

## **Council – 7th January 2019**

### **Report of Community, Leisure and Culture portfolio holder Councillor Garry Perry**

I am pleased to report to Council that the services within Community, Leisure and Culture have continued to deliver sterling work over the past twelve months. My services cover a wide variety of front-line services and I will start with those in Leisure, Culture & Operations.

#### **Sport & Leisure**

In Sport & Leisure the Active Living Centres have performed very well. Led by the new centres at Oak Park and Bloxwich, income is currently on target to exceed £4.1m in the 2018/19 financial year. We have also increased the number of memberships and this currently stands at 6,400. Prior to the development of the new centres, memberships were below 2,400. Memberships however only tell part of the story.

To deliver against our philosophy to get “*more people, more active, more often*” and to help improve the mental and physical health and well-being of Walsall’s residents, it is worth noting that these memberships are in addition to our swimming lesson and pay-to-play attendances. There will be more than 2 million visits to the four centres this year.

We also have more than 2,500 children enrolled on the Walsall Leisure Swim Academy. Delivered in partnership with the Walsall-based Swimming Teachers Association, the Swim Academy delivers weekly lessons to Walsall children, providing both a crucial life-skill and also encouraging a habit of regular participation.

It proves that where the council can be bold and to commit to schemes that cut across various agendas (health, children’s, adults and regeneration), that these projects can make a genuine contribution to enriching lives.

Forest Arts Centre has operated well during the year and is in a period of transition to meet its reduced revenue subsidy. I am pleased to say that it is becoming more commercial and has attracted a wide variety of shows and entertainment including Fairport Convention, Omid Djalil, Chris Ramsey and Jethro. Tribute bands covering Adele, Phil Collins, George Michael, Queen, Buddy Holly and Rod Stewart have added to the centres’ appeal. The addition of the new tiered seating in the A3 Arena has further enhanced the facility, confirming Forest Arts Centre as Walsall’s principal performing arts and events venue.

The Walsall Music Hub, delivering both school music and after-school music, has had another strong year, delivering weekly music tuition to more than 5,000 Walsall school children. The year culminated with four sell-out performances of Christmas at the Movies, with massed choirs of Walsall children performing favourites from festive films.

We are currently looking at a new operator to run the outdoor education service based at Aldridge Airport and Sneyd Reservoir and I hope that we are able to reach a satisfactory conclusion by mid-2019.

2019 offers further opportunity for development and the advancement of services to Walsall residents. The Active Living Centres' on-line booking and joining systems will make services easier for residents to access. New water-play features at Bloxwich Active Living Centre will enhance the family swim experience and the Oak Park car park extension is now underway, resolving the long-standing parking problems that were an unfortunate by-product of the success of the service.

### **21<sup>st</sup> Century Information & Skills service**

In the 21<sup>st</sup> Century Information & Skills service (the libraries) it has been a busy twelve months. 2018 has been primarily about consolidation of the redesigned service with the final staff changes being completed in Autumn last year. Officers have also been coordinating the project to renovate, restore and redecorate the Lichfield Street "Hub" building.

The Central Library closed for refurbishment on 23 December 2017. January saw the clearance of the entire library and former museum, ready for handover to the developers. Several heritage services around the country benefited from redundant museum items, including the National Emergency Services Museum in Sheffield and Dudley Canals Trust. A temporary town centre replacement for the Central Library opened in the former Town Hall Restaurant a week earlier than planned on 30 January. This offered a full array of reading resources and public computers for children and adults.

The Lichfield Street Central Library and EM Flint Art Gallery building originally housed the Central Library and Walsall Museum and has been the subject of a major £4.6m capital project has been undertaken during 2018. A new roof was required to replace the 113 year old tiles and damp damage has had to be extensively repaired in-line with conservation requirements. We have also created a new 4 hour fire resistant Archive within the old Art Gallery in-line with The National Archive's specification.

The modernised building will house the town's adult, children's and reference library, a small café offer, the Local History Centre & Archive (from Essex Street), an ICT training suite and hireable space. The focus will be a joined-up offer linking to the council's corporate priorities of economic development, jobs, training and skills as well as lifelong learning.

This month the temporary Council House Library will move back into the main building and will re-open at the end of January. Officers are continuing to review what we keep at the Local History Centre & Archive and this will also move into its new location in Lichfield Street and be open by the end of March.

From January 2018 the opening hours across the five District Libraries (Aldridge, Bloxwich, Brownhills, Darlaston and Willenhall) and Streetly Community Library increased by three

hours a week, to include Sunday opening 1pm-4pm. This means that every Walsall library now opens on Sundays – compared with only two other libraries across the rest of the Black Country.

