

## **Scrutiny Overview Committee**

**18 April 2024 at 6:00PM**

**Meeting Venue: Council Chamber at the Council House, Lichfield Street, Walsall**

**[Livestream Link](#)**

**Membership:** Councillor Murray (Chair)  
Councillor Nawaz (Vice-Chair)  
Councillor P Bott  
Councillor Cooper  
Councillor Follows  
Councillor Hicken  
Councillor K. Hussain  
Councillor Latham  
Councillor Sears  
Councillor Singh Sohal  
Councillor Waters

**Portfolio Holder:** Councillor Bird - Leader of the Council

**Quorum:** 4 Members

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 14 March 2024.  
*(Enclosed - Pages 6–12)*
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. **Marketing and Advertising Strategy**  
To receive an overview of the Council’s marketing and advertising strategy.  
*(Enclosed – Pages 13 - 19)*
7. **Emergency Planning**  
To receive an overview of the Council’s Emergency Planning function.  
*(Enclosed – Pages 20 – 46)*
8. **Operation Freeway**  
To receive an overview of the Operation Freeway.  
*(Enclosed – Pages 47 - 48)*
9. **School Gate Parking Working Group – Recommendation Monitoring**  
To review the implementation of the recommendations from School Gate Parking Working Group.  
*(Enclosed – Pages 49 - 56)*
10. **Housing Standards Working Group – Final Report (Published on 17<sup>th</sup> April 2024)**  
For the Committee to consider the final report of the Housing Standards Working Group  
*(Enclosed – Pages 57 - 80)*
11. **Scrutiny Chairs Feedback**  
To invite Scrutiny Chair’s present to present their feedback in respect to matters raised at other Scrutiny Overview Committees since the previous meeting.
12. **Areas of focus – 2023/24**  
To consider the areas of focus for the Committee during 2023/24  
*(Enclosed – Pages 81 - 82)*
13. **Forward Plans**  
To receive the latest Forward Plans in respect of the following:
  - Executive Forward Plans.

- Black Country Joint Executive Committee.
- West Midlands Combined Authority Board.

*(Enclosed – Page 83 – 93)*

**14. Recommendations Tracker**

To consider progress on recommendations from the previous meeting.

*(Enclosed – Pages 94 - 98)*

**15. Date of next meeting**

To be determined at Annual Council in May 2024.

# Minutes of the Scrutiny Overview Committee held in the Council Chamber at Walsall Council House

Thursday, 14 March 2024 at 6.00p.m.

**Committee Members present:** Councillor J Murray (Chair)  
Councillor A Nawaz (Vice-Chair)  
Councillor P Bott  
Councillor M Follows  
Councillor A Hicken  
Councillor N Latham  
Councillor K Sears  
Councillor G Singh-Sohal

**Portfolio Holder present:** Councillor Bird – Leader of the Council  
Councillor Andrew – Deputy Leader and Regeneration  
Councillor Ferguson – Internal Services

**Officers present:** Judith Greenhalgh – Executive Director of Resources and Transformation  
Philippa Venables – Director of Regeneration and Economy  
Nadia Inglis – Interim Director of Public Health  
Elise Hopkins – Director of Customer Engagement  
Alison Ives – Head of Planning and Building Control  
Helen Dudson – Elections Service Manager  
Matt Powis – Senior Democratic Services Officer

**Other attendees:** Gary Fulford – Group Chief Executive - Walsall Housing Group  
Fay Shanahan – Corporate Director of Operations and IT – Walsall Housing Group  
Kul Bains – Chief Executive – WATMOS (Virtual)  
Sue Sargeant – Executive Director of Housing – WATMOS (Virtual)

## 60. Apologies

An apology was received from Councillor Hussain.

## 61. Substitutions

There were no substitutions.

62. **Declarations of Interest and Party Whip**

There were no declarations of interest or party whip.

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

There were no items to consider in private session.

64. **Minutes**

A copy of the minutes of the meeting held on the 6 February 2024 was submitted [annexed].

**Resolved**

**That, the minutes of the meeting held on 6 February 2024, copies having previously been circulated, be approved as a true and accurate record.**

65. **Social Housing – Invitation to social landlords**

The Chair welcomed representatives from the Walsall Housing Group (WHG) and WATMOS. He requested both providers to provide the Committee with an update on their current work including partnership works and existing and future developments.

The Group Chief Executive of Walsall Housing Group and the Corporate Director of Operations and IT were present, and the following points were raised:

- WHG had invested over £50m to improve its housing stock in 2022/23.
- 182 homes in Walsall were built by WHG during the period 2023/2024.
- Since 2013, WHG had completed and built over 1500 homes in Walsall and represented an investment of over £300m to the Borough.
- Planning performance agreement had been agreed with the Council to speed up planning permission in the Borough to deliver more homes.
- There was a commitment for strong tenancy sustainment with a pledge to not evict anyone into homelessness.
- WHG had created over £49m in social value projects such as securing future employment opportunities.
- WHG became the first housing provider to become a sustainable housing provider by an accredited body.
- There were a number of legislative and regulatory changes affecting the industry. Changes would likely impact on the finances on many housing providers across the country.
- Supply and demand of housing was an issue not unique to WHG.

- Costs of living and the cost of supplies such as building materials remained an issue for the sector.
- Decarbonisation of existing stock was a priority for the organisation.

The Chief Executive of WATMOS and the Director of Housing were then invited to present, and the following points were raised:

- There were over 1000 properties across 21 tower blocks in the Borough that had received retrofitting investment.
- WATMOS had received £7.9m through grant funding working with the Council through the Social Housing Decarbonisation Fund.
- WATMOS had received the West Midlands Efficiency Award in 2023 and shortlisted for landlord of the year at Inside Housing Awards.
- Over 80% of the residents were satisfied with WATMOS.
- The Group had many active tenant groups which enabled greater community collaboration to utilise the right services at the right time.
- 16 units had been secured in Willenhall and work had progressed.
- Like WHG, there were concerns about the number of legislative and regulatory changes affecting the industry.
- Government funding, policies and further action on regeneration projects within the social housing sector were required in order to move the industry forward.

At this point, the Chair adjourned the meeting at 6:16p.m for Members observing Ramadan. The meeting was reconvened at 6:26p.m.

The principal points from the ensuing discussion are outlined as follows:

- Under 7000 residents were on the Council's waiting list. However, there was 1500 on the waiting list for WHG housing.
- 1000 WHG homes were in the pipeline for development over the coming years.
- Quality of housebuilding was a priority for WHG. It was noted that WHG had set a maximum limit of two defects per home which mirrored industry standards.
- 20 evictions had occurred over the past year. However, it was noted that 10 were listed as abandonments, 5 were antisocial behaviour and 5 were net arrears.
- Mediation between tenants would only be proposed if it was deemed that an amicable agreement could be reached with the individuals concerned.
- WHG customer service channels by phone reached an average of 900 calls per day and were answered within 8 minutes. However, there were known peak times, which exceeded aforementioned times.
- 90% of complaints raised with WHG were answered on time and in accordance with the Ombudsman Code of Practice.
- Partnership working was important for WHG and WATMOS. It was noted that all social landlords regularly communicated with each other.
- WHG spent over £500k a year clearing fly tipping in the Borough. Regular partnership work was carried out to identify and clear any fly tipping. The Director of Customer Engagement noted it was possible for future



partnership working with WHG to be carried out to improve the Council's digital fly tipping reporting mapping system.

- A Member sought clarification on the number of WHG homes which were thermowrapped. In response, it was noted that WHG had actively worked with the Council to decarbonise the housing stock, however, the number of thermowrapped homes would be circulated to the Committee in writing.
- There was a view that community skip days were successful.
- WATMOS confirmed that Sandbank Towers had been thermowrapped and new windows had been installed as well as other retrofitting. Over £6m had been spent on Sandbank.
- A Member sought clarification on the number of reported instances of mould and damp. In response, it was confirmed that a response would be provided in writing. In this respect, WATMOS confirmed that a home condition survey would be carried out across its housing stock and further information on the number of homes affected by mould and damp would be available in late 2024.

There was a request for other social landlords such as the Longhurst Group to be invited to a future meeting of the Committee. The Senior Democratic Services Officer confirmed that this request would be added onto the work programme.

**Resolved:**

**That, the social housing landlords be commended and further cooperation between the Council and social landlords be carried out in future.**

**66. Electoral Services – Impact of new legislation**

The Elections Services Manager gave an overview of the impact and implementation of the second tranche of the Elections Act 2022 ahead of the May 2024 Elections. [Annexed]

The introduction of the Elections Act 2022, led to a number of key changes such as the implementation of voter identification and changes relating to accessibility at polling stations. The Committee noted that ahead of the Election in May 2024, the following changes were being implemented in accordance with the Act:

- Since October 2023, online absent voter applications (OAVA) allowed electors to apply for a postal or proxy vote via GOV.UK with the requirement for electors to provide a national insurance number. It was noted that paper absent voter applications were still available to use.
- Postal vote handling restrictions were introduced in January 2024, which apply restrictions on political campaigners handling postal votes and require individuals to complete a declaration form when hand delivering postal votes. Secrecy requirements were extended to postal and proxy votes.

- In January 2024, the 15-year limit on British citizens living overseas being able to vote was abolished. Therefore, overseas electors would be eligible to vote in UK Parliamentary General Elections subject to the required documentary evidence for their original qualifying address.

It was highlighted that the Elections team had been proactive in communicating changes with electors, prospective candidates and agents. This included reminders about the requirement for voter identification for the elections in May 2024.

A question and answer session took place and following on, the principal point from the ensuing discussion:

- A Member sought clarification on the number of overseas electors on the electoral register. In response, the Elections Manager confirmed that this figure would be provided to the Committee in writing.
- Evidence of former residency was required with overseas electors when applying to vote in the UK Parliamentary Election.
- The Council together with the Electoral Commission was regularly advertising the requirement for ID when voting including how to obtain a Voter Authority Certificate (VAC).
- The Council had arranged for Voter ID advertisement on bin waggons for the upcoming elections in May 2024 as this was successful in previous elections.
- New advertisements had been placed in the resident magazines and the Council had seen an uptake in register to vote applications as a result.
- The Council's website was regularly updated as the deadline for VAC application on 25 April 2024.
- Elections team was working with Walsall Connected team to administer VACs and collaboration had been successful.
- It was noted that in the Council's Tax booklet including information on how to obtain identification ahead of the elections in May 2024.
- There was a standard approach for postal vote verification in accordance with the Electoral Commissions guidance.

**Resolved:**

**That, the second tranche of the Elections Act 2022 legislation, the responsibilities of the Returning Officer, Electoral Registration Officer and the actions being taken to deliver associated responsibilities be noted.**

**67. Section 106 Monitoring**

The Head of Planning and Building Control introduced the Section 106 (S106) monitoring report. [Annexed]

A breakdown of S106 contributions and agreements by ward was provided and the process for securing S106 agreements was explained. It was noted that regular performance reports were presented to Planning Committee.

It was highlighted that as of February 2024, £4.5m of contributions had been transferred to the service areas. Over £3.5m had been expended and allocated to date which resulted in a balance of £709k left unallocated.

A concern was raised in respect of outstanding S106 monies for Darlaston including projects planned and uncompleted works. It was noted a response would be provided in writing from the Healthy Spaces Team.

A Member requested that a regular future report be presented on the topic which included representatives from Planning and Healthy Spaces teams.

**Resolved:**

- 1. The infrastructure funding secured through S106 planning obligations during the financial period up to February 2024 including details of committed/spent funding and infrastructure secured be noted.**
- 2. The approved procedure for securing necessary infrastructure through S106 planning obligations and the role of members in the process be noted.**

**68. Scrutiny Chair Feedback**

The Chair invited each Scrutiny Committee Chair to present their feedback since the last meeting of the Committee.

**69. Housing Standards Working Group – Terms of Reference**

The Senior Democratic Services Officer outlined the report which requested the Committee to consider the terms of reference of the Housing Standards Working Group.

It was noted that the Group had conducted regular meetings since January 2024 and it was expected that the final report would be presented to the Committee on 18<sup>th</sup> April 2024.

The Leader of the Council highlighted the issue of fly tipping in the Borough. There was a suggestion that more could be done with social housing landlords and subsequently charged for the Council clearing up any instances of fly tipping.

**Resolved:**

**That, the Housing Standards Working Group Terms of Reference be approved.**

**57. Areas of focus – 2023/24**

The Committee noted the proposed areas of focus for the remaining meetings of the municipal year. [Annexed]

A Member requested that a future report be received on the Council's use of Section 215 powers and exploring any such methods to enhance existing partnership to tackle fly tipping.

A Member suggested that a report be received on the Darlaston Town Funding.

**Resolved:**

- 1. That, the areas of focus for 2023-24 and forward plans be noted.**
- 2. That, a future report be received on the Council's use of Section 215 powers and exploring any such methods to enhance existing partnership to tackle fly tipping.**
- 3. That, a future report be received on the Darlaston Town Funding at the Economy and Environment OSC.**

**58. Recommendations Tracker**

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

In respect of the action regarding the WMCA Annual Report, the Executive Director of Resources and Transformation confirmed that work had commenced with Democratic Services on this issue.

**Resolved:**

**That the recommendation tracker be noted.**

**59. Date of next meeting**

It was noted that the date of the meeting would be 18 April 2024.

There being no further business, the meeting terminated at 7.50p.m.

Signed:

Date:

**18 April 2024**

**Marketing and Advertising Strategy**

**Ward(s): All**

**Portfolios: Leader of the Council - Councillor M Bird**

**1. Aim**

Delivering the Council's marketing and advertising activity is the responsibility of Communications Marketing & Brand (CMB) which sits within the Hub. The purpose of CMB is to tell the Council's story by enhancing engagement with staff, elected members, residents and stakeholders; managing and protecting the Council's reputation; and by raising the profile of Walsall Council and the Borough. The aim is to embed a proactive approach to communications, marketing and advertising. Maximising opportunities to raise awareness of Council services and to promote the Borough.

**2. Recommendations**

That committee notes the update and members support the Council's promotions and priority campaigns by sharing communications content with their communities and across personal networks.

**3. Report detail – know**

- 3.1 Communications Marketing & Brand was established as part of the Proud transformation programme. It was implemented in 2022 and forms part of the Hub, alongside Business Insights and Policy & Strategy. The Council's in-house Print & Design service sits within CMB.
- 3.2 The Hub is a set of teams, brought together and centralised to work with service areas to inform and support the delivery of organisational outcomes. It enables a golden thread to connect from Our Council Plan to all parts of the Council. The Hub sits within the Resources & Transformation directorate.
- 3.3 CMB operates an integrated communications model delivering media relations, reputation management, internal communications, member and stakeholder engagement, social media community management, marketing, brand management, campaign development and delivery, public consultations and income generation through advertising. The team comprises of specialists and fully rounded communications professionals.
- 3.4 The priorities for Communications Marketing & Brand mirror the priorities set out in Our Council Plan. Corporate priority campaigns are refreshed each year and

run through the municipal year from June to May. The priority campaigns for 2023/2024 are:

### **Subheading 1 – Priority Campaigns:**

- Regeneration
- Family Hubs
- Street Pride
- Heritage, Leisure & Culture
- Community Safety
- Local Borough Plan
- We Are Walsall 2040
- Staff Engagement & Culture
- Elections
- Children's and Young People's Health
- Sexual and Reproductive Health
- Tobacco Control
- CQC Readiness

- 3.5 Working collaboratively with our partners is essential to the successful delivery of effective communications and marketing. A place-based approach was adopted during the Covid pandemic to ensure that residents and businesses were fully informed about measures to prevent the spread of the virus and to support the roll out of the vaccination programme. Collaborative working is now embedded. Partners are drawn from the public and private sector, community groups and associations, the West Midlands Combined Authority and from across the local government sector.
- 3.6 Media relations is important for the promotion of Council services and managing the reputation of the Council. Effective relationships have been established with local and regional newsrooms. Former journalists have been recruited to support the handling of media enquiries. More than 40 press releases are issued every month. Most of them issued proactively to promote our service and to support the priority campaigns listed above.
- 3.7 It is estimated that around three quarters of the adult population of Walsall are regular users of social media. At a time when there are more phones in the world than there are people it's essential that the Council engages with residents via those channels that are most popular and convenient. Social media experts in CMB manage the Council's corporate social media accounts. In the last year the number of followers of those accounts has risen by 68% to more than 108,000.
- 3.8 Engagement with elected members and with staff is a priority. CMB supports the Chief Executive with her regular updates. A combination of video and written updates are shared with all councillors, all staff and with MPs and local and regional partners. In addition, around 60 news and information updates are published every month via the Council's intranet, Inside Walsall. Typically, Inside Walsall is viewed more than 160,000 times a month (an increase of more than 100% compared to a year ago). The recent Employee Survey, which was developed and distributed by colleagues within CMB, received the biggest response to any staff survey that we have carried out in recent times.

