

Covid-19 - Update

Impact on benefits, finances, housing and jobs Update



Walsall Council

PROUD OF OUR **PAST** OUR **PRESENT** AND FOR OUR **FUTURE**

Summary: 1

The new schemes introduced by Government do provide some support.

There are many customers financially disadvantaged that required additional support.

Since the 16 March 2020 both the DWP and Councils have seen dramatic increases in demand.

- **Universal Credit (UC):** Nationally the number of households in receipt of Universal Credit has risen from 3.7million to 4.2million between May 20 and May 21. The number of UC claimants continued to grow in Walsall in the same period as more customers move away from legacy benefits. The number of cases now seems to have stabilised.
- **Housing Benefit (HB) and/or Council Tax Reduction (CTR) applications:** On average 107 new applications received per week in January and February 2020. This increased to 285 by April 2020. The number of new applications continued to be above average prior to COVID 19 and is only now starting to return to pre-covid levels.
- **Discretionary Housing Payments (DHPs):** Walsall applications increased by 10% (March 2019 to March 2020). Spend in March 20 was 12% higher than March 19. This trend continued and a 12.5% increase in spend was seen comparing 2019 to 2020 data. The full DHP budget was spent for 20/21 and again we are only just starting to see a reduction in DHP awards. We could see this increase again if the £20 uplift is removed from Universal Credit from the end of September 2021

Summary: 2

Increase in homeless presentations / applications: combination of economic and social issues expected to dramatically increase demand for help especially post lockdown

Housing Evictions –In England, legislation preventing bailiff enforcement of evictions has now expired. This was in place from 17 November 2020 until **31 May 2021**. Therefore, orders can now be enforced where the landlord has a valid warrant of possession, which means that there is likely to be significant demand for help from that date onwards:

- Increase in council tax reduction applications and spend and or
- Housing support (emergency accommodation and homelessness applications)
- Potential increase in DHP spend and demand

Rogue landlords will continue to be rogue! Covid-19 won't improve their behaviour and there are likely to be many vulnerable tenants impacted by their actions over the coming weeks.

Domestic Abuse:

- More women and girls will be abused and are at risk in this period. Every pandemic and major disaster has found this.
- Nationally deaths have doubled.
- Expected to be a surge in demand for help when lockdown lifts.

Government measures to support customers in the coronavirus crisis - 1

Customers on benefits

- £20 per week increase to Working Tax Credit basic amount (due to end in October 2021)
- £20 increase to Universal Credit standard allowance (due to end in October 2021)
- Local Housing Allowance rates increased to the lowest 30th percentile of market rents
- Housing Benefit additional earnings disregard increased by £20 per week
- Employment and Support Allowance (ESA) now payable from day one instead of day seven
- Department for Works and Pensions (DWP) stopped all overpayment recovery action on a temporary basis
- There has been a number of changes to definitions within various benefits/tax credits to ensure customers effected by coronavirus can either claim or continue to receive benefits if they are now unable to work

Universal Credit customers continuing with their employment as normal during the Coronavirus outbreak will not be financially disadvantaged. Sanctions and conditionality were temporarily suspended for three months for all Universal Credit customers. The impact on these customers was:

- Were they maintaining payment of bills during the crisis?
- Impact on their mental health during lockdown?

Measures - 2

Employed

- Coronavirus Job Retention Scheme (CJRS) - Extended until 30/09/21
- Statutory Sick Pay payable from day one not day four
- £1,000 grant to employers for each member of staff kept in employment after furlough until end of Jan 2021

Self-employed

- Self-employed Income Support Scheme (SEISS) - 5 Grants have been issued. Extended to 30th September 2021
- Minimum Income Floor suspended in Universal Credit until the 31st August 2021
- Business Grants for small businesses

Other initiatives

- £500 million Council Tax Hardship fund supporting 25,029 households.
- Free school meal voucher scheme
- Social/Private landlords ban on evictions was extended to 31.5.21. Bailiffs asked not to carry out an eviction if anyone in the property has covid symptoms or is self-isolating
- From 1.6.21 the notice period for evictions was reduced to 4 months and from 1.8.21 to 2 months where rent arrears were less than 4 months. This is due to end on 30.9.21
- £750 million support package to charities
- £3.2m emergency fund for rough sleeping – Walsall allocated £4.5k
- £1.6bn for local authorities – mainly for social care but also for homelessness and rough sleeping – Walsall allocated £9.6m
- £3m for food redistribution organisations
- Test & Trace Isolation support payments made to over 1800 individuals.
- Winter Grant schemes continued, being renamed covid local support grants, and will cover up to 30.9.21. Over 43,500 individual payments helping almost 12,000 families have been supported. The payments total over £2.3m.
- Absence from home abroad rules have been clarified such that Housing Benefit can continue where the person intended to return in 4 weeks but, owing to travel restrictions, is unable to do so