The opening of the Council House Library restored seven day opening for the Central Library service after not opening on Mondays for several years. The Central Library service now opens 9.5 more hours at 59 hours per week, 18% more than any other Black Country library, and one of only three Black Country libraries open seven days a week.

In addition, the Mobile Library introduced a new Saturday service in May, specifically to target those areas of the Borough that no longer have a static library. Officers have also been working to procure an access control system for the District Libraries and Streetly Community Library that will allow “out-of-hours” access by our residents. Discussions are on-going and we hope to confirm a commence date for this project in the next few weeks.

The Schools Library Support Service unfortunately closed at the end of March following a decision by the Schools Forum not to continue with de-delegated funding. Although extensive marketing was undertaken at the time, not enough schools were able to commit to buy into the service to make it viable. We continue to work on options to make best use of the remaining resources to offer a limited service based around the district libraries.

To celebrate the centenary of female suffrage, Aldridge District Library hosted two talks by local historian Sue Satterthwaite and these were covered by local TV news.

The 2018 Summer Reading Challenge was on a “Mischievous Makers” theme. The Reading Challenge is important in helping to keep up children’s reading levels over the summer holiday period and attracted some 1,855 children from across the Borough. There were also twenty-five separate Reading Challenge events held in the libraries and 527 children and 270 adults attended these.

National Libraries’ Week was held in October 2018 and marked the launch of Walsall’s new provision of PressReader – a digital transformation exercise enabling 24/7 access to full digital editions of some 7,000 newspapers and periodicals. Free with a library card PressReader enables direct delivery of material from more than 120 countries directly to a PC, laptop or mobile device. There were almost 2,000 downloads in the first month.

### **Walsall Leather Museum**

The Leather Museum mounted a special exhibition from February to May 2018 to mark the centenary of female suffrage. This included an original 1916 white dress in remarkable condition, supported by contemporary banners from local Co-operative societies. It also used items from the Museum store’s social and domestic collection to highlight the role of women at work and in the home during this period.

The museum held its annual Easter Family Fun Day with theatrical and other performances and activities throughout the museum all day. This is always the biggest event of the year and in May the museum hosted a Walsall College exhibition by its Special Educational Needs students.

Staff delivered a new pop-up exhibition for HRH The Princess Royal's visit to Walsall in June and also for Willenhall Memorial Park's First World War Day.

For the 30<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of the Leather Museum, there was a "We Are 30!" reception on 9 July launching the "Celebrate!" exhibition. This showcased some of the most creative and successful designers working in leather today. It also launched the revamped "Made in Walsall" gallery: the museum's biggest permanent gallery, redesigned with new interpretation panels and new exhibits. There were also leatherworking demonstrations by staff from local, high-end leather goods company, Ettinger.

Wicked Walsall (October 2018 – April 2019) is the museum's current temporary exhibition, delving into the darker side of Walsall's history, and utilising some of the weird and wonderful artefacts from the Museum's stored collections.

The Leather Museum was used as a film set this year for a new film, "You Are My Sunshine". Catherine Lister and Ian Bott were both featured in a BBC "Inside Out" episode which focussed on the end of the First World War. "Homes under the Hammer" was also filmed at the Museum.

We are currently looking at how the Museum can focus on "Made in Walsall" to better focus on Walsall as a town of 100 trades and be proud on what we have done in past, are making now, and will continue to make in the future. It is anticipated that we will be able to roll out a new offer, whilst still holding onto our strong leather heritage, during 2019.

## **Bereavement & Registration**

The Council's Register Office submitted its Annual Performance Report to the National General Register Office in April 2018. I am pleased to report that the National General Register Office confirmed that the council continues to be a high performing district in terms of performance against the Key Performance Indicators and national standards.

Work has recently been undertaken to improve the internal decoration of the ceremony rooms at the Register Office. This has improved the overall experience for couples attending their ceremonies.

We are on target at the Local History Centre & Archive for its relocation from Essex Street to the new Lichfield Hub early this year. Work has included the review and cataloguing of the existing archive collection and this has enabled a rationalisation in the material which will need to be transferred.

As I am sure Members will agree the work of our Bereavement Services is one of the most sensitive that we provide and, in support of this, I am looking to make significant investment in the cemeteries and crematorium. The 2019/20 draft Capital Programme includes provision for the extension of Willenhall Lawn Cemetery. This will provide further burial areas and the refurbishment of the public toilets plus the installation of air conditioning at Streetly Crematorium.

## **New Art Gallery**

Between January and April the Gallery hosted the National Gallery Masterpiece Tour. We were privileged to be chosen as the first venue of 2018 to exhibit Hans Holbein's *A Lady with a Squirrel and a Starling* and this was the centrepiece in our Family Gallery. Shown alongside are complementary works from our Permanent Collection encompassing key collections themes: *Portraits and Animals and Birds*.