- 3.9 The management of the Council's brand and identity is important if residents and businesses are to be fully aware of the range of services that the Council provides. Establishing and promoting a consistent brand helps residents to appreciate what the Council stands for, which in turn helps to build trust. Effective management of the Council's brand also supports our recruitment ambitions. In amongst the branding activity this year, signage has been reviewed and updated in the Council House and Civic Centre, the Environmental Services Depot and at Council offices across the Borough.
- 3.10 Income is generated for the Council through advertising on council-owned assets. These include roundabouts, bin lorries and digital adverts on the Council's website. Advertising is coordinated through CMB by our Head of Marketing & Brand. There are 41 roundabouts across the Borough on which space can be sold for advertising. Advertising opportunities also include our full fleet of refuse lorries. Advertising on our website launched a year ago. Opportunities to further grow income with billboard advertising and on other large format advertising on Council-owned land are being explored as well as litter bin advertising and sponsorship opportunities.
- 3.11 Outdoor advertising is also important for the promotion of the Council and our priority campaigns. Examples of this include: the window displays on the former M&S store in the Saddlers Centre promoting plans to transform Walsall town centre; the recent We Are Walsall 2040 resident roadshows were supported by a branded bus which travelled the Borough raising awareness of our long term vision for Walsall; and the Council's fostering service which is promoted on roundabouts and on refuse lorries.
- 3.12 By adopting this integrated communications model which is set out above we are engaging more effectively with residents and businesses and with those who work for the Council. Communications and marketing is raising awareness of We Are Walsall 2040 and sharing the Council's plans to transform the Borough through its ambitious regeneration programme. Performance is monitored through a dashboard which is produced monthly. The dashboard for March 2024 is included as Appendix 1.

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

Communications Marketing & Brand operates within its budget and has done so since its implementation in 2022. Income generated through advertising is growing following the expansion of advertising on roundabouts and on bin lorries and following the launch of advertising on the Council's website. Embracing new opportunities will enable us to further grow this income.

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

Working collaboratively with our partners enables the Council to engage with communities across the Borough. Using evidence-based targeting we can reach communities through digital communications who previously may not have engaged with Walsall Council. Maximising opportunities to tell the Council's story through online and offline channels enables us to reach those who may

not have access to digital devices as well as those who are more digitally connected.

## **6. Decide**

- 6.1 There is an important role for members in helping to inform our residents, raising awareness of the services that the Council provides and in promoting the Borough locally, regionally and nationally. The sharing of information provided through regular updates from our Chief Executive and passing on news updates published on the intranet (Inside Walsall) and on our social media channels, enable the Council to engage with more of our residents and businesses.
- 6.2 Support from elected members for priority campaigns such as We Are Walsall 2040, Family Hubs and for our public health campaigns can help to amplify messages and ensure that the correct information reaches our communities preventing mis-information being spread unchallenged.

## **7. Respond**

Members will continue to be informed of upcoming communications through a weekly planner. Council news and information is available on Inside Walsall and on the Council's website. Colleagues within Communications Marketing & Brand will continue to engage with elected members to facilitate the sharing of communications to all parts of the Borough.

## **8. Review**

Performance is monitored through a monthly communications dashboard (see Appendix 1). If it is useful for members an annual update will be provided to this Committee.

## **Background papers**




Appendix 1 - Communications Dashboard March 2024


### **Author**

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# COMMUNICATIONS MARKETING AND BRAND

	Proactive media relations	<b>75%</b>	Yearly total	<b>73%</b>
	Reactive media relations	<b>25%</b>	Yearly total	<b>27%</b>
	Advertising Value Equivalent	<b>£591,194</b>	Yearly total	<b>£6,753,793</b>

**51**  
Press releases and holding statements  


**22**  
Media enquiries / filming requests  


**Top publications by volume**

Express & Star (Wolv)	70
Birmingham Mail (eClips)	42
Birmingham Mail	40
BBC WM	6
BBC	4

@WalsallCouncil  
Total followers  
**110.2k** ↑  
Mar 2023 - 64.9k

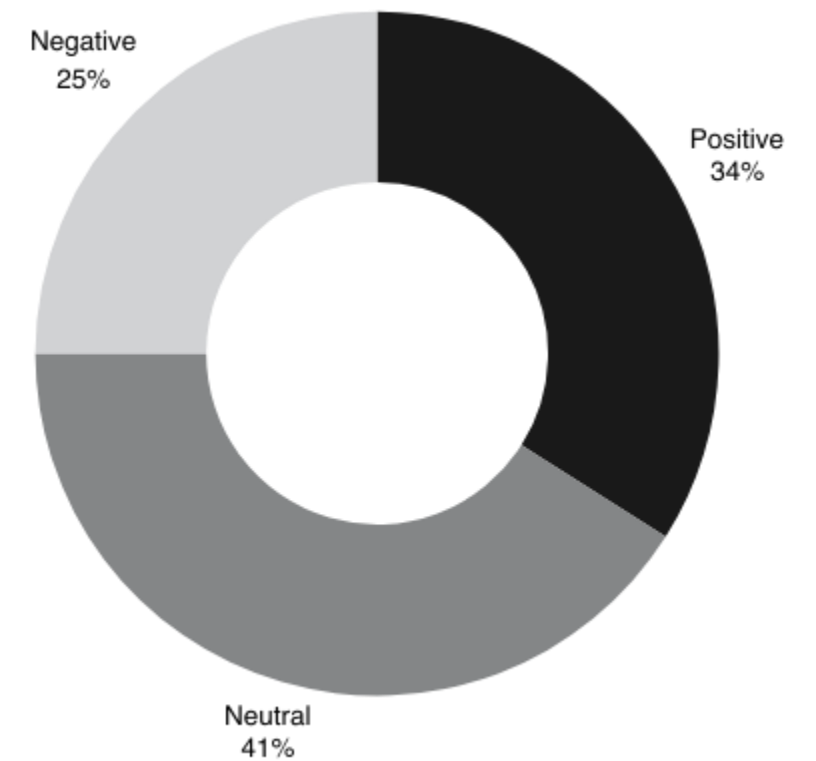
@WalsallCouncil  
Total engagements  
**62.1k** ↑  
Mar 2023 - 44k

@WalsallCouncil  
Total impressions  
**885k** ↑  
Mar 2023 - 628k

Videos: long and short-form  
**30**

Inside Walsall news articles	<b>57</b>
Total Inside Walsall visits	<b>160.7K</b> ↑ March 2023 - 151K
Total homepage visits	<b>95K</b> ↑ March 2023 - 76K

## March 2024 Social media sentiment





# CONTENT SHOWCASE - MARCH 2024

## Social media highlights

### Top Facebook post



### Top Twitter/X post



### Top LinkedIn post



## Press and media highlights



## Tobacco Control Campaign



4.84k impressions | 387 engagements | 316 clicks

### Top culture and heritage post



### New free youth club launches in troubled area of Walsall

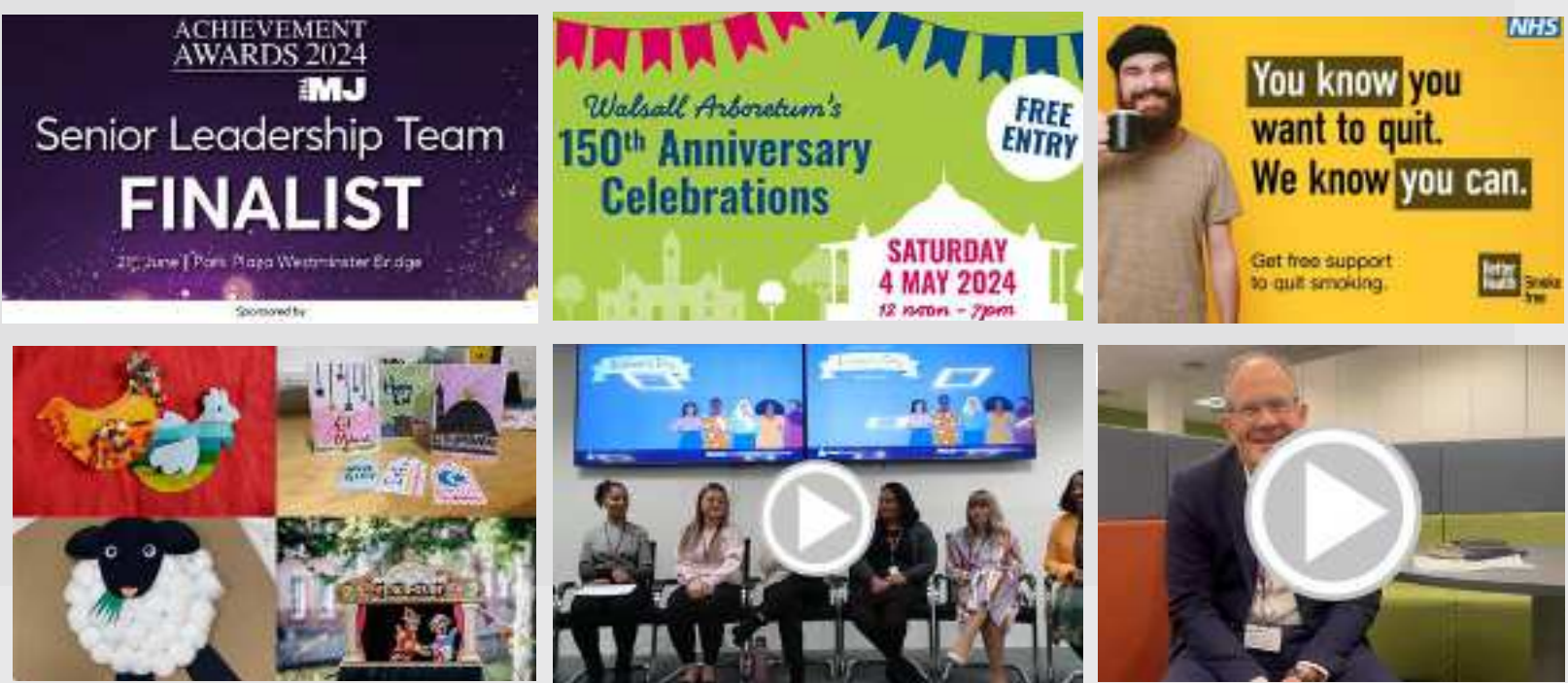


# CONTENT SHOWCASE - MARCH 2024

## Marketing and brand highlights

- Launch of Walsall Arboretum’s 4 May celebratory event campaign
- Train advertising campaign for The New Art Gallery Walsall seen by an estimated 100,000 people across Birmingham, the Black Country and Staffordshire
- We are Walsall 2040 roadshows took place throughout March visiting key destinations across the borough
- Launch of branding for the new Senior Managers’ Space
- Created a series of four new Teams backgrounds

## Inside Walsall highlights



## Income generation

- First of our new outdoor advertising locations out to tender which will close early in April
- Reviewing sites on key highways to identify locations for the next set of outdoor advertising opportunities
- Roundabout advertising now 55% sold with most contracts 2-3 years in length, securing long term income for the Council.
- Shared learnings and insight at the cross council income generation group

**18 April 2024**

**Overview of Emergency Planning**

**Wards:** All

**Portfolio:** Leader of the Council

**1. Aim**

- 1.1. To ensure that the council are prepared to respond appropriately to a major emergency or a disaster that affects our capability to provide essential services.

**2. Recommendations**

- 2.1. The committee is asked to note the information provided in respect to the council's emergency planning function.

**3. Report detail – know**

- 3.1. Walsall Council Emergency Planning Unit are council's essential component of the civil protection framework, which works to the Civil Contingencies Act 2004. The Act outlines the responsibilities of local responders, dividing them into Category 1 and Category 2 organisations, each with specific duties to fulfil in emergency preparedness, response and recovery.
- 3.2. Category 1 responders are the main agencies, including emergency services, local authorities, and NHS bodies. They have a comprehensive set of duties, which include risk assessment, contingency planning, public information dissemination, and maintaining readiness to respond to emergencies.
- 3.3. Category 2 responders are 'co-operating bodies' like transport and utility companies, which may be less involved in planning but are crucial during incidents affecting their sectors. Their duties involve cooperating and sharing relevant information with Category 1 and other Category 2 responders.
- 3.4. Both categories come together to form Local Resilience Forums (LRFs), which facilitate coordination and cooperation at the local level. LRFs serve as platforms where responders can plan and prepare collectively, ensuring that all agencies are aligned and ready to act in a unified manner during emergencies. Walsall sits within the West Midlands Conurbation Local Resilience Forum.
- 3.5. The Local Resilience Forum are also required to share information and cooperate with other local responders to enhance coordination as well as producing a Community Risk Register which risks for the community and assesses how likely they are to lead to an emergency and the potential impact they would have. The register is created through a risk assessment, and the LRF uses the information to plan and prepare for emergencies that may occur.

- 3.6. The council's emergency planning unit provide an emergency call out function 24-hours a day, 365 days of the year. Additionally, the team coordinate the council's response to any incident or emergency requiring input from the local authority. Examples of incidents including large building, road and industrial fires; the Covid-19 pandemic and Operation London Bridge [the death of the monarch].
- 3.7. The unit work closely with internal services to ensure response plans and business continuity plans are in place and tested. The team arrange training and exercises to review readiness and capability and to learn lessons to inform a real-life response. Examples of exercises include Operation Acorn which tested Directors and Executive Directors plans in the event of a national power outage.
- 3.8. More widely, the team work closely with partners to ensure a coherent multi-agency response in the event of an incident. In addition to regular routine liaison, multi-agency exercises serve to test plans, develop common understanding and build strong relationships. For consistency, much of the public facing communication is issued at a regional level, including the example at **Appendix A**.

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

- 4.1. The emergency planning service is revenue funded with a total budget of £256,910.

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

- 5.1. The council's emergency planning function tackles inequalities by identifying vulnerable communities, tailoring response plans, and distributing resources equitably. Community engagement and education empower residents, while partnerships with responders and voluntary organisations ensure inclusive responses.
- 5.2. Both planning and recovery aim to identify and address the root causes of vulnerability. Through these measures, local authorities promote equity by aiming to mitigate the disproportionate impacts of disasters on marginalised populations.

#### **6. Consultation**

- 6.1. Consultation during the development of local authority emergency plans is vital for effective response. Stakeholders including other category 1 responders, community groups, healthcare providers, and local businesses offer diverse perspectives and expertise.
- 6.2. This process ensures that plans are comprehensive, address specific community needs, and secure support from key agencies. Community input helps identify vulnerable groups, assess risks, and tailor strategies accordingly.
- 6.3. Through inclusive consultation, local authorities build stronger, more resilient communities better prepared to face emergencies.

#### **7. Decide**

- 7.1. The committee is asked to note the detail provided in this report.

## **8. Respond**

- 8.1. The emergency planning team are currently drafting the latest iteration of council's emergency plan. This document will be presented to cabinet for approval later in the year.

## **9. Review**

- 9.1. The emergency planning team review council wide plans on a regular basis.
- 9.2. Business continuity plans are reviewed by service managers annually.

## **10. Appendices**

- 10.1. **Appendix A** - Preparing the West Midlands for Emergencies.

### **Background Papers**

None.

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# Preparing the West Midlands for Emergencies - Community Risk Register



**Know the risks, be informed, get prepared**



This document is designed and produced by West Midlands Local Resilience Forum to inform people and better prepare them for risks that could occur where they live or work.

# Foreword by Local Resilience Forum Chair

We are currently living in unsettled and troubling times. There are multiple conflicts happening across the world and the wide-ranging impacts of COVID-19, the increase of severe weather events due to climate change and the evolving cyber challenges are examples of an evolving threat picture. The context of this means that crises we face will have far reaching consequences and the frequency and scale of the challenges are likely to increase over the next decade.

The West Midlands Conurbation Local Resilience Forum (LRF) is a multi-agency partnership made up of representatives from local public services, including emergency services, local authorities the NHS and others. The LRF works to identify potential risks and produce plans to prevent or mitigate the impact on our local communities.

This booklet, known as the Community Risk Register (CRR) is an informative document produced for communities of the West Midlands. It has been developed around the three fundamental principles: that we need to have a shared understanding of the risks we face; that we must focus on prevention and preparation; and that resilience requires whole of society to be involved. It contains information about events such

as severe weather and accidents as well as malicious threats such as terrorism and cyber-attacks. There is also information about what to do if they occur and how to stay informed.

We have assessed each risk by considering the likelihood of it occurring and the impact it would have on you, the community, if it did occur. There will always be some uncertainty when assessing risks, however we have used historical and scientific data, professional judgement and national guidance to produce an informed Community Risk Register.

Being informed about local risks allows us, and you, to take action, strengthen our resilience and work together to minimise disruption within our communities.

Working together to build our resilience will mean we are better equipped to tackle the challenges that come our way, ensuring our businesses grow, our communities thrive and our residents can build a brighter future.

## Contact us:

 [lrf\\_coordinator@westmidlands.police.uk](mailto:lrf_coordinator@westmidlands.police.uk)

 <https://twitter.com/WMidPrepared>

### Category 1 Responder

- ▶ Emergency Services
- ▶ British Transport Police
- ▶ West Midlands Ambulance Service
- ▶ West Midlands Fire Service
- ▶ West Midlands Police
- ▶ Local Authorities
- ▶ Birmingham City Council
- ▶ Coventry City Council
- ▶ Dudley Metropolitan Borough Council
- ▶ Sandwell Metropolitan Borough Council
- ▶ Solihull Metropolitan Borough Council
- ▶ Walsall Metropolitan Borough Council
- ▶ Wolverhampton City Council
- ▶ Health Bodies

- ▶ UK Health Security Agency
- ▶ NHS England
- ▶ Local NHS Provider Trusts
- ▶ Birmingham & Solihull Integrated Care Board
- ▶ Black Country Integrated Care Board
- ▶ Coventry & Warwickshire Integrated Care Board
- ▶ Government Agencies
- ▶ Environment Agency

### Category 2 Responder

#### Utilities

- ▶ Electricity Distributors and Transmitters
- ▶ Gas Distributors
- ▶ Telephone Service Providers (fixed and mobile)
- ▶ Water and Sewerage Undertakers

### Transport

- ▶ Birmingham International Airport
- ▶ Bus and Coach Operators
- ▶ National Highways
- ▶ Transport for West Midlands
- ▶ Train Operating Companies (passenger and freight)

### Government Agencies

- ▶ Health and Safety Executive
- ▶ DEFRA
- ▶ Met Office
- ▶ Animal Plant Health Agency (APHA)
- ▶ Coal Authority

### Supporting Responders

- ▶ Ministry of Defence
- ▶ Government Departments
- ▶ Voluntary Sector



# Prepare yourself for emergencies and risks

## Preparing for an emergency – how can YOU prepare?

Find out how to turn off water, gas and electricity supplies in your home.

