

Cabinet – 20 March 2024

Walsall Healthy Levelling Up Partnership

Portfolio:	Councillor Andrew – Deputy Leader & Regeneration
Related portfolios:	Councillor Perry – Deputy Leader & Resilient Communities
Service:	Economy, Environment and Communities
Wards:	St Matthews
Key decision:	Yes
Forward plan:	Yes

1. Aim

1.1. In March 2023, Levelling Up Partnerships (LUPs) were announced by government as a new place-based approach to policy making and regeneration, with Walsall selected as one of twenty LUP areas. This report seeks Cabinet approvals to take forward the Walsall Healthy Levelling Up Partnership and deliver positive outcomes for the local area.

2. Summary

2.1. Levelling Up Partnerships (LUPs) are a new place-based approach to policy making that will bring together public and private sector partners and the collective power of government to provide bespoke place-based regeneration and boost delivery of the levelling up priorities.

2.2. LUPs were introduced by government in March 2023 at the Spring Budget where an initial twenty areas in England, including Walsall, were invited to form a Partnership with the Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities (DLUHC). The partnership locations were identified as the most in need of levelling up over the 2023-24 and 2024-25 periods based on four key metrics:

- Percentage of adults with Level 3+ qualifications
- Gross Value Added (GVA) per hour worked
- Median gross weekly pay
- Healthy life expectancy

2.3. In October 2023, the council was also approached by the Department of Health and Social Care (DHSC) with the opportunity to be considered as a “Healthy LUP”, recognising some of the key health and inequality problems in the borough. A proposal was subsequently drafted based on harnessing key health

benefits of the regeneration opportunities that a LUP would bring. The proposal was shared and agreed with CMT in October 2023 and submitted to DHSC in November 2023.

- 2.4. The activity set out in this report to drive the Walsall Healthy Levelling Up Partnership aligns with Our Council Plan themes of; supporting a dynamic, resilient, and diverse economy where businesses invest, and everyone has the right jobs and the right housing; people are supported to maintain or improve their health, wellbeing, and quality of life; and the people of Walsall feel safe in a cleaner, greener borough.
- 2.5. In addition to £90,000 initial capacity funding, the LUP area could be allocated up to £20million funding to distribute to priority projects, subject to the government approving proposals. This is therefore a key decision as such funding exceeds the threshold for “significant” expenditure of £500,000.

3. Recommendations

- 3.1. That Cabinet approve that the council act as the Accountable Body for the Walsall Healthy Levelling Up Partnership, to be in receipt of and administer funds of up to £20million in accordance with government guidance and approvals.
- 3.2. That Cabinet delegates authority to the Executive Director for Economy, Environment and Communities, in consultation with the Cabinet Member for Regeneration, to agree the final Walsall Healthy Levelling Up Partnership priority projects with DLUHC, and to finalise governance and delivery responsibilities.

4. Report detail – know

Context

- 4.1. Walsall has been selected as one of twenty LUP areas across the country who have access to a shared pot of up to £400million (up to £20million for each area). It is recognised that each area is faced with unique challenges and opportunities and each LUP will seek to devise a policy programme that supports the “Levelling Up” agenda in the short term. To do this, government plan to engage in an intensive deep dive phase which combines granular data with local expertise and knowledge. The DLUHC team will provide the resource needed for the deep dive stage of the LUP, which is expected to conclude by the end of June 2024.
- 4.2. The proposal to be a “Healthy LUP” means that Walsall would be one of only three or four Healthy LUPs in the country, increasing the interest amongst Government Departments in how Walsall sets out to tackle the challenges faced.

- 4.3. LUP areas have been encouraged to begin exploring opportunities that might benefit from a Partnership approach and start to build a meaningful and long-term two-way relationship. Government is keen to identify and understand in more depth the key challenges and opportunities for Walsall as part of the preparatory work building up to the deep dive phase. To this end, initial introductory meetings have been held between senior council officers and representatives from DLUHC to share information and discuss proposed working arrangements.
- 4.4. DLUHC had previously advised that to develop the Walsall LUP proposals, a £90k revenue budget allocation would be provided. It has now been confirmed that the council will receive £45,000 revenue funding to spend in 2023/24 and a further £45,000 in 2024/25 and therefore consideration of how this will be utilised is required.
- 4.5. Once the deep dive phase has concluded, to help unleash the full potential of the LUP, a package of policy interventions will be agreed with the LUP area through a programme level business case, led by DLUHC in consultation and with input from the Partnership. The current expectation is that each LUP could be allocated approximately £20million of capital funding for delivery in the area. The LUP will be able to allocate and distribute funding subject to the government approving the proposals.
- 4.6. Initial discussions with representatives from DLUHC have suggested that the governance and delivery models could be similar to the format employed under the Town Deal funded programmes, so the Town Deal Board could be asked to have an oversight role of the delivery of the agreed projects. The final details for governance and delivery are expected to be agreed with DLUHC as the Deep Dive phase is initiated. DLUHC are also expecting to agree the final list of projects with the council once the initial Deep Dive work has been completed.
- 4.7. The process and timescales for the development stages and transition to delivery of the LUP are as follows:

Activity	Expected Timing
Preparatory work for LUP	Ongoing- <i>current stage</i>
LUP introductory meeting between the Levelling Up Minister and the MP(s)	2-4 weeks prior to the beginning of the deep dive phase (March 2024)
Kick-off meeting with LUP policy team in advance of deep dive phase	2 weeks prior to the beginning of the deep dive phase (March 2024)
Deep dive phase	Q2 (Apr-Jun) 2024
Transition to LUP delivery	From Q3 (July-Sept) 2024

Council Plan Priorities

- 4.8. Our Council Plan 2022-25 sets out the Council's aims of reducing inequalities and maximising potential. The Walsall Healthy Levelling Up Partnership will align with the objectives of Our Council Plan including:

- Economic- supporting a dynamic, resilient, and diverse economy where businesses invest, and everyone has the right jobs and the right housing.
- People- People can access support in their community to keep safe and well and remain independent at home.
- Communities- the people of Walsall feel safe in a cleaner, greener borough.

Risk management

- 4.9. The LUP programme is a government initiative in which there is a prescribed role for local authorities, working with local partners and private sector. The council is required to manage the risk of non-compliance by adhering to the guidelines provided by DLUHC and by ensuring that partnership members and partners do the same. This management will be supported by the toolkit and by working with the task force and with DLUHC officers to ensure that funding is spent in accordance with the guidance and objectives of the programme.

Financial implications

- 4.10. An initial £45,000 of revenue funding has been released by government to develop the Levelling Up Partnership pipeline and project level business cases. A further £45,000 will be administered in 2024/25 for revenue related activity.
- 4.11. Once LUP proposals are approved by government, the council will be in receipt of up to £20million to be received in the 2024/25 financial year. The council will act as Accountable Body for these funds and will allocate and administer funding as per the approved business case.
- 4.12. Programme Management and Accountable Body costs would be recorded and included within the individual project budgets so that these could be recovered from each of the projects as appropriate.
- 4.13. Initial dialogue with DLUHC suggests that, similar to Town Deal Funds, the Section 151 Officer will be required to sign-off and submit the final project business cases and required information to government to secure the LUP grant funding. Processes will be confirmed through further guidance from DLUHC.

Legal implications

- 4.14. Procurement will work with Legal Services to determine forms of contract suitable for the commission of any agreed LUP activity where the council is required to hold the contract. The undertaking of procurement procedures will also ensure compliance with the Council's Contract Rules and the best value obligations under the Local Government Act 1919.

Procurement Implications/Social Value

- 4.15. The council's recently appointed 'commissioned partner' will develop a coherent and prioritised list of projects to share with DLUHC colleagues based on impact, strategic fit and deliverability.

- 4.16. In delivering the LUP priority projects, the council will work to drive and influence social value by working with local suppliers where possible and ensuring that a broad mix of suppliers are considered and that tender processes reflect social value principles wherever possible.
- 4.17. Where relevant, the council must work with the LUP partners and stakeholders to understand and assess how proposed projects will be delivered in compliance with subsidy control.

Property implications

- 4.18. There are currently no property implications arising from this report.

Health and wellbeing implications

- 4.19. Walsall will be one of only three or four Healthy LUPs in the country, recognising some of the key health and inequality problems in the Borough. The Walsall Healthy LUP proposal aims to have positive health and wellbeing outcomes through the policy intervention and regeneration to be delivered by the LUP priority projects.

Reducing Inequalities

- 4.20. The Levelling Up Partnership programme works to bring together residents and organisations across all communities to create activity that will benefit all in alignment with the levelling up priorities. As a key partner, the council will ensure that all relevant activity is impact assessed to understand any impact upon protected groups and the wider community groups with which the fund will interact with.

Staffing implications

- 4.21. The council will be required to support the Walsall Healthy Levelling Up Partnership with capacity and advice, as well as potentially being a delivery agent. Where this may have staffing implications, the council will seek to access the capacity funding which DLUHC have set out to facilitate LUP implementation. This will be qualified and quantified as the work programme is developed and any resource support will be accessed in line with the agreed processes and assurance framework. It is expected that the Accountable Body team (part of the Programme Management service area) will support in managing the LUP programme and ensuring compliance of future project business cases.

Consultation

- 4.22. For the reasons set out above, there will be a high level of consultation across services and with key public and private sector partners in the deep-dive phase and in the development of the priority projects and business case.

5. Decide

5.1 In preparing for the Levelling Up Partnership DLUHC has advised local authorities to consider the following:

- Priorities – what are the pipeline projects and opportunities/challenges and how might government work differently to address these.
- Specific priorities – what opportunities could be delivered within 12 months from commencement of the deep dive.
- Defining the geography – anticipated to focus on the largest urban area.
- Resourcing and capacity – including utilising existing place-based forums.
- Engagement with external stakeholders – to maximise engagement in the deep dive.
- Relevant local documents – building up a strong evidence base of strategies, policies and plans.
- Wider interventions – how the LUP may want to align or differ from existing area interventions.

6. Respond

- 6.1. An initial list of potential priority projects and opportunities is being developed-building on the initial list set out in **Appendix A** - based on existing development pipeline projects, initial project ideas and opportunities for further exploration and refinement (subject to defining the LUP geographical area).
- 6.2. The council's appointed 'commissioned partner' will continue to develop a coherent and prioritised list of projects as the deep-dive progress and share with DLUHC colleagues based on impact, strategic fit and deliverability.

7. Review

- 7.1. Further dialogue will take place with DLUHC regarding emerging proposals for the Walsall Healthy LUP and the outcome of these discussions will be reported to CMT as appropriate.

Appendices

Appendix A - Levelling up for Health and Wellbeing in Walsall –
Proposal 1 November 2023 proposal

Background papers

None.

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20 March 2024



Councillor Adrian Andrew
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20 March 2024



Levelling up for Health and Wellbeing in Walsall – Proposal 1 November 2023



Context

Our [We are Walsall 2040 borough plan](#) outlines the significant ambitions we have for Walsall, and the residents we serve, with the aim of being the most improved borough in the West Midlands by 2040, having narrowed the gap in life expectancy and healthy life expectancy across all neighbourhoods. The borough plan was developed following wide community consultation. We have recently published our locally developed [Walsall Wellbeing Outcomes Framework](#), which we are looking to build into our commissioning processes, corporate performance framework and wider programmes. We recognise both the health and [inequality](#) challenges we face, being in the top 10% most deprived boroughs in the country, with the [4th highest prevalence](#) of obesity nationally and some of the [lowest levels of physical activity](#). However, there is a significant opportunity through our range of regeneration and place-shaping programmes to begin to close the gap, accelerate recovery and improve the lives of the people of Walsall.

