

Council – 19 July 2010

State of Walsall Debate

Portfolio: Councillor Bird – Leader of the Council

Service: Council wide


Wards: All

Summary of report

Council agreed at its meeting on 19 April 2010 that Council Procedure Rule 17 be amended to allow for the State of Walsall debate to be held at the first ordinary meeting of Council in the Municipal Year.

The attached information has been compiled to provide a profile of key issues in the Borough. This is background information to assist and inform the debate at the council meeting.

Paul Sheehan
Chief Executive

 652006

STATE OF WALSALL

PEOPLE

Latest official population estimates give a population for Walsall of 255,900 people for 2009. Numbers have increased over recent years, reversing a period of decline throughout the 1990s.

There are relatively more 'dependent' people – aged up to 20 and over 65 – than the West Midlands or England average.

Population projections show that the number of people will continue to increase over the next five years; numbers of dependent people will increase and numbers of people of working age will decrease (see figure 1).

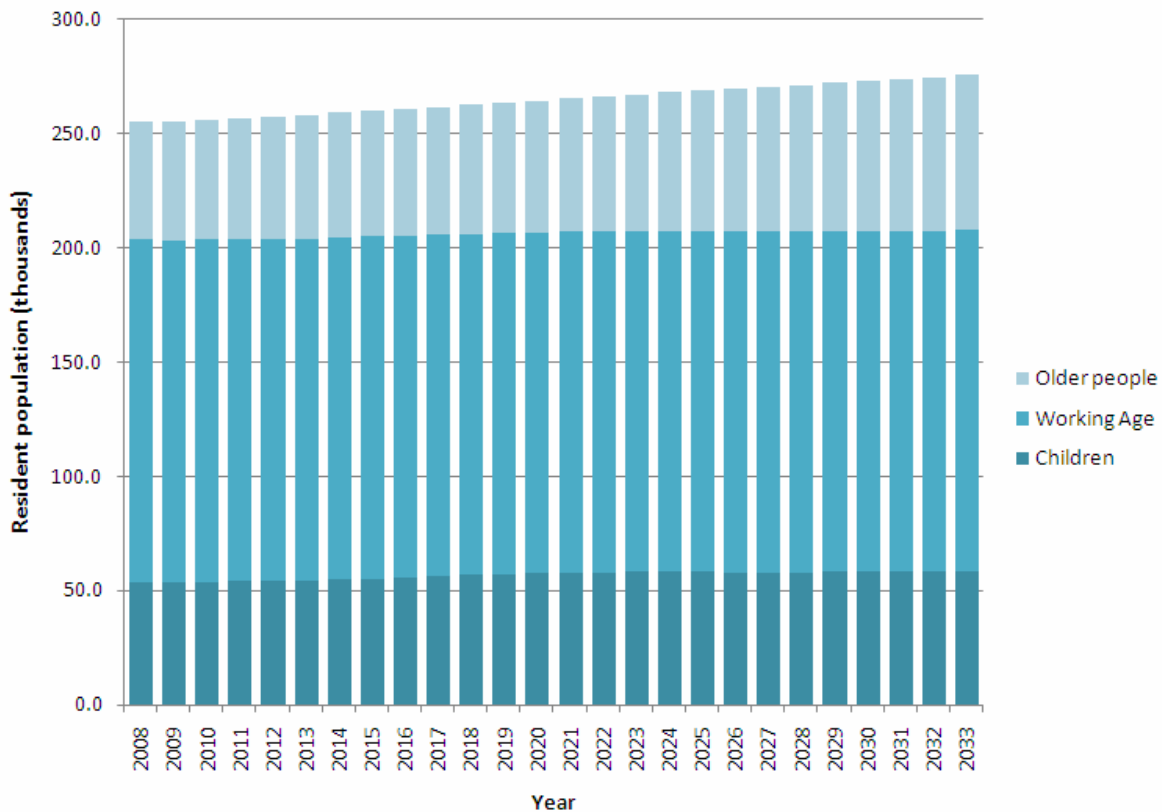


Figure 1: Walsall population projections by broad age group (2008-2033)

Source: 2008-based Sub-national Population Projections, Office for National Statistics

At 2001 Walsall had a non-white ethnic population of 13.6% (34,400 people). Estimates show that this increased by 5,600 people at 2007. The minority ethnic population will continue to increase over the next five years.

