



Walsall Council

You are hereby summoned to attend a meeting of the Council of the Metropolitan Borough of Walsall to be held on **MONDAY the 8TH day of NOVEMBER 2021 at 6.00 p.m.** at the Town Hall, Walsall.

Public access via: <https://youtu.be/lxYOWzI4tMY>

Dated this 29th day of October 2021.

Yours sincerely,

Chief Executive.

The business to be transacted is as follows:

1. To elect a person to preside if the Mayor and Deputy Mayor are not present.
2. Apologies.
3. To approve as a correct record and sign the minutes of the meeting of the Council held on 20th September, 2021 (**pages 5 to 16**)
4. Declarations of interest.
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. Mayor's announcements.

7. Appointment of Deputy Mayor for the remainder of the Municipal Year 2021/2022.
8. To receive any petitions
9. To answer any questions in accordance with Council procedure rules:
 - (a) From the public: None.
 - (b) From members of the Council:

Cllr Worrall:-

In order for Walsall Council to celebrate the Commonwealth Games and provide lasting beneficial legacy to the citizens of Walsall, I and residents that are cyclists and have disabilities are proposing a fully accessible cycling and walking link between Walsall Gallery Square via the Arboretum to the Commonwealth Games site at Perry Barr, to be named "The Commonwealth Way."

We have researched the route in detail: it avoids the dangers and pollution of busy main roads, using instead properly-surfaced canals towpaths and park and green space paths, linked as necessary via lesser-used roads, to provide a healthy, safe, relatively low-cost, link to and from the Games. Details will be circulated to each member of Council, and appropriate Council officers, before the Full Council meeting on 8 November

We have also researched similarly accessible, low-cost, feeder links from Darlaston, Willenhall, Bloxwich and Pelsall into the proposed common route to the Games site.

May I ask the portfolio holders for Regeneration, and Clean & Green: Cllrs. Andrew and Butler, respectively, to say whether they might be minded to support the principle of creating such a commemorative link and, if they do, to ask officers to evaluate options and a timetable for creating it, perhaps using our proposals as a starting point, and linking as appropriate with partners such as our neighbouring authorities at Birmingham and Sandwell and the Canal & River Trust as a major player?

Cllr Smith:-

Given that at the Council Meeting of 20/9/21, this Council voted unanimously to pass the following Notice of Motion:

"This Council notes the widespread public concern, bordering on anger by many residents across the Borough, at what is seen as a deterioration in the services of many GP Practices/Health Centres; Concerns about:

- Difficulty getting through on the phone to many of them.
- Difficulty getting a doctor's appointment within a reasonable time, especially a face to face appointment

- Extra pressure put on A&E as a result of many patients being unable to obtain satisfactory responses from their GP Practices/Health centres, thus feeling the only alternatives being A&E or the Urgent Care Walk-in Centre, where patients could and often do, have a wait of several hours before being treated.
- Particular problems around inequality that the shift away from face to face meetings and towards more phone appointments and online appointments pose, especially for patients who may be profoundly deaf, unable to speak, have language barrier issues, be visually impaired, have serious mental health issues, have learning difficulties and those without the appropriate skills and/or access to computers and the internet.

and consequently this Council resolves to use the maximum influence that it has to engage with the appropriate organisations and bodies including its own Health and Well Being Board, Healthwatch Walsall, Walsall's Members of Parliament and the Department of Health and Social Care, in order to a) draw attention to this concern and b) call for a massive improvement in what is perceived by many to be an deteriorating and unacceptable service for so many."

Can you tell me, this Council and the public what action has been taken since then by Council Officers to act on this Resolution and in particular, which bodies/organisations/individuals have been contacted, and what responses have been forthcoming as a result?

10. **Portfolio holder briefings.** To receive a 5 minute presentation from the following portfolios:

- (a) Education and Skills – Councillor Towe (**pages 17 – 25**)
- (b) Clean and Green – Councillor Butler (**to follow**)

(Note: A member of the Council may ask the portfolio holder any question and another associated question without notice upon each report. Questioning by members is limited to 10 minutes for each report presented.)

11. To consider the following motion, notice of which has been duly given by **Councillors A. Nawaz, K. Hussain, N. Gultasib, R. Worrall, I. Robertson, S. Nasreen, S. Ditta and H. Bashir.**

This Council accepts and adopts in full, with all examples therein, the All Party Parliamentary Group on British Muslims' definition of Islamophobia, which is:-

'Islamophobia is rooted in racism and is a type of racism that targets expressions of Muslimness or perceived Muslimness'

And further resolves to act and combat robustly all forms of Islamophobia through its internal and external policies.

12. To consider the following motion, notice of which has been duly given by **Councillors Nawaz and Robertson.**

“Council recognises the importance, to all communities and countries, of the Glasgow COP26 conference where Countries are meeting to agree a way forward to combat climate change.

The Council wishes to develop local measures that could be put into place to contribute to this agenda here in Walsall and resolves to establish a cross party working group to engage with a wide range of partners both in the public, private and voluntary sectors to develop a set of recommendations as to how we could make changes to enable and promote a green agenda here in Walsall.”

13. To consider the following motion, notice of which has been duly given by **Councillors Nawaz and K. Hussain.**

“This Council regrets the decision taken to cease the £20 uplift on Universal Credit and acknowledges many Walsall families will be detrimentally impacted upon by this decision.

This Council recognises the cumulative impact of rising utility bills, rising inflation, increase in transport costs, increase in fuel cost and many other rises that have added to the cost of living for our residents and have pushed many into financial hardship facing choices of buying food to feed their children or keeping them warm.

This Council resolves to write to the three Walsall MP’s asking them to publically acknowledge the above and to publically call for the reversal of the decision to cease the £20 UE uplift and to write to the appropriate minister to inform him / her of the impact on our most vulnerable families.”



Walsall Council

Minutes of the **ORDINARY MEETING** of the Council of the Walsall Metropolitan Borough held on **Monday 20th September, 2021, at 6.00 p.m.** at the Town Hall, Walsall.

Present

Councillor R. Burley (Mayor) in the Chair

Councillor G. Ali

“ B. Allen
“ H. Bashir
“ M.A. Bird
“ C. Bott
“ P. Bott
“ O. Butler
“ A.G. Clarke
“ S.J. Cooper
“ D. Coughlan
“ S. Coughlan
“ S.R. Craddock
“ S.K. Ditta
“ S. Elson
“ K. Ferguson
“ G. Flint
“ M. Follows
“ N.Z. Gultasib
“ A.D. Harris
“ L.A. Harrison
“ A.J. Hicken
“ A. Hussain
“ K. Hussain
“ D. James
“ L.D. Jeavons
“ P. Kaur

Councillor E. Lee

“ Mrs. R.A. Martin
“ F. Mazhar
“ K. Murphy
“ J. Murray
“ S. Nasreen
“ A.A. Nawaz
“ M. Nazir
“ K. Pedley
“ G. Perry
“ W. Rasab
“ L.J. Rattigan
“ I.C. Robertson
“ S. Samra
“ K. Sears
“ G. Singh Sohal
“ P. Smith
“ C.A. Statham
“ M.A. Statham
“ C.D.D. Towe
“ A. Underhill
“ V.J. Waters
“ J. Whitehouse
“ T.S. Wilson
“ R.V. Worrall
“ A. Young

17. **Apologies**

Apologies for non-attendance were submitted on behalf of Councillors A. Andrew C. Creaney, N. Gandham, S. Johal and A. Nazir

18. **Minutes**

Resolved

That the minutes of the meetings of the Council held on the 26th May, 2021, copies having been sent to each member of the Council, be approved as correct records and signed.

19. **Declarations of interest**

Councillors Allen and Perry declared an interest in item 19 - Notice of Motion – GP Practices / Health Centres.

Councillor Bashir declared an interest in item 17 – Notice of Motion – Universal Credit.

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

There were no items to be considered in private session.

21. **Mayor's announcements**

Death of Councillor Harban's Sarohi

The Mayor referred to the death of Councillor Harbans Sarohi, a member of Walsall Metropolitan Borough Council from May 2000 to July 2021, elected Deputy Mayor on May 2021. The Mayor and Councillors A. Nawaz, S. Sohal, M. Bird, P. Smith and K. Hussain paid tribute to Councillor Harbans Sarohi, following which it was **moved** by the Mayor, duly seconded and:

Resolved:

That this Council have heard with deep regret of the death of Councillor Harbans Sarohi, a member of Walsall Metropolitan Borough Council from May 2000 to July 2021, elected Deputy Mayor in May 2021, and places on record their appreciation of his services to the borough over a period of many years and expresses its condolences to his family at this sad time.

22. **Appointment of Deputy Mayor 2021/22**

It was **moved** by Councillor Nawaz and seconded by Councillor Jeavons:

That Councillor Sean Coughlan be appointed Deputy Mayor of this Borough for the remainder of the municipal year 2021/22.

The motion having been put to the vote was declared **lost** – the voting being recorded as follows:

**For the motion –
18 members**

Cllr: Nawaz
Burley
Bashir
C. Bott
P. Bott
D. Coughlan
S. Coughlan
Ditta
Gultasib
K. Hussain
Jeavons
Mazhar
Nasreen
M. Nazir
Robertson
Underhill
Worrall
Young

**Against the motion –
34 members**

Cllr: Bird
Ali
Allen
Butler
Clarke
Cooper
Craddock
Elson
Ferguson
Flint
Follows
Harris
Harrison
Hicken
A. Hussain
Kaur
Lee
Martin
Murphy
Murray
Pedley
Perry
Rasab
Rattigan
Samra
Sears
Singh Sohal
Smith
C. Statham
M. Statham
Towe
Waters
Whitehouse
Wilson

**Abstentions –
1 member**

Cllr: James

At this juncture, the following members left the room and did not return.

Councillors, Nawaz, Burley, Bashir, C. Bott, P. Bott, D. Coughlan, S. Coughlan, Ditta, Gultasib, K. Hussain, Jeavons, Mazhar, Nasreen, M. Nazir, Robertson, Underhill, Worrall, Young.

There then followed an adjournment.

Upon reconvening, the Director of Governance, Mr Anthony Cox, advised that in the absence of a Mayor or Deputy Mayor, a person to preside would need to be appointed. Mr Cox duly sought nominations for a Chairperson.

23. Appointment of Chairperson to preside

Councillor Bird **moved** and it was duly seconded by Councillor Perry that Councillor P. Smith be appointed as Chairperson for the duration of the meeting.

Resolved

That Councillor P. Smith be appointed Chairperson for the duration of the meeting.

24. Petitions

The following petitions were submitted:

- (1) Councillor D. Coughlan:-
 - Barrowman Reinstatement – Willenhall
 - Barcroft School
- (2) Councillor Waters - Traffic Calming – Rushall
- (3) Councillor Whitehouse – Road Safety - Pool Hayes Lane

25. Questions by members of the Public

In accordance with paragraph 10.8, Part 4 (Rules of Procedure) of the Councils Constitution, the Mayor read out the following question at the request of the questioner, who was not in attendance:-

The Harvestime housing development is over 50 % complete in Raleigh Street Birchills Pleck ward. What progress has been made on traffic management plan for local area as approved in planning consent.

The Mayor confirmed that, in the questioner's absence, and at the questioner's request, a response would be provided to them in writing.

26. Questions by members of the Council

(a) Councillor. P.E. Smith asked the following question of Councillor Bird:

“Given that:

- a) at an Extra ordinary Meeting of Walsall Council, held in private, on 7th August 2017, Walsall Council agreed, after a named vote (27 for, 21 against) to support a Motion moved by the then Leader of the Council, Cllr

S. Coughlan and seconded by Cllr. A Nawaz to “*approve an amendment to the 2017.18 Capital Programme to include a budget for the acquisition of the Saddlers Centre Shopping Centre and associated purchase costs of £13.802m*”, effectively buying a previously privately owned town centre shopping centre (the Saddlers Centre) that had made a loss of over £2.9m in the year before (2016), according to Topland (Saddlers, Walsall) Limited Financial Statement dated 31/5/16 and

- b) at the time Walsall Council was seeking to “save” £86m by 2020, including the closure of libraries, less grass cutting & street cleaning and other front line cuts,
- c) The Council at the time was receiving “due diligence” advice that supported the acquisition, from Cushman & Wakefield Investment Teams based in London & Birmingham whilst simultaneously a Cushman & Wakefield team based in Bristol was acting for the vendors (Topland), and furthermore, at that time, Cushman & Wakefield also had an interest in the near by Old Square Shopping Centre
- d) The then Leader of the Council, Cllr. S Coughlan was quoted in a statement published on 9/8/17 as saying “This is a very positive story for Walsall. This acquisition will provide the Council with an opportunity to add to its existing investment portfolio whilst the rental income generated will meet the aims and requirements of the Council’s four year financial plan.”

can the present Leader of the Council explain to what extent the 21-strong opposition in a named vote at the meeting of 7/8/17 to this purchase, has been vindicated, with particular reference to the forecasted anticipated cash surplus based on the Asset Management Strategy for the property prepared by the Council’s external property experts, Cushman & Wakefield which included both capital return on an assumption of sale at the end of a five year period (from 2017) plus rental income minus costs?”

Councillor Bird replied as follows:

“The acquisition of the Saddlers Centre was approved by Cabinet on 26 July 2017, and Council approved an amendment to the 2017/18 Capital Programme as required by the Constitution to include the acquisition costs. At that time the acquisition of the Saddlers Shopping Centre provided the Council with an opportunity to add to its existing investment portfolio and to achieve one of the aims of the four-year medium term financial plan in terms of the generation of increased rental income.

The Council was in receipt of specialist property investment and legal advice and undertook the necessary due diligence. The property investment advice was that the proposed purchase price represented market value, and that based upon a five-year financial model for the acquisition and management of the property it showed a return of investment of £10.9m. The financial

model was based on an Asset Management Strategy for the property prepared by the Council's specialist external property advisors.

The Asset Management Strategy included an investment model to make improvements in the Centre, as well as a targeted campaign to attract new retailers to the Centre to further enhance it as an integral part of the prime retail offer in Walsall. It also included a medium term strategy option of sale in five years' time i.e. in 2022/23 upon which the total estimated return on investment of £10.9m was calculated. As circumstances have changed given the impact of covid and the success of the Connected Gateway Scheme within the Future High Streets Funding bid, the final strategic business case and any financial implications arising from this will impact on the Strategic Asset Plan and will need to be incorporated into the Treasury Management Strategy and Budget report which Council will receive and be able to vote on in February 2022. The centre is a key strategic asset in relation to delivery of our masterplan.

Mr. Smith asked the following supplementary question:

"To what extent do you agree with me that given the fact that the Council before borrowing the £13.8m to purchase the centre did not consider the financial state of the company, Topland, Saddlers Walsall, especially their account of 2016 which showed a loss of over £2.9m, do you agree therefore that the council at the time was not in a position to make a reasoned judgement even though it went ahead with the borrowing and the purchase".

Councillor Bird replied:

"According to the Wednesbury rules, one should have all the information to make a sound decision. I wasn't present at that meeting as I have already said. However, it was a public document at Companies House and the figures you quote for Topland Walsall was in actual fact showing a loss. My understating is that there was a holding company offshore and as a result it was drawn back to the centre. My concern was expressed then and now that the advising agents for vendor and purchaser should have been examined more closely."

(b) Councillor. P.E. Smith asked the following question of Councillor Bird:-

"If as Leader of the Council, you accept, either wholly or partially that:

a) many people feel that it is time to get Walsall Council "back to normal", including the opening up of the Civic Centre to the public and so that face to face meetings can soon be held in Committee Rooms and the Council chamber without the need for laptops, headphones, masks, etc. for those who feel comfortable doing so and so that members of the public can once again have an opportunity to attend, observe and speak (where appropriate) in the interests of democratic accountability,

and

b) many people feel that there seems to be an apparent drive to make it easier (if not compulsory) for more and more Office Council employees to work from home, which is detrimental to good communications and accountability,

and

c) many people feel that the drive for more “working from home” will have a negative impact on the regeneration of the town centre and could also have a de-motivating effect on much of the workforce,

Will you therefore, if this drive for more and more office- based workers to work from home becomes inevitable, **comment on the views that** these “remote employees” could become particularly vulnerable in any future drives to save money if looking to delete posts and that the financial viability of the Civic Centre itself could become questionable, thus leading to the call to “rent out” more units of the Civic Centre and/or even to consider it being put up for sale?”

Councillor Bird replied as follows:

“Thank you for this question Councillor Smith

I welcome the opportunity to explain the Council’s approach to blended working .

Firstly the pandemic is not over – case rates in Walsall remain high, our hospital continues to be under great pressure from the number of Covid hospital inpatients and sadly people continue to die from the virus. Covid has not gone away. The health and wellbeing of staff, councillors and customers is my, and my Cabinet’s, priority. This has been, and always will be, key to our approach and forward plan. It is my imperative that staff, Members and visitors to our buildings remain safe; social distancing rules, enhanced cleaning schedules, prior booking of desk space and rooms all remain and these safety requirements continue to limit the numbers in our buildings for the foreseeable future.