Work out how your family will stay in contact in the event of an emergency.

Consider whether elderly or vulnerable family, friends or neighbours may need your help.

### Grab bag essentials:

- ▶ Battery radio
- ▶ Wind up torch
- ▶ First Aid kit
- ▶ Spare clothes
- ▶ Blankets
- ▶ Toiletries
- ▶ Bottled water
- ▶ Tinned food.



### If you must leave home in an emergency:

- ▶ Unplug all appliances
- ▶ Take your grab bag
- ▶ Tune into local radio stations for emergency advice and instructions
- ▶ Lock windows and doors.

## Top tips

- ▶ Find out the emergency procedures for your children at school and at your workplace.
- ▶ Find out how to tune into your local radio station.

# Emergency Alerts



Emergency Alerts is a UK government service that will warn you if there's a danger to life nearby.

In an emergency, your mobile phone or tablet will receive an alert with advice about how to stay safe.

The government does not need to know your phone number or location to send you an alert.

## Reasons you might get an alert

You may get alerts about:

- ▶ Severe flooding
- ▶ Fires
- ▶ Extreme weather.

Emergency alerts will only be sent by:

- ▶ The emergency services
- ▶ Government departments, agencies and public bodies that deal with emergencies.

## What happens when you get an emergency alert

Your mobile phone or tablet may:

- ▶ Make a loud siren-like sound, even if it's set on silent
- ▶ Vibrate
- ▶ Read out the alert.

The sound and vibration will last for about 10 seconds.

An alert will include a phone number or a link to the GOV.UK website for more information.

You'll get alerts based on your current location - not where you live or work. You do not need to turn on location services to receive alerts.

## What you need to do

When you get an alert, stop what you're doing and follow the instructions in the alert.

### If you're driving or riding when you get an alert

- ▶ Do not read or respond to an emergency alert while driving or riding.
- ▶ Find somewhere safe and legal to stop before reading the message. If there's nowhere safe and legal to stop, and nobody else is in the vehicle to read the alert, you can listen to news on live radio to find out about the emergency.
- ▶ It's illegal to use a hand-held device while driving or riding.

## If you cannot receive emergency alerts

If you do not have a [compatible device](#), you'll still be informed about an emergency. The emergency services have other ways to warn you when there is a threat to life.

Emergency alerts will not replace local news, radio, television or social media.

# Where to go for advice

If people are seriously injured call 999 immediately



## NHS111

If you have an urgent medical problem and you're not sure what to do, call 111 or go online to [NHS111](http://NHS111)



## Citizen Aid app

Download the Citizen Aid app for step-by-step guides on how to stay safe and save the lives of the injured.



## The British Red Cross

This app covers useful first aid skills and information. It's suitable for anyone looking to learn first aid to help others in an emergency.



You can also find tips on how to prepare for emergencies both at home or while out and about.

## what3words

Around the world, emergency services and non governmental organisations are using what3words to find and help people in need. Every three metre square of the world has a unique combination of three words. Its an easy way to find and share exact locations.



Download apps free from Google Play or Apple Store.





# What to do in the event of an emergency



In a major emergency all media channels will, on the advice of the emergency services, communicate the information required for public safety.

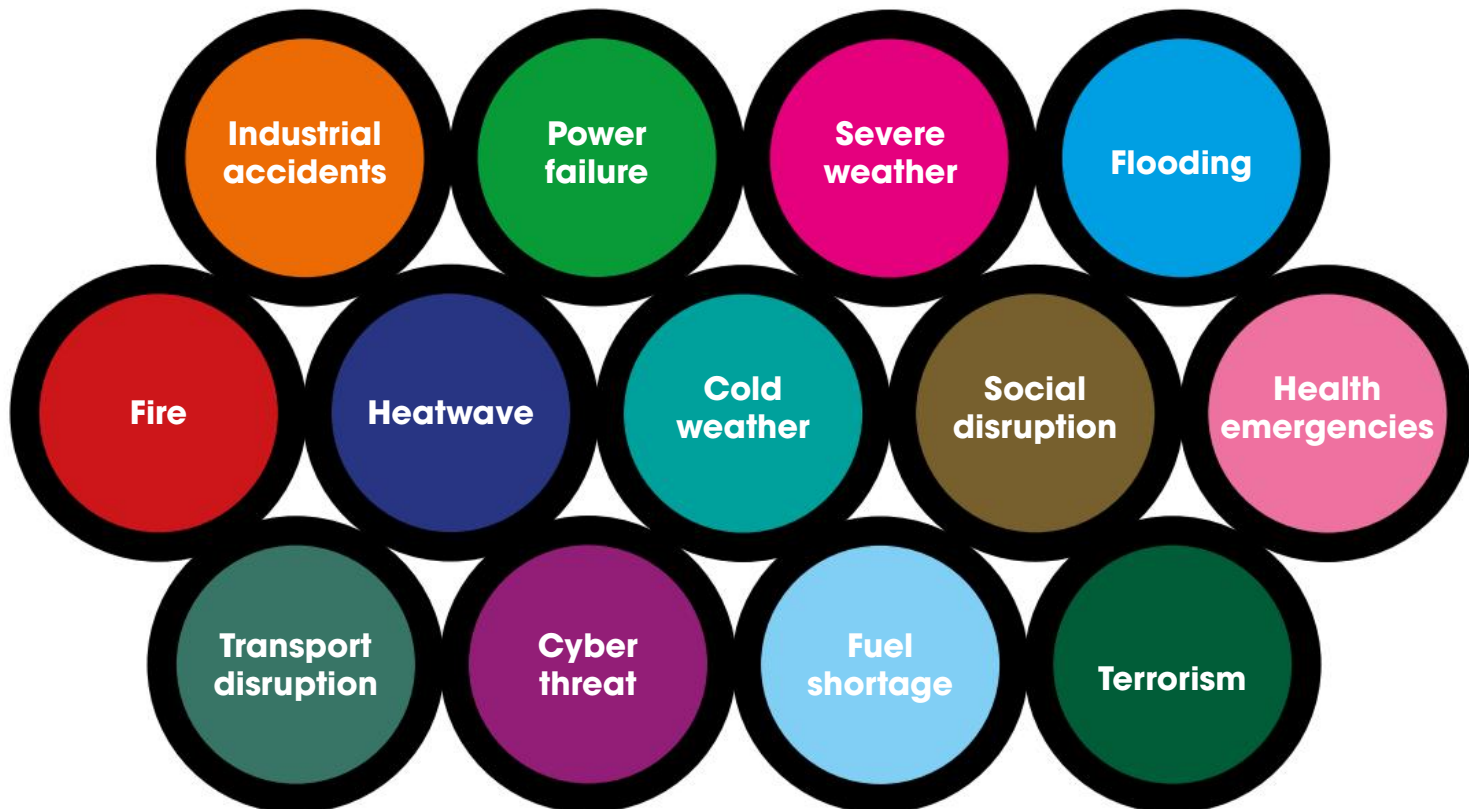
If you are not involved in the incident, but are close by or believe you may be in danger, in most cases the advice is to:

- ▶ Go inside a safe building
- ▶ Stay inside until you are advised to leave
- ▶ Tune into local radio, TV or social media for latest updates and information.

BBCWMM Radio

@metofficeUK / [www.metoffice.gov.uk](http://www.metoffice.gov.uk)

Over the next few pages we have provided advice about what to do in the event of any of the following Community Risks in the West Midlands.



# Industrial accidents

Industrial activities involving dangerous substances have the potential to cause accidents or serious injury.

## Three ways to prepare yourself and your family:

1. Be aware if you live near a hazardous site. If you hear a warning of an incident, go indoors, close all your doors and windows and tune into local news channels for advice.
2. If evacuated, know where key documents and medications are so you can leave quickly.
3. Consider backup childcare and check what your child's school plans are during emergencies.

## In an emergency:

### How are we prepared?

West Midlands Fire Service maintains multi-agency emergency plans to manage results of a major accident.

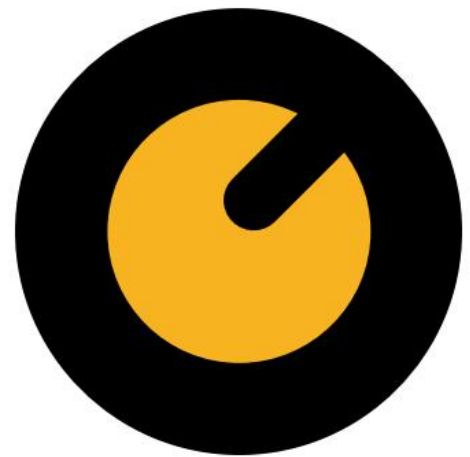
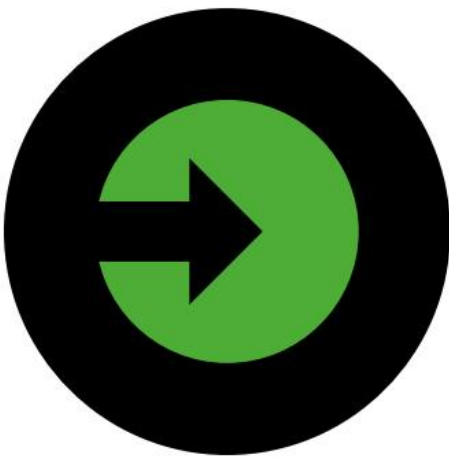
## COMAH

The Control of Major Accident Hazard (COMAH) Regulations 2015 are the enforcing regulations within the UK. COMAH regulations aim to prevent and mitigate the effects of major accidents involving dangerous substances, which can cause serious damage / harm to people and / or the environment.

Health and Safety Executive (HSE) website allows you to search for COMAH establishments in your area.

Search online for 'COMAH Public Information' to identify establishments in your area.

If you are unsure what to do; **Go in.** **Stay in.** **Tune in.**



## Top tip

- ▶ Store basic supplies at home like bottled water, a torch and batteries.

# Power failure

[www.nationalgrid.com/power-cuts/tips-prepare-for-power-cut](http://www.nationalgrid.com/power-cuts/tips-prepare-for-power-cut)

## Five ways to prepare for a power cut:

1. Keep a torch in a safe place.
2. Any vulnerable family members may register as a priority customer with National Grid.
3. Back up and save any work or files on your computer.
4. A wind-up, solar or battery radio is essential to hear when the power cut is likely to finish.
5. Consider an analogue landline phone that will work in a power outage. Keep a battery / solar charger handy so that you can recharge electronic devices.

## In an emergency:

If you experience a power cut that you weren't expecting you can report it by calling 105. This will connect you to your distribution network operator (DNO), who owns and maintains the power lines that connect to homes or businesses.

## Fact

The move to fibre broadband means that in the event of a power cut you will not be able to use an analogue telephone on your landline connection.

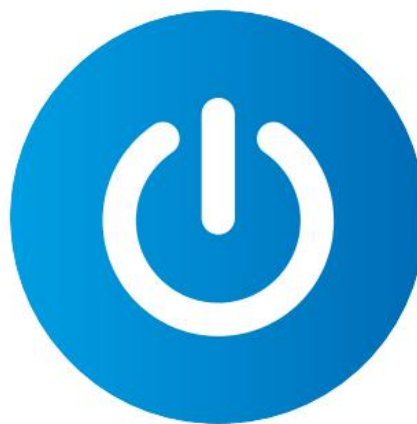
The roll-out of fibre is programmed to be completed nationally by 2026. Many streets across the country have already been completed.

If there is a major outage, most central telecoms infrastructure may continue to have power, however street cabinets may not. If the premises has Fibre to the Premises (FTTP), the property will be reliant on alternative energy resources, and telephones powered by power storage devices, batteries and battery back-ups. These are managed by the telecommunications providers and/or consumers directly, not Openreach.

Ofcom state priority service users on registers and known vulnerable customers reliant on telecoms must have a provided free back-up that has a duration of at least one hour.

## Top tip

- ▶ Keep fridges and freezers closed, with a blanket over, as they will stay cold for hours.



# Severe weather

The United Kingdom is prone to weather extremes, including heatwave and cold weather ranges, including snow, flooding and high winds. This is increasing due to the consequences of global warming.

## Four ways to prepare for severe weather:

1. Create a list of useful contacts of family and friends just in case you need help or assistance.
2. Check on vulnerable people near to where you live or work.
3. Only travel if essential - always check and prepare your vehicle first.
4. Pack useful items appropriate to the weather conditions, including clothing, equipment, food supplies and bottled water.

## In an emergency:

Stay up to date with the latest weather forecasts and warnings.

Go online and sign up to Met Office email weather alerts: [Metoffice.gov.uk](https://www.metoffice.gov.uk)

Download the Met Office Weather app



## Fact

In the future, the Met Office project the intensity of rain will increase. In the summer, this could increase by up to 20%. In winter, it could increase by up to 25%. This will mean weather warnings could be issued more frequently.



## Top tips

- ▶ Notify friends and family of severe weather warnings and share on social media.
- ▶ Ensure you and your family are prepared for prolonged disruption or loss of utilities.



# Flooding

Surface water flooding is particularly difficult to forecast. It can happen at very short notice and can occur in locations far from the sea or rivers.

## Two most important ways to prepare:

1. Put together a flood 'grab bag':
  - ▶ Insurance documents
  - ▶ Mobile phones and chargers
  - ▶ Emergency cash and credit cards
  - ▶ Prescription medication
  - ▶ Children / pet essentials.
2. Use the National Flood Forum resources and Environment Agency resources to help prepare. These include a checklist and emergency flood kit.

## Fact

Winter 2015/2016 was the second wettest winter on record and storms ('Desmond' and 'Eva') resulted in heavy and sustained rainfall. 17,600 UK properties were flooded and several bridges collapsed, disrupting access to and from local communities.

Find out if you're at risk of flooding:

[gov.uk/check-flood-risk](http://gov.uk/check-flood-risk) or call 0345 988 1188

[nationalfloodforum.org.uk](http://nationalfloodforum.org.uk)

## In an emergency:

Prioritise your list and make sure the important things are done first.

Think - how can you prevent water from entering your property?

Move your car to higher ground (if safe to do so).

Make sure you are able to keep warm, food, flasks etc.

Most possessions can be replaced, but sentimental family photographs should be stored somewhere safe.



## Top tips

- ▶ Never walk or drive through flood water, it may be deeper than it appears.
- ▶ Turn off electricity and gas supplies if they have been in contact with water and get them checked prior to using them again.



# Fire

Fire prevention and safety at home. The emergency services are trained to cope with a wide range of emergency situations, but there is a lot that you can do to help them and yourself.

Reduce fire hazards in your home:



If moving through or trapped in smoke, stay close to the floor where the air is cleaner.

If there is a fire, get out, stay out and call 999.



If a door feels hot, do not open it, as it probably means there is a fire on the other side.

Most fire deaths and injuries occur while people are sleeping. Plan an escape route should a fire break out at night.



Fit and maintain smoke alarms – at least one on every floor.

Never use the lift in an evacuation.

Remember, never re-enter your home until West Midlands Fire Service has made it safe.

If you're unlucky enough to have a fire at home, the main thing to remember is, **don't** tackle the fire yourself, however small it is.

Get out, stay out and call 999.

For more information or to arrange a home safety check, call West Midlands Fire Service on 0121 380 6067 or visit [www.wmfs.net](http://www.wmfs.net)



**WMFS**  
**West Midlands  
Fire Service**

# Heatwave

Evidence about risks to health from heatwaves is extensive and consistent from around the world. Excessive exposure to high temperatures can kill.

## Four key public messages to follow:

1. Cool yourself down - have plenty of cold drinks, avoid excess alcohol and hot drinks.
2. Always take regular breaks when exercising.
3. Check elderly neighbours, family or friends regularly during a heatwave.
4. Use plants and bowls of water to keep rooms cool, close curtains in the day and turn off unnecessary lights. Open windows at night when safe to do so.

## In an emergency:

[Prepare yourself, find out how to cope in hot weather.](#)

Heatwaves can be dangerous, especially for the very young, very old or those with certain medical conditions.

Call 999 for an ambulance if a person has severe symptoms, such as a loss of consciousness, confusion or seizures.

For health advice when its not an emergency go to [NHS111](#) or call 111.

## Fact

Climate change will make hot spells more frequent and severe. The number of extremely hot days in the UK could increase four-fold, posing increasing risk to human health from extreme heat.



## Top tips

- ▶ Stay out of the heat - especially between 11am and 3pm when the sun reaches its peak.
- ▶ Consult your GP if you feel unusual symptoms or contact NHS 111 if symptoms persist.
- ▶ Register for the [Met Office Heat-health Alert service](#)



# Cold weather

Extreme weather and cold temperatures increase the risk of illness and injury. Some groups of people are particularly vulnerable.