Opportunity and potential

The current level of skills among Walsall's working age population is generally low. Latest figures (2008) show 18.6% of adults living in the borough have no qualifications, compared with 16.0% regionally and 12.3% nationally. Similarly, Walsall has very few highly skilled residents who have qualifications at level 4 or above - just 18.7% of adults compared with 24.5% in the West Midlands and 28.7% in England (see figure 2).

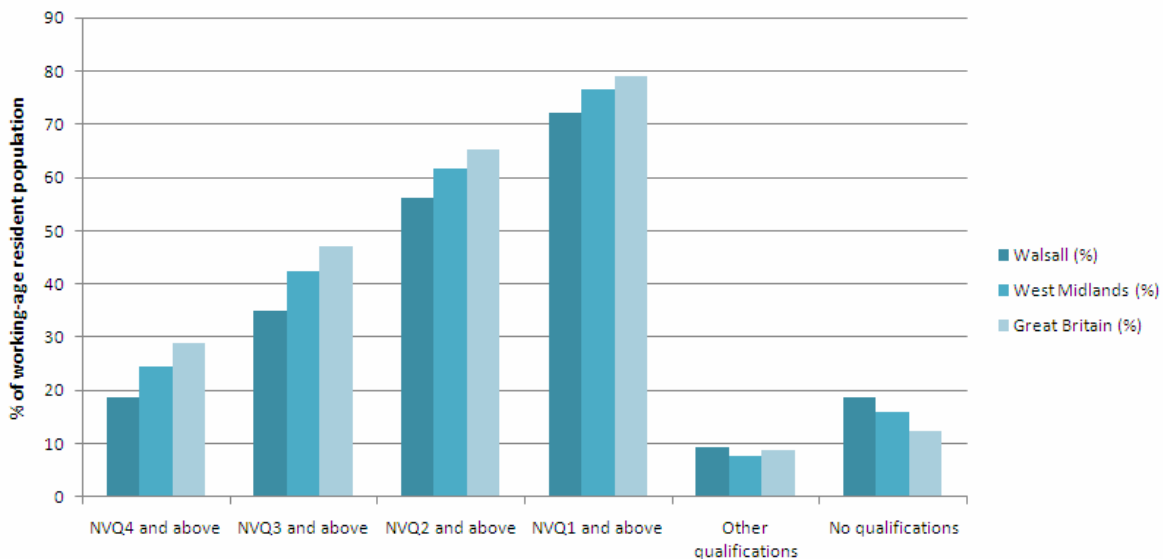


Figure 2: Working-age resident qualifications, 2008

Source: Annual Population Survey, Office for National Statistics

Levels of basic skills, or 'skills for life', are also poor. Walsall has 16% of adults failing to meet the minimum GCSE grades D-G standard for literacy. And while 44% of adults in England have a literacy standard equivalent to GCSE grades A*-C or above, the equivalent proportion in Walsall is only 35%. Adult numeracy rates are of even lower, with 1 in 2 adults in Walsall with skills that would fail to meet even the minimum GCSE standard.

Over a third of businesses in Walsall have found skills to be a barrier to recruiting new staff: 22% have problems accessing staff with appropriate higher level skills, while a further 14% find lack of basic skills to be a particular issue.

Walsall has shown gradual improvements in GCSE attainment (% pupils achieving 5 or more A*-C GCSEs) since 1997 and this improvement is also reflected in national figures.

In the final quarter of 2009/10, Walsall had a NEET (young people Not in Education, Employment or Training) percentage of 8.1%. The spread of those who are NEET across the borough correlates strongly with the most deprived areas.

Teenage conception rates in Walsall have significantly reduced since 1998 with the local reduction being far greater than nationally or regionally. Since 2006, however, the gap between Walsall and the national rate has widened. In 2008 there were 288 teenage conceptions in Walsall, of which 64% (184) led to births.