We have a range of strong partnerships in the borough, including with Walsall Together, our well-established and respected place-based health and care partnership. The ambition for Walsall place is clear, with the vision of having the healthiest high street in the country, a focus of our [Town Centre masterplan](#), and linked with healthy high streets research undertaken in Walsall town centre by the [Royal Society of Public Health](#) in 2020/21.ⁱ A number of the recommendations in this report could be built upon should Walsall be granted Healthy Levelling Up partnership status.

Levelling up Partnership and wider regeneration in Walsall

Under the auspices of the national [Levelling Up](#) programme, we are delighted to be establishing a new relationship with Central Government as part of the [Levelling Up](#)

[Partnership](#) (LUP), alongside delivering a suite of other Levelling Up regeneration programmes in the borough centred on the development opportunities within the [Walsall Growth Corridor](#): namely the [Willenhall Framework](#), [Walsall Town Deal](#), [Bloxwich Town Deal](#), and more recently the Darlaston Long Term Town Deal. These programmes are all based in areas of significant deprivation in the borough and are part of a wider £1.5bn transformation programme for Walsall, which is already under way.

We would be honoured to be put forward for consideration as a Healthy LUP, with this being just one part of a wider range of health improvement opportunities we have across all our place improvement programmes and projects. Please see below for a long list of projects and programmes (yet to be shortlisted) that are currently being considered for LUP funding and the focus that we would plan to have upon health outcomes/funded projects with a focus on health. Note the progress already being made with the Bloxwich Town Deal project, which will be making use of the Walsall Wellbeing Outcomes Framework to evaluate the programmes.

The key health benefits we can harness through our Levelling Up Partnership include:

- 1) Support for development of town centre and healthy high streets
- 2) Development of a creative quarter in Walsall Town centre, and the opportunities to promote art and culture organisations as health assets
- 3) Improvement/additions to our health service/community infrastructure
- 4) Building on our active travel infrastructure



Levelling up for Health and Wellbeing in Walsall – Opportunities through LUP

Healthy High Streets Team

A full proposal (revenue funding being sought) is currently in place for a small number of posts to support the ambitions in the recommendations made by the Royal Society of Public Health in the Healthy High Street research undertaken in Walsall Town Centre. These posts would support local businesses, focus on encouraging change of use to support transformation of the town centre and will also support with progressing a number of the health elements linked with the below, alongside internal Public Health and Regeneration teams. The public health team are currently reshaping and will be looking to recruit a post to support a broad range of wider determinants of health programmes, who will also support this agenda.

Arena Theatre – Arts and Health

Consider the relocation of the [Arena theatre](#) into the town centre. This would fit neatly with the focus we plan to develop in Walsall on arts and health. We are currently partners on a research bid with the Royal College of Arts and Mindkind (local community and voluntary sector organisation) to support promotion of our arts and culture organisations, alongside our green and blue spaces, as health assets. The New Art Gallery and Leather museum, as council owned assets are key partners in this bid. The New Art Gallery does engage with our communities as part of its cultural offer, providing an invaluable health and wellbeing pathway for us to further develop for the benefit of health and wellbeing. Walsall is also in the development stages of a refreshed cultural compact. The work is led by a voluntary organisation with membership from the third sector, the council, housing, and Walsall Together colleagues. Previous research by Wolverhampton University identified that the town's markets added a real sense of cultural identity and an opportunity to build community cohesion. Also, the rich history of artisan crafts in the Borough was a source of pride for many. This has led to the development/proposal to run a "festival of making" in 2025 and 2026. There is an intention to link this with the mental health benefits of this engagement with possible links to mental health support.