## Two key public health messages to follow:

1. Keep your home warm, efficiently and safely:
  - ▶ Heat your home to at least 18°C
  - ▶ Get your heating system checked
  - ▶ Ensure you have loft insulation
  - ▶ Do not obstruct radiators with furniture or curtains.
2. Look after yourself:
  - ▶ Have plenty of food and hot drinks (including five portions of fruit and vegetables per day)
  - ▶ Exercise is good all year round
  - ▶ Stock up on tinned and frozen food
  - ▶ Speak to your GP for advice.

## In an emergency:

Top tips to stay well and healthy

- ▶ Wear multiple layers and good grip shoes or boots if you have to go outside.
- ▶ Get help with money. There are benefits and other help you can get to keep your home warm.
- ▶ Met Office inform the public about bad weather by giving out warnings and alerts on TV, radio and newspapers.

For health advice when its not an emergency go to [NHS111](#) or call 111.

### Fact

A significant number of excess deaths occur during the winter months compared with the non-winter months. The majority of deaths occur among people aged 75 and over.

## Top tips

- ▶ Sign up to weather alerts or call the Met Office 24/7 Weather Desk 0370 900 0100.
- ▶ Check on older neighbours or relatives, make sure they are safe, warm and well.
- ▶ Register for the [Met Office Heat-health Alert service](#)

# Social disruption

Industrial action can lead to temporary closures, reduced services and disruption to organisations, customers and the general public.

## Four consequences of industrial action:

1. Disruption to essential services (transport, health and education)
2. Possible public order challenges (with associated pressure on policing)
3. Disruption to business (via lost working hours)
4. Economic damage (particularly for transport sector industrial action).

## What is public disorder?

Public disorder can take many forms, including rioting, looting, vandalism, violence and arson.

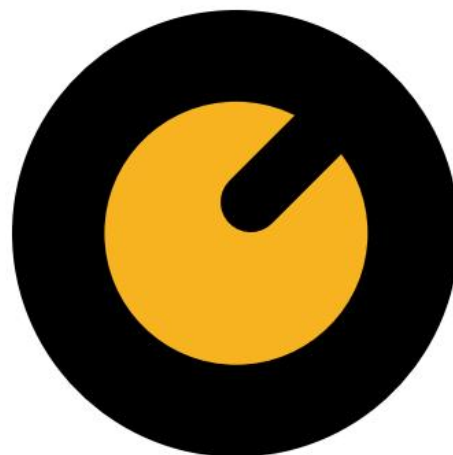
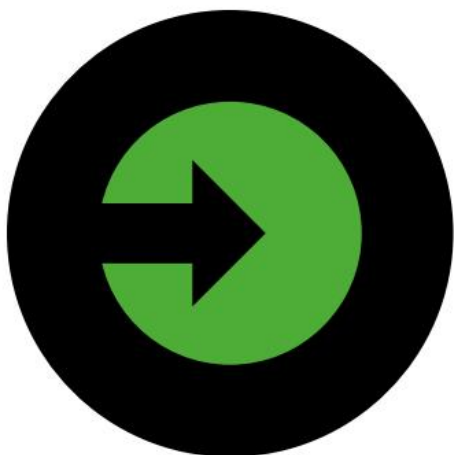
Consequences of public disorder may include:

- ▶ Physical / psychological casualties
- ▶ Disruption to critical services (particularly policing and health)
- ▶ Damage to property and infrastructure
- ▶ Possible evacuation or temporary shelter requirements
- ▶ Possible economic damage.

## Fact

In recent times there have been strikes in both the public and private sector by fuel tanker drivers, firefighters, teachers, health service staff, London Underground workers, government employees, and other groups of workers.

Go in. Stay in. Tune in.



## Top tips

- ▶ Plan - how would YOU cope with temporary disruption to services?
- ▶ If you are unsure what to do: Go in. Stay in. Tune in.

# Health emergencies

A pandemic is a worldwide event in which many people are infected with a virus in a short time.

## Three ways to prepare for and minimise illnesses:

1. Vaccines can help reduce your risk of severe illness. Contact your GP for eligibility requirements.
2. Keep personal stocks of over-the-counter medication to help relieve symptoms.
3. Good hygiene - regularly wash hands with soap and warm water and clean surfaces to remove germs.

## Medical advice

Ask someone to collect your medication, shopping and general supplies so that you can remain home when you are ill. Go online to [www.nhs.uk](http://www.nhs.uk)



NHS111 is the free 24/7 number to call when you have an urgent healthcare need. It directs you to the right local service, first time.



Have you got the NHS App?  
[Download the NHS App](#)

Download it free from Google Play or Apple Store.



## Fact

Over the past 25 years, more than 30 new, or newly-recognised, infections have been identified around the world. The pattern of known infections also changes constantly, as the areas where disease is constantly present expand beyond traditional limits.



## Top tips

- ▶ A healthy lifestyle is a great defence against illness.
- ▶ Book a GP appointment or call 111 for non-emergency medical advice.



# Transport disruption

Accidents, severe weather, flooding, strikes... even volcanic eruptions can all disrupt the transport network.



## Four ways to prepare for disruption:

1. Keep a car emergency kit - include a first aid kit, blankets, torch, bottled water and food.
2. Check before you travel - TV, radio, apps, internet.
3. Think how to contact your family or friends if affected - know who to ask for assistance.
4. Consider alternative methods of transport - bus, bike, train or tram.

## In an emergency:

Check online:

[www.birminghamairport.co.uk](http://www.birminghamairport.co.uk)

[www.tfwm.org.uk](http://www.tfwm.org.uk)

<https://nationalhighways.co.uk/travel-updates/travel-alerts/>

[www.nationalrail.co.uk](http://www.nationalrail.co.uk)

## Fact

West Midlands has several motorways serving the area including the M5, M6, M40, M42 and M54. It's home to Birmingham International Airport. Birmingham New Street station is a major transport hub and High Speed Two (HS2) is in development.

## Top tips

- ▶ Check weather forecasts and travel updates before travelling - it's your responsibility.
- ▶ Listen to emergency services advice via local FM radio, TV and social media.

# Cyber threat

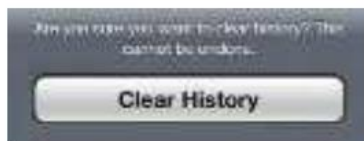
Cyber threat is the possibility of a malicious attempt to damage or disrupt a computer network or system.

## Four ways to prevent cyber crime and fraud:

1. Avoid using public WiFi for checking bank accounts - it may not be secure!
2. Download the latest software update for your phone. Install anti-virus software and a firewall on your computer.
3. Do not share any personal information with people before verifying their credentials.
4. Destroy receipts with your card details on and post with your name and address on.

## Fact

Action Fraud is the UK's national reporting centre for fraud and cyber crime. You should report fraud if you have been scammed, defrauded or experienced cyber crime.



**ActionFraud**  
Report Fraud & Internet Crime  
[actionfraud.police.uk](http://actionfraud.police.uk)

## Report fraud and internet crime to Action Fraud

**actionfraud.police.uk**  
Secure online reporting and advice on avoiding the latest scams  
(24 hours a day, seven days a week)

**0300 123 2040**  
Report and advice over the phone  
Our phone lines are open:  
Mon-Fri 8am to 8pm | Sat-Sun 8am to 5pm  
Calls charged at local rate




## Top tips

- ▶ Use strong, hard to guess passwords using a combination of letters, numbers and symbols.
- ▶ When using public computers, leave no trace of your activity.



# Fuel shortage

During disruption to fuel supply, it is also possible that stocks could be further depleted through increased consumer demand (panic buying).



## Three ways to prepare for a fuel shortage:

1. Maintain your vehicle so that it's fuel efficient as possible and regularly check your tyre pressure.
2. Consider alternative methods of transport - bus, bike, train, walk.
3. Home - you may keep up to 30 litres of fuel in a shed or garage (only in a suitable container).
  - Remember petrol is DANGEROUS - store it away from any means of ignition. [For more guidance, visit hse.gov.uk](https://www.hse.gov.uk)

## Fact

In May 2021, computer hacking of the Colonial Pipeline in the USA caused 30% of gas stations in Atlanta to be without fuel, 31% in Raleigh, North Carolina, and unleaded gas prices hit an average of \$2.99 a gallon – its highest price since November 2014.

## Top tips

- ▶ By keeping a constant speed you will consume less fuel – drive steadily. 
- ▶ Don't idle at traffic lights. One minute of idling consumes more fuel than starting your engine. Turn off the ignition if you're waiting. 
- ▶ Maintain your vehicle. Poorly tuned engines can double your fuel consumption.
- ▶ Consider other ways of conserving fuel, such as car sharing, walking or cycling.
- ▶ Minimise travel (only essential journeys) and follow emergency services advice.



# Terrorism

The most significant terrorist threat comes from international terrorism. As recent European attacks have shown, attacks may be mounted without warning.

## Four possible signs of terrorism:

1. People trying to remain hidden or out of view.
2. Individuals covertly trying to take photographs of security details such as of CCTV and security staff.
3. People attempting to gain entry to restricted areas.
4. Anyone deliberately trying to conceal objects on themselves, such as weapons.

## In an emergency:



Download CitizenAid app or visit [CitizenAid.org](http://CitizenAid.org)

## Fact

Emergency services are specially trained to deal with major emergencies and have specialist equipment to deal with a whole range of incidents. If necessary, military assistance can be called on by the Government.

**COMMUNITIES DEFEAT TERRORISM**

**MAKE NOTHING HAPPEN**

If you see or hear something that could be terrorist related, act on your instincts and call the police, in confidence, on **0800 789 321** or visit [gov.uk/ACT](http://gov.uk/ACT)

COUNTER TERRORISM POLICING

**ACT** ACTION COUNTERS TERRORISM



**Top tips**

- ▶ Be vigilant - look out for suspicious behaviour, vehicles or packages.
- ▶ If you believe there is an immediate threat to life, call 999.



# What to do to keep yourself safe

## Terrorist weapons attacks

Weapon related attacks are rare in the UK. The 'STAY SAFE' principles tell you some simple actions to consider at an incident and the information that officers may need in the event of an attack.

### Run

- ▶ Escape if you can
- ▶ Consider the safest options
- ▶ Is there a safe route?
- ▶ Can you get there without exposing yourself to greater danger?
- ▶ Insist others leave with you
- ▶ Leave belongings behind.



### Tell

- ▶ **Call 999** - what do the Police need to know? If you cannot speak or make a noise listen to the instructions given to you by the call handler.
- ▶ **Location** - Where are the suspects?
- ▶ **Direction** - Where did you last see the suspects?
- ▶ **Descriptions** - Describe the attacker, numbers, features, clothing, weapons etc.
- ▶ **Further information** - casualties, type of injury, building information, entrances, exits, hostages etc.
- ▶ **Stop** other people entering the building, if it is safe to do so.



### Hide

If you cannot **Run**, **Hide**

- ▶ Find visual cover from gunfire (if you can see the attacker, they may be able to see you)
- ▶ Find physical cover from gunfire e.g. substantial brickwork/heavy reinforced walls (cover from view does not mean you are safe. Bullets go through glass, brick, wood and metal)
- ▶ Be aware of your exits
- ▶ Try not to get trapped
- ▶ Be quiet, silence your phone and turn off vibrate
- ▶ Lock / barricade yourself in
- ▶ Move away from the door.



Download CitizenAid app or visit [CitizenAid.org](http://CitizenAid.org)

**if you have been exposed to a HAZARDOUS SUBSTANCE**

**REMOVE YOURSELF**

Get away from the hazard as quickly as possible. Do not touch anything. Do not breathe in any fumes or dust. Do not touch anything.

**REMOVE OUTER CLOTHING**

Remove any outer clothing, shoes, and accessories. Place them in a plastic bag. Do not touch anything.

**REMOVE THE SUBSTANCE**

Wash your face, hands, and any exposed skin with water. Do not use soap. Do not touch anything.

If you think someone has been exposed to a hazardous substance, use caution and keep a safe distance to avoid exposure yourself. In an emergency call 999.

**If you have been affected then follow the REMOVE advice:**

- ▶ **REMOVE** yourself from the hazard to avoid further exposure.
- ▶ **REMOVE** outer clothing if affected by the substance.
- ▶ **REMOVE** the substance from skin if affected.

More detailed advice can be found online here: <https://www.protectuk.police.uk/advice-and-guidance/response/remove-remove-remove-guidance-hazardous-substance-exposure>



## Suspicious items - guidance for the public

- ▶ Do not touch
- ▶ Try and identify an owner in the immediate area
- ▶ If you think its suspicious, don't feel embarrassed or assume someone else will report it
- ▶ Report it to a member of staff or security, or if they are not available dial 999 (do not use your mobile phone in the immediate vicinity)
- ▶ Move away to a safe distance - even for a small item such as a briefcase move at least 100m away from the item starting from the centre and moving out
- ▶ Remember, if you think its suspicious, **say something**.



## Bomb threat guidance

The vast majority of bomb threats are hoaxes designed to cause alarm and disruption. As well as the rare instances of valid bomb threats, terrorists may also make hoax bomb threat calls to intimidate the public, businesses and communities, to draw attention to their cause and to mislead police. While many bomb threats involve a person-to-person phone call, an increasing number are sent electronically using email or social media apps.

No matter how ridiculous or implausible the threat may seem, all such communications are a crime and should be reported to the police by dialling 999. For non emergencies, contact British Transport Police on 61016.



## ProtectUK

Launched in 2022, ProtectUK is a new central hub for counter terrorism and security advice.

On the website you can view the current UK threat level, find advice and guidance to protect yourself and your business and also perform a risk assessment to help you to manage risk.

Visit: [www.protectuk.police.uk](http://www.protectuk.police.uk)



# Contact your Local Authority Resilience Team

## Birmingham

- ▶ Emergency Planning, Birmingham City Council  
PO Box 37, Birmingham, B4 7DQ
- ▶ [www.birmingham.gov.uk/resilience](http://www.birmingham.gov.uk/resilience)
- ▶ [emergencyplanning@birmingham.gov.uk](mailto:emergencyplanning@birmingham.gov.uk)
- ▶ 0121 303 4825



## Solihull

- ▶ Solihull Council, Council House, Manor Square, Solihull, B97 3QB
- ▶ [www.cswprepared.org.uk](http://www.cswprepared.org.uk)
- ▶ [cswrt@warwickshire.gov.uk](mailto:cswrt@warwickshire.gov.uk)
- ▶ 0121 704 6032



## Coventry

- ▶ Council House, Earl Street, Coventry, CV7 5RR
- ▶ [www.cswprepared.org.uk](http://www.cswprepared.org.uk)
- ▶ [cswrt@warwickshire.gov.uk](mailto:cswrt@warwickshire.gov.uk)



## Walsall

- ▶ Council House, Lichfield Street, Walsall, WS1 1TP
- ▶ [www.walsall.gov.uk](http://www.walsall.gov.uk)
- ▶ [emergencyplanningunit@walsall.gov.uk](mailto:emergencyplanningunit@walsall.gov.uk)
- ▶ 01922 650 000



## Dudley

- ▶ Dudley Metropolitan Borough Council, Council House, Priory Road, Dudley, DY1 1HF
- ▶ [www.dudley.gov.uk/council-community/emergencies/](http://www.dudley.gov.uk/council-community/emergencies/)
- ▶ [disaster.mgt@dudley.gov.uk](mailto:disaster.mgt@dudley.gov.uk)



## Wolverhampton

- ▶ Civic Centre, St Peter's Square, Wolverhampton, WV1 1SH
- ▶ [www.wolverhampton.gov.uk/community/incident-and-emergency-planning](http://www.wolverhampton.gov.uk/community/incident-and-emergency-planning)
- ▶ [emergency.planning@wolverhampton.gov.uk](mailto:emergency.planning@wolverhampton.gov.uk)



## Sandwell

- ▶ Resilience Team, Council House, Oldbury, B69 3DE
- ▶ [www.sandwell.gov.uk/emergencyplanning](http://www.sandwell.gov.uk/emergencyplanning)
- ▶ [emergency\\_planning@sandwell.gov.uk](mailto:emergency_planning@sandwell.gov.uk)



# More information

## Contact the Local Resilience Forum:



West Midlands Conurbation Local Resilience Forum,  
C3, 51 Park Lane, Aston, Birmingham, B6 5DL



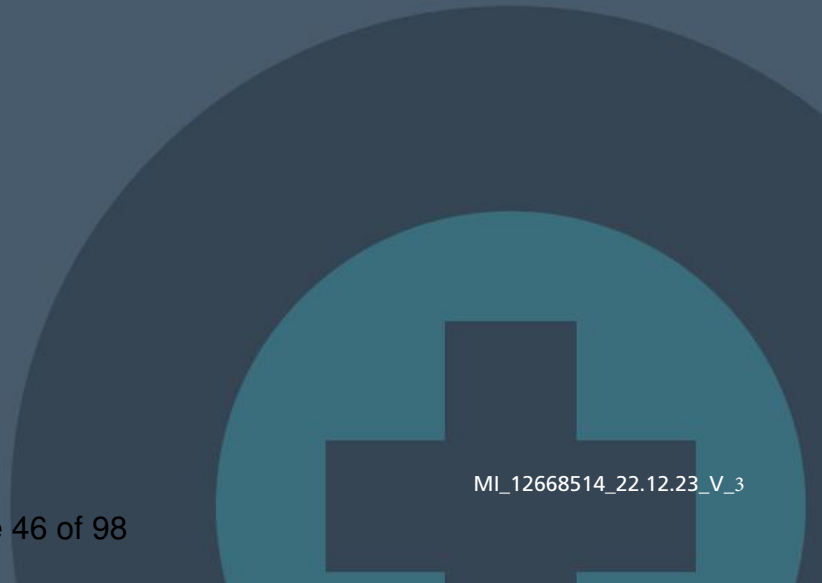
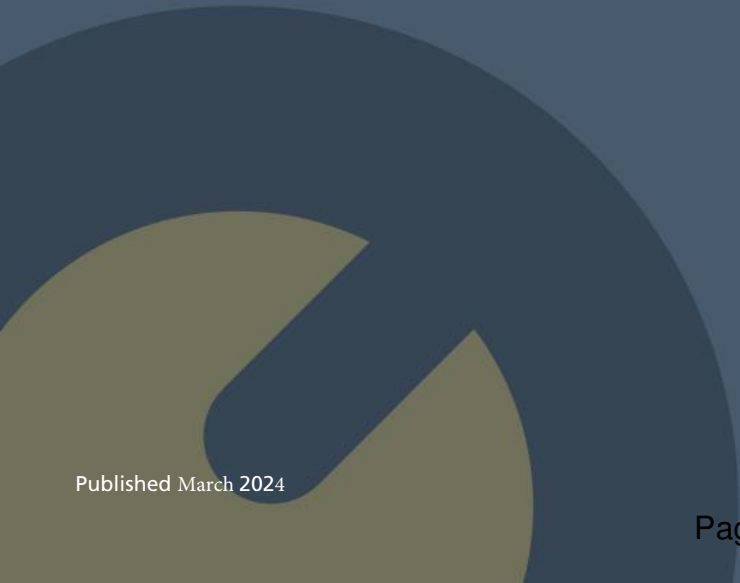
Steve Vincent: 07741 816253 Luke Martin: 07391 019528



[lrf\\_coordinator@westmidlands.police.uk](mailto:lrf_coordinator@westmidlands.police.uk)

## Accessibility

You may request a printed version of this Community Risk Register or get the content in alternative formats (easy to read or large print format).