Local artist Andrew Tift presented a major solo exhibition "Immortalise" from May to September. The exhibition brought together brand new works combined with selected works from the artist's past and comprised of paintings, drawings, sketchbooks and for the first time, a series of photographs.

A fully illustrated publication accompanies the exhibition and a limited edition print by the artist has been produced to accompany the exhibition, available from the Gallery Shop.

In September the world famous artists Gilbert & George (G&G) visited the NAG on 18<sup>th</sup> September. In conjunction with the University of Wolverhampton's School of Art, the Gallery hosted a public "in conversation" with G&G to a packed lecture theatre of nearly 200 students, staff and the public on the following day.

In conjunction with Arts Council England and the University we have just undertaken an external consultancy to look further at the future management and governance options for the Gallery and are currently reviewing their report.

## **CCTV**

The contract with Transport for West Midlands continues to be monitored and the webpage has updated and will continue to be improved. During 2018/19 the surveillance system has received investment including upgrading Walsall Town Centre and Darlaston cameras. Over 30 downloads have been requested by the Police and via Freedom of Information Requests. Investment into the system will continue with Aldridge district centre receiving permanent cameras early in the New Year.

The deployable cameras remain in-house with requests being managed via the operational locality panels to ensure the assets are used effectively. Downloads for information currently stands at 25.

Since July 2018 the covert cameras have been managed by the community safety team which forms part of the fly tipping taskforce. Over 38 downloads have been carried out to support Community Protection in bringing forward prosecutions.

## **Victims of Crime**

Referrals for support to all types of victims of crime continues to increase as does the demand for support from internal service areas. This includes seasonality prevention work, access and egress ASB issues, large scale security improvements, planning application reviews and mediation.

Over 90 victims of crime and anti-social behavior have been supported this year ranging from items supplied to safeguard / prevent crime, to support through signposting and further referrals. A large proportion are victims of domestic abuse referred in by council officers, the Police and Women's Aid.

Financial support for victims has been sought through the office of the Police & Crime Commissioner to address the upturn in victim referrals.

## **Prevent**

The Prevent Coordinator continues to work alongside the Home Office and local partners to develop and drive forward a Prevent Delivery Plan. Part of the plan includes the Prevent Education Officer providing support and training to a wide range of schools and education providers in the borough including Early Years and out of school education. Since June 2017 WRAP training has been delivered to over 3,000 members of staff in the education sector and 177 council employees have also received training.

Identifying vulnerabilities within the community plays a crucial role in the Prevent agenda and these have been supported through the provision of three successful bids to the Home Office; Reveal Theatre Company, British Muslim Youth Group and Aaina Community Hub.

The Prevent agenda will be further extended to elected members who have been invited to attend a meeting with senior officers from the Home Office on 17 January 2019 so they can ask questions direct to the Home Office and help influence national policy and decision making around this agenda.

## **Safer Walsall Partnership**

The SWP has been refreshed and the strategic priorities have been agreed by the Partnership. Attendance has improved and a number of working groups have been designed to deliver against the priorities. The Partnership can expect to receive a strategic assessment in January 2019 which will help shape a new Community Safety Plan and will provide the opportunity to review the strategic priorities.

The Partnership is also co-designing a Community Safety Conference with whg which will be delivered in 2019 with a key focus being around 'exploitation'.

Modern Slavery training has been cascaded down to all staff within the council and further training for the VCS will follow in 2019.

A scoping exercise to understand need / demand and service provision is underway in relation to domestic abuse which will help shape and influence a new Domestic Abuse Strategy in 2019.

### **Localities and Partnerships**

The Locality Model has progressed significantly this year performing at operational and strategic levels. Operationally, issues are referred to the operational locality panels having been pre-screened to ensure reports are comprehensive in detail in order to provide the best solutions for the people in need of support. Vulnerable locations and themes are now being progressed as part of the panel meetings.

The Strategic Locality Partnership Boards have each agreed 4 priorities drawn from the Walsall Plan and these will be revisited once the Walsall Plan has been fully refreshed. Work is continuing with partners to understand how best to integrate communities into the model to help shape emerging work streams and input into the development and delivery of Locality Plans.

A large number of community groups are being supported to meet local needs and address repetitive issues which is delivered using a partnership approach and encouraging communities to participate on the problem solving process. The range of support and project delivery is broad and includes upcycling some of the old library buildings to community led initiatives, 10 streets work, seasonality projects and business meetings.

### **Supporting the Voluntary and Community Sector**

The VCS Transformation Programme has actively worked strategically to put in place long term solutions to sustain the VCS. This includes the development and approval of the Council's first formal Policy since COMPACT to support the VCS. A Community Asset Transfer Policy received cabinet approval in September 2018. The aim of the Policy is to provide a fair and transparent framework to consider the transfer of council owned assets to the VCS. This process promotes the co-location of services and supports the VCS in delivery high quality services in areas of need.