Health

Between 2008 and 2015 it is likely that the number of children aged up to 15 years will increase by 1,700; the number of people of pensionable age will increase also by 3,500.

Male life expectancy in Walsall is 1.8 years less than the average for England and Wales and the gap is getting wider (see figure 3).

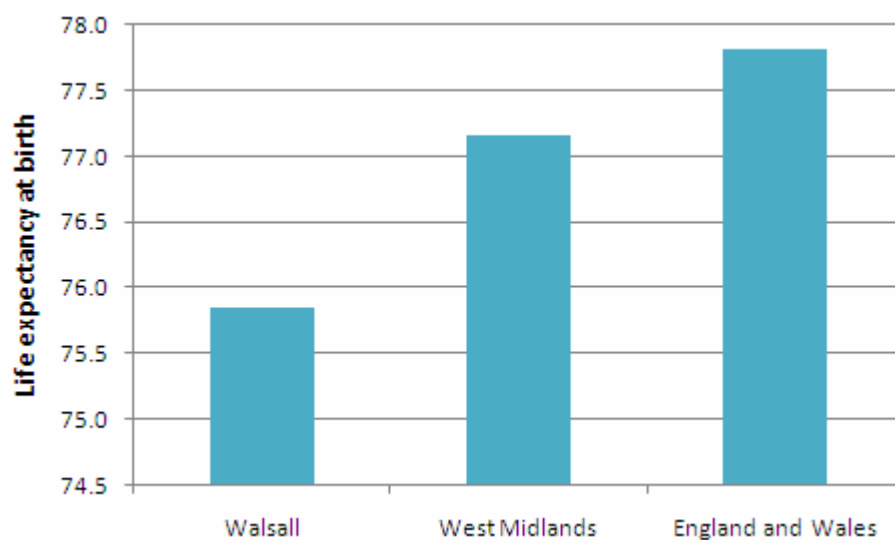


Figure 3: Male life expectancy at birth, Jan 2006 – Dec 2008

Source: Office for National Statistics

Female life expectancy in Walsall is 0.4 years less than the average for England and Wales (see figure 4).

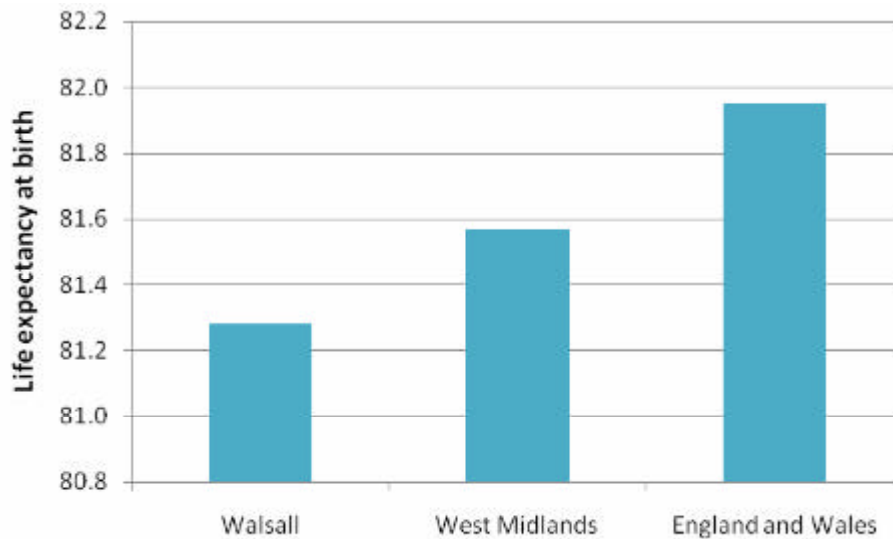


Figure 4: Female life expectancy at birth, Jan 2006 – Dec 2008

Source: Office for National Statistics

Walsall's infant mortality rate has been rising since 2000-02 and projections indicate this is likely to continue.