**18 April 2024**

**Operation Freeway**

**Wards:** All

**Portfolio:** Deputy Leader & Regeneration

**1. Aim**

- 1.1. To manage and maintain the road network effectively and efficiently to facilitate transportation, supporting economic growth, and enhance the quality of life for residents and businesses.

**2. Recommendations**

- 2.1. The committee is asked to note the information provided in respect to Operation Freeway.

**3. Report detail – know**

- 3.1. The UK highway authority operates under a two-tier system comprising national and local levels. At the national level, National Highways oversee the strategic road network, largely motorways and trunk roads, ensuring consistency and strategic planning across the country. Local authorities, including Walsall Council, manage minor roads, including urban and rural routes, within their boundary.
- 3.2. The M6 Toll is a northern bypass for Birmingham and the West Midlands conurbation. In 1991, the decision was taken to build a new privately funded motorway. Midland Expressway Ltd was awarded the concession to build and manage the M6 Toll and the road opened in December 2003 and carries over 50,000 vehicles a day.
- 3.3. Operation Freeway is a strategic response plan, owned by National Highways, which aims to mitigate the impact of exceptional events on the strategic road network. It focuses particularly on the M6 between junctions 3a & 11a. The plan is classified as “official sensitive” and is therefore not publicly available to view.
- 3.4. The plan outlines the criteria for triggering Operation Freeway. These triggers include a declared major incident that results in the Strategic Road Network becoming inoperable in both directions for a time likely to exceed 24 hours.
- 3.5. In the event that a major incident is declared, a dynamic risk assessment is completed. Consultation with a regional tactical group is undertaken and authorisation is then sought from the Secretary of State for Transport to suspend toll charges on the M6 Toll for 24 hours.
- 3.6. The measures can be extended in 24 hour increments up to a full duration of three days.



3.7. Since its inception in 2008, Operation Freeway has been a consideration for any significant incident on the M6 in the West Midlands urban conurbation. However, no incident has ever reached the thresholds required to activate the measure.

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

4.1. Operation Freeway has no financial implications for Walsall Council.

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

5.1. Effective management of the UK strategic road network reduces inequalities by improving connectivity between regions, facilitating smoother access to economic opportunities, essential services, and education. Enhanced infrastructure benefits marginalised communities, promoting socio-economic balance and narrowing spatial disparities across the country.

#### **6. Consultation**

6.1. Operation Freeway requires coordination with various stakeholders, including the Central Motorway Police Group, Midlands Expressway Limited, and local authorities, to manage traffic flow and provide accurate information to the public.

#### **7. Decide**

7.1. The committee is asked to note the detail provided in this report.

#### **8. Respond**

8.1. Should the need to activate Operation Freeway arise and there be a likely impact on the local road network, Walsall Council would be actively involved in discussions and multi-agency action.

#### **9. Review**

9.1. Operation Freeway was initially created in spring 2008 and is currently on its 20th version.

9.2. Walsall Council do not directly influence the review cycle or content or the response plan. If a need to input was required, this would be channelled through existing arrangements with National Highways and the Department for Transport.

### **Background Papers**

None.

### **Authors**

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18 April 2024

**School Gate Parking Working Group – Recommendation Monitoring**

**Wards:** All

**Portfolio:** Street Pride

**1. Aim**

- 1.1. To provide a highway network that is safe for all users, facilitate active travel choices and enables access to education.

**2. Recommendations**

- 2.1. The committee is asked to note the progress that has been made in respect to school gate parking.

**3. Report detail – know**

- 3.1. At many locations across the borough, roads around schools experience a surge of traffic concentrated over a 50 minute period at school drop off and pick up times. This results in an increased risk of collisions with vulnerable road users and other motorists, unlawful parking, congestion and consequential impacts on air quality.
- 3.2. Statistics from the Department of Transport reveal that 14% of children killed on Great Britain's roads in 2018 were harmed during the morning school run between 7am and 9am and 23% after school between 3pm and 5pm. In Walsall, between 2017 and 2020, these figures were 10% and 18% respectively, lower than the national average in both instances.
- 3.3. In March 2022, schools were invited to partake in an online survey about school gate parking. 63 schools and early years' settings responded and of those establishments 63% said that school gate parking was always a problem around their site.
- 3.4. Between April 2022 and January 2023, a Scrutiny Overview Committee working group considered the multi-faceted approach that the council takes to manage school gate parking. They considered the following themes:
- a) Engineering
  - b) Partnerships
  - c) Education
  - d) Enforcement
- 3.5. The working group made 16 recommendations, provided at **Appendix A** of this report.
- 3.6. Progress against the recommendations is provided at **Appendix B**.

- 3.7. The most significant progression since the submission of the working group report is the implementation of moving traffic enforcement. In July 2023, the council was empowered to carry out enforcement activity at for prescribed offences at specific locations, including in respect to school streets. Cameras were installed at all ten school street locations and enforcement commenced in September 2023.
- 3.8. During the first six months, councils are required to issue a warning in the first instance and advise that any further contraventions at the same location will result in the issue of a penalty charge notice [PCN].
- 3.9. Across the ten school streets, the council issued 2,556 enforcement warnings and 432 PCNs during the 2023 autumn term.

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

- 4.1. Measures to improve road safety during peak school times, including the implementation of school streets enforcement, have been funded from surplus parking and bus lane income. This income can only be used for funding costs of enforcement, costs of operating public transport and highways improvements.

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

- 5.1. Enhancing road safety around school entrances plays a pivotal role in diminishing inequalities by creating a secure environment that benefits all students.
- 5.2. In economically disadvantaged areas, where families may rely on walking or public transport, safer routes to school ensure that children can travel to education providers without facing disproportionate risks. Additionally, opportunities to make active travel choices can help to address health inequalities, offering a sustainable and inclusive approach to enhance overall well-being and reduce disparities in health outcomes.

#### **6. Decide**

- 6.1. The committee is asked to note the work being carried out in respect to school gate parking.

#### **7. Respond**

- 7.1. Work to progress the recommendations of the 2023 report is continuing.

#### **8. Review**

- 8.1. A report regarding the recommendations will be provided to Cabinet in the new municipal year.

#### **Background Papers**

- **Appendix A:** Scrutiny Overview Working Group Recommendations
- **Appendix B:** Scrutiny Overview Working Group Recommendations Tracker
- Scrutiny Overview Working Group Report: [Improving School Gate Parking](#)

#### **Author**

Kathryn Moreton – Director [Place & Environment]  
[Kathryn.Moreton@Walsall.gov.uk](mailto:Kathryn.Moreton@Walsall.gov.uk)

## Scrutiny Overview Working Group Recommendations

Engineering

1. That the Council continue to support the roll out of the School Streets Programme through the continuation of investment into school enforcement static cameras.
2. The Head of Highways, Transport & Operations investigate, in consultation with the Head of Planning, the use of Section 106 contributions to improve the safety of roads surrounding schools.
3. That Head of Highways, Transport & Operations investigates the potential benefit of creating 20mph zones around schools as part of 'We Are Walsall 2040'.
4. That the Head of Highways, Transport & Operations investigate the creation of standard non-statutory signage for use on school premises outside schools in Walsall to encourage responsible driver behaviour with respect to parking and idling. The signage should include a warning that CEOs operate in the area.

Partnership

5. That Officers of the Council work in partnership with West Midlands Police to combat problem areas for the school gate parking. The Working Group support the establishment of a liaison group (to discuss enforcement activity) between the Council and the Police.
6. Continue to encourage parents/carers and pupils to use alternative methods of travel to and from school
7. That the Council produce a new education campaign before the start of the new school year on the issue of road safety and school gate parking a. To invite schools as part of this campaign to design new road signage and contribute to a road safety video aimed at parents and pupils.
8. To request that the Council's two representatives currently sitting on the Transport for West Midlands Transport Delivery Committee raise the relevant recommendations of this working group at a strategic level.
9. Request that the Portfolio Holder for Education and the Executive Director of Children's Services write to all head teachers in the Borough to highlight best practice and provide guidance (including the A\*Stars programme) in relation to safety of children on roads near their schools.

Education

10. That the Council continue to encourage schools currently not participating in the A\*STARS programme to become involved.
11. To encourage, through the A\*STARS Programme, parents/carers to access schools via sustainable modes, but if they must drive to park five minutes' walk from the school gate to alleviate congestion and to contribute to public health.



- a. Schools are requested to identify local parking provision (where possible) to provide park and walk opportunities.

### Enforcement

12. That the Head of Highways Transport & Operations explores the extension of Traffic Regulation Officers surrounding schools to maximise their use to improve safety.
13. To request that the Portfolio Holder for Regeneration write to the Secretary of State for Transport to ask that the Government support the rollout of powers to Councils to enforce via CCTV Traffic Regulation Orders and that loopholes in the existing legislation be closed, including supporting the granting of powers to Councils to enforce obstructions of highways offenses.
14. That the Council uses the Moving Traffic Offences powers once granted.
15. That the Head of Highways Transport & Operations work with APCOA to explore changing the uniform of Civil Enforcement Officers to make them more visible to the public and act as a deterrent.
16. That the level of enforcement around schools is increased.

## Scrutiny Overview Working Group Recommendations – Progress Tracker

Action	Detail	Status	Comments
Engineering			
1	That the Council continue to support the roll out of the School Streets Programme through the continuation of investment into school enforcement static cameras.		School street camera enforcement now in place at 10 schools with further opportunities for schemes, funded from parking and bus line income, being explored.
2	The Head of Highways, Transport & Operations investigate, in consultation with the Head of Planning, the use of Section 106 contributions to improve the safety of roads surrounding schools.		Section 106 Board was established in October 2022 and is ongoing with regular highways and transport officer representation
3	That Head of Highways, Transport & Operations investigates the potential benefit of creating 20mph zones around schools as part of 'We Are Walsall 2040'.		On hold - Awaiting revised government guidance on 20mph speed limits.
4	That the Head of Highways, Transport & Operations investigate the creation of standard non-statutory signage for use on school premises outside schools in Walsall to encourage responsible driver behaviour with respect to parking and idling. The signage should include a warning that CEOs operate in the area.		Railing banners with appropriate/considerate parking messages and anti-idling are available for schools to loan through the A*STARS programme. Additional permanent signage detailing restrictions is installed outside schools as standard.
Partnership			
5	That Officers of the Council work in partnership with West Midlands Police to combat problem areas for the school gate parking. The Working Group support the establishment of a liaison group (to discuss enforcement activity) between the Council and the Police.		Liaison with the police has been ongoing, particularly since the implementation of moving traffic enforcement. A local road safety working group comprising council officers, the police and other partners is being explored and considerable joint work already takes place regionally.
6	Continue to encourage parents/carers and pupils to use alternative methods of travel to and from school		This is promoted through the council's A*STARS programme.
7	That the Council produce a new education campaign before the start of the new school year on the issue of road safety and school gate parking (a) To invite schools as part of this campaign to design new road signage and contribute to a road safety video aimed at parents and pupils.		Resources are sent to guardians of new school starters promoting active travel methods and the associated benefits and explaining the parking restrictions and reasons to adhere to these. Transition training to pupils moving from primary to secondary school also promotes the use of active travel, coupled with

			<p>Bikeability training to educate pupils on using active modes of travel safely.</p> <p>Additional investment will need to be secured if a road safety video is to be delivered.</p>
8	To request that the Council's two representatives currently sitting on the Transport for West Midlands Transport Delivery Committee raise the relevant recommendations of this working group at a strategic level.		To be raised once a further update has been provided to Cabinet.
9	Request that the Portfolio Holder for Education and the Executive Director of Children's Services write to all head teachers in the Borough to highlight best practice, and provide guidance (including the A*Stars programme) in relation to safety of children on roads near their schools.		
Education			
10	That the Council continue to encourage schools currently not participating in the A*STARS programme to become involved.		Several new schools have joined the A*STARS programme this year as part of targeted engagement activity.
11	<p>To encourage, through the A*STARS Programme, parents/carers to access schools via sustainable modes, but if they must drive to park five minutes' walk from the school gate to alleviate congestion and to contribute to public health.</p> <p>(a) Schools are requested to identify local parking provision (where possible) to provide park and walk opportunities.</p>		<p>In the autumn term of this academic year (23/24) 24 schools have set up or plan to set up a 5 minute walk zone, 3 schools plan to introduce a park and stride scheme, 3 schools are hosting 'let's walk together' events and 4 schools either have or plan to set up a Walking Bus.</p> <p>The Walking or Wheeling scheme recorded 75,308 active journeys in the autumn term.</p>
Enforcement			
12	That the Head of Highways Transport & Operations explores the extension of Traffic Regulation Officers surrounding schools to maximise their use to improve safety.		Traffic regulation orders are amended twice yearly. Any amendments to the restrictions outside schools will be identified in partnership with the schools via our A*STARS engagement and delivered via this process.
13	To request that the Portfolio Holder for Regeneration write to the Secretary of State for Transport to ask that the Government support the rollout of powers to Councils to enforce via CCTV Traffic Regulation Orders and that loopholes in the existing legislation be closed, including supporting the granting of powers to Councils to enforce obstructions of highways offenses.		A consultation on enforcement of public highway obstructions already undertaken by the Department for Transport nearly 2 years ago – the consultation has now closed and the outcome is awaited.

			The implementation of moving traffic enforcement powers has significantly increased the scope of enforcement that local highway authorities can do via CCTV.
14	That the Council uses the Moving Traffic Offences powers once granted.		The council was granted moving traffic enforcement powers at specific locations, including all ten school streets, in July 2023.
15	That the Head of Highways Transport & Operations work with APCOA to explore changing the uniform of Civil Enforcement Officers to make them more visible to the public and act as a deterrent.		Uniform requirements for civil enforcement officers are detailed in the relevant legislation with limited scope for change.
16	That the level of enforcement around schools is increased.		The implementation of camera enforcement in respect to school streets and school keep clear markings has significantly increased enforcement provision.

**Scrutiny Overview Committee**

**Agenda  
Item No. 10**

**18 April 2024**

**Housing Standards Working Group Final Report**

**Ward(s):** All

**Portfolios:** Cllr A. Andrew – Regeneration

**Report:**

At its meeting on 28 September 2023, the Committee established a working group to consider housing standards in the Borough. The Working Group commenced and engaged with multiple stakeholders from January 2024 to gain further understanding of the issues within the sector. The final report is attached at Appendix 1 for approval by the Committee.

**Recommendations:**

**That, subject to any comments Members may wish to make, the final report of the Housing Standards Working Group be forwarded to the next meeting of Cabinet for discussion.**

Contact Officer:

Matt Powis

Senior Democratic Services Officer

[Matthew.powis@walsall.gov.uk](mailto:Matthew.powis@walsall.gov.uk)

01922 652156



# Housing Standards Working Group Report



As presented to the Scrutiny Overview Committee – 18 April 2024



Walsall Council

## **Foreword from the Lead Member Councillor A. Hicken.**

The Scrutiny Overview Committee asked members to form a working group to address concerns in regard to housing standards across the borough. As committee members, five of us volunteered to take on this task and have met over a number of months to examine evidence and conduct research. I am pleased to present the Housing Standards Working Group report along with a series of recommendations.

If this working group had been established just a few years ago this report would have looked very different. Over the last few years we as a society have faced the coronavirus pandemic, a cost of living crisis, and an incredible surge in the demand for housing. This has led to incredible pressures on both individuals and families not only across the borough of Walsall, but also nationwide.

