Many councils have warned that, without action by the Government, they will be forced to issue section 114 notices when the override ends.
- The 2025 Spending Review includes a commitment to reform the SEND system, at least in part through the new Transformation Fund. Details of these reforms will be set out in a Schools white paper in the autumn.
- The Government's upcoming reforms to the Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND) system must be bold enough to eliminate local authorities' deficits on the DSG going forwards before March 2028, while ensuring SEND children receive the support they need.

Therefore, this Council resolves to:

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

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

.

The meeting terminated at 19.51p.m.

Mayor:

Date: