

Councillor Perry, Deputy Leader & Resilient Communities Portfolio

Introduction

Our Council Plan – Priorities

The Resilient Communities portfolio encompasses a wide range of services, which all play a key role in supporting residents and local communities. The services in this portfolio also directly contribute towards delivering the following ‘We are Walsall 2040’ ambitions:



We worked very hard to ensure that all communities had the opportunity to be heard, and contribute, towards our future vision for 2040. This important work continues, as we now work with partners, and residents, to develop our new Borough Plan. Our

positive work with residents and communities is something which continues to thrive; whether through the Walsall Community Network, Making Connections Walsall, Walsall for All, Team Walsall, Walsall Connected, or through our relationships with other individual groups, far too many to mention here, who deliver when needed. You know who you are, and the Borough is extremely proud to have so many residents, who are active in delivering for Walsall Communities.

Enforcement will be fundamental to delivering on our We are Walsall 2040 commitment to make Walsall a better place. Our range of enforcement officers, currently operate in very difficult circumstances, but continue to deliver results which improve lives, whether it be through prosecutions, closure orders or a wide range of other enforcement tools. Our residents and communities also play a major part in supporting us to deliver positive outcomes, but despite our collective efforts, demand continues to increase. For that reason, this administration has committed to invest more into improving our work in this area, a commitment which is shared across the Council chamber. Our commitment is to deliver continuous improvement and investment across all four key areas to support delivery towards our We are Walsall 2040 vision:



In addition, we continue to focus on:

- Our resident led locality approach
- Our commitment to community groups (including co-design and co-production
- Continued access to the council at locations that make sense to our residents; and
- Continued drive to improve Walsall for everyone.

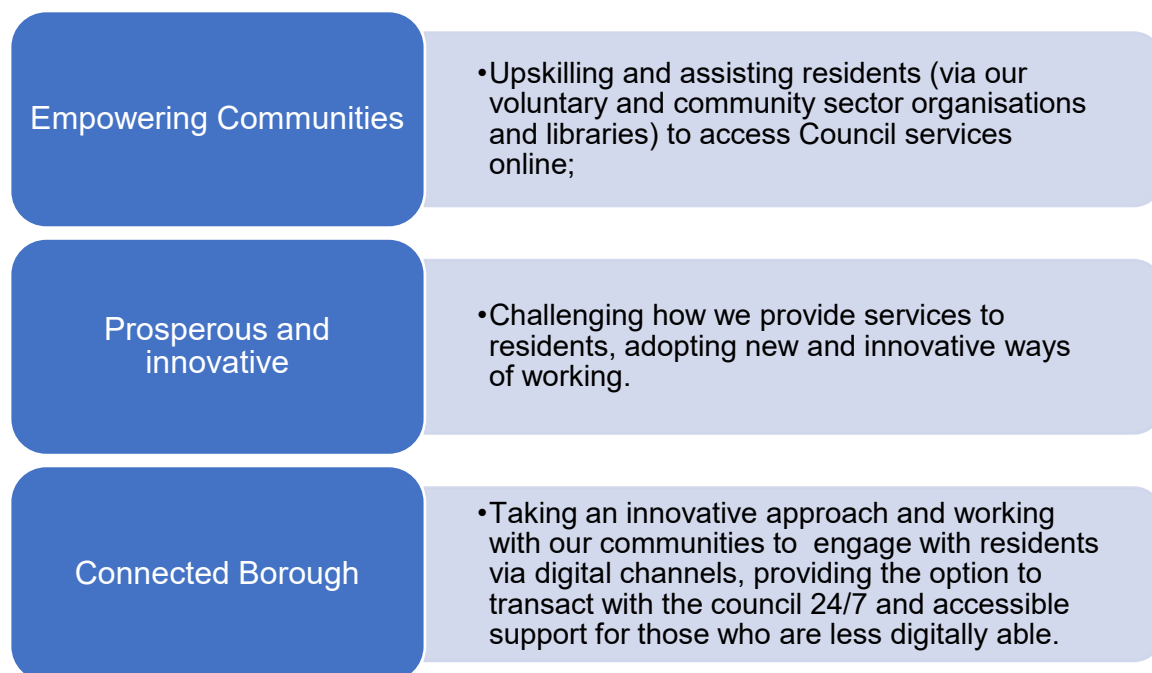
Our Service Delivery

Walsall Connected

Following extensive consultation with residents, partners and staff, we developed our Customer Experience Strategy (2021 – 2026) which set out our ambition that:

“We want to do things right, first time, every time, and make services accessible, to help reduce inequalities and maximise potential.”

Walsall Connected was a key deliverable of the strategy and was launched in July 2022. It is a successful collaboration between Walsall Council and Community Partner Organisations across the Borough, co-designed to offer face-to-face digital upskilling, general support, signposting and access to first-line Council services. The primary aim of Walsall Connected is to ensure digitally excluded residents receive consistent support in accessing Council services online and gain essential everyday transferable digital skills. The work of Walsall Connected significantly contributes towards our We Are Walsall 2040 objectives by:



There are now 29 centres across the Borough delivering the full Walsall Connected offer, this comprises 7 libraries, 21 Community organisations and a centre at the Healthcare Island at Walsall Manor Hospital (launched in July 2023). The latest organisation to come onboard is Darlaston All Active operating out of Darlaston Town Hall who joined November 2023. In addition, by the end of 2023 we had 15 voluntary (non-funded) partners supporting Walsall Connected with a reduced offer, offering general guidance to Council services and other support services and signposting to the main centres for upskilling and more in-depth support. The team continue to work on building this network. Since launch in July 2022 and as of the end of December 2023 Walsall Connected has supported 13,031 customers, of which 8,292 in completing the process independently in future and 11,733 were helped on the day they visited a centre. Only 2% required referral to a specialist Council service area.

We have a 99% family and friends recommendation rate from customers surveyed. The Walsall Connected Annual Report July 2022 to July 2023 has been published, which is available for more information on the launch, progress during its first year and future ambitions.

WMCA Connected Services Programme

Walsall Connected has been successfully supporting the delivery of the WMCA Connected Services Programme. In November, the West Midlands Mayor, Andy Street, attended an event at Walsall Manor Hospital to learn more about successes in delivering the programme and the work being done in Walsall to encourage digital inclusion. Over 1400 devices/data have been distributed to Walsall residents and small organisations in 2023 - this supports the Council's continued work to increase digital inclusion. There has been effective links to support the NHS, Public Health, Leisure Services, Employment & Skills, DWP, WHG plus others who are providing services and supporting residents across Walsall.

Housing, Welfare and Resettlement

Homeless Prevention

The number of Rough Sleepers in the borough continues to be low, remaining in single figures throughout 2023. We carry out bi-monthly night counts which has contributed to the low number of rough sleepers. As of December 2023 we had three rough sleepers, in contrast to 26 in January 2016. Our Winter Night Provision started 30th November 2023. To date six individuals have been accommodated under SWEP, this was lower than the previous year. All individuals are being supported by the Rough Sleepers team.

Our Change into Action (CIA) scheme continues to receive donations from the public to support rough sleepers. To date we have received donations in excess of £13,500.00. These funds can be accessed by charities and partner agencies to provide additional support for those who have had a history of rough sleeping or who are at risk of rough sleeping.

Housing and Welfare Services continue to strive in preventing homelessness and Walsall continues to maintain a prevention rate above the national average.

Additional Homeless Temporary Accommodation

We have secured additional temporary accommodation, including, two long term empty Council cemetery lodges which have been refurbished and brought back into use. A further 10 empty homes have been secured through Compulsory Purchase Order, auctions and direct purchase from housing associations. Five of which are currently being refurbished and will be available to help homeless households during February 2024. The Council has been successful in securing £1.4m grant funding towards these costs from the Local Authority Housing Fund.

Housing Register

WHG announced the closure of their register held on behalf of Walsall Council from September 2023, from this date the Housing register was setup by Walsall Council. Multiple aspects needed to be setup, a specialist team to deal with applications, system upgrades, training, produce policies and procedures, all delivered in a very short timescales.