A war in Europe has pushed rising energy prices and has plunged more residents into fuel poverty. There has become a fear of the cost of heating homes, which has discouraged people from ensuring that their home is kept at a healthy temperature. This has also contributed to less ventilation and worsening health conditions as a result.

The changing housing market and surge in demand has led to severe pressure on the housing waiting list. This has led to individuals and families living in properties which are not suited to their needs. This can range from individuals with accessibility issues, to families without enough bedrooms.

As we have seen during the coronavirus pandemic that people depend upon access to public open space. As residents increasingly live in properties that are unsuitable for their needs access to good local amenities is essential.

Members of this working group have had to work within a tight timeframe for delivery of this report. As a result, we have conducted independent research to understand the difficulties which were facing residents. It has been challenging to understand the issues and to work through possible recommendations in such a short window of time. As part of our work, we questioned social housing landlords, private landlord representatives, and also from teams from across Walsall Council.

As we conclude our work, it has become clear that the standard of housing across the borough is not only unacceptable, in some areas it has worsened in recent years. This report shows the something clearly has to change. Over the last few years fuel poverty has grown as a result of rising energy bills. We also believe that health conditions caused or worsened by the standard of housing is avoidable and should be treated as such.

As well as concerns over the number of people on the housing waiting list, and the unsuitability of some properties, we also examined the risks to those living in temporary accommodation. There is a real risk that temporary accommodation

can become increasingly long-term as the demand for properties grows. This not only places significant financial pressure on local authorities, but also increases the harm of people being placed into unsuitable properties.

Whilst we cannot solve our housing crisis without government support, it has become clear that efforts to increase housing supply will alleviate some demand in the market. This will create opportunities for movement in housing supply and demand and create more opportunities to allocate the right homes to the right people.

We were pleased to hear that one of our local social housing landlords, whg, have partnered with local health providers to proactively solve housing issues that affect their residents. Work done in this area will possibly lead to health benefits and put less long-term pressure on healthcare providers. We believe that this kind of partnership work will help increase the quality of life for residents and is something that should be encouraged and expanded upon with other social housing providers.

We have also found through our work that social landlords are more likely to be engaged with retrofit projects than private landlords. Retrofit projects are likely to improve energy efficiency of dwellings and as such, lower heating bills and create a more comfortable environment for tenants. Private landlords are often dependent on grant schemes to engage in such projects, which means that their tenants can sometimes be faced with larger energy bills as their homes are less energy efficient.

We were also concerned that the move to reduce costs by eliminating gas supplies from properties, also meant that more residents were forced into expensive electric heating. This inadvertently increases the risk of individuals and families falling into fuel poverty, as their bills can sometimes be around four times more expensive than those with gas-powered heating systems.

We also examined energy performance of both existing and new build properties. We felt that it was of vital importance to see retrofits on existing properties, but also improved standards of new housing, so that the condition of housing across the borough improved. We found that there is a risk that even new build properties will not be built to a high enough standard to prevent the need for retrofitting in the future. This will lead to a additional costs that could have been avoided, and by their very nature, mean that families will be living in properties which could have been made to a better standard.

As part of our work to examine the condition of housing across the borough, we found that public amenity was of importance to those living in poor housing conditions. We have seen during the coronavirus pandemic that people value public spaces and that they can play a role in improving both mental and physical health. As such, we feel that investment in local parks and green spaces will improve the quality of life for residents.

Housing policies should take into account the need for open space if we are to build more housing. Higher densification of housing in existing areas will also

mean that more people will make use of green spaces. We should react accordingly and make sure that they are well placed to cater for their increased use. Investment in these areas may also help to achieve other health related targets.

In this report you will find further information and a series of recommendations that we believe should be considered by policymakers. I would like to thank all members of the working group for their input, and also to thank those who engaged with us in our work.

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## **Introduction and Context**

Where people live impacts health, educational achievements, and life chances in general. Housing is a key determinant of health; poor quality housing being intrinsically linked with poor health. Condition of housing may either cause ill health or over the long term make health conditions worse. Addressing defect causes within homes can improve occupants' health and lower the costs to the NHS through fewer GP visits, fewer emergency admissions to hospital and fewer accidents that then require expensive and intensive rehabilitation.

Poor housing affects children particularly, not just in childhood but throughout their life. Guaranteeing all children, a decent quality home that their family can afford would transform lives for decades to come.

People should all be able to afford to rent or buy a home that meets their needs, whatever their income. Housing costs shouldn't stop people buying life's essentials or stand in the way of getting a job or higher pay.

All homes should be places of security and comfort, where people can relax free from risks and with the right support in place. Homes should support people's health and wellbeing, not make it worse.

Homes must be comfortable to live in, cheap to heat, and no longer reliant on burning expensive fuels for energy.

Investment in housing, and the dynamics of the housing market itself, have wide-ranging impacts on growth, jobs, skills, productivity, and financial stability at a local and national level. Housing strategies must actively support objectives for local growth and stability.

(‘Why We Need a Long-term Plan for Housing 2023’ - National Housing Federation)

## **Terms of Reference**

The draft terms of reference were discussed and agreed by a meeting of the working group that took place on 23<sup>rd</sup> January 2024. The terms of reference were subsequently considered at a meeting of the Scrutiny Overview Committee on 14<sup>th</sup> March 2024.

The full version of the Working Groups terms of reference can be found at Appendix 1 to this report. The Working Group was supported predominantly by:

Elise Hopkins – Director (Customer Engagement)  
Appollo Fonka – Strategic Housing and Standards Lead  
Nikki Gough – Democratic Services Officer

## Methodology

The Working Group has held six formal meetings during its investigations, considering the views of several witnesses. Members also met informally to progress their investigations.

The Working Group wished to understand how Walsall Council could design and deliver a long-term plan to meet the following themes, as set out in the National Housing Federation's report – 'Why we need a long-term plan for housing'.

1. Every child should live in a good quality, secure home with enough space to play and learn.
2. Everyone lives in a home they can afford, and that makes work pay.
3. Everyone lives in healthy and safe home, which meets their needs.
4. Everyone lives in a warm and energy efficient home.
5. Housing underpins local growth and economic stability.

In order to achieve this, adopted the following approach:

- Who do you want to see?
- When do you want to see them?
- What will you ask them?
- What other information will you want to see?

Members of the Working Group had regular informal meetings to information share and identify topics for further consideration. This was feedback at formal Working Group meetings.

## Membership

The Working Group membership consisted of the following Councillors:

Councillor A. Hicken  
Councillor A. Nawaz  
Councillor V. Waters  
Councillor M. Follows

## Witnesses

The Working Group met and interviewed the following witnesses:

Director, Customer Engagement.
Strategic Housing and Standards Lead.
Representative from the Private Landlord Steering Group.
Whg
Green Square Accord.
The Head of Regeneration.
The Portfolio Holder for Regeneration

## **Working Group Findings**

### **Enhancing Energy Efficiency**

The cost of heating a home has risen in recent years, this has pushed families into fuel poverty. The Working Group considered how the reduction of energy bills was key to improving not only comfort levels, but also the quality of houses. Residents can be fearful of adequately heating and ventilating their home due to the high cost, this worsens health conditions and affects the fabric of the property through damp and mould.

Members discussed the ways in which high quality insulation, on both new builds and retrofits, could be used to lower energy bills for residents whilst maintaining or increasing the health of residents and their homes. Concern was expressed that there was a large stock of older homes within the Borough, meaning that fuel bills would remain high, and the housing standard would remain poor.

It was acknowledged by the Working Group that some work had been done by Registered Social Landlords to improve their properties, Private Landlords often relied on Government subsidies to fund such works. Without sufficient grant funding available, the Working Group were concerned that private landlords would be unwilling to improve the energy performance of their properties. As the percentage of those in rented accommodation increases, this leaves an increasing number of residents at risk of higher energy bills and suffering from health conditions linked to their home. The Working Group would therefore like to see higher quality homes being constructed, with energy efficiency being a key consideration in construction.

The Working Group heard that the Council had adopted the Home Energy Conservation Act Action Plan, which sought to tackle fuel poverty within the Borough. In addition to working with energy companies to seek to bring funds and help to residents, the Council had a duty to enforce minimum energy efficiency standards in private rented properties under the Energy Efficiency (Private Rented Property) (England and Wales) Regulations 2015, which established a minimum level of energy efficiency for privately rented property in England and Wales.

Members discussed that energy efficiency and the reduction of energy bills for residents should be a key focus. It was acknowledged that an energy efficient home was more enjoyable and healthier to live in. The Working Group felt that it was important to encourage the adoption of better building standards for new constructions and the retrofitting of existing buildings with energy-efficient technologies. As new developments were created, communities could benefit from enhanced energy saving measures. It was acknowledged that homes built with better energy efficiency reduced energy usage and had lower energy bills, thus fuel poverty could be reduced. Members felt that in this request, consideration of appropriate energy efficiency should be done wherever possible, but with a particular focus on affordable homes.

Independent research was conducted by Members, and through this it became apparent that the current model of Energy Performance Certification was becoming increasingly ineffective in calculating energy efficiency improvements. Consideration was given to the suitability of the Energy Performance Certification (EPCs) and the benefits that this provided to residents. The Working Group was concerned that EPCs were not fit for purpose and suggested that a new approach to assess energy efficiency should be considered as EPC's were not effective at assessing the true energy cost of a property. This undermined efforts to create more affordable and healthier homes in communities. A Working Group Member provided information on 'Passivhaus', which was a system that used just 10% of the energy to heat a home compared to the UK average property would only ever reach an EPC-rating of 'C' due to the criteria used.

Members felt that it would be beneficial for the local authority to work with Registered Social Landlords to develop a comprehensive programme for retrofits to make homes more energy efficient. Members considered the role of the West Midlands Combined Authority and the Local Authorities' role in managing the issuing of grants for the renovation of social housing and in developing and managing a retrofit plan for Walsall. As part of this plan, it was considered beneficial to examine which areas of the Borough were most in need of energy saving measures and to assess the cost of such a plan.

## Quality of Housing

The Working Group considered the standard of housing in Walsall and was informed by the Strategic Housing and Standards Lead that the following types of complaints were most prevalent from service users:

1. Issues relating to damp and mould.
2. Excess cold due to lack of heating.
3. Falls around the home.

Preventing and treating damp and mould was highlighted by the Working Group as a priority. The Working Group considered ventilation and felt that it would be beneficial to conduct assessments to identify measures which could address any issues identified. This could include retrofitting older buildings with new ventilation systems or installing trickle ventilation.

Census data indicated that 7.8% of properties in Walsall had electrical central heating, which increased to above 35% in some areas of the Borough, and increased to 60-80% in some particular areas. The cost of heating properties using electric panel and oil radiators was far higher than other heating systems. The Working Group was concerned that an increasing number of tenants were facing fuel poverty, were struggling to heat their homes, and may therefore be fearful of allowing adequate ventilation into their properties. This could inevitably cause long-term health problems and should be a serious public health concern. The Working Group thought that improving the overall standard of housing by ensuring landlords were informed and engaged was important.

Members felt that poor air quality impacted on housing standards, and that a pro-active approach to the maintenance of properties to prevent poor health should be adopted by the local authority – this should include work to make sure that air quality was monitored.

The Working Group were supportive of a scheme operated by Walsall Housing Group which received referrals from healthcare providers if there was a health issue which could be related to housing standards. It was felt that this could be further expanded to identify such links and support that could be provided to residents.

There was an acknowledgment that the impact of anti-social behaviour on residents' health and wellbeing. Although outside of the remit of the Working Group it was suggested that the Council should give further consideration to the impact of anti-social behaviour on the quality of life of residents and how it could be tackled.

There was a concern regarding the increased use of temporary accommodation due to ongoing difficulties in the housing sector. This brings both a higher cost to the Council, but also often places families in unsuitable or unsustainable properties. It was suggested that where possible, and whilst demand dictated, reclaimed land and new housing supplies should be utilised to cater for those families currently living in temporary accommodation to mitigate this issue.



## Promotion of Housing Standards

The Working Group learned that the Housing Standards Service in Walsall was until August 2023, provided as part of the Housing Standards and Improvement Team. However, this team had been incorporated into Housing & Resettlement. Members were informed that the work of the team and noted that the team was principally one of law enforcement to secure remedial works in dwellings and supporting activities for landlords to help them provide safe and healthy dwellings for their tenants. Providing advice to tenants and acting as liaison between tenants and landlords was also routine for the team.

The Working Group heard that the Council responded to queries and complaints from tenants and other residents regarding problem private properties and where appropriate, took enforcement action using a range of legislation. Over the past 6 years, the team had received an average of around 715 service requests annually. Most of these related to general advice on tenancy related matters and to unsafe and dangerous living conditions in privately rented dwellings.

Members of the Working Group were happy to hear that the Housing Standards Team had a close working relationship with other sections of the Council including, Housing & Welfare Support, Community Protection, Environmental Health, Legal, Asset Management, Public Health, Planning and Building Control. It also worked closely with external organisations such as the West Midlands Fire and Rescue Service and the West Midlands Police. The Group noted that there were often overlaps between housing standards work and community protection enforcement functions such as empty properties, elements of drainage, structural noise in residential properties, and rubbish accumulations and pest infestation in residential premises.

There was a recognition of the role of the team in regulating the private rented sector and to improve the standard of properties through enforcement action, education, advice, and grant assistance. This was achieved through property inspections/visits, preparing, and issuing enforcement notices, preparing and issuing financial penalty fines, dealing with service requests, processing and issuing HMO and caravan site licences, reviewing and commenting on relevant planning applications, and seeking to bring long term nuisance empty properties back into use.

The Working Group considered the Renters Reform Bill which proposed considerable changes to the private rented sector with the intention of creating more security for tenants. Because the changes were so significant, the Government had consulted with tenants, landlords and agents.

The Working Group heard details of the proposed changes as detailed in the Renters Reform Bill, which included the following: -

- Section 21 or 'no fault evictions' would be abolished. Landlords would not be able to evict tenants after the end of a fixed term without giving a specific reason.
- Rented properties would not have a fixed term, they would have a "periodic tenancy" which means a rolling tenancy each month and no specific end date.

Two months' notice would be required by the landlord/tenant for the tenant to leave unless there were issues with rent payments or anti-social behaviour.

- Rents to be increased on an annual basis only, requiring two months' notice and tenants would be allowed to challenge excessive rises.
- Landlords would be required to join an Ombudsman Scheme.
- A new 'Privately Rented Property Portal' would be introduced to give landlords and tenants information on their rights and responsibilities. The portal would ensure that landlords demonstrated they were compliant with lettings legislation for example, showing their membership of the Ombudsman Scheme, who owned the property and the property's energy performance.
- Landlords would not be able to flatly refuse tenants with pets unless the property wasn't 'suitable', for example a large dog in a small flat or ownership was banned by a leasehold agreement. Both landlords and letting agents should be able to require pet insurance to cover any damages.
- Local authorities would be given more enforcement powers to crack down on criminal landlords.

In the future, landlords would also be required to provide homes which were of a specified 'decent standard' and would not be able to reject tenants because they had children or received benefits.

The Working Group was advised that where new legislation was introduced, there was often no corresponding resources to allow for its enforcement. For example, the proposals to the sector through the Renters Reform Bill. If approved, this bill would bring in additional responsibilities that the team would have to comply to on behalf of the Council. As such, additional requirements, would lead to an increased volume of work.

It was noted that there was not a national register of landlords in Walsall, however, there was a mailing list of landlords who had opted to join. This was alongside a landlord steering group to discuss common themes between landlords, the Council and other partners. The Working Group met with the Chair of the Landlord Steering Group to discuss challenges faced by the sector and explore the support it needed to provide a high quality of housing to Walsall residents. This included a better partnership with the Council and access to information and support in a timely manner. Members heard that this was previously provided and had been of great benefit to the sector.

There was a consideration of the challenges facing the sector, which included the complexity of the regulatory framework along with limited resources and capacity within Councils. It was noted that there was a lack of awareness of rights and responsibilities among both tenants and landlords. There were concerns that due to an ever-increasing housing demand, there was an imbalance of power between landlords and tenants, and this limited choice in the market. Members also considered the fast-changing nature of the sector (Air BnB, guardianship, rent-to-rent).

There was an acknowledgement that there were numerous high-quality landlords and letting agents providing a range of property types throughout the Borough to meet a broad range of housing needs. Whilst the biggest proportion of the private rented sector was well run by responsible landlords there was a serious concern about the housing standards of the bottom end of the housing market and the vulnerable residents who accessed it.

## **Housing Supply and Demand**

The Working Group heard from the Group Chief Executive and the Corporate Director of Operations & IT (whg) and considered the context and history of the social housing stock transfer in 2003. As part of this discussion, it was noted that Walsall's affordable housing stock had remained static over the last decade accounting for a quarter of the stock. Housing growth (5.7%) had kept up with household growth (4%) between 2011 and 2021 (ONS 2011 & 2021 Census), private sector properties made up 16% of the total stock.

The Group questioned challenges facing the social housing sector and was informed that demand far outweighed the supply of housing, despite whg being the biggest house builder in Walsall. An issue for whg was the lack of land supply, and often premium priced land. Land which had previously been used for industrial use was often uneconomical for landowners to sell, the Working Group was informed that construction costs had increased by 25%. Members also learned that it could prove difficult for whg to source contractors.

The Chief Executive informed the Group that a significant proportion of their stock was under occupied, despite efforts to provide incentives to free up larger houses. It was acknowledged that this may in part be due to close knit communities who did not want to move from their locality. To continue to build and invest more homes in the Borough it may be necessary to densify and design homes in a different way.