Customers still dramatically impacted

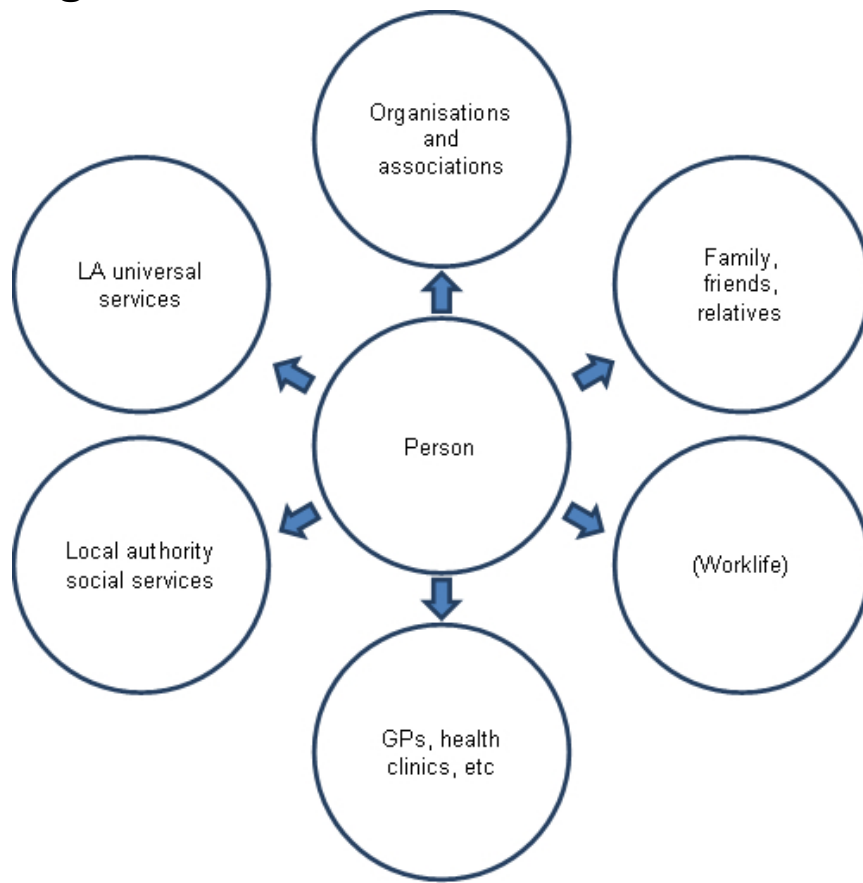
- Low paid workers are the most vulnerable
- Workers on zero hour contracts, temporary workers and self-employed are most likely to be affected economically by coronavirus
- Customers with no recourse to public funds – there were calls to allow those who are now unable to work because of Covid19 to have immediate access to welfare support but this was not accepted
- Charities called for the Government to temporarily remove legal barriers to homelessness provision and make clear that everyone who is homeless is eligible for assistance - regardless of priority need, intentionality, local connection, or immigration status. This was successful and temporary provision made available
- Resolution Foundation say that despite measures put in place a huge number of people are still going to lose their jobs and need immediate income support to avoid hardship

Food bank support

- Food Banks operate independently to the four Hubs in Walsall and referrals are received from a number of locations such as the Beacon Centre, Housing First, Crisis Support, and Social Workers and between November 2020 and July 2021 they received 391 requests for food parcel deliveries to the most vulnerable.
- Trussell Trust confirmed a record 2.5 million emergency food parcels given to people in crisis in the past year.
- TT issued 1,239,399 parcels between April and September 2020 which is an increase of 47% on April-September 2019 where 843,655 food parcels were issued.
- Ablewell reported from Jan to August 2021 there has been a reduction by 39% in the number of food bank vouchers issued (860) to assist 1976 adults and children.
- The Black Country Food Bank assisted 7407 adults and children during 2020 and 4048 up to 31st July in 2021. To compare the same period Jan to July there was a slight decrease of 11% in numbers of family members who were provided with food this year.
- They have had to limit vouchers to one per week (this provides 3 days worth of food) and limit to a maximum family size of 4
- Families received Free School Meals vouchers or support via the Hubs

Working with Communities – Strength Based Approach

Walsall Council has adopted a “Strength Based Approach” to supporting and working with residents and communities.



- The Strength based approach is a nationally recognised social work approach focusing on the individual and recognising peoples strengths.
- The support for Community Associations and other community based organisations is a key element of the Council’s Resilient Communities approach. It is argued that the approach encourages a strength based approach as conversations, resources and solutions are embedded in the community.
- This approach is reliant on the work of the Community Associations and their stability and longevity. Discussions with the Portfolio Holder covering Resilient Communities has identified:
 - Strong Cabinet support for the strength based approach and strong support for the Community Association Network.
 - No plans to reduce this support, indeed a desire to see more support to the Community Association Network.
 - Increasing integration and joint approaches with Council teams.
- The Portfolio Holder confirmed in his view “there is a need for universal services (where appropriate) but also a need for a change in approach, to treat the Community Associations as valued partners, co-designing and delivering together at an appropriate level”.



Making Connections Walsall (MCW)

MCW is a Council-funded social prescribing service initially created in 2017 to help the lonely and isolated residents of Walsall. The service was further enhanced in March 2020 to provide pandemic support to our most vulnerable.

The majority of service referrals are made via the West Midlands Fire Service and resident details are captured on the DCRS₍₁₎ system, commissioned by Public Health.

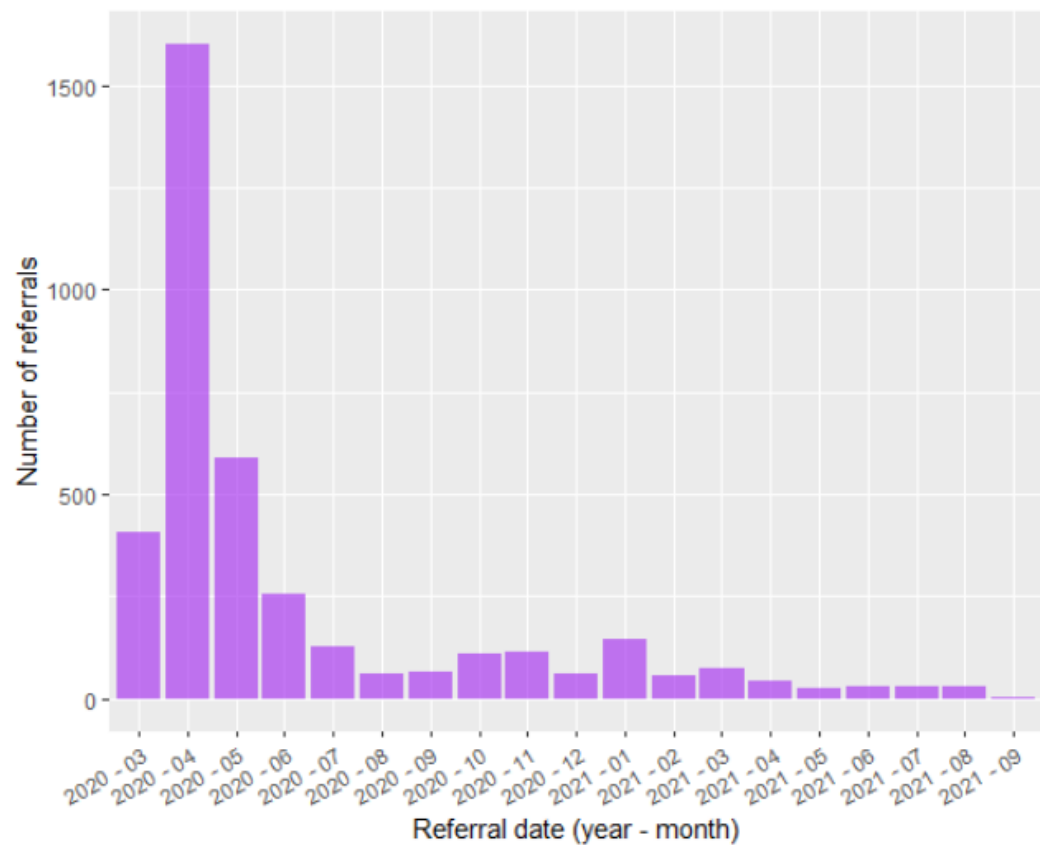
- For this analysis, only referrals captured on the DCRS system are included.
- Includes all referrals between 1st March 2020 and 6th Sep 2021.

From a total of 3,828 referrals, only 623 had ethnicity recorded (16.2%). However, this is higher than 10.5% completeness in the previous report.

(1) Data Collection & Reporting Service

Making Connections Walsall (MCW)

Number of referrals by month



Source: DCRS

Comparison of ethnicity by year of referral

Includes % in year and (total referrals in brackets)

2020: Referrals from 1st Mar to 31st Dec

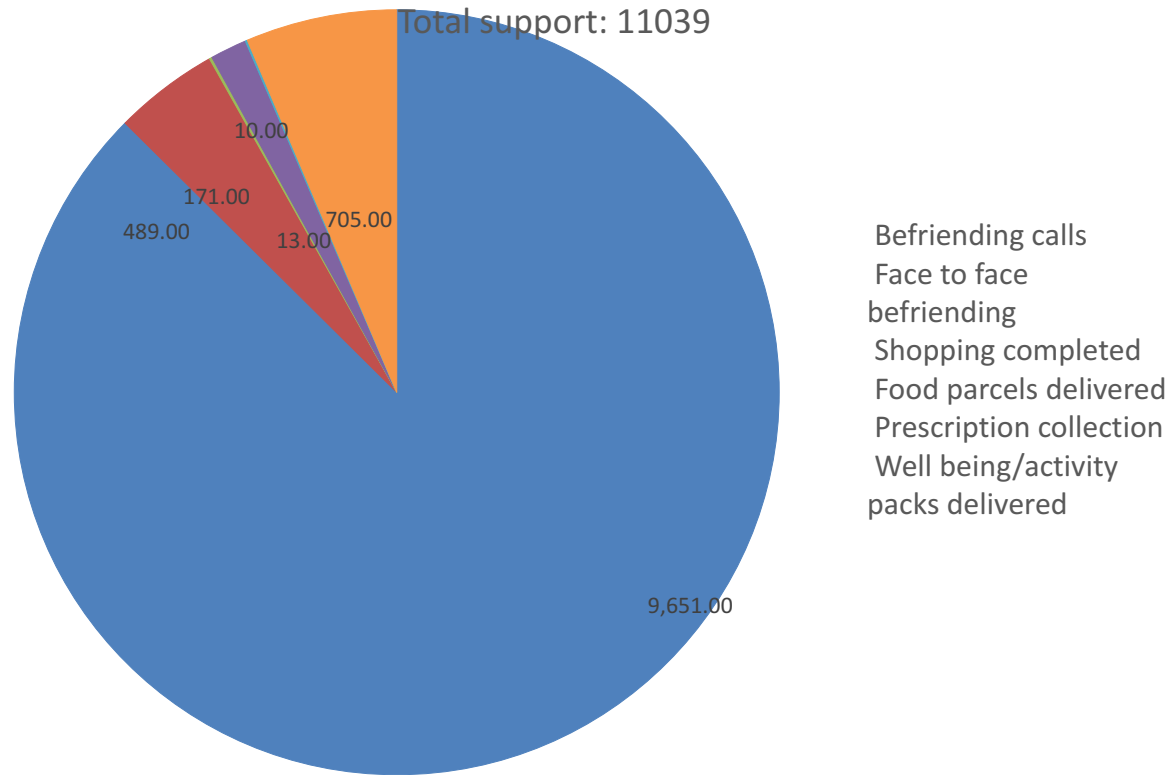
2021: Referrals from 1st Jan to 6th Sep

Ethnic_group	2020	2021
Asian	10.0% (36)	5.7% (15)
Black	2.5% (9)	3.0% (8)
Mixed	1.7% (6)	2.7% (7)
White	85.8% (309)	88.6% (233)
Total	100.0% (360)	100.0% (263)

As most referrals don't include the resident's ethnicity, only broad ethnic categories are used in this analysis.

The proportions are very similar when comparing both years, but please note the relatively small number of referrals behind some of the percentages.

Making Connections: Overall Summary of support



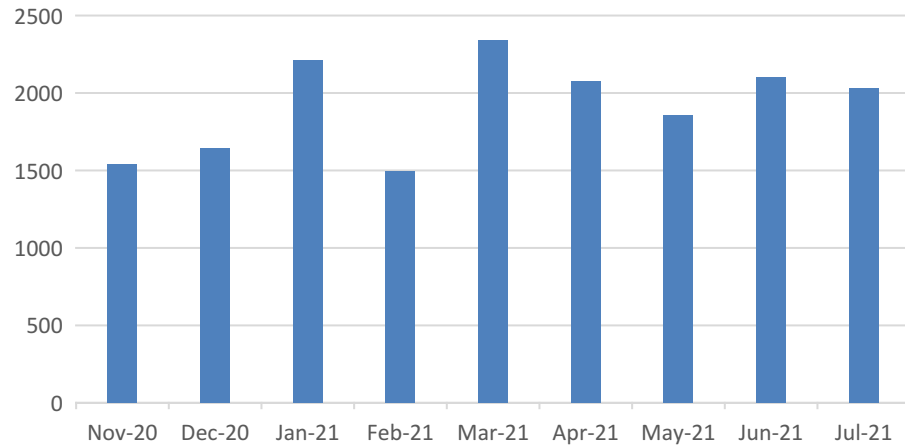
- The pie chart shows that befriending is still a high priority for the hubs
- Wellbeing/activity packs are still popular but are dependant on funding.
- There has been a recent increase in the number of referrals from residents who are self isolating or who have Covid and require support with food. The hubs are providing advice and referral information.

This analysis shows overall support provided for new referrals received via email, fire service and directly to the hubs (this does not include any data for referrals that are being made to satellite hubs)

Making Connections - Number of befriending completed

Befriending Service Requests

Befriending requests completed



17,281 befriending calls completed

01.11.20 – 31.07.21

- This chart shows the number of befriending calls completed each month during 01.11.20 – 31.07.21
- The increase in befriending calls completed is linked to Walsall Council and the 4 x hubs making contact with all Clinically Extremely Vulnerable residents in Walsall during January – March 2021.
- The number of calls each month remain consistent as ongoing befriending support is still required for residents who are still anxious about going out.
- Many of the hubs have started completing face to face befriending on residents door stops.
- Walsall Community Network received £100,000 of funding from the lottery to fund a project called 'Neighbourhood Natters', which enabled 4124 residents to have face to face befriending along with additional support like a meal, books, activity packs etc

- This analysis shows new befriending referrals received via email, fire service and directly to the hubs (this does not include any data for referrals that are being made to satellite hubs)

DfE HAF programme – a reminder of what it is ?

- Walsall has received £1,799,290 investment across 20/21 and 21/22 to
- Deliver a enriching, healthy activities and food programme during Easter, Summer and Christmas Holidays to
- All children on 14,000 children eligible to FSM in Walsall
- Opportunity to coordinate resources across the local authority to get the right help to the right children
 - HAF programme
 - Keep in Touch Team
 - Short break provision



What have we delivered:

Easter 2021

1866 children engaged in the Easter Programme – this makes up around **13.5%** of children eligible on free school meals

Because of Covid restrictions the programme during Easter was focussed on activity packs and online activities with some limited face to face delivery for vulnerable children:

235 Face to Face participants across **9** delivery sites
1758 Virtual Participants engaged in **69** online sessions **15** online courses delivered by **17** partners
1820 – Food Boxes delivered to families homes providing **7280** healthy meals
385 specific Activity Packs delivery packs being delivered to complement interactive online engagement into activities
1000 physical Activity Packs
1369 children proactively signposted to extra help and support

Summer 2021

3000 children engaged in the Easter Programme – this makes up around **21.4%** of children eligible on free school meals

457 children and young people registered who had special education needs /medical or disability

During the Summer we were able to focus on face to face delivery:

169 different holiday clubs, 36 different courses , 117 different pick and mix offer across 47 sites

6,406 complimentary healthy recipe boxes delivered

798 families signposted to extra help and support and further information
School nurses and street teams visited providers for signposting for families



Impact

Been single mum suffering from mental health & get really anxious all the time this was fun for girls & they both engage. They watched the videos how to cook & chopping veg's really enjoyed eating the food.