To date the Council have received 2,849 applications via online portal applications and 2,927 consented applications transferred from the WHG register. The team have received 1,358 calls since it was established in September 2023.

Grants Disabled Facilities (DFG)

To date we have approved 516 Disabled Facilities grants, of which 407 homes have had much needed adaptations completed. This funds a variety of adaptations such as ramps, stairlifts and wet rooms.

Housing First

Since this essential service began in 2018 it has helped 103 rough sleepers off the street and into their own homes, with individual tailored support from the Council's contractor GreensquareAccord as and when needed. There are still 34 individuals on the programme, with a further 29 now successfully living independently in their tenancies (further 14 died, 11 moved to another area, and the rest are imprisoned/moved to alternative accommodation/lost contact with scheme).

Domestic Abuse Safe Accommodation

In early 2023 we commenced a new refuge service for victims of domestic abuse, which included a small block refuge, and an increased number of dispersed homes to enable better outcomes and provide more options for victims including male, and those with older male children. Approximately 80 households have received safe accommodation in the last 12 months, with around 60% being assisted to move on to a permanent tenancy, and the remainder returning home or moving to another area.

Refugee Resettlement

Since 2021 we have been proud to resettle 142 Afghan individuals into Walsall. In many cases the head of household was involved in assisting our Armed Forces in Afghanistan. We have welcomed 109 individuals through the Homes for Ukraine Scheme since it started in April 2022. The number of arrivals has slowed significantly, with 16 individuals still being registered on the scheme for first year support, and there is also a basic support offer in place for those who have been here longer than 12 months. Of those that have left the scheme 17% have returned to Ukraine, 17% are still residing with the host after 12 months, 27% are living in their own accommodation in Walsall and 39% have left Walsall and gone to another council area in England. Both Afghan and Ukrainian families have been supported to integrate into communities, and access employment and training, by the Council's appointed contractor the Refugee and Migrant Centre. Households have also received support and assistance from other voluntary organisations, including Nashdom and the Afghan Community and Welfare Centre.

Community Safety and Enforcement

This service consists of Environmental Health, Community Protection, Licensing, Trading Standards and Community Safety. It is a high demand and high priority area of work protecting the public from a wide variety of harms including anti-social behaviour, rogue traders, fly tipping, litter, unhygienic food premises, unsafe workplaces and products, counterfeit and illicit goods, infectious diseases and stray dogs. Community Safety and Enforcement Service has conducted over 11,500 regulatory interventions ranging from requests for service, inspections, samples, registrations, licences, responses to consultations and seizures of harmful goods. The service has taken formal enforcement action in over 640 cases whether that be service of statutory notices, fixed penalty notices, prosecutions, revocations of licences or emergency prohibitions. The information below provides an overview of some of the key achievements for each team.

Key Achievements

- Renewal of the councils Gambling Statement of Principles, consulting on hackney carriage fares, convictions policy and a fit and proper person test for the taxi trade.
- Trading standards seized 320,000 cigarettes, 126kg of tobacco, £42,800 cash, 10,500 illegal vapes from 71 premises.
- Community Safety CCTV team issued 448 littering FPN's generating an income of £34,525 and helping reduce the burden of litter on the borough.
- Development of off-road vehicle operations with police fixed wing aircraft and drones leading to the seizure of over 40 uninsured and nuisance vehicles.
- 98 enforcement notices served on fly tippers and landowners with harmful waste accumulations on their property, four fly tipping prosecutions and one vehicle seized for fly tipping offences.
- Proactive work with night-time economy venues including pubwatch, bleed kits, knife detection equipment, drugs, and stop and search policies.
- Continued support for the Black Country Car Cruising injunction leading to a number of interim injunctions being awarded by the High Court while the Supreme Court consider an appeal based on injunctions on unknown persons.
- Reducing the impact of Unauthorised Encampments in the borough through use of the Transit Site, injunctions and bailiffs whilst providing a safe and well equipped site meeting the welfare needs of the travelling community.

Community Safety and Enforcement Key achievements 2023



11,500
The service carried out in excess of 11,500 regulatory interventions during 2023



594
Waste, fly tipping and litter notices were served across Walsall during 2023



Proactive work with night time economy venues to ensure bleed kits, knife detection equipment, drugs and stop and search policy's are readily available.



Operation CeCe
320,000 illicit cigarettes
126kg tobacco & 10,500 illegal vapes seized from shops across Walsall by Trading Standards.



Injunction
Continued evidence gathering and support for the Black Country Car Cruising/Racing Injunction.



PSPO
The Town Centre PSPO was renewed and 7 people were prosecuted for breaching the prohibitions.



1987
Taxi and driver licences were issued in 2023 and 196 Enforcement actions were taken against taxi drivers or vehicle owners to protect public safety



40+
Off Road vehicles seized by Police during joint operations with Drones and Fixed wing aircraft



1593
96% of food businesses have achieved a food hygiene rating of satisfactory or higher.

Community Building and Cohesion

The Community Building and Cohesion team focus on community development and action to improve Walsall as a place. To support the work, we have recently introduced a new model for VCSE infrastructure which is already getting attention from other authorities. Walsall for all is on a journey to become a strongly independent organisation and Walsall Community Network provides a strong spine for our locality work with other 90,000 visits per month. Making Connections Walsall provides support for social prescribing and robust infrastructure for residents seeking support.

Launch of the Resilient Communities VCS Locality Lead Model

In partnership with NHS Black Country Integrated Care Board (ICB), Walsall Council tendered for a new locality-based model of support for the voluntary, community, social enterprises (VCSE) and faith sector within Walsall. In May 2023, a contract for 2 years with an option of another year extension was awarded to 4 VCSEs. The new arrangements were named 'Resilient Communities Locality Leads' and the contracts were designed to deliver a strategic and operational perspective on each of the four localities.

The model prioritised the following five key functions of voluntary sector infrastructure: VCSE leadership and advocacy; Partnerships and collaboration; Capacity building; Volunteering and Locality Based. The delivery organisations are:-

- Manor Farm Community Association East
- Bloxwich Community Partnership North
- Old Hall peoples Partnership West
- Nash Dom South



Each of these organisations are embedded in their locality with their own facilities, with strong relationship with their areas. They have functional knowledge which supports their strategic oversight of their localities.

Resilient Communities Conference

Resilient Communities held its first conference on 29 September. The event was a success with over 100 VCSE representatives and Council staff attending to hear from numerous speakers ranging from Walsall Community Network, Walsall Connected, Walsall for All. The main guest speaker was from 'Nurture Development' who presented on the principles and practices of Asset Based Community Development.

VCS Recognition Event

On Friday 19 January 2024, Resilient Communities held its first VCSE recognition event celebrating volunteers and staff from within the sector. Key community organisations from across the Borough nominated 2 individuals who have gone above and beyond for their charity. Special recognition awards were also given to Mark Brindley and Cresswell Wanderers Football Club. Over 100 volunteers and staff attended and it was a pleasure presenting certificate of recognition to them all.

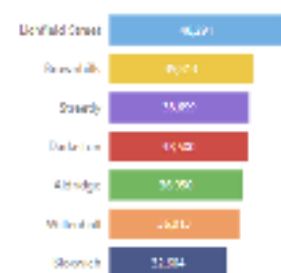
New and Emerging Communities

Both directly and through Walsall for All we work with a wide range of groups with many backgrounds.

Walsall libraries are delivering a wide range of services including education, book borrowing, computer skills, health & wellbeing and tackling isolation. Throughout 2023, Libraries' staff continued to work very closely with Walsall Connected supporting residents in accessing Council Services online.

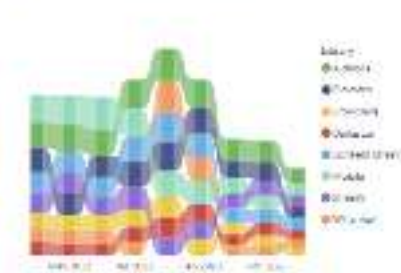
How many visitors per Library?

Walsall Strategic Library Programme 2023/24 (Walsall Connected)



Where are books being borrowed?

Walsall Strategic Library Programme 2023/24 (Walsall Connected)



How many PC sessions each month?