The types of homes being built was discussed and it was noted that it could depend upon the size of the site, although often a range of properties were built. Members wished to explore the use of modular homes in Walsall, however the Chief Executive stated that this type of housing would not necessarily achieve a quicker turnaround. This type of housing was not, by default, of better quality or cheaper by a significant amount to be of benefit. whg prioritised build quality, and it was stressed that a more energy efficient home had a higher build cost.

Members were informed that a key form of private rented property in Walsall was Houses in Multiple Occupation (HMO). The Working Group learned that the definition of a HMO included bedsits, shared houses, flats, lettings with their own facilities but which were not self-contained, and some types of poorly converted 'self-contained' flats. HMOs were properties that were occupied by a least 3 different tenants, forming more than 1 household whereby the tenants shared facilities such as cooking or sanitary facilities. The Working Group were concerned that HMO's may not provide a good standard of housing.

An assessment of HMO conditions (based on the 2019 Stock Condition Survey) had been undertaken and the details below summarised some key data:

- 2,030 HMOs (11.3% of all private rented stock).
- 356 HMOs (17.5% of all HMOs) have a Category 1 hazard.

Members discussed HMOs and were informed that in general they were both a popular and valuable type of residence for many younger residents and for residents on lower incomes who needed an affordable home. It was a more accessible form of tenure for many vulnerable residents than other forms. The Council was committed to ensuring that this type of accommodation, as with other forms, were of a good quality. Quality in this type of accommodation was represented by homes that were kept in good repair condition, not overcrowded, were safe and offered a reasonable standard of basic amenities such as bathrooms, bedrooms, and kitchens. It was recognised however, that there were landlords and agents who were not managing their HMOs effectively, however the Working Group noted the work of the Council to mitigate this issue.

The Head of Planning presented information in relation to a 'Article 4 direction' which was described as the removal of permitted development rights (meaning small HMOs would need to apply for planning permission). Walsall Council did not currently use Article 4 Directions to restrict houses in multiple occupation, however the Council had commissioned a company to gather data to determine if there was a need to apply for an Article 4 Direction. It was clarified that Article 4 Directions were for perpetuity. The use of supplementary planning documents (SPDs) was explored as a tool to improve the standard of HMOs. Officers confirmed that these could be built into the Walsall Local Borough Plan. When considering Article 4 directions, the Working Group felt that the following point should be acted upon and carried out:

- a) Conduct consultations with stakeholders, including landlords, tenants, local residents, businesses, and community groups to justify the introduction of the direction.
- b) Create detailed guidance documents for property owners, outlining the requirements and implications of the Article 4 direction including information as such as planning permissions, exemptions, and the application process for converting properties into HMOs.
- c) Allow a reasonable transition period for existing HMOs and those in the planning stages, providing clarity on how existing properties will be treated and any grace periods for compliance.
- d) Outline a clear enforcement strategy for non-compliance, including penalties and the process for addressing unauthorised HMOs.
- e) Provide resources and support for landlords to understand their responsibilities under the new regulations and for tenants to understand their rights.
- f) Establish a system for monitoring the impact of the Article 4 direction on the local housing market and community. Regularly review and, if necessary, adjust the approach to ensure it remains effective and responsive to changing circumstances.
- g) Launch a public awareness campaign to inform the community about the Article 4 direction, its objectives, and the benefits it aims to bring to the area.
- h) Consider collaborating with neighbouring local authorities to ensure a coordinated approach to HMO management, especially in areas where housing markets are interconnected such as the neighbouring Black Country authorities.

- i) Encourage the improvement of HMOs' sustainability and living standards by linking the Article 4 direction with broader housing quality initiatives, such as energy efficiency programs and minimum space standards.

The Working Group found that due to the lack of housing availability, residents were more likely to be in properties which were unsuitable for their needs. From growing families to people with accessibility issues, the definition of unsuitable was very dependent on the circumstances of the individual or family.

As the demand for housing increases and the availability of properties remains a challenge, the Working Group considered it important that a solution was found to these issues. Living in unsuitable properties could pose a risk to the health of the occupant and affect their quality of life.

## **Healthy Spaces and Communities**

The Working Group felt that the promotion of healthy spaces and communities was integral to the overall wellbeing of residents and contributed to the social, economic, and environmental vibrancy of an area. Members felt that further work should be done by the Council to facilitate healthy spaces when new developments were at the planning stage. If new developments considered physical activity, social cohesion, and access to green spaces it would benefit the health and wellbeing of communities.

The Working Group considered extreme weather events and measures that could take place to reduce their impact on communities. The following methods were considered to be of benefit and could be investigated further by the Council.

- a. Flood defences.
- b. Heatwave mitigation through tree planting and reducing the urban heat island effect.
- c. Sustainable urban drainage systems.

A Member conducted independent research into the principles outlined in the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) section on 'Promoting Healthy and Safe Communities'. Members felt that it was essential that communities were able to benefit from well maintained and good quality public amenities. As was seen during the pandemic, parks and open spaces were highly valued among residents and were beneficial in improving mental health and increasing levels of physical activity. As housing challenges continue, the Working Group considered good public amenities to be essential for health and wellbeing.



## Local Planning Policies and the Housing Strategy

The Working Group received and considered the Housing Strategy, which aimed to deliver the Walsall Plan priorities and support the Council's other strategies.

Members considered its six objectives:

1. Increase housing supply and choice for our residents.
2. Improve the energy efficiency of homes.
3. Improve housing conditions and tackle rogue landlords.
4. Create and maintain resilient and integrated communities.
5. Promote independent living, and health and wellbeing.
6. Preventing and reducing homelessness.

Members of the Working Group discussed key targets that had been set to deliver the strategy and the progress made to achieve these. The Group noted key targets and deliverables set in the Housing Strategy including achieving 25% of affordable housing on all applicable sites, which had been accomplished.

The Working Group considered that the Walsall Borough Local Plan outlined the Council's vision for the Borough. Policies should promote sustainable development while protecting and enhancing the local environment. Members acknowledged that the Council was in the process of preparing the Walsall Borough Local Plan and suggested that this was an opportunity to influence and shape the way that homes were built in the Borough.

Policies in relation to 'Technical Housing Standards', particularly with a focus on aspects like the 'Nationally Described Space Standard' (NDSS) were considered crucial for ensuring quality, sustainability, and comfort in housing. By focusing on these areas, new housing developments could not only meet the minimum space and quality requirements but also contribute positively to the overall living environment and community well-being.

The Working Group considered the following areas of benefit:

- Regular review of local building regulations and alignment with the latest Technical Housing Standards and best practices in housing design and construction.
- Technical Housing Standards to emphasise sustainability and accessibility.
- Implementation of a robust system for monitoring and evaluating the impact of the Technical Housing Standards on new housing developments.
- The balance of high standards alongside the need for affordable housing.
- Partnership work with housing associations, non-profit organisations, and community housing groups to ensure that standards were met in all sectors of the housing market, including social housing.

## Conclusion

As part of the Working Groups efforts to examine housing standards across the Borough, Members have become concerned at the issues facing families and individuals. There is a large proportion of individuals living in fuel poverty, and the standard of some housing is poor. Preventing and treating damp and mould should be particularly highlighted as a cause of deep concern.

Improving the standard of the housing stock in Walsall is a complex situation which does not have a simple fix. New build suitable housing for residents is dependent upon land availability and willingness of owners to supply that land, which is linked to commercial viability for the landowner. Where land is secured for construction and homes are built to a higher standard/more energy efficient this is more expensive to construct and purchase/rent – which is again linked to commercial viability. Social landlords in the Borough face issues with land availability and cost, and demand far outweighs supply.

Retrofitting of older stock is costly, slow and can displace residents, meaning careful partnership working is needed if any future large-scale schemes were to be planned. Social landlords will need to consider if retrofitting older homes is cost effective and the best way to improve housing standards in the Borough.

It is clear that, all Partners have a role to play in ensuring that the current and future housing stock of Walsall is of a good standard. This work will be underpinned by the Housing Strategy and legislation which gives the Council the power to become involved where necessary. The Group noted that the issues faced in Walsall are replicated nationally, with no clear best practice to draw from.

Through the investigations and information gathered by the Working Group, several recommendations have been identified and are listed below. These include work to educate homeowners/landlords, the improvement of existing properties and the construction of new properties. This combined with the use of planning policies can help to improve and future proof properties for the future – providing a higher standard of housing for Walsall residents.

## **Recommendations**

### ***Enhancing Energy Efficiency***

In order to improve the standard of housing in Walsall, the following is recommended:

1. That the Council consider a grant scheme or other incentives for property owners who improve their buildings energy performance.
2. That the 2025 – 2030 Housing Strategy contains priorities and actions on retrofitting properties to improve energy efficiency.
3. The Council works in partnership with Registered Social Housing Landlords and other Partners to review the cost effectiveness and benefits of retrofitting the housing stock in Walsall.
4. That Cabinet calls upon the West Midlands Combined Authority to write to the Government requesting that Councils be given the power to be more actively involved in the retrofitting plans for their area.
5. The Chairman of the Housing Standards Working Group, in conjunction with the Chair of the Scrutiny Overview Committee, write to Government to call for a review the methodology used to create Energy Performance Certificates to ensure they remain fit for purpose.

### ***Quality of Housing***

To improve the quality of housing in Walsall, the Council should:

6. Launch public awareness campaigns to educate residents and businesses about the importance of good ventilation and indoor air quality, including practical tips for improving air flow and reducing indoor pollutants.
7. Implement a program for monitoring indoor air quality in public buildings, such as schools, libraries, and community centres, to ensure they meet health-based standards. Publish the results to promote transparency and accountability.
8. Extend the scheme operated by WHG in offering housing assessments for individuals with health conditions living in all housing types.
9. Integrate ventilation and air quality improvements into broader climate adaptation plans, ensuring that buildings remain resilient and habitable as temperatures rise and air quality challenges increase.
10. Include air ventilation as a metric in future stock condition surveys.

### ***Promotion of Housing Standards***

11. That the Council should consider the following actions in relation to the promotion of Housing Standards:
  - a) Ensure regular inspections of privately rented properties to ensure compliance with housing standards and use enforcement powers to compel landlords to carry out necessary repairs and improvements, especially in cases where tenants' health and safety are at risk.

- b) Run public awareness campaigns to educate both landlords and tenants about the importance of regular maintenance, the potential health impacts of neglected repairs, and the support available from the council.
  - c) Support community-based initiatives and social enterprises that provide free or low-cost repair and maintenance services, especially targeting vulnerable populations or areas with higher needs.
  - d) Develop a robust system for reporting and tracking housing repair issues within the private rented sector.
  - e) Offer training and resources for landlords on property maintenance, legal responsibilities, and best practices in property management.
12. The Council should consider the assignment of a link officer to improve engagement with the Landlord Steering Group and the establishment of a Registered Social Landlord steering group to improve access to support services for landlords and to share best practice and common issues.

### ***Housing Supply and Demand***

13. Building on the work of the Derelict Land Taskforce, a Housing Land Taskforce be established to:
- a) unlock the borough's land supply, to continue to identify underused, derelict, or brownfield sites within the borough for residential development.
  - b) Engage with the West Midlands Combined Authority and/or Homes England to utilise their CPO powers to assist with this objective.
  - c) Set a target for the completion of a number of Compulsory Purchase Orders on derelict land and empty properties each year.
14. The Council should consider the evidence in favour of applying for an Article 4 direction to provide a strategic approach to manage and control the number of HMOs, ensuring that housing standards and community cohesion are maintained. If possible, the Article 4 direction should cover the entire Borough of Walsall, and/or a particular focus on areas where the proliferation of HMOs could detrimentally impact the housing market or community balance. This should include the following objectives:
- Preserving housing stock for families.
  - Maintaining neighbourhood character.
  - Ensuring a balanced community.
  - Sufficient provision for cooking and washing facilities.
15. The Council introduce policies to control and manage the growth of HMOs in a sustainable and proportionate way – limiting the effects of over-supply on local communities. The policy should also consider off-street parking, the sandwiching effect, radius, and proximity of other HMO's.
16. The Council should investigate the potential to establish a local lettings agency within the Council to manage private rental properties on behalf of landlords, offering a guaranteed rent scheme to provide a more cost-effective source of temporary accommodation and better standards for tenants.

## ***Healthy spaces and Communities***

To create healthy spaces and communities, the Council should consider the following:

17. New developments should contribute positively to the health and wellbeing of community by reducing environmental pollution and by engaging with communities in the planning process.
18. Develop policies to deal with climate change prevention measures to reduce vulnerabilities of communities to extreme weather events.

## ***Local Planning Policies***

That in recognition of the importance of the Walsall Borough Local Plan and associated planning policies, the following points are considered for inclusion:

19. Promote higher standards of construction, in relation to energy efficiency, for new build properties in the upcoming Walsall Borough Local Plan and associated planning documentation as required, such as Passivhaus.
20. That as part of the Walsall Borough Local plan the following should be promoted:
  - a. Mechanical ventilation systems are installed as standard on new-build.
  - b. Heat exchanger technology to recover heat and therefore lower energy usage whilst still maintaining adequate ventilation.
  - c. New builds to exceed national standards for ventilation and indoor air quality. (This would include advanced ventilation systems that ensure a consistent supply of fresh air).
  - d. Promote the development of green roofs, walls, and other green infrastructure, which can improve outdoor air quality and reduce pollution infiltration into buildings.
  - e. Consider introducing air quality as a planning consideration.
21. Technical Housing Standards, including space standards, are integrated into the local development plans and frameworks, such as the Walsall Borough Local Plan. This integration should consider the specific needs and characteristics of the local area while adhering to national standards.
22. Formally adopt the Nationally Described Space Standard within local planning policies to ensure that all new dwellings meet minimum space requirements. (This adoption should be backed by clear enforcement mechanisms to ensure compliance).
23. Ensure that the technical housing standards emphasise sustainability and accessibility, energy efficiency, water conservation, and design features that support aging in place and accessibility for people with disabilities.

## Scrutiny Overview and Scrutiny Committee – Housing Standards Working Group

### Initiation Document

Working Group Name:	Housing Standards Working Group
Committee:	Scrutiny Overview Committee
Municipal Year:	2023/24
Chair:	Councillor Hicken
Lead Officers:	Elise Hopkins (Director, Customer Engagement) Appollo Fonka (Strategic Housing and Standards Leas) Nikki Gough (Democratic Services Officer)
Membership	Councillors A. Nawaz, V. Waters, P. Bott, A. Hicken, Follows
Co-opted Members	Not specified

#### Context

- 1.1 During the first round of Overview and Scrutiny meetings, Housing Standards was identified as a potential working group topic. It was agreed that this Working Group would commence in January 2024.
- 1.2 Where people live impacts health, educational achievements, and life chances in general. Housing is a key determinant of health; poor quality housing being intrinsically linked with poor health. House condition may either cause ill health or make it worse. Addressing defect causes within homes can improve occupants' health and lower the costs to the health service through fewer GP visits, fewer emergency admissions to hospital and fewer accidents that then require expensive and intensive rehabilitation.
- 1.3 Poor housing affects children particularly severely, not just in childhood but throughout their life. Guaranteeing all children, a decent quality home that their family can afford would transform lives for decades to come.
- 1.4 People should all be able to afford to rent or buy a home that meets their needs, whatever their income. Housing costs shouldn't stop people buying life's essentials, or stand in the way of getting a job or higher pay.
- 1.5 All homes should be in places of security and comfort, where people can relax free from risks and with the right support in place. Homes should support people's health and wellbeing, not make it worse.
- 1.6 Homes must be comfortable to live in, cheap to heat, and no longer reliant on burning expensive fuels for energy.
- 1.7 Investment in housing, and the dynamics of the housing market itself, have wide-ranging impacts on growth, jobs, skills, productivity and financial stability



at a local and national level. Our housing strategy must actively support our objectives for local growth and stability.

## **Objectives**

- 2.1 To determine how Walsall Council can design and deliver a long-term plan to meet the following themes, as set out in the National Housing Federation's report – 'Why we need a long-term plan for housing'.
- 2 Every child should live in a good quality, secure home with enough space to play and learn.
- 3 Everyone lives in a home they can afford, and that makes work pay.
- 4 Everyone lives in healthy and safe home, which meets their needs.
- 5 Everyone lives in a warm and energy efficient home.
- 6 Housing underpins local growth and economic stability.

## **Scope**

In order to review the Borough's readiness to meet the themes outlined in the plan the working group will consider the following:

- 'Why we need a long-term plan for housing' - National Housing Federation's report.
- Stock Condition Survey 2019.
- Walsall Council Housing Strategy.
- Housing availability and need.
- Understanding the responsibility of tenants and landlords.
- Feedback from local residents.

In addition to the above we will also consider the readiness of other providers such as:

- Social Housing providers.
- Private Landlords.
- Housing of Multiple Occupation providers.

## **Equalities Implications**

The Equality Act 2010 protects children, young people and adults against discrimination, harassment and victimisation in relation to housing, education, clubs, the provision of services (including healthcare) and work.

The public sector equality duty in Section 149 of the Equality Act requires public bodies, including local authorities and healthcare providers, to take active steps to eliminate discrimination and to do positive things to promote equality.

## **Who else will contribute?**

6.1 Walsall Housing Group, Green Square Accord, Head of Regeneration, Cabinet Members National Housing Federation, National/local landlord forums. Feedback from local residents.