There is also now informative information on iShare that provides a breakdown of the voluntary and community sector service offer, drilled down into each locality. This will be updated every 6 months and aims to add value to colleagues and partners at an operational level working with children, adults and families.

The Council has also recently signed up to a Voluntary Sector Partnership Agreement with the VCS through One Walsall that commits the council to a set of principles and indicates our commitment to the VCS and the value put upon this sector.

Phase two of the programme is currently being designed with the VCS Board which forms part of the Walsall Proud Programme.

**Exemplary VCS Projects:** Walsall Council has already been working hand in hand with the VCS which are aligned the Council's Corporate Plan and contributes to the Walsall Plan priorities. Listed below is a small example of such initiatives:-

**One Walsall:** The Clinical Commissioning Board, The VIEW board and the Council have provided strong support to a new and vibrant organisation, which supports shared priorities, and focus on championing the VCS sector. A three year arrangement was agreed and One Walsall has delivered to its plan. Positive discussions are underway to ensure that the work of One Walsall can continue for the next three years. This is a key part of the transformation of the sector.

**The Reading Rooms in Pelsall:** This initiative has only been achieved through the involvement and commitment of the VCS. A brand new building, which was in decline, has had its fortunes turned around by:

- Listening and supporting the VCS sector to deliver differently with a heavy focus on community need.
- Brave leadership from both the CCG and the Council to allow the sector to drive the facility forward.

It is a successful and vibrant place with levels of footfall increased four- fold. Communities came together to support and manage the old Pelsall Library space which is now delivering services including a book exchange which has over 800 members. Pelsall book exchange is run with the support of over 80 volunteers who are passionate about keeping this provision open for the community. The remaining space has been used for community activities including children's groups, a Friendly Gym, a community café and a job club. Further initiatives are planned for the future as the model continually focuses on community need.

**Walsall Night Shelter:** This service was commissioned and works with over 100 volunteers to provide improved cold weather provision for rough sleepers and provides an opportunity for other services to support this group of vulnerable adults.

**Walsall Wood Book Exchange:** This project was raised initially by Walsall Council Councillors who met with council officers and the community to set up a book exchange within Oak Park Active Living Centre which would be managed by volunteers. Books were also donated from a number of sources including a proportion no longer required from Pelsall Book Exchange. This is a good initiative which also showcases the will and ability to work across wards for the benefit of our communities.

**New Invention:** A facility that supports community work with a particular focus on youth provision but inclusive of all elements of the community. A community organisation now



manages the building and their newly opened 'Hive' youth club attracts over 40 young people each night. An innovative school uniform exchange programme, which incorporated the local schools, was well received by the local community and Tesco donated new uniform and stationery to sell. Whilst the new parent and toddler sessions are growing in numbers, other community activities are being developed based on the needs of the community.

**Streetly Sports and Community Association:** This organisation has recently invested heavily in the modernisation and update of their building, which has increased usage of the building and their facilities. They have refurbished their changing rooms, new insulated ceilings fitted, complete redecoration, new signage and rebranding. With the support of the Disability Facilities Grant, the disabled toilet was also replaced. The building has been transformed, and the community have welcomed the changes. They have increased their health and well-being provision and offer a range activities for all ages.

There are many lessons that have been learned from our work and much more to learn including:

- A true understanding of the power of the sector.
- How the sector can support the priorities of our work.
- The skills and professionalism within the sector that often remains untapped.
- Our role in supporting communities.

## **Community Development**

The Community Associations (CA) continue to be championed and supported internally and externally to the Council. Additional funding (along with their annual grant) was offered to the CA's recently to pilot short term projects and invest in their sustainability. This was gratefully received by all organizations. There has been a hive of activity in the community over the festive period with many holding pantomimes, Christmas/craft fayres and providing Christmas lunches for local resident. They have all been well received by the local community.

2018 has seen a number of CA's invest their reserves in the refurbishment of their centres. Streetly Sports and Community Association and Bloxwich Community Partnership have made major alterations which have considerably improved their sustainability. I would suggest a visit to both.

Walsall Community Network meet every quarter and is attended by most CA's. The meetings are valuable to the centre managers who share advice and support. The meetings are also an opportunity for Council officers to share information and to take back any concerns/issues.

During April 2018 – September 2018 the activities, projects and events funded through community Development benefited over 20300 residents.

December 2018 saw a significant amount of community activity including Christmas tree festivals, Community events and Cultural celebrations. All were well managed, well attended and enjoyed by local communities. They allowed time for our cohesion team to start community conversations across a whole range of issues.

### **Walsall People Project**

The Walsall peoples Project is a grant funded project designed to bring communities together.