The proportion of smokers in Walsall is above average; childhood and adult obesity rates are also above the national average. Participation in sport or active recreation is below average.

Crime and Feeling Safe

Total recorded crime fell from 20,900 in 2008/9 to 19,100 in 2009/10. This masks an increase in the number of domestic burglaries (see table 1 and figure 5).

Over the same period the number of anti-social behaviour (ASB) incidents reported to the Police fell by nearly 1,900 – the second biggest percentage drop in the West Midlands. However the proportion of people that think ASB is a problem in their local area is above the national average. Teenagers hanging around on the streets and rubbish or litter lying around are the biggest issues for people, although public perceptions of both have improved since 2006/7.

Table 1: Recorded crime by type, 2008-10

Crime Type	2008/09 Actual	2009/10 Actual	Change on 2008/09
Domestic Burglary	1,366	1,588	+ 16.3%
Burglary Other Building	1,712	1,569	- 8.3%
Violent Crime	4,969	4,844	- 2.5%
Robbery	435	442	+ 1.6%
Vehicle Crime	2,620	2,130	- 18.7%
- theft of vehicle	841	674	- 19.9%
- theft from vehicle	1,779	1,456	- 18.1%
Criminal Damage	4,233	3,581	- 15.4%
- damage to dwellings	1,137	927	- 18.5%
- damage to other building	542	441	- 18.6%
- damage to vehicles	1,753	1,453	- 17.1%
Drug offences	678	685	+ 1.0%
Total Recorded Crime*	20,874	19,136	- 8.3%

Source: Safer Walsall Partnership (Richard Butler)

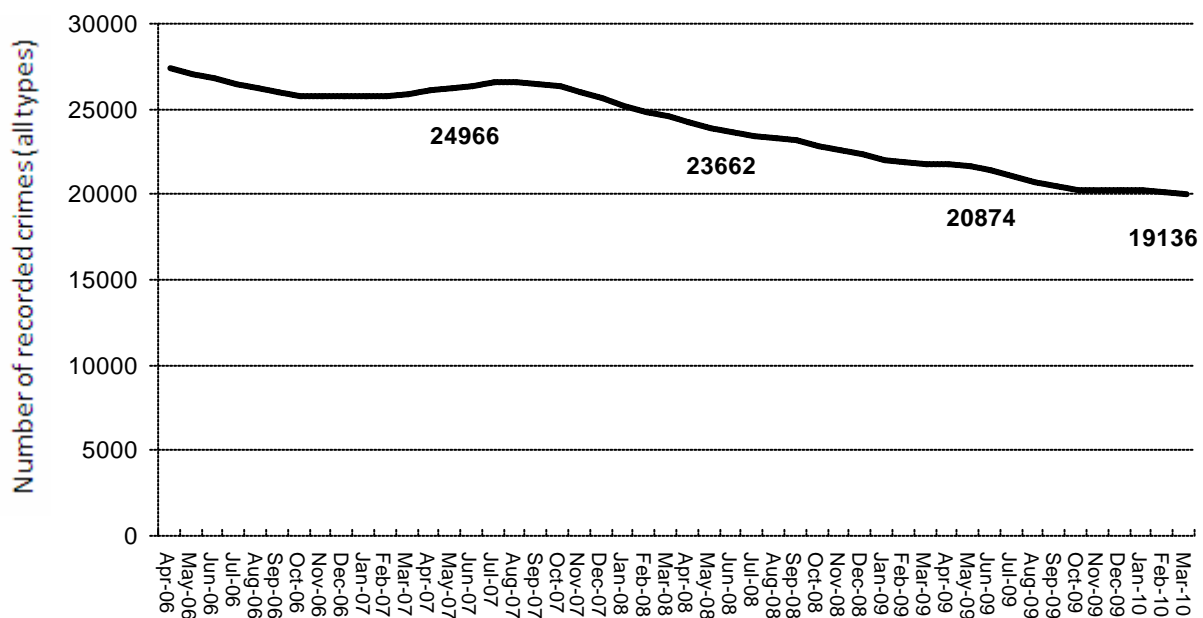


Figure 5: Total recorded crime, Apr 2006 – Mar 2010

Source: Safer Walsall Partnership (Richard Butler)

PLACES

There has been an improvement in the proportion of people who are satisfied with the local area as a place to live although Walsall still lags behind the national average.