That said, Covid-19 has been the catalyst for change that has driven innovation, adaptation and transformation at pace. Over the past 17 months we have seen purposeful local leadership, swifter decision making and deeper collaboration with partners and our communities. There has been a strengthening of awareness of the capacity of communities and what the Council, partners, businesses and local people can achieve and deliver together. Our blended working approach capitalises on the lessons we have learnt from the past 17 months, recognising the extraordinary contributions of our staff and volunteers and the rapid progress achieved in digitalising and transforming service delivery.

The Council’s approach is now to use the new ways of working as a catalyst for change in the way that people work and services are delivered.

There is no “back to normal” as is suggested by many – nor should there be. Work is what we do and not where we do it.

Personnel Committee in April and Cabinet in July agreed some core principles for staff coming back to buildings where they have been working full time at home. It is fair to say that the Council has not been closed over the last 17 months and the innovation that’s been shown, in particular with the resilient communities model has been exemplary and held up to be a fine example of how we can work with the community.

These principles mean that staff will come into buildings only when required. For the purposes of collaboration, team building, problem solving, development, training, face to face meetings and recruitment. And with technology available, they may use different buildings for different purposes rather than coming to the same place each time.

This approach is better for staff engagement, for recruitment and retention and is better for carbon reduction targets. As an example during the past year there has been a 27% reduction in sickness days lost. There has been a 52% reduction in short terms sickness due to stress, mental health and depression. Voluntary turnover is only 4.5%, much lower than in previous years. However, we expect Managers in this Council to manage in this Council - to manage performance and ensure that staff are delivering to the targets that they have been given. My understanding is that the Trade Unions have supported this blended approach to work and committee meetings, like this evening, are now held in person not necessarily in the building we have become accustomed to over many years.

I would say this, the Council’s budget is based on my administration’s priorities, it is about how we wisely spend every £1 of Walsall resident’s council tax on the services which matter to our residents. Savings have already been agreed based on the Council’s medium term financial plan and as a result, going forward that transformation programme will find the savings that we need to have.

Simply reverting to our old ways of working is not an option, and like many other private companies and public sector bodies, we are changing to the best ways of working for our residents and for our staff. We all hope that this is a temporary measure and as a result, going forward, we will see the new normal but recognising that the Pandemic has not gone away and will not be ignored”

Mr. Smith asked the following supplementary question:

“What consultation has taken place a) with the employees and their Unions and even more importantly b) with the boroughs residents, sadly increasingly called customers in various Council papers who pay via their taxes for the services that could be affected by this change of work practice”.

Councillor Bird replied:

“In May of this year we carried out a full staff survey, 75% of our staff said that they felt that blended working would be beneficial to the Councils services and indeed to their productivity. In some capacity 62% of staff say that their work/life balance has improved. This means that staff are more motivated and have higher levels of satisfaction working for the Council reducing turnover and sickness as I eluded to earlier. It is fair to say and I’d be very churlish if I didn’t say this, there are those that still find contacting certain individuals difficult. The Chief Executive and I have spoken about this and as a result there will be a pressure upon managers to ensure that staff are doing the work that we expect them to do by achieving the targets that are set out by those managers. I think we can look back over the last 18 months and be very proud of what we have achieved by transposing our services into a seamless digital delivery. We have still got a long way to go and, as I said, the Pandemic isn’t over. Go forward living with Covid and not ignoring it. Public health has to be the priority and I have to say if you look back and Birmingham Council had a meeting and over 100 of those councillors and officers were pinged as they had been in touch with a Covid carrier. That is something we have to take very seriously, very much like some applications in Planning when we are told that the highways officer isn’t happy with something, it’s a brave person that puts their hand up to overrule that. In this case it’s Public Health that we must listen to and The Director of Public Health has made it very clear at Personnel Committee that a blended way of working is the next step of the recovery that we hope we all will see.”

27. **Recommendation of Cabinet**

Treasury Management Annual Report

The report to Cabinet on 21 July, 2021 was submitted.

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

Resolved

That the annual position statement for treasury management activities 2020/21 including prudential and local indicators (Appendix A) be noted, in line with the requirements of the Treasury Management Code of Practice (2017).

28. **Recommendation of Standards Committee**

Code of Conduct for Elected Members

The report to Standards Committee on 12th July, 2021 was submitted.

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

Resolved

That the Code of Conduct for Councillors be approved.

29. **Recommendation of Licensing and Safety Committee**

Statement of Licensing Policy and Cumulative Impact Assessment

The report to Licensing and Safety Committee on 25th August, 2021 was submitted.

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

Resolved

That the Statement of Licensing Policy and Cumulative Impact Assessment be approved.

30. **Annual report of Audit Committee 2020/21**

The report to Audit Committee on 8th July, 2021 was submitted.

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

Resolved

That the Annual Audit Report 2020/21 be noted.

31. **Scrutiny Annual Report 2019-2021**

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

Resolved

That the Scrutiny Annual Report 2019-21 be noted.

32. **Adoption of the International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance Definition of Antisemitism**

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

Resolved

That Council adopts the International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance Working Definition on antisemitism for use across the Council, together with the worked definitions of anti-semitism.

33. **Portfolio holder briefing – Leader of the Council**

A report was submitted.

The Leader, Councillor Bird, gave a presentation.

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

34. **Notice of Motion - Universal Credit**

In accordance with paragraph 13.4 ('a' and 'c') of Part 4 (Rules of Procedure) of the Council's Constitution, this matter was not proceeded with as those members that had moved the motion, were not present.