Thank you so much my children my child has autism and physical disabilities he never eat different things but the different ingredients that you gave made him curious he actually ate the vegetable goulash he loved it made me so happy

Children got active, sleeping pattern did not disturb, waking up with every day excitement for activities and fun. I must say this Playscheme is a brilliant idea for those single parents like me who can carry on going to work without any hesitation. Single parent do find hard during holidays because like me have no family to look after the children during holidays. Bonus is that at the end of week we get food parcels too. I really appreciate you and salute to your service. Thank you to all your hard work and friendly staff. Big thank you to everyone. God bless you all

Children being Happy, Healthy, Learning Well

99%

enjoyed the activities they took part in

86%

learned a new skill from cooking through the recipe boxes provided

78%

made them more active and move around

82%

said the holiday activities had taught them something new

56% of children felt good/happy before the activity this increased to 93% feeling happy after they attended the activity

78%

Of parents said HAF had been a big help



Ethnicity of confirmed cases

In the previous version of this report, confirmed cases by ethnicity were presented as a % of all cases within a time period. These data are no longer available to us, but an improved solution is now provided by Public Health England (PHE) which present an ethnicity specific rolling 7 day case rate (per 100,000 population).

Converting the case numbers into rates takes into account the local population structure and therefore allows for a meaningful comparison between ethnic groups.

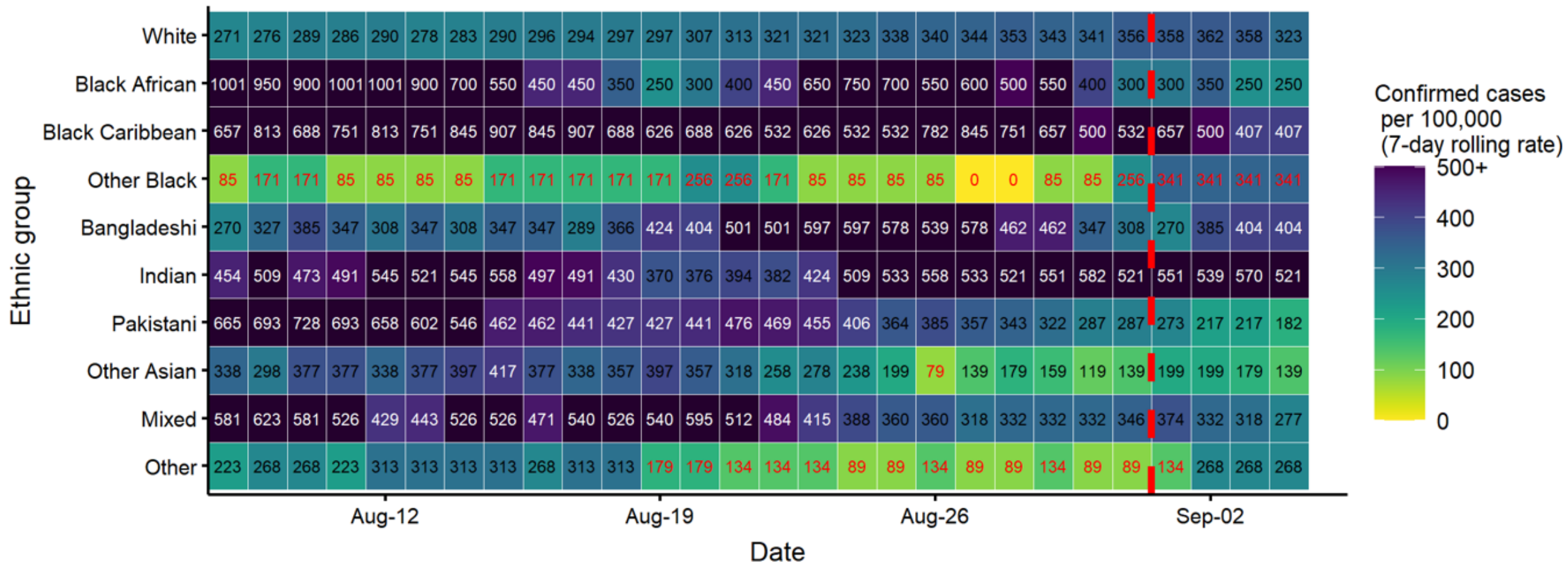
The heatmap on the following slide presents these rates by ethnicity for the period from the 8th August 2021 to 4th September. Higher case rates are shown with a darker shade.

Interpretation

- Numbers with red text should be interpreted with caution, as the underlying case numbers are < 5 (therefore affecting the robustness of the statistic).
- Numbers to the right hand side of the vertical red dashed line represent the most recent 4 days and should be considered provisional.

Ethnicity of confirmed cases

OFFICIAL SENSITIVE



Source: PHE; Epidemiology of laboratory-confirmed COVID-19 cases in Walsall (5th Sep 2021)



Walsall Council

PROUD OF OUR PAST OUR PRESENT AND FOR OUR FUTURE

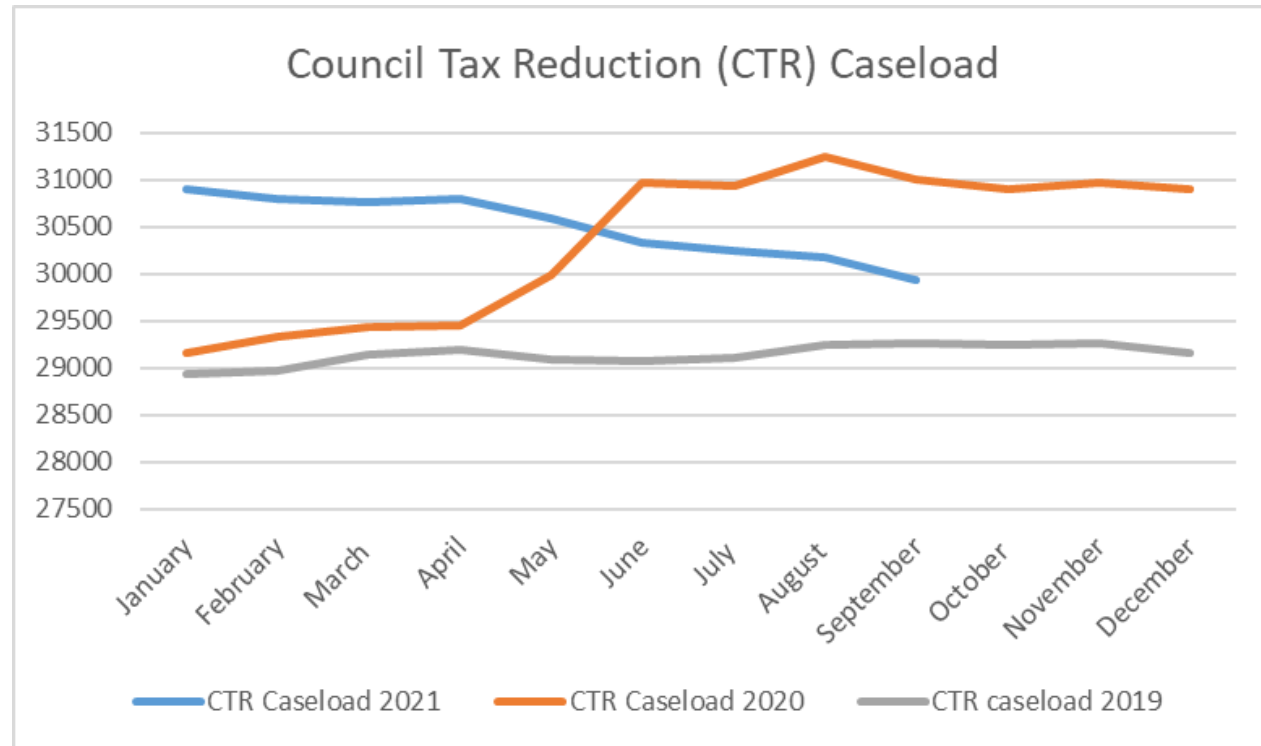
Economic Impact Nationally

A House of Commons briefing (1st June 2021) stated:

- Unemployment levels are up by 19% for the period Jan-Mar 2021 compared to Jan-Mar 2020
- Job vacancies were 19% lower in the 3 months to April 2021 than in the 3 months before the pandemic
- Furloughed workers has begun to decline after rising early in the 2021 lockdown 31st Mar 2021 4.2m jobs were furloughed this is a reduction from 28th Feb from 4.7m
- Consumer spend fell by 10.6% in 2020. The Bank of England estimates between Mar-Nov 2020 households saved £125b but the hi
- Since the start of the pandemic, employment levels have fallen for young people aged 16-24 by 7%, while they have fallen for older workers aged 65+ by 9%. In comparison, employment levels for those aged 25-64 have also fallen, but by only 1.2%.
- The unemployment rate (the proportion of economically active people aged 16+ who are unemployed) has risen from 4.0% to 4.7%.

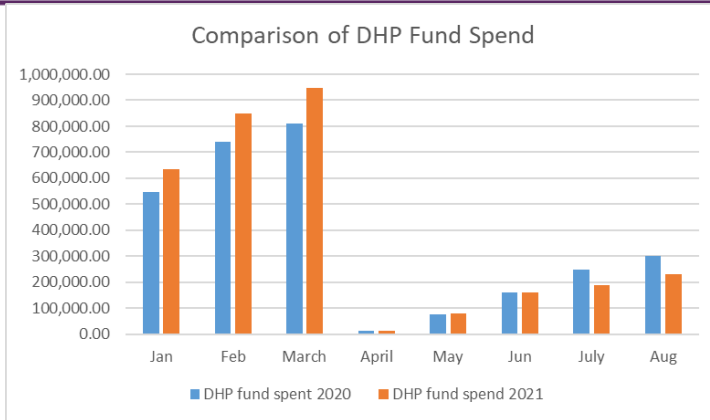
It is predicted things will continue to get worse while restrictions are in place an anticipation redundancy increases will be seen over the next few months

Impact on Council Tax Reduction caseload



- Our Council Tax Reduction (CTR) costs increased by £1,226,000 between 1 March 20 and December 2020 due to the requests for additional support and change in circumstances associated with the Coronavirus outbreak
- The CTR caseload rose by 5.98% between January 2020 and December 2020, peaking in August 2020.
- We continued to monitor the number of CTR applications made on a weekly basis since the last update and we are now seeing a steady return towards pre-covid levels, with reductions in pensioner and working age numbers
- The total cost of the CTR scheme as at September 2021 (for this financial year is just over £15 million)