Walsall residents say that levels of crime, clean streets, health service and affordable decent homes are important to the quality of life (see table 2); they say that activities for teenagers, road and pavement maintenance, clean streets, levels of crime and traffic congestion are most in need of improvement (see table 3).

Table 2: Top five things that residents feel are most important in making somewhere a good place to live

Bloxwich/ Blakenall/ Birchills/ Leamore	Brownhills/ Pelsall/ Rushall/ Shelfield	Darlaston/ Bentley	St Matthew's/ Paddock/ Palfrey/ Pleck	Streetly/ Pheasey/ Aldridge/ Walsall Wood	Willenhall/ Short Heath	WALSALL
level of crime 60%	level of crime 57%	level of crime 62%	level of crime 55%	level of crime 65%	level of crime 54%	level of crime 59%
Clean Streets 58%	Clean Streets 51%	Clean Streets 53%	Clean Streets 50%	Clean Streets 46%	Clean Streets 50%	Clean Streets 51%
Health services 39%	Health services 45%	Affordable decent housing 39%	Affordable decent housing 43%	Health services 47%	Affordable decent housing 41%	Health services 40%
Affordable decent housing 35%	Education provision 33%	Health services 39%	Health services 33%	Public transport 39%	Health services 39%	Affordable decent housing 36%
Public transport 31%	Public transport 32%	Activities for teenagers 30%	Education provision 30%	Education provision 37%	Education provision 35%	Education provision 31%

Source: Place Survey, 2008

Table 3: Top five things that residents feel are most in need of improvement in their local areas

Bloxwich/ Blakenall/ Birchills/ Leamore	Brownhills/ Pelsall/ Rushall/ Shelfield	Darlaston/ Bentley	St Matthew's/ Paddock/ Palfrey/ Pleck	Streetly/ Pheasey/ Aldridge/ Walsall Wood	Willenhall/ Short Heath	WALSALL*
level of crime 51%	Activities for teenagers 64%	Activities for teenagers 53%	level of traffic congestion 45%	Activities for teenagers 57%	Activities for teenagers 52%	Activities for teenagers 52%
Road and Pavement repairs 50%	Road and Pavement repairs 48%	Road and Pavement repairs 43%	Road and Pavement repairs 42%	Road and Pavement repairs 53%	Road and Pavement repairs 48%	Road and Pavement repairs 48%
Activities for teenagers 48%	level of traffic congestion 35%	level of crime 43%	Activities for teenagers 41%	level of crime 31%	Clean Streets 34%	level of crime 36%
Clean Streets 45%	Clean Streets 33%	Clean Streets 42%	level of crime 36%	Clean Streets 31%	level of crime 32%	Clean Streets 36%
Job prospects 29%	Facilities for young children 27%	Job prospects 30%	Clean Streets 34%	level of traffic congestion 30%	Job prospects 26%	level of traffic congestion 29%
	level of crime 27%					

*Job prospects (Walsall = 25%); facilities for young children (Walsall = 24%)

Source: Place Survey, 2008

Levels of crime and clean streets are, therefore, most important and most in need of improvement

Housing choice

As at March 2008 Walsall had 26,407 (24%) social rented properties and 82,254 (76%) in the private sector, which totalled 108,724 properties. In April 2009 the average house price in Walsall was £113,194 – an annual reduction of 15.5%.

There has also been a reduction in the overall number of new dwellings completed. Since 2006/07 annual housebuilding has fallen from 705 to 466 completions.

Over the last two years a greater proportion of people have achieved independent living in Walsall than either regionally and nationally.

Strong and dynamic communities

The proportion of people that think they can influence local decisions is considerably lower than the national average (22% in Walsall compared to 38% nationally). The proportion of people who would like more involvement is similar to the national level.