35. **Notice of Motion - Definition of Islamophobia**

In accordance with paragraph 13.4 ('a' and 'c') of Part 4 (Rules of Procedure) of the Council's Constitution, this matter was not proceeded with as those members that had moved the motion, were not present.

36. **Notice of Motion – GP Practices / Health Centres**

Councillors Allen and Perry left the room having declared an interest and took no part in the discussion or voting thereon.

The following motion, notice of which had been duly given was **moved** by Councillor P. Smith, seconded by Councillor Bird and:

Resolved

That this Council:

notes the widespread public concern, bordering on anger by many residents across the Borough, at what is seen as a deterioration in the services of many GP Practices/Health Centres; Concerns about:

- Difficulty getting through on the phone to many of them.
- Difficulty getting a doctor's appointment within a reasonable time, especially a face to face appointment.
- Extra pressure put on A&E as a result of many patients being unable to obtain satisfactory responses from their GP Practices/Health centres, thus feeling the only alternatives being A&E or the Urgent Care Walk- In Centre, where patients could and often do, have a wait of several hours before being treated.
- Particular problems around inequality that the shift away from face to face meetings and towards more phone appointments and online appointments pose, especially for patients who may be profoundly deaf, unable to speak, have language barrier issues, be visually impaired, have serious

mental health issues, have learning difficulties and those without the appropriate skills and/or access to computers and the internet.

and consequently this Council resolves to use the maximum influence that it has to engage with the appropriate organisations and bodies including its own Health and Well Being Board, Healthwatch Walsall, Walsall's Members of Parliament and the Department of Health and Social Care, in order to a) draw attention to this concern and b) call for a massive improvement in what is perceived by many to be an deteriorating and unacceptable service for so many.

The meeting terminated at 8.43 p.m.

Councillor Towe Portfolio Holder - Education and Skills

The Directorate has three service areas, Children's Social Care and Safeguarding, Early Help & Commissioning and Access & Inclusion. As Portfolio Holder for Education and Skills, my report details those activities within Access and Inclusion we are most proud of, the challenges we face and the areas upon which we are focussing attention to ensure better educational outcomes for all children and young people in the Borough.

Due to the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic, most exams and assessments did not take place in the 2019/20, or 2020/21 academic years. The government also announced that it would not publish school or college level results data on [Compare school and college performance](#) (also commonly referred to as school and college performance tables) in autumn 2020 or autumn 2021, and that this data would not be used to hold schools and colleges to account. They have also made clear that results data from 2020/21 will not be used in school and college level performance measures in future years. This report has to refer to the latest 2019 attainment outcomes and associated benchmarking data, in line with this guidance: <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/coronavirus-covid-19-school-and-college-performance-measures/coronavirus-covid-19-school-and-college-accountability>

1. What do we know?

There are 130 educational settings in Walsall.

7 Special Schools	8 Nursery Schools	85 Primary Schools	18 Secondary Schools
1 All through School	3 Pupil Referral Units	1 College	7 Independent Schools

As of September 2021, 81.8% (99) of Walsall schools have an Ofsted published grade of good or better compared to 80.2% in September 2020 and 79.3% in September 2019 and compared to 86.4% nationally.

LA maintained schools graded good or better is 89.2%, academy converters is 73.7% and academy sponsor led schools is 57.9%

Just to mention, Ofsted's return to inspection in 2021 happened in phases, with no graded inspections for education or social care providers planned before the summer term. For maintained schools and academies, from January, they resumed monitoring inspections of schools judged inadequate at their previous inspection and some schools graded as requires improvement. Emergency inspections of schools continued as they had done throughout the pandemic, in response to any serious concerns raised with Ofsted, we had no emergency inspections in Walsall. Routine inspections, which resulted in a school being awarded a new grade or being confirmed in its current grade, resumed in the summer term. Full inspections then continued from September 2021.

Walsall's school children have more economic, language and health challenges than regional, national and statistical neighbours:

- 31.6% of Primary School children and 27.5% of Secondary School pupils are in receipt of Free School Meals an increase from the previous year.
- 24.9% of Primary School pupils and 21.1% of Secondary school pupils have English as an additional language.
- 27.2% of Reception aged pupils and 44.4% of year 6 pupils are overweight.

In general, the outcomes for children at the end of Primary School show some improvement - progress in Writing has improved and is better than statistical neighbours, and although a slight decline from 2018 progress in Maths remains higher than the national average:

- The percentage of pupils achieving the expected standard at key stage 2 in Reading, Writing and Maths remains at 61.0% in 2019 - no change from 2018. Indicator cancelled for 2020.
- The percentage of pupils achieving the expected standard at key stage 2 in Maths has increased by 3% from 74% in 2018 to 77% in 2019. Indicator cancelled for 2020.
- The percentage of pupils achieving the expected standard at key stage 2 in Reading has increased by 2% points from 72% in 2018 to 70% in 2019. Indicator cancelled for 2020
- The percentage of pupils achieving the expected standard at key stage 2 in Writing is 77% in 2019 – the same as in 2018. Indicator cancelled for 2020

Improvements in outcomes at key stage 4 are smaller and remain below national and regional averages:

Progress 8 and Attainment 8 have become the chief measures of schools' performance, replacing the old 5 A*-C GCSEs including English and Maths measure. They are based on students' attainment in their best eight subjects at GCSE and the progress made from the end of Year 6, when the Key Stage 2 SATs in Reading and Maths are taken.

- The average Attainment 8 score in 2020 is 47.4 an improvement from 44.0 in 2019.
- The average Progress 8 score in 2019 is -0.11 an improvement from -0.19 in 2018. This is now above statistical neighbours. 2020 data not published yet, expected November 2021.
- 64.9% of pupils achieved a grade 4 or above in English and maths in 2020 compared with 58.0% in 2019.