There is opportunity, as part of the Arena Theatre regeneration programme, to build in a health promoting community/health service space. This would be done in consultation with NHS partners, as part of wider plans around our health/care and voluntary sector infrastructure, which includes the new [Hatherton Centre](#), four newly established [Family hubs](#), as well as a range of resident support hubs delivered through our [Walsall Connected](#) programme and wider [Walsall Community Network](#). We have a strong community and voluntary sector in Walsall, with a Compact which is due to be refreshed. There is potential for a health/community focused space to be developed as part of mixed use second building (to include residential space) next to the Hatherton Centre.

Leather Museum – Arts and Health	Consideration of the heritage offer including the potential relocation of the council-owned Leather Museum (and re-use by Walsall College).
Creative Industries Centre – Arts and Health	Building on Walsall Town Deal project to develop a creative industries quarter in St Matthews.
Saddler Centre – Walk in Centre	Proposals are being developed to site a Walk-in Centre at the Saddler Centre which sits at the heart of the town centre, and is also currently a site for our Young People’s Health and Wellbeing Service (Positive Outcomes Project). We would ensure services provided were prevention-focused and linked with our wider preventative health, public health and care infrastructure.
Connected Gateway active travel project	This gateway connects Walsall train station and Walsall bus station, providing an open pedestrianised route between the two, which fits neatly with our physical activity and active travel agendas. There are opportunities for green walls to be developed along the Gateway also and installation of large digital screens, which could be used for health-promoting opportunities.
Walsall Market / Incubator Space	Development of a new markets offer including creation of ‘build-on’ incubator space (to create a new business) and an indoor/outdoor market as part of the Town Centre Masterplan. There is potential to explore the use of market stalls for promotion of fresh food/farmers’ markets, and for health and public health services to engage with members of the public on health matters during the expanded opening times for the markets. There will also be a large digital screen near to the market which can be used, as above, for health-promoting opportunities.
Walsall Adult Community College	As part of the Adult Community College moving into Walsall Town Centre, we are developing a project called ‘The Link’ which will be an employment and skills hub. However, this space is a flexible asset, with potential for health and community-focused activities.

Links to wider improvement work

The above table focuses only on the Levelling up Partnership funding proposals as per the scope of the Healthy LUP. However, there are significant programmes of work happening in a wide range of our district centres which also lend themselves to the healthy levelling up agenda. The Willenhall Framework proposes to incorporate new housing, green spaces, community facilities and improved walking and cycle routes in the development of key areas in Willenhall. The Walsall and Bloxwich Town Deal programmes include improving active travel infrastructure (including canal tow paths), creating new parks and allotments for growing food (which fits with our developing local food plan), supporting employment in a number of ways including development of an incubation space and digital access centre on Bloxwich High Street.

Our Levelling Up Zone focuses on housing and employment development, and we are keen to explore further health opportunities through this work, including engaging strategic employers with health at work programmes. Finally, the Darlaston Town Deal

funding Walsall will receive as a mixture of both revenue and capital funding provides an excellent opportunity for us to build in a range of health promoting and community focused activities and capital projects, linked with current local assets and services. All of the above links with wider work being undertaken through Public Health and the Healthy Spaces team re encouraging physical activity and access to our green spaces in the borough, and with Trading Standards who support our men's wellbeing at work programme, as well as work around takeaway premises and health. Further we have a developing relationship with British Judo and British Triathlon and their Big Active programme, focused on getting communities active.

The health-promoting power of the Walsall regeneration programmes in their own right is clear. However, opportunities are amplified when linked with wider council, health and care partnership, community and voluntary sector infrastructure and services. For Walsall, being a Healthy Levelling up Partnership, would open up further opportunities not only through the programmes supported through LUP funding, but across our family of programmes, which go significantly beyond LUP. With additional revenue funding we could also upscale our ambitions. We look forward to developing a productive partnership with both DLUHC and DHSC, for the benefit of Walsall residents.



Health on the High
Street and the health :