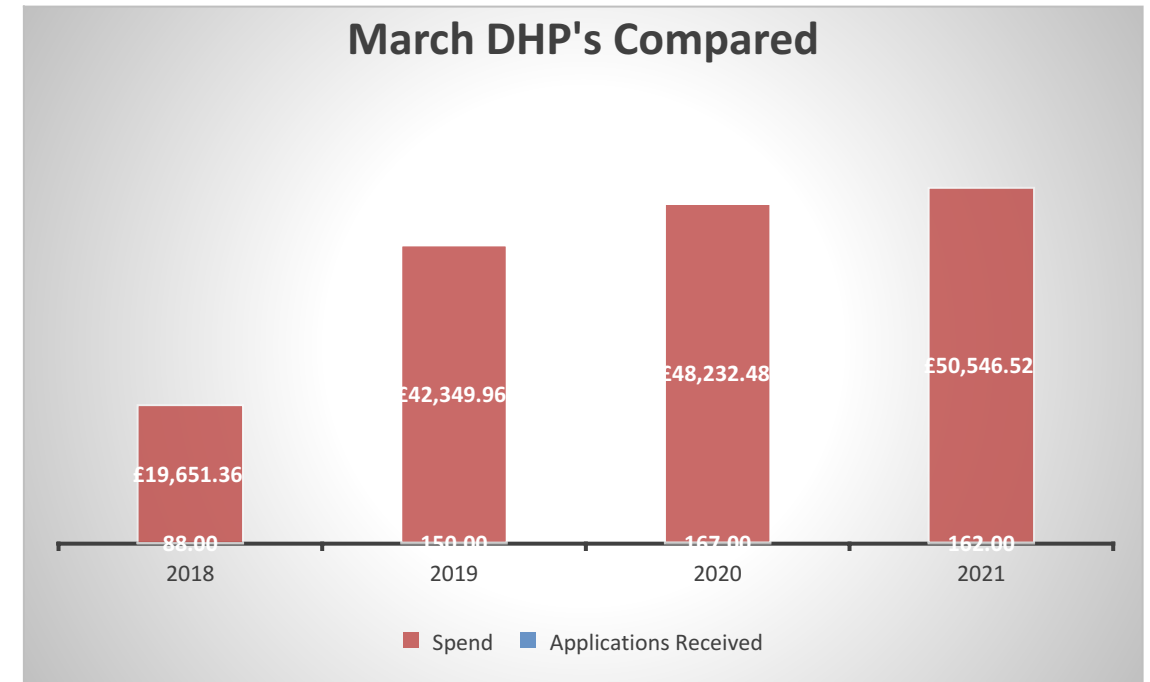
Impact on Discretionary Housing Payments (DHP)



Source data above – Northgate

DHP fund spending increase by £70,307 comparing spending at Jan 2020 with Jan 2021. However, August 2021 spend is now lower than August 2020 spend

Overall spending on DHP's remains within funding targets although it increased from £809,000 in 2019/20 to £948,000 in 2020/21



This graph shows how spending in the month of March over the last 4 years has changed.

* 44% increase on spend from December 19 to December 20

Effects on Housing Evictions in Walsall: 1

The new rules implemented by central government regarding evictions have now ceased.

1. The provisions in the Coronavirus Act 2020 were extended so that, **from 29 August 2020 and until 31 May 2021, landlords had to provide 6 months' notice to their tenants in most circumstances.**
2. The required notice in relation to anti-social behaviour, domestic abuse, rioting and false statement, the notice periods were returned to their pre-Coronavirus Act 2020 lengths. In some cases, this means that proceedings for anti-social behaviour can be brought immediately after notice has been served. Notice periods on these grounds otherwise vary, depending on the type of tenancy and ground used, between 2 weeks and 1 month.
3. Where at least 6 months of rent is unpaid, a minimum 4-week notice period was required. If less than 6 months of rent is unpaid, then the notice period was 6 months.

There are implications that Walsall Council may face if customers do not:

- clear the arrears themselves
- or notify us they need help

And as the evictions come through the court process we foresee:

- an increase in DHP requests and or
- an increase customer demand for Housing Support from those facing eviction

Effects on Housing Evictions in Walsall: 2

Quote from a registered social landlord (RPs) in Walsall

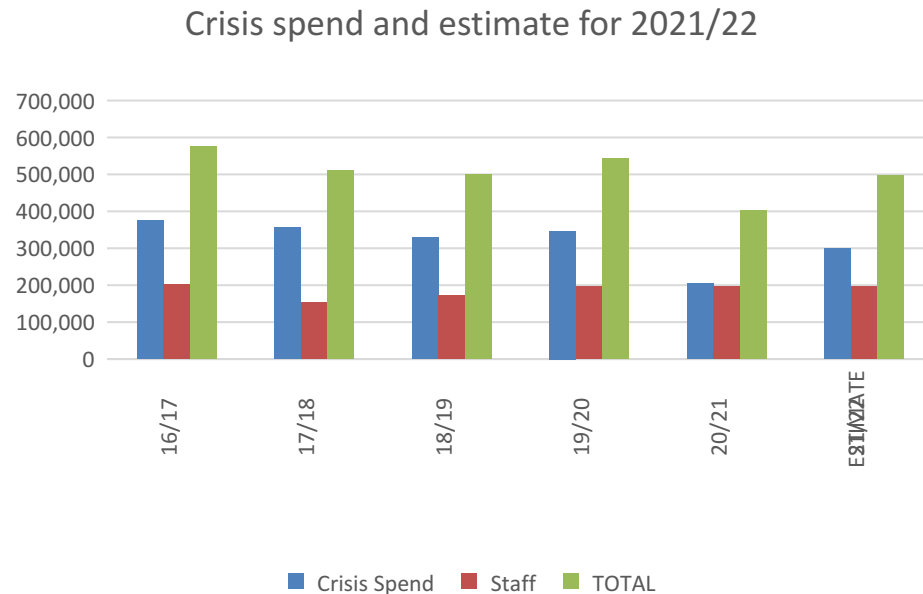
‘Early analysis shows that we have seen a sharp rise in cases where Tenants are self-employed or never claimed out of work benefits and now are unable to pay rent’