The proportion of children who are identified as having special educational needs is lower than national and regional averages and their outcomes are improving:

- In 2021, 15.2% of pupils have a special educational need (SEN support or EHCP) compared with 15.9% nationally.
- 18.0% of children with SEN Support achieved the expected standard at KS2 in reading, writing and maths compared with 25.0% nationally. This shows an improvement of 3% from 2018 and the gap to national has narrowed to from 9% in 2018 to a 7% gap in 2019. Indicator cancelled for 2020.
- 10.0% of children with an EHCP achieved the expected standard at KS2 in reading, writing and maths. This is slightly higher than the national average of 9%. This shows an improvement of 4% from 2018. Indicator cancelled for 2020.
- At KS4 the average progress 8 score for children with SEN Support continues to improve year on year and is now -0.46, an improvement of 0.12 and better than statistical neighbours. 2020 data not published yet, expected November 2021.

Poorer and disadvantaged pupils perform worse than their counterparts elsewhere do but the attainment gap compared to their peers is closing:

- 44.0% of pupils eligible for Free School Meals (FSM) achieved the expected standard at KS2 in reading Writing and Maths in 2019 compared with 47.0% nationally. The percentage gap from those who are not eligible for FSM has closed by 2% to 23%. Indicator cancelled for 2020.
- There is no change from 2018 outcomes for disadvantaged pupils. 49.0% achieved the expected standard in Reading, Writing and Maths in 2019 compared to 51% nationally.

Compared with non-disadvantaged pupils in Walsall the gap remains at 21%. This is 1% below the national gap of 20.0%. Indicator cancelled for 2020.

- At KS4, the average Attainment 8 score for those pupils eligible for Free School Meals is 38.7 in 2020 with a gap of 11.3 compared with those who are not eligible for free school meals.
- The average Attainment 8 score for disadvantaged pupils in Walsall is 39.5 in 2020 with a gap of 12.3 compared to non-disadvantaged pupils. This is better than the national gap of 13.5.

2. Introduction

Our ambition is to create a culture where there is effective, high quality learning provision, combined with meaningful and purposeful school partnerships, focused on the direct pursuit of improved outcomes for all Walsall's young people.

Our **Walsall Right for Children** vision sets out our ambition of the broad view of the role of Schools in their immediate community, in Walsall as a whole and beyond and with the aim to meet the needs of the whole child. That is:



In the Children's Services Directorate, the Access and Inclusion service will deliver the Walsall Right for Children vision through two distinct strategies:

- The Access Strategy- this outlines how we ensure we have sufficient school places to match the needs of our children and how children will access them.
- The Inclusion Strategy- this outlines how we ensure the quality of provision that our children and young people receive, and how and when we will support, challenge and intervene when necessary.

3. Achievements and challenges

We focused at the beginning of the year on developing our SEND and Accessibility Strategy linked to our Inclusion Strategy. This sets out the vision, priorities and aims to ensure a step change in improved outcomes for all children and young people with SEND.

This was important as one of the emerging concerns which has arisen from the pandemic is the higher rate and prevalence of recognised anxiety and social, emotional health concerns amongst our children and young people.

We have been allocated funding centrally from the DfE to support the initial Wellbeing for Educational Return in September 2020 and this funding has been extended further to include the coming Autumn and Spring terms. Our Educational Psychologist team as well as our safeguarding lead and school nursing team are working in partnership with our school SENDCos and Dedicated Safeguarding Leads in providing a package of support and training directly to schools and to children and young people. Social, emotional health and autism are two of the increasing needs which are emerging for our children and young people.

3.1 Summary of projects and initiatives during the pandemic

The working relationship between the LA and Schools has never been stronger. I see this in the weekly Head Teachers Meeting and the regular School Governor Support Sessions, all of which I have attended. The reasons for this are multi-faceted. This includes the swiftness we

have responded and adapted to circumstances created by the pandemic, rather than a “this is the way it’s always been done” approach. This has fostered a sense of sharing and bringing down of barriers that may have pre-existed.

Below is an overview of the key work and activity from each team in Access and Inclusion during this time.

3.2 The work of The Virtual School

The Virtual School plays a strategic role in ensuring we meet our corporate parenting responsibilities with regard to improving the educational outcomes of children in care. The Virtual School work alongside professionals who work directly with children in care and care leavers to develop and improve joint working and raise educational outcomes. The Virtual School work with schools, colleges, universities, nurseries, children's social care, health professionals and report to the Corporate Parenting Board.

As all children returned to school, the staff at The Virtual School were welcomed back into schools to provide face to face support to children in care. Our tutors, mentors and key workers were able to provide additional support in the classroom to help children catch-up from any lost learning.

In addition to the support provided by virtual school staff over 50 children and young people received extra 1:1 tuition provided by external tuition companies. We also continued to provide additional online tuition through our own learning platforms.

We delivered a number of learning and enrichment programs to help children return to school, such as our ‘Summit2Success’ programme which was a 9 week programme to help children build confidence, resilience and self-esteem and our 4 week English for Speakers of other Languages group course which supported young people new to the UK and Walsall.

We continued to provide learning resources i.e. laptops and tablets to children who were new into care or did not have the equipment for home learning and support parents/carers with home learning.

Children with a social worker:

In June 2021 the DfE announced that from September 2021 the role of the Virtual School Head would be extended to take a strategic leadership role in promoting the educational outcomes for all children with a social worker not just children in care.

Virtual School Heads have been asked to make visible the disadvantages that children with a social worker can experience, promote practice that supports children’s engagement in education and to level up children’s outcomes and narrow the attainment gap so every child with a social worker can reach their potential. This includes making sure that children with a social worker benefit from support to recover from the impact of COVID-19.