Walsall Strategic Library Programme 2023/24 (Walsall Connected)



Walsall Archives are building and delivering projects which are keeping safe and accessible for future generations the incredibly rich history of Walsall.

Our Strategies

To support delivery of the Walsall 2040 vision, 'Walsall for All' are now leading consultation on a new cohesion/integration strategy for Walsall, a key priority of which, will be to help ensure that 'seldom heard' voices are included in this process (including the voices of white deprived communities). A new Community Safety Plan for 2024 - 2026 will also be developed, following the publication of a new strategic assessment, which is due for publication later this year. Our Domestic Abuse Needs Assessment has already been completed, but this will now be used to help catalyse collective efforts to tackle this high profile and harmful issue. We will use the insight gained, to refresh the boroughs Domestic Abuse Strategy and Delivery Plan, and further strengthen the boroughs Local Domestic Abuse Partnership Board (which is a statutory function). We intend to further build on the success of our groundbreaking partnership Walsall Connected, which enables our residents to contact the Council in ways best suited to them and has now evolved to include 29 sites (which includes our network of 7 Libraries, and a range of partner organisations from the Voluntary and Community sector). To do this we intend to refresh our Customer Experience Strategy (2021 – 2026) and learn from resident feedback, to help us to continuously improve access to services, both through enhancing our online presence, but also by offering face to face and telephony assistance for those not able to connect virtually for whatever reason.

Our Projects

Illegal Off Road Bikes

In a bid to combat the scourge of illegal off-road vehicles Operation Adhesion was launched in November 2022. The aim of the operation was to use key skills within the Safer Walsall Partnership and beyond to gather evidence, identify offenders and formulate an effective approach to deterring future ASB and/or criminal use of vehicles. Over the course of 2023 a series of partnership 'all out' days in hot spot locations around the borough took place involving the national fixed wing police aircraft and the police drone team. This work will continue in 2024.

Serious Violence

A comprehensive serious violence needs assessment has been completed for the borough and published on the Walsall Insights website, which will help us to comply with the Serious Violence Duty.

Walsall for All

The model will be further developed in 2024, with an increased focus on embedding Walsall for All as an 'independent voice', focusing on cohesion issues and positively influencing the council and other statutory partners.

Team Walsall

A key part of our Resilient Communities approach is the development of the independent voice of the VCSE sector. Team Walsall brings together practitioners across a wide range of VCSE organisations. Team Walsall will play a critical role in

the development of the new Walsall COMPACT which will further embed the key principles of our Resilient Community model.

CCTV

We will continue to invest in CCTV and look at opportunities to enhance coverage locally to support our ongoing enforcement work.

Growth of Temporary Accommodation

In November 2023 it was agreed that £6.2 million of capital funding be allocated for the purchase of 32 additional temporary accommodation units and to carry out any refurbishments required, to reduce our reliance on bed and breakfast which is not suitable for homeless applicants, especially those with families. Additionally, it is not as cost effective using and relying on bed and breakfast.

WMCA Digital Inclusion Funding (to be confirmed)

We are due to receive confirmation of funding from WMCA that will support digital inclusion work via Walsall Connected, if granted this would provide 2 years funding to Walsall Connected VCS partners to offer further support for general digital skills and may lead to employment or education.

Walsall Connected – Increased Volunteering Pathways

Developing more volunteering opportunities for residents of Walsall – through establishing a clear and beneficial volunteer offer for both individuals and voluntary organisations, Walsall Connected will create pathways for residents to get involved with the Council and their communities which will bring with it the benefits that accompany becoming a volunteer such as experience, education, self-development, and social inclusion.

Thank you

Thank you to our residents and our community volunteers, many of whom give up their valuable time to help support our community to thrive in a range of different ways. I want to give my thanks to the voluntary and community sector organisations, who have shown amazing Leadership and support, by getting involved in helping to co-design our services. Finally, to the team that works within the Resilient Communities portfolio who have supported me to deliver so many positive initiatives this year.



A handwritten signature in cursive script, appearing to read 'Gangadhar'.

Portfolio Holder
Deputy Leader & Resilient Communities