A number of RPs have confirmed that they have seen arrears rising, they are now conducting analysis, COVID 19 restrictions have limited the support they are able to provide

We will also need to model the potential impact on PRS legal (and illegal) evictions and homeowner repossessions as both will be expected to increase.

Rogue landlords are unlikely to get better – they will continue to ignore tenants needs, break the law and undertake unlawful evictions. Many will use the lockdown as an excuse to do even less to help their tenants.

Crisis Support in Walsall



- * Walsall crisis support has seen a reduction in expenditure over the last 4 years
- * Government schemes and increases in benefit assisted affected residents reducing the demand following COVID 19 pandemic
- Walsall's community COVID 19 support via hubs supported residents during pandemic and absorbed much of this new demand
- There was a reduction in crisis spend in 2020/21 on the previous reported estimate by £152.6k. This is due to the additional support provided by the government schemes during Covid-19 reducing demand.

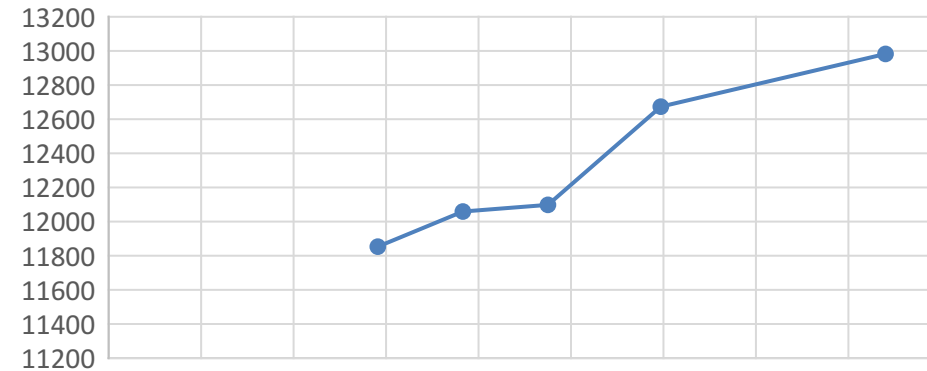
Data source – Crisis support accounting system

Free School meals impact

(These totals are for schools that use Walsall Council's free school meals service. Schools that administer their own FSMs will not be included in these figures.)

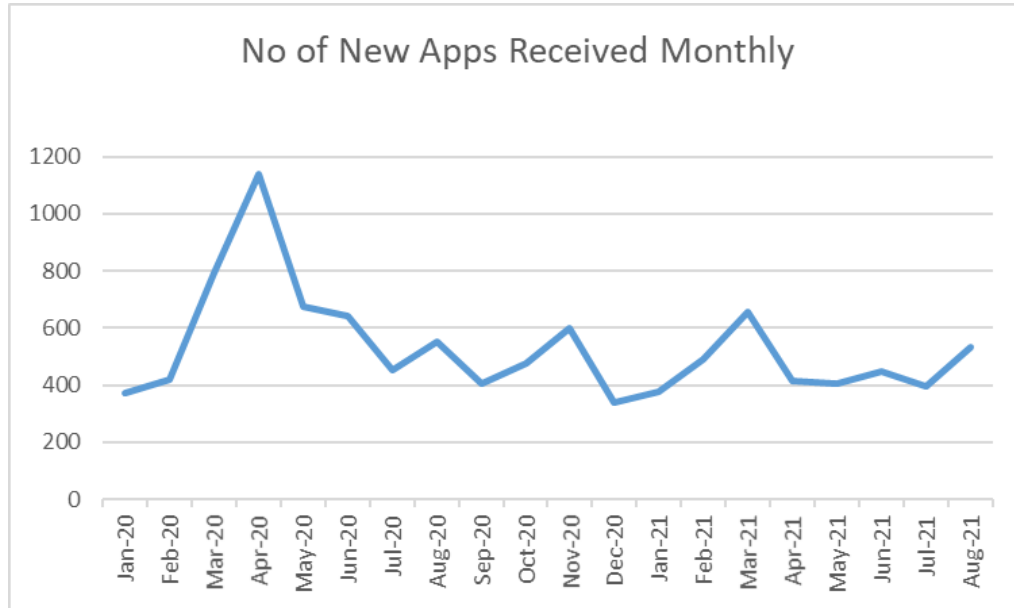
Impact since schools first closed 23.03.2020

- 1,129 new eligible FSM children have been added to the scheme



- Problems with the national voucher scheme leading to schools asking for direct help
- 8,124 additional voucher cheques have been issued through our own local scheme providing £121,860 of support to households since the implementation of the first national lockdown in March of this year
- The FSM team has received 8,269 new applications over this period (figure up to as at 