Quality of environment

The cleanliness of streets has improved recently - compared with national levels, littering and detritus are classed as satisfactory and levels of graffiti and fly-posting are good. The amount of littering and general detritus has halved in the last year.

Fly-tipping remains of concern locally; in 2009/10 there were 1,488 incidents of fly-tipping compared to 1,097 incidents in the previous year.

Walsall has made outstanding progress in increasing the amount of household waste recycled – 47.3% of all household waste collected in 2009/10 was recycled. As a result the amount of waste going to landfill has reduced from 46,997 tonnes (2008/9) to 32,657 tonnes (2009/10).

In 2007, Walsall Borough emitted a total 1,715 thousand tonnes of carbon dioxide (CO₂). Over 41% of this total was for commercial and industrial use, 34% for domestic use and 25% for road transport. Over the past 12 months there has been significant investment in improving energy efficiency across all housing sectors in the borough, aimed at reducing CO₂ emissions and tackling fuel poverty. As a result the proportion of low income households with efficient heating has increased from 29% (2008/9) to 42% (2009/10).

There are 109 nature conservation sites in the borough including 43 Sites of Importance for Nature Conservation (SINCs) and 66 Sites of Local Interest for Nature Conservation (SLINCs) covering 907.7 hectares, of which the vast proportion are actively managed - 627 ha.

Since 2007/8 Walsall's roads are seen to be in generally good condition compared to the national average. Only 6% of principal roads, and 4% of non-principal roads, are classed as requiring maintenance.

PROSPERITY

The 2007 Index of Multiple Deprivation ranks Walsall as the 45th most deprived English local authority (out of 345). This hides significant variations within the Borough. Parts of Blakenall, Birchills Leamore, St Matthew's and Pleck are amongst the 10% most deprived areas of the country while parts of Streetly and Aldridge are in the 10% least deprived (see figure 6).