The project is progressing really well and is starting to have real impact. We have expanded the number of drop in sessions within Community Associations. Relationships are building between communities and increased service integration is occurring in areas where European communities have historically not engaged.

The Roma event on Sunday 9<sup>th</sup> December at Palfrey CA attracted over 300 parents and children with over 25 volunteers helping. Cultural costumes were made and children and parents engaged in traditional singing and dancing, visiting a fire service presentation/engine and Police and Public Health stalls. A number of new volunteers have come forward and a cultural dress making project is to be developed.

The Ministry of Housing Communities and Local Government are very complementary of our approach as we are employing a Hungarian Roma directly. We are deemed as the best practice nationally. Whilst identifying the right person was difficult the outcomes have been worth the time and effort as we have reached out to up to 400 Roma residents.

Public Health attended the event and we are planning to develop a healthy life style project specifically for Roma.

The Housing Standards element of our activity is going well however we still have many landlords who offer very poor accommodation to newly arrived communities and established communities.

### **Lets Talk About It**

We are currently evaluating funding applications to deliver basic English to individuals who can speak no or little English. There have been a number of very good submission while also experiencing a number of applications who were using the fund to build organisational infrastructure with very limited outputs. Delivery of the successful project will be in January 2019.

### **School Twinning**

The school twinning developed by Community Cohesion team is looking very positive with a total of 14 schools now involved. Working through the Twinning Network and the Faith and Belief Forum the outcomes to date have been really positive.

The intention through the two Big Locals, Mossley and Palfrey will be to further community group twinning and expand the principle of twinning to other areas, such as Streetly, Pelsall and East and West of the borough and also twinning with community groups.

## **Walsall Smiles**

We are launching a new campaign to make Walsall the smiling capital of Britain. This venture is still in its infancy. We will be working with community groups, schools, nurseries, businesses and directly with the public to give awards.

## **Hate Crime**

A Hate Crime Strategy Group meets on a regular basis and we will be developing our hate crime reporting systems and will use champions to reduce hate in Walsall while increase reporting. The focus of the work will be centered on victims and their experiences.

## **Integration Area Programme**

Walsall was successful in potentially attracting in over 2 million of grants from MHCLG dedicated to Integration Area activity. £815k of this funding has been allocated to us for this financial year and further announcements are expected in January 2019. We are intending for 70% of this funding to be used in grass root community projects. The Programme is independent from the Council and governed through the Local Integration Partnership (LIP). The LIP – **Walsall for All** - met again on 11 December where a launch date was agreed and a potential ministerial visit was discussed.

## **Environmental Health**

### **Food Safety**

The service continues to inspect businesses to ensure they are hygienically preparing, storing and serving food in order to protect public health. The Food Law Enforcement Service Plan was placed before Council in and received positive feedback in terms of the amount of work done by a relatively small team of officers. Of particular satisfaction is that compliance with food hygiene law in Walsall Businesses continues to improve and is at the highest it has been since the introduction of the rating system in 2011 with nearly 90% of businesses achieving a satisfactory assessment. Of these businesses nearly 50% (761) have the very highest rating (5) and of the 1500 business rated only 0.4% (7) have the very lowest rating (0). The service also continues to ensure that those few businesses who consistently flout hygiene regulations are robustly dealt with four businesses currently under investigation for poor standards, two businesses issued with Simple Cautions, two business owners prosecuted and fined over £1000 each and 1 business owner receiving a suspended prison sentence, curfew order and compensation costs payable to victims of a Salmonella food poisoning outbreak caused by his business in summer 2017. Nine businesses have been formally closed using emergency powers due to pest infestations and 14 served with health and safety prohibition notices due to unsafe electrics, unsafe gas appliances and unguarded machinery posing an immediate risk to staff.

## **Health Switch Award**

Health Switch encourages and rewards good compliance with food hygiene regulation and the provisions of a wider variety of healthy foods and food preparation processes at takeaway premises. The award has now been introduced to 150 takeaway businesses - 63 businesses have been issued with Bronze Awards, 34 have been issued with Silver Awards and 16 have been issued Gold Awards. The attainment of the award is reported well on social media and in the press and this year working with The Crossing at St Pauls a Youtube video extolling its virtues was produced reaching many thousands of people interested in what the award has to offer as well as what healthy food the Crossing provides.

## **Health and Safety**

Walsall Environmental Health working in partnership with Birmingham City Council, Wolverhampton Environmental Health, PHE (West Midlands) was nominated for a Chartered Institute of Environmental Health excellence award. In partnership these organisations developed and delivered the first bespoke eyebrow micro-blading infection prevention and control training course. This initiative aims to reduce potential skin infections and blood borne virus risks.

Environmental Health received notifications of accidents that take place at businesses within the Borough. These accidents are risk assessed for severity and investigations undertaken where resources allow.