## **Timescale and Reporting Schedule**

The following dates are based upon the need for the working group to be completed in the same municipal year:

Terms of Reference to be approved by Overview Scrutiny Committee – 6 February 2024

Draft report to be considered by Working Group – Early April 2024

Final report to be considered by Overview and Scrutiny Committee – 18 April 2024

A detailed timetable of meetings and activities can be found at Appendix A.

### Risk Factors

The following table documents potential obstacles to the progress of the working group:

<b>Risk</b>	<b>Likelihood</b>	<b>Mitigation</b>
Short timescale to complete work.	<b>Medium</b>	Realistic expectations of what can be achieved. Clearly defined objectives and timetable.
Social Landlords are not able to engage within timescale.	<b>Medium</b>	Invite Partners as soon as possible, allow virtual attendance.
Objectives of the Group are broad within the timescales available.	<b>Medium</b>	Members complete research and information gathering outside of meeting – report back at meetings.

### Appendix A Timetable

<b>Date at 5pm.</b>	<b>Activity</b>
23 <sup>rd</sup> January	Initial meeting – Terms of Reference agreed.
6 <sup>th</sup> February	Terms of Reference presented to Scrutiny Overview Committee.
13 <sup>th</sup> February	Information and evidence gathering by Working Group.
26 <sup>th</sup> February	Information and evidence gathering by Working Group.
12 <sup>th</sup> March	Information and evidence gathering by Working Group.
21 <sup>st</sup> March	Information and evidence gathering by Working Group.
8 <sup>th</sup> April	Draft conclusions and recommendations agreed by Group.
18 <sup>th</sup> April	Present final report and recommendations to Scrutiny Overview Committee.

## Scrutiny Overview Committee – Area of Focus – 2023-24

	28 <sup>th</sup> September 2023	9 <sup>th</sup> November 2023	11 <sup>th</sup> December 2023	6 <sup>th</sup> February 2024	14 <sup>th</sup> March 2024	18 <sup>th</sup> April 2024
<p>Economic Growth, Enable greater local opportunities for all people, communities and businesses.</p> <p><i>Lead OSC: Economy &amp; Environment</i></p>		WMCA Annual report.		Walsall Borough Local Plan		
<p>People Encourage our residents to lead more active fulfilling and independent lives. People maintain or improve their health and wellbeing.</p> <p><i>Lead OSC: Social Care &amp; Health</i></p>						
<p>Internal focus, all Council services are customer focused, effective efficient and fair.</p> <p><i>Lead OSC: Scrutiny Overview Committee</i></p>	S106 monitoring	Recruitment and retention	Q2 financial monitoring  Draft Budget & Capital Programme	Final report on Budget & Capital Programme	S106 monitoring  Electoral Services report (impact of new legislation)  Housing Working Group Terms of Reference	Marketing and advertising  Emergency Planning and Operation Freeway
<p>Children have the best possible start and are safe from harm, happy, healthy and learning well</p> <p><i>Lead OSCs: Children's &amp; Education</i></p>						School Gate Working Group recommendation monitoring.
<p>Communities are empowered so that they feel connected and that they belong in Walsall. Create safe and healthy places whilst building a strong sense of community.</p> <p><i>Lead OSC: Scrutiny Overview Committee</i></p>	Violent crime – WM Police	Housing waiting list			Social Housing providers	Housing Working Group – Final Report

Notes: Council Plan themes can be cross cutting for all Overview and Scrutiny Committees. Lead Overview and Scrutiny Committees identified for reference. Quarterly Financial Monitoring circulated via email.

## Scrutiny Overview Committee – Area of Focus – 2023-24

- WMCA – Update – Briefing report to be circulated.
- Longhurst Group – Social Housing Update.

Notes: Council Plan themes can be cross cutting for all Overview and Scrutiny Committees. Lead Overview and Scrutiny Committees identified for reference. Quarterly Financial Monitoring circulated via email.



## **FORWARD PLAN OF KEY DECISIONS**

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

**8 APRIL 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  
MAY 2024 TO AUGUST 2024 (08.04.2024)**

1	2	3	4	5	6	7
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
67/23 (4.12.23)	<b>Council Plan 2022/25 – Q3 23/24:</b>  To note the Quarter 3 2023/24 (outturn) performance against the Markers of Success in the Council Plan 2022/25.	Cabinet  Non-key Decision	Elizabeth Connolly  <a href="mailto:Elizabeth.Connolly@walsall.gov.uk">Elizabeth.Connolly@walsall.gov.uk</a>	Internal Services	Cllr Bird	17 April 2024
22/24 (18.3.24)	<b>Acquisition of a Property in Pelsall for Operational Purposes:</b>  To approve the acquisition of a property for operational purposes.  <i>This will be a private session report containing commercially sensitive information.</i>	Cabinet  Key Decision	Nick Ford  <a href="mailto:Nick.Ford@walsall.gov.uk">Nick.Ford@walsall.gov.uk</a>	Internal Services	Cllr Andrew	17 April 2024
20/24 (4.3.24)	<b>Protective Characteristics for Care Leavers:</b>  To agree that ‘care experience’ be treated as if it were a Protected Characteristic under the Equalities Act 2010, so that decisions on future services and policies made and	Cabinet  Key Decision	Zoe Morgan  <a href="mailto:Zoe.Morgan@walsall.gov.uk">Zoe.Morgan@walsall.gov.uk</a>	Internal Services	Cllr Elson	17 April 2024

	adopted by the council consider the impact on people with care experience.					
13/24 (5.2.24)	<p><b>Multifunctional Devices leasing contract:</b></p> <p>To consider the award of a 5-year contract for the leasing of multifunctional devices (MFDs) and production print devices.</p> <p><i>This will include a private session report containing commercially sensitive information.</i></p>	Cabinet  Key Decision	Sharon Worrall  <a href="mailto:Sharon.Worrall@walsall.gov.uk">Sharon.Worrall@walsall.gov.uk</a>	Internal Services	Cllr Ferguson	17 April 2024
19/24 (4.3.24)	<p><b>Compact Sweeper Hire Contract:</b></p> <p>Award of contract for 5 hired compact sweepers (plus a spare) for 6 years. Street Cleaning – Clean &amp; Green.</p> <p><i>This will include a private session report containing commercially sensitive information.</i></p>	Cabinet  Key Decision	Den Edwards  <a href="mailto:Den.Edwards@walsall.gov.uk">Den.Edwards@walsall.gov.uk</a>	Internal services	Cllr Murphy	17 April 2024
21/24 (4.3.24)	<p><b>Healthwatch Contract Extension:</b></p> <p>For Cabinet approval to extend the current contractual arrangements for Healthwatch under Reg 72 to allow for full design, tendering and implementation.</p>	Cabinet  Key Decision	Grace Charles  <a href="mailto:Grace.charles@walsall.gov.uk">Grace.charles@walsall.gov.uk</a>	Internal Services	Cllr Pedley	17 April 2024
10/24 (5.2.24)	<p><b>Surveillance and Access to Communications Data:</b></p>	Cabinet  Key Decision	David Elrington  <a href="mailto:David.Elrington@walsall.gov.uk">David.Elrington@walsall.gov.uk</a>	Internal Services	Cllr Perry	17 April 2024

	To review the authority's performance as regards directed surveillance and to approve an updated policy for surveillance and the interception of communications data.					
12/24 (5.2.24)	<b>Walsall Safer Streets – Palfrey Big Local and General Update:</b>  To cover the work of Palfrey Big Local, their resident led approach and the outcomes they have achieved.	Cabinet  Non-key Decision	Paul Gordon  <a href="mailto:Paul.Gordon@walsall.gov.uk">Paul.Gordon@walsall.gov.uk</a>	Internal Services  Palfrey Big Local	Cllr Perry	17 April 2024
23/24 (18.3.24)	<b>Commercial Strategy:</b>  To agree the strategic approach to generating income, reducing costs, fostering an entrepreneurial culture, forming partnerships, and investing in businesses to support local economies and social objectives	Cabinet  Key Decision	Michele McPherson  <a href="mailto:Michele.McPherson@walsall.gov.uk">Michele.McPherson@walsall.gov.uk</a>	Internal Services	Cllr Bird	June 2024
24/24 (8.4.24)	<b>Interim provision of street lighting services:</b>  To ensure the provision of street lighting between the end of the PFI and the start of the next term contract.	Cabinet  Key Decision	Katie Moreton  <a href="mailto:Kathryn.Moreton@walsall.gov.uk">Kathryn.Moreton@walsall.gov.uk</a>	Internal Services	Cllr Andrew	June 2024
16/24 (14.02.24)	<b>Playing Pitch and Outdoor Sports Strategy:</b>  To adopt a new strategy and establish a council led steering group to undertake ongoing monitoring and annual update.	Cabinet  Key Decision	Jaki Brunton-Douglas  <a href="mailto:Jaki.Brunton-Douglas@walsall.gov.uk">Jaki.Brunton-Douglas@walsall.gov.uk</a>  Black Country PPOSS - Overarching Strategic Framework	Internal Services	Cllr Flint	June 2024

			Walsall PPOSS - Assessment Report			
57/23 (6.11.23)	<p><b>Walsall Net-Zero 2041 Climate Strategy:</b></p> <p>To approve the Walsall Net-Zero 2041 Strategy.</p>	Cabinet  Key Decision	<p>Katie Moreton</p> <p><a href="mailto:Kathryn.Moreton@walsall.gov.uk">Kathryn.Moreton@walsall.gov.uk</a></p>	Internal Services	Cllr Flint	July 2024
66/23 (4.12.23)	<p><b>Waste Management Strategy Update - Fryers Road Household Waste Recycling Centre redevelopment (HWRC):</b></p> <p>That Cabinet approve the pre-tender budget for the redevelopment of a larger Fryers Road HWRC and agree to use the Pagabo framework (design and build stages) for the procurement of Fryers Road HWRC.</p>	Cabinet  Key Decision	<p>Katie Moreton</p> <p><a href="mailto:Kathryn.Moreton@walsall.gov.uk">Kathryn.Moreton@walsall.gov.uk</a></p> <p>Stephen Johnson</p> <p><a href="mailto:Stephen.Johnson@walsall.gov.uk">Stephen.Johnson@walsall.gov.uk</a></p>	Internal Services	<p>Cllr Andrew</p> <p>Cllr Murphy</p>	July 2024

**Black Country Executive Joint Committee**  
**Forward Plan of Key Decisions**

**Published up to June 2024**

<b>Date Created</b>	<b>Key Decision</b>	<b>Contact Officer</b>	<b>Main consultee</b>	<b>Date of meeting</b>
	No decisions scheduled.			



# West Midlands Combined Authority

## Forward Plan



## Forthcoming key decisions

Title of key decision:	Decision to be taken by and date:	Open or Exempt:	Portfolio Lead	Employee to contact:
<b>Arrangements for Mayoral Question Time with MPs</b> To agree the arrangements for mayoral question time sessions with the region's MPs.	WMCA Board 14 June 2024	Open	Andy Street Mayor of the West Midlands	Jonathan Gibson Head of Policy & Public Affairs
<b>Penalty Fares for Midland Metro</b> Following public consultation, to agree a new penalty fare amount and to consider moving to a proposed two-tier penalty structure, where the fee amount will reduce for early payment.	WMCA Board 14 June 2024	Open	Councillor Mike Bird Portfolio Lead for Transport	Chris Hopkinson Owner Representative - West Midlands Metro
<b>Private Sector Representation</b> To consider retaining existing private sector representation on WMCA boards until such time as the future Single Settlement governance structure is known.	WMCA Board 14 June 2024	Open	Councillor Stephen Simkins Portfolio Lead for Economy & Innovation	James Hughes Member Relationship Manager
<b>Bus Options Report</b> To consider options for the future delivery of the region's bus network.	WMCA Board 19 July 2024	Open	Councillor Mike Bird Portfolio Lead for Transport	Steven Hayes Head of Network Transformation
<b>Key Route Network Review 2023/24</b> To approve the amended Key Route Network within the WMCA area.	WMCA Board 19 July 2024	Open	Councillor Mike Bird Portfolio Lead for Transport	Rachel Ing Corridor Manager

## **The Forward Plan**

This document sets out known 'key decisions' that will be taken by the West Midlands Combined Authority (WMCA) over the coming months.

Forthcoming key decisions are published online to meet the statutory 28 day notification rule for each meeting where a key decision will be taken. Where it has not been possible to meet the 28 day rule for publication of notice of a key decision or an intention to meet in private, the relevant notices will be published as required by legislation as soon as possible.

### **What is a key decision?**

A 'key decision' means a decision of the Mayor, WMCA or officer which is likely:

- (a) to result in the WMCA incurring expenditure, making savings or generating income amounting to £1m or more; or
- (b) to be significant in terms of its effects on communities living or working in an area comprising two or more wards in the area of the WMCA

The report relating to a decision, together with any other documents being considered, will be available five clear working days before the decision is to be taken (unless the documentation contains exempt information).

The forward plan also provides notice of when the WMCA may decide to exclude the press and public during consideration of a particular matter due to the potential for disclosure of confidential or exempt information. The grounds upon which local authorities can exclude the press and public are specified by law and details of the exempt categories are available on request from the Governance Services team ([governance.services@wmca.org.uk](mailto:governance.services@wmca.org.uk)).

Councillors or members of the public wishing to:

- make a representation about why a matter should be heard in public, or
- submit information to the decision-making body about an item in the forward plan, or
- request details of relevant documents, or
- seek advice about the WMCA's decision-making arrangements,

should contact the Governance Services team: [governance.services@wmca.org.uk](mailto:governance.services@wmca.org.uk)

## Scrutiny Overview Committee – Recommendation Tracker (23/24)

Committee Meeting Date	Agenda Item	Action/Recommendation	Officer responsible	Status	Target Completion Date	Notes
12 December 2022	Customer Engagement	That data be shared with Members regarding: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a. A detailed breakdown on the time it takes calls to be answered across the Council.</li> </ul>	Elise Hopkins	In progress		This item has been delayed due to progress on a new customer demand dashboard.
28 <sup>th</sup> September 2023	West Midlands Police – Update on Policing within Walsall	That Cabinet are requested to: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a. Ensure Walsall Council works with West Midlands Police to improve road safety and reduce road harm in the Borough.</li> <li>b. Consider the feasibility of co-locating the Council's community protection teams alongside West Midlands Police to increase co-operative working.</li> </ul>	Democratic Services	Completed	13 December 2023 – Cabinet	Response provided on the Cabinet Decisions list on 14 December 2024. This can be accessed <a href="#">here</a> .

<p><b>28<sup>th</sup> September 2023</b></p>	<p>Areas of Focus 2023-24</p>	<p>Democratic Services assess the feasibility of collating all items related to police and judicial matters which could be considered by the Council's Overview and Scrutiny Committees.</p>	<p>Craig Goodall</p>	<p>Completed</p>		<p>A review indicated that the police had been required at 3 meetings in the last twelve months. This was reported to SOC in November 2023 who were content to continue inviting the police to attend meetings on an as required basis.</p>
<p><b>9 November 2023</b></p>	<p>WMCA Annual Report</p>	<p>That those members appointed to the West Midlands Combined Authority, Transport for West Midlands, Fire Authority and the Police and Crime Panel provide an annual report to full Council.</p>	<p>Democratic Services</p>	<p>In progress</p>	<p>TBC</p>	

9 November 2023	Recruitment and Retention	<p>A Member requested figures relating to internal promotions with a specific breakdown on ethnic backgrounds. Response would be provided in writing.</p> <p>Electronic exit interview forms were provided to those employees leaving the Council. In addition, face to face exit interviews could be requested on demand as appropriate. A breakdown of the reasons and figures on exit monitoring would be provided to the Committee in writing.</p>	Michele Leith Nicola Rickhuss	Completed		Emailed on 26 February 2024
9 November 2023	Local Authority Control of Housing Waiting List	A discussion ensued on the rights of tenants in respect of disrepair and notice of repossession. It was agreed for information on this matter to be disseminated to all Councillors.	Elise Hopkins	Completed		Emailed on 5 February 2024
11 December 2023	Budget and Capital Programme Feedback	<p>A number of questions were raised in respect of discussions from the Budget and Capital Programme (Forecast Revenue &amp; Capital Outturn):</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Renovation of Park Tennis Courts</li> <li>• One Palfrey Big Local</li> </ul>	Stuart Wootton	Completed		Circulated on 20 December 2023



		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Social Housing Decarbonisation Scheme Reduction</li> </ul>				
	Budget and Capital Programme Feedback	A breakdown of temporary accommodation numbers would be circulated to the Committee.	Elise Hopkins	Completed		Circulated on 6 February 2024
	Budget and Capital Programme Feedback	Officers confirmed that a study would be carried out on whether it would be feasible for the Council to incentivise one-off annual Council Tax payments. This would be subject to whether the Council achieved better investment returns and cashflow as a result.	Shaun Darcy	Completed		Circulated on 6 February 2024
14 March 2024	Electoral Services – Impact of new legislation	A Member sought clarification on the number of overseas electors on the electoral register	Helen Dudson	Completed		Circulated on 10 April 2024

	Social Housing	A Member sought clarification on the number of WHG homes which were thermowrapped.	Fay Shanahan	In progress		
	Social Housing	A Member sought clarification on the number of reported instances of mould and damp in WHG properties.	Fay Shanahan	In progress		
	Section 106 Monitoring	A concern was raised in respect of outstanding S106 monies for Darlaston including projects planned and uncompleted works. It was noted a response would be provided in writing from the Healthy Spaces Team.	TBC			