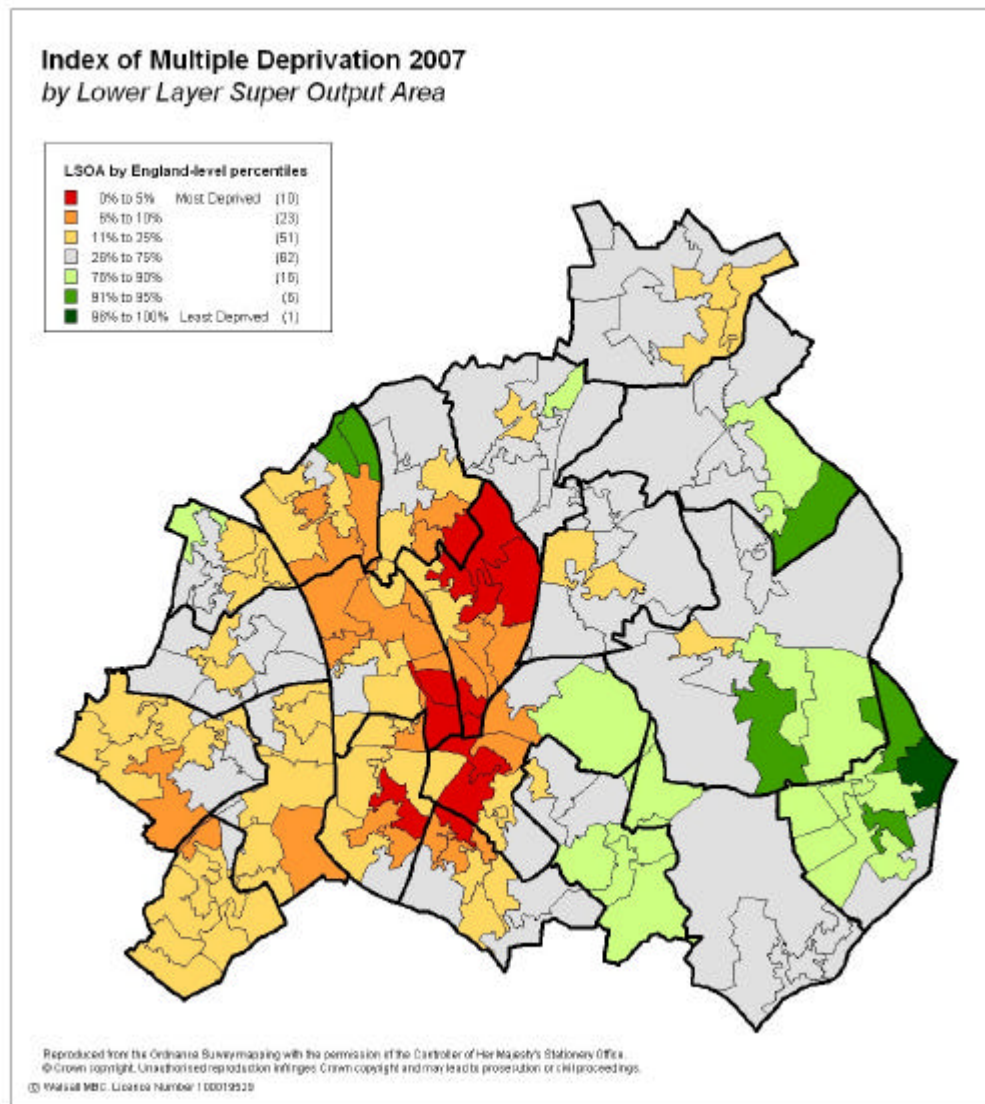


Figure 6: Index of multiple deprivation, 2007

Source: Department of Communities and Local Government

Enterprise

Although Walsall has seen some growth in the number of new business start-ups it has remained below the levels experienced in the West Midlands and England overall. In 2008 the proportion of business start-ups in Walsall was 10.2% of the

stock of enterprises, which was less than in the West Midlands (10.8%) and in England (11.8%). At the same time, the proportion of closures in Walsall (10%) was greater than regionally (9.3%) and nationally (9.5%).

The rate of enterprise start-ups in Walsall in 2008 was 37.9 per 10,000 adult residents, which was well below the rate for the West Midlands (47.6) and England (57.2).

Worklessness

Walsall has a rate of working age people on out-of-work benefits (Jobseeker's Allowance claimants, lone parents on Income Support, Employment Support Allowance/Incapacity Benefit customers, and others on income related benefits) that is higher than the regional and national average (see figure 7).