Some of the more significant investigations that are ongoing include an individual severing their fingers whilst cutting meat with a band saw, a person falling from a low loader and breaking their femur and hip and another individual having his back broken after falling from and being trapped by a pallet truck.

The service continues to prioritise reports of legionella bacteria in water systems due to the serious consequences for public health. A major investigation into poor water management at a local hotel has been undertaken and health and safety staff continue to work closely with the hotel owners to ensure customers and staff are not placed at risk. Close work has also been undertaken with Public Health England and the Health and Safety Executive relating to two domestic cases of legionella infection.

## **Animal Control**

On the 1st October 2018 the Animal Welfare (Licensing of Activities Involving Animals)(England) Regulations 2018 came into force. Environmental Health staff commenced a programme of "Animal Activity Licence" inspections in order to issue new

licences in 2019 for selling animals as pets, boarding of cats and dogs, hiring out horses, breeding dogs and keeping or training animals for exhibition. This is one of the largest changes to animal licensing law in over 50 years and has taken a considerable amount of time and energy to set up using only existing resource within the team.

Significant amounts of work also took place in response to concerns over the licensing or otherwise of Rosedene Rescue Centre in Rushall. Following extensive investigations, discussions with the owners and liaison with Police, RSPCA, vets and others the owners decided against pursuing the licensing of the premises to trade in animals and continue as a purely local rescue activity.

### **Pest Control.**

2018 saw the busiest season for the pest control team since the introduction of pest charges in April 2016. The two pest control officers dealt with over 1500 appointments in 9 months. The officers will be embarking shortly on a programme of baiting the main and domestic sewers with bait to assist in controlling rat activity in areas of high risk or demand.

### **Trading Standards**

Trading Standards continue to use local, regional and national intelligence to identify key issues that need action to protect the public's health and also financial detriment.

### **Product Safety**

The service has been responsible for a number of unsafe product recalls during the year including unsafe toys, electrical goods and skin lightening cream. The service has worked extensively with a start-up business that acts as a distributor for foreign manufacturers and importers, selling a myriad of diverse items through online shopping platforms such as eBay. Officers have spent considerable time with the business to resolve issues arising from unsafe goods stopped by Port Authorities, providing advice on the safety of their products and guiding them through the international recall of an unsafe ceiling light. By engaging with the business officers have not only helped prevent unsafe goods being distributed but also saved the business significant costs associated with product recalls.

### **Illicit Tobacco**

Promotional campaigns have been undertaken to further raise the issue of illicit tobacco in the borough. The initiative introduces the public to the tobacco sniffer dogs and lots of material showing the grotesque impact of smoking tobacco on health. These dangers and the anonymous hotline number for reporting illicit tobacco sellers have also been promoted on the rear of all Walsall Council payslips.

Intelligence received about illicit tobacco has led to joint working between Trading Standards, Walsall Police, Border Control and HMRC raiding shops selling counterfeit and non duty paid tobacco. As well as disrupting the supply of illicit and harmful products and raising public awareness illegal workers have also been identified during these raids. A total of 69,190 illicit cigarettes and 16,950g of illicit hand rolling tobacco have been seized and investigations into these matters are ongoing. As a result of similar activity in 2017 a convenience store owner was arrested and in January 2018 was found guilty of possessing 12,900 illicit cigarettes and 5650g of illicit hand rolling tobacco. The Court imposed a 12 month community order and costs of £3478.65.

Funding from the Black Country Tobacco Alliance has been utilised for a new venture using an Eastern European undercover investigator to try to reveal the extent of illicit tobacco sales from shops that are believed to be selling but are not keeping stock on the premises. Recent interventions resulted in 6 out of 7 shops selling illicit tobacco to the undercover test purchaser and investigations continue.

### **Underage Sales**

A project investigating the safety and sale to minors of e-liquids at Bescot Market was funded by Public Health Walsall. After the first phase of visits and underage test purchasing all stall holders were brought to compliance with respect to safety and labelling requirements and one sale of e-liquid to a minor was made. This project is being replicated by other Black Country authorities.

There have been 3 other test purchasing sales to minors by Walsall retailers relating to alcohol, cigarettes and e-liquids. A departmental caution was issued with regard to the sale of e-liquid and further legal action is being considered for the other two sales. Furthermore, in June 2018, a shop owner was fined £1380 and ordered to pay £1584 costs after selling alcohol to a 14 year old test purchasing volunteer.

### **Food Standards**

During the year the Trading Standards food sampling program identified banned food colours in Asian sweets and takeaway meals, peanuts in peanut free takeaway meals, substitution of premium fish species with cheaper alternatives and fraudulent goat meat sold from butchery counters. Follow up samples, business advice and formal investigations are ongoing.

An allergy advice project has also been undertaken using shared data from Environmental Health and Trading Standards. Letters and information leaflets have gone out to all zero and one rated food catering premises. Follow up visits are planned together with sampling where appropriate.

A regional Trading Standards project investigating the sale of foreign labelled food was combined with a local project investigating the sale of out of date food at smaller convenience stores. Officers identified and visited 19 retailers selling foreign labelled food. Such foods do not contain the required allergen information in English nor special instructions for use for nutritional products such as infant formula milk. Of the retailers visited 5 are now compliant and officers are currently working with the other businesses to achieve compliance. 13 shops were found to be selling food past its use by date. One of these had 76 out of date food items for sale some of which were over a month past their use by date. These foods were taken as evidence and investigations are ongoing.

### **Intellectual Property Crime – Counterfeiting**

Intelligence from Walsall Markets office led to the arrest of perfume sellers in Walsall town centre. Four men working as a team were selling counterfeit perfumes from carrier bags often targeting vulnerable consumers and accompanying them to the bank to withdraw cash. The men were arrested during an undercover trading standards and police exercise. The matter is still under investigation.

### **Fraud and Fair Trading**

A joint Trading Standards and police operation also led to the arrest of two men in Walsall town centre suspected of bogus charity collection. The two men were purporting to be collecting money for a children's cancer charity but were in fact working for a bogus charity collection business that on further investigation by trading standards are operating nationwide and are subject to a wider inquiry.

Walsall Trading Standards have continued to assist vulnerable consumers in civil disputes. These interventions have amongst many positive results led to £1091.00 being recovered for a 91 year old consumer in respect of a mis-sold hearing aid, £10,000 for an elderly disabled couple in respect of a faulty bathroom adaptation and £1574 for an elderly lady from her care provider. Deeper analysis of the care provider case has resulted in a wider assessment of potential unfair terms and conditions imposed by care providers across the borough and trading standards are consulting with Adult Safeguarding on the matter. Trading Standards have also put considerable resources into an online bed and mattress retailer that was highlighted as a problem trader at a national level. This work has had a positive effect on the number of complaints and the refund of a considerable amount of money although further work is still required.

Trading standards continue to investigate all complaints of doorstep crime and rogue trading with the aim of providing support to victims and effective enforcement action against perpetrators. A fraudulent trading prosecution has been brought against an individual who took £3,500 from an elderly, vulnerable consumer for roofing work that was

described as “worthless” by the expert witness who examined the roof on behalf of trading standards. The case has been adjourned several times and will be heard in the New Year.

## **Weights and Measures**

In December 2017 Walsall undertook a short measure project in relation to beer and spirits. Ten out of eleven premises delivered short measure beer, all but one of these were within the industry tolerance of 5% deficient. Businesses were advised and follow up letters sent.

Trading standards once again undertook a weighbridge testing exercise this year. 12 weighbridges were tested and four were found to be out of tolerance resulting in 28 day repair notices being issued. One of these was a public weighbridge that was over 100kg out of tolerance.

## **Licensing**

Work has continued throughout the year to better integrate Licensing into the wider Regulatory and Public Health work of the Service. Information from Licensing is and will continue to be compared and contrasted with information held by Environmental Health and Trading Standards to ensure those who do not comply with all regulatory regimes are specifically targeted.

Work on reviewing and updating Private hire and Hackney Carriage Conditions and Policies resulted in a public consultation that received over 250 comments from the Trade, residents, internal services and external partners and charities. These comments have been worked on by the service and key partners such as legal service and Clean and Green and should result in an excellent and more modern set of documents.

Similarly the Service has consulted on the review of the Walsall Council Statement of Principles for Gambling. Statutorily this Statement has to be reviewed and published every three years. The licensing of premises is strictly controlled by law and guidance but the wider implications of Gambling on the communities of Walsall are also being considered and consulted upon.

Taxi Licensing has introduced a text messaging service for easier and more direct communication with drivers to try and improve efficiencies and prevent delays in the licensing process. It has also continued to investigate and scrutinise applications for Private Hire and Hackney Carriage drivers licences to ensure that only those that the Council consider fit and proper hold a licence in the Borough. The Service is contributing to Black Country and wider regional discussions about consistency and better communications between licensing authorities to ensure the wider system of licensing is effective.



## **Community Protection**

The Community Protection Team are responsible for enforcing a range of legislation relating to Taxi and Private Hire vehicles, Statutory Nuisance, antisocial behaviour, licensing, unauthorised encampments and environmental crime. This work is undertaken through a programme of investigating individual complaints and conducting targeted enforcement operations.