Grant funding has been provided to help the Virtual School Head deliver the extended duties. The funding formula for the grant is based on the number of schools in each local authority, not children with a social worker. Walsall’s grant is £100,000. The virtual school will take on two additional staff to help with the additional responsibilities.

3.3 The work of the Access Teams

Education Welfare & Attendance

To support schools the Education Welfare Service (EWS) issued simplified guidance highlighting the key points raised in DfE issued guidance to schools throughout COVID-19.

The EWS initiated the daily collection, monitoring and recording of pupil attendance at Schools for vulnerable pupils and those pupils of key worker parents from all Walsall Schools. This data was initially required twice daily for the monitoring conversations held between ourselves and the Department for Education. We continued to monitor pupil attendance from September and in line with the government guidance, are able to issue fines where requested to do so by schools

School Admissions and Appeals: Phased Admissions (Primary and Secondary)

The service continued with post offer day activity for the Secondary School Admission round and ensured that the offer of reception class places could still be made to parents as planned on national offer day on 16 April 2021.

Exclusions

We acted swiftly to confirm the LA's position with regards to exclusions and need for Schools to retain 'excluded' pupils and those pupils that were on the 'cusp of exclusion' on roll at their existing School during this unprecedented period. This process ensured that there was clarity about LA/School responsibility for undertaking monitoring and safeguarding checks for these students.

Appeals

School Appeal Hearings were initially suspended but re-commenced on 01 June 2020. The regulations, currently in place until September 2022, allow appeal hearings to be held remotely, via video and/or telephone link or for the appeal to be determined based on a written submission in line with current social distancing requirements.

Elective Home Education

During the Covid-19 period the service area maintained communications with the Elective Home Education Community in the Borough through calls and emails on a regular basis. Requests for parents to provide their annual reports and plans electronically to demonstrate they are providing a suitable education continued in the absence of undertaking home visits. Between 1st September 2020 and 31st August 2021 261 Children and Young People (CYP) have become Electively Home Educated. The majority of these new registrations (68.1%, 178) have been made during the months of September to December 2020, with 98 in September, 38 in October, 22 in November and 20 in December. This is an increase on 2019.

In support of changing demographics and the need for more school places, the council has undertaken a number of school expansion capital projects over the last few years.

Capital projects

Recent projects that have been or are about to be completed include:

- Oakwood Special School – internal remodelling of parts of the Education Development Centre to increase the number of places by a further 30
- Castle Business & Enterprise College – 3 class block modular classroom
- Mary Elliot School – internal remodelling to create 30 additional places
- Manor Primary school – 2 classrooms, toilets, relocation of MUGA
- Rosedale Primary School – 3 class block extension
- Short Heath junior School – 4 class block modular classroom for completion in December 2021.
- St Michaels Primary School – 2 classrooms, hall extension
- Christ Church Primary School – 4 classrooms extension on programme with completion due by November 2021, mobile classrooms will remain in place until all works completed.

- Relocation of the New Leaf PRU to the Spindle Tree/Stroud Avenue site

All projects are within timeframe and budget.

3.4 Work of the Inclusion Team

One of the key successes for our school improvement team over the pandemic has been the on-going support for our Inadequate Ofsted graded schools. At the start of March 2020 there were four schools with an Inadequate Ofsted grading in Walsall. Of those four, three were maintained schools and one was an academy. Since the start of the return to full Section 5 inspections at the start of 2021 all four of Walsall's Inadequate Ofsted graded schools were inspected.

- New Leaf Short Stay PRU improved and was graded RI with elements of Good.
- Jane Lane improved was graded to be RI overall and was Good in all but one area.
- St Bernadette's Primary were graded as Good in all areas
- All Saints National Academy were found not to be taking effective action and remain Inadequate.

A core pieces of focused school improvement work is RADY (Raising Attainment of Disadvantaged Youngsters). The local and national concerns about the attainment gaps increasing for disadvantaged and vulnerable learners is a key focus of our working moving forward. We have also supported all schools and setting, in partnership with the Education Endowment Foundation, with a number of free online module training sessions. These have focused on Metacognition (awareness and recognition of one's own thought process), Learning Behaviors and SEND (special educational needs and disabilities) in the mainstream setting. The first tranche of our work was launched in the Summer Term whilst the second phase was launched in the Autumn Term.

Throughout the pandemic we have continued to closely work with all schools and settings. Although academies are not generally part of our school improvement dedicated work, we have offered opportunities to be part of our projects and support through this time.

We have produced biweekly bulletins with key updates, links and information. We have also had weekly remote meetings to which all Head Teachers and Principals are invited where we work in close partnership with our Walsall Public health colleagues to provide essential information about Covid 19 and about Childrens Services working. All of these sessions are recorded for future reference.

Officers also have weekly meetings with colleagues from the DfE remotely to support, monitor and measure our schools and settings throughout Covid and in particular where there have been national lockdowns. These meetings are known as DfE REACT meetings and there are standing national agenda items as well as regional and local items and themes.

We continue to address the SEND Written Statement of Action which was as a result of the Ofsted inspection in January 2019. Work has continued to progress in key areas however due to the pandemic certain identified actions have had to pause. We have not been able to measure the impact on improving outcomes for SEN pupils similarly to that of all learners.

The team have worked exceptionally hard to support schools, pupils, parents and carers throughout the pandemic given the constraints of lockdown and Covid 19 restrictions. Virtual visits and remote access has enable much of the work to continue but everyone is trying to conduct face to face assessments and visits where it safe to do so.

We had a dedicated Special Schools Inclusion Manager who met with all special schools and PRUs during this time to support our most vulnerable learners. Key links and messages particularly around the daily management during the pandemic were given via the Special

Schools Inclusion Manager and schools have told us that they valued this direct support.