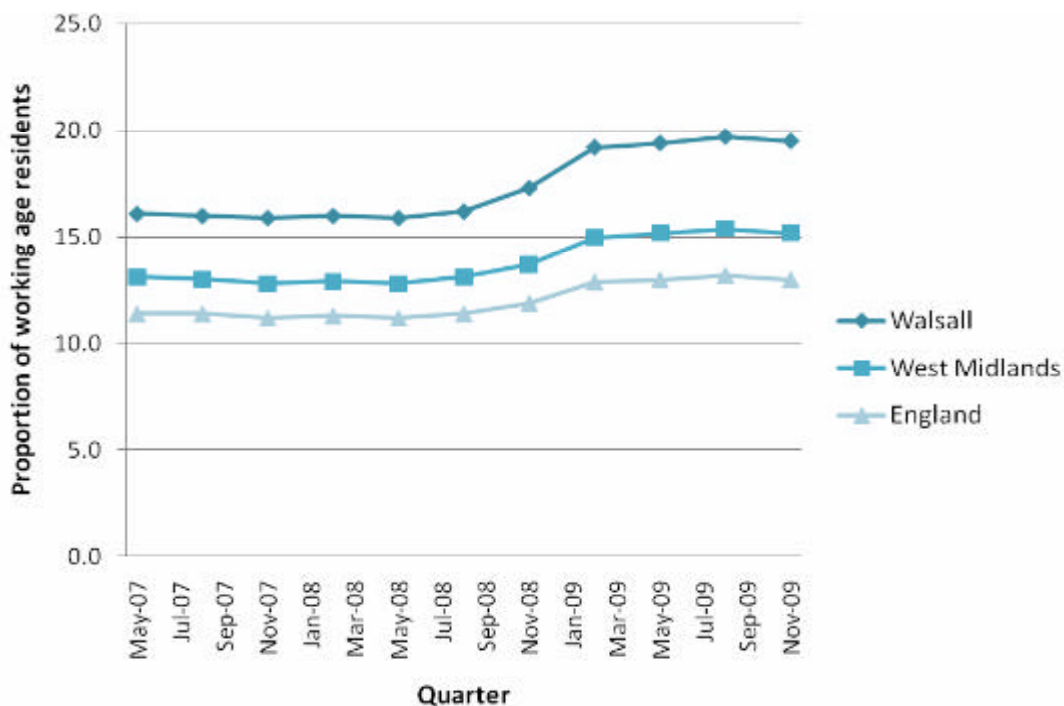


Figure 7: Working-age residents claiming out-of-work benefits, May 2007 – Nov 2009

Source: Department of Work and Pensions

In November 2009, 19.5% of working age Walsall residents were claiming out-of-work benefits, compared with 15.2% in the West Midlands and 13.0% in England. This is a rise in the borough of 3.4 percentage points from May 2007, and over this same period the gap between Walsall and the regional and national levels of worklessness also widened.

The main component of the rise in worklessness during the economic downturn has been the increased number of JSA claimants, with the rates of other benefit claims remaining relatively stable. After a period of improvement throughout 2007 to a low of 3.7% in December 2007, the proportion of JSA claimants rose to a peak of 7.5% at the start of 2010. However, there has been a slight improvement in the most recent months (down to 7.1% in April 2010).

Not only did the rate of JSA claimants in Walsall rise during the recession – as it did throughout the country – but the rate in the borough rose much more sharply than it did for either England or the West Midlands overall, particularly between October 2008 and May 2009.

Child poverty is inextricably linked to worklessness. The most recent official figures show an increase in the gap between Walsall and England which is likely to have widened further given more recent trends in worklessness (see figure 8).

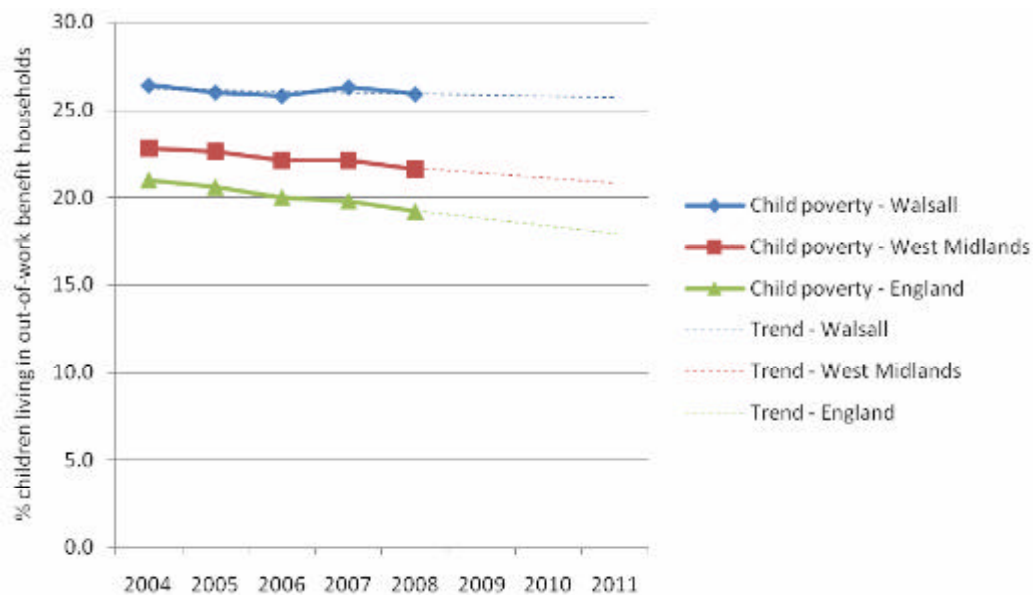


Figure 8: Child living in out-of-work benefit dependent households, 2004-2008

Source: Department of Work and Pensions