### **Unauthorised Encampments (UE)**

In 2018 there has been a reduction in the number of UEs with 40 on Council Land or Highway and 20 on private land. (This compares to 65 and 27 respectively in 2017). 16 of these were on sites on which there is an injunction. (figures to 12/12/18 to update after 31/12/18). There are several work streams on-going to further improve how UEs are managed and to support both residents and members of the travelling community. This includes working with colleagues in planning, regeneration on the establishment of transit sites; work with public health on developing a needs assessment and work with the cohesion team on engagement with the travelling community. The service coordinated the Authority's response to the Government consultation on unauthorised encampments and developments. The government has not yet published its response to the consultation. Officers worked with colleagues in Money Home Job to support a particularly vulnerable family with young children to get permanent accommodation in the borough.

### **Environmental Crime**

Work has continued in conjunction with Clean & Green to tackle fly tipping. In December "Walsall's Most Wanted" was launched. An appeal was made to the public to identify people who have been captured on CCTV fly tipping but who have not been identified through the normal enquiries. Images and video of three suspects were put out to appeal and within 10 days, positive identities were received for two of them. The reward for providing information which results in a successful prosecution of a fly tipper has been increased from £100 to £500. There are currently 31 live investigations into incidents where fly tipping has been captured on CCTV. In total, investigations have commenced into 71 cases during the year resulting in the issue of 17 FPNs. 24 have had to be closed as there was insufficient evidence, vehicles were cloned, stolen or on false plates or due to the personal circumstances of the offender. The CCTV cameras in use for fly tipping are covert cameras, mostly situated in the more rural locations. There have been 3 column-mounted camera systems trialled during the year resulting in the purchase of 6 additional cameras. These are suitable for locating in the urban areas of the borough and will be deployed early in the year. The team have dealt with over 3000 enquiries that are categorised as environmental. In addition to the FPNs for fly tipping, 144 formal notices have been served for matters such as accumulations of rubbish in gardens, the presence

of vermin, drains etc. The powers to serve notices contained in the Antisocial Behaviour Crime and Policing Act 2014 have been used to clear two locations of rubbish which have problem areas for many years. The notices also require the owners to keep the site clear. The proprietors at one location have appealed the notice and the case is scheduled to be heard in Spring 2019. The outcome of that appeal will inform the extent to which these powers can be used in this way more widely across the borough. Along with colleagues from Clean & Green, officers are being filmed for a Channel 5 documentary highlighting the work of local authorities in tackling various aspects of filth and grime. This programme is scheduled for broadcast early in 2019.

### **Anti Social Behaviour**

The Community Protection Team has initiated three prosecutions for breach of the Public Spaces Protection Order (PSPO) that is in the town centre. Two individuals were prosecuted for injecting drugs and were given fines by the court. A third case is pending for begging so as to cause harassment, alarm or distress and failing to keep a dog on a lead or under control. An application for a Criminal Behaviour Order is being made alongside this prosecution. The PSPO on the Beechdale estate expires in 2019 and work is starting now to determine if that order should be renewed and if there are any amendments to it needed.

### **Licensing Enforcement**

There have been a number of proactive enforcement operations, often out of normal hours targeting the hackney carriage and private hire trades. These are to ensure that the drivers and proprietors are complying with the requirements and to ensure that members of the public can travel in safety. 21 drivers had their licence suspended or revoked for failing to produce medical certificates or their DBS returns, or because they were involved in other offences. In addition 39 drivers or vehicle proprietors were taken to Licensing and Safety Committee for various breaches of the legislation and licence conditions. Two investigations are ongoing for illegal plying for hire. Multi-agency vehicle stop checks are carried out in conjunction with the police, VOSA and other agencies to ensure taxis and scrap metal collectors' vehicles are safe, insured and licensed. Other aspects of the compliance are also checked.

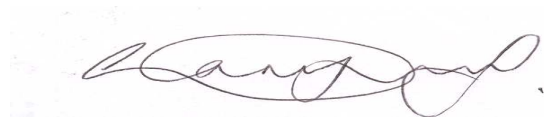
Visits are being made to premises which have not paid the annual fee under the Licensing Act 2003 and whose premises licence has been suspended. Joint visits are also made with the police to pubs to ensure compliance with the legislation and any conditions attached to the licence.

## **Statutory Nuisance**

There have been three prosecutions in 2018 for breach of abatement notices relating to two incidents. One case was for the odour emanating from waste material in bird cages which was also attracting vermin whilst the other related to light nuisance. A further case is pending in relation to a barking dog causing a noise nuisance. In total 45 abatement notices have been issued during the year.

## **Other Work**

Investigations are ongoing for the placing of scaffolding on the highway without a permit following an incident where a lorry was damaged by a protruding scaffolding pole. In total the team have dealt with 7260 complaints and enquiries and served 197 formal notices during the year.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'G Perry', is written over a faint, light-colored grid background.

Councillor G Perry  
17 December 2018