We continue to address the EHCP timeliness and backlog as identified in the Written Statement of Action. Due to the pandemic and lockdowns there has been disruption to Annual Reviews which are led by schools. We have seen an increase in requests to assess pupils and the numbers of EHCPs for CYP in Walsall has also increased significantly. To manage this we have increased the number of SEN case workers and officers to manage the increased work load.

One significant development as identified in the Written Statement of Action is the development of our new and improved Local Offer, which is available for all services and users. The Local Offer also signposts parents, carers and CYP to our SENDIASS service which is provided by Family Action.

4. Next Steps

Within Access and Inclusion we have identified the following priorities for the year ahead:-

- Review the Specialist Provision across the whole Borough to ensure that there are the right pupils in the right provision and at the right time in line with our Walsall Right for Children vision.
- Ensure all schools provide a graduated approach to SEND in accordance with the SEN Code of Practice (2014), to ensure timely and needs led support with a focus on promoting independence and inclusion.
- Improve access and achievement of the vulnerable and disadvantaged learners.
- Attendance and behaviour within our schools continues to be a key priority area.

5. Conclusion

Our ambition is to create a culture where there is effective, inclusive, high quality learning provision, combined with meaningful and purposeful school partnerships, focused on the direct pursuit of improved outcomes for all Walsall's young people.

Realising our collective ambition for children relies on us all, whoever we are, and in whatever role we fulfil - Elected Members, Schools, Health colleagues, Employees, Parents, Carer or Community Members, acting as Champions for all children.

This report has set out the achievements Children's Services are proud of, the challenges faced by the Directorate and where attention is being focussed to improve outcomes for children, young people and families going forward. Undoubtedly, the circumstances in which the Directorate is operating will continue to be challenging and there is more to do. There is an absolute determination across Children's Services and this Administration to improve outcomes for all children and young people and to make a difference to the lives of those children who need it most.

Skills

Walsall Works

Since its inception in 2012, the award winning **Walsall Works** programme has supported its residents, particularly young people aged 16-24 years, to improve their skills base through access to functional skills, upskilling in the workforce, apprenticeships and retraining.

- People accessing funded and non-funded Apprenticeships – 1046
- People supported into training or traineeships – 1483
- People supported into employment – 2062

Despite restrictions in relation to Covid-19 and limited face to face engagement, the programme has still been able to maintain delivery in some partner venues alongside a calendar of virtual skills roadshows, a face to face expo, and continue to job match employer vacancies with local people in sectors such as construction, health and social care, hospitality and logistical roles. The team have used all virtual communication methods and social media platforms, www.walsallworks.com and weekly bulletin to promote a range of training and employment vacancies.

BC Impact

Walsall Council together with the other Black Country Local Authorities Dudley, Sandwell, and Wolverhampton, have been delivering this programme since July 2016 (funded by European Social Fund / Youth Employment Initiative (ESF/YEI)). The project is targeted at getting 16-29 year old NEETs engaging with positive activities such as education, employment and training. The programme which provides non statutory support and guidance is currently due to end in July 2023.

The programme provides personalised, joined up provision of local services to support young people who are unemployed, inactive and at risk of social inclusion to overcome barriers to participation and enter sustainable employment. Referrals are received from a multitude of sources i.e. education and training providers, Health Services, Families, Voluntary Community Services, Police, Probation and local authority teams such as Locality hubs, Youth Justice, Teenage Parents, Transitional Leaving Care.

Despite the difficult operating environment with the pandemic, the project continued to offer a hybrid delivery mode with most of our participant interactions delivered remotely. However, arrangements were in place to support the most vulnerable young people face to face in partner venues or home visits if required.

Impact Hub

The **Impact** Hub in the Crossings at St Pauls Walsall, is a drop-in facility and this has become a focal point for young people to seek support. Advisors are available daily Monday to Friday. Due to the effects of the pandemic we envisage NEETs and levels of unemployment to remain high in the borough. The Hub is a vital resource for the community to seek support.

Impact data table:

Impact Programme	Enrolments	Interventions	Outcomes
16-29 year olds (total)	4436	2461	1328
16-25 year olds (total)	3755	2119	1170

Kickstart

This national **Kickstart** scheme pledged to create 250,000 high quality paid 6-month work placements for young people aged 16 to 24 who are claiming a Universal Credit benefit and are at risk of long term unemployment. Walsall Council's Employment & Skills team are an authorised Gateway organisation for the new DWP Kickstart scheme and aim to bring forward 150 pledged placements from over 70 local employers, with 70 live placements with:

Careers Enterprise Company

Funding from the **Careers Enterprise Company** has been secured to build additional capacity in the existing Employment and Skills team to work with disadvantaged, vulnerable and hard to reach young people pre-16 and post 16 who are identified as being at risk of becoming NEET. A high percentage of the target group may not have attended school this past year

and therefore will have missed out on vital education and careers guidance. Young people identified at risk will be supported through targeted one-to-one contact and face to face interventions delivered by a qualified Careers Advice and Guidance practitioner.

The project will focus on those young people in year 11 and year 13 during the summer period to ensure a smooth transition back into post 16 provisions. The additional capacity has allowed work to begin and reach out to young people who are elective home educated (EHE), not registered with education in Walsall as children missing education (CME). The overall aim is to ensure that we are able to support young people back into education settings.

Youth Unemployment

The pandemic has seen a greater rise in the volume of **young benefit claimants** in Walsall with 2,555 claimants aged 16-24 in September 2021 in comparison to 1,925 claimants in March 2020. The number of 16-17 remains at approx 35 claimants, with 1,495 claimants being aged 18-21 years old. 60% of young claimants were male.



Councillor Chris Towe
Cabinet Member Education and Skills
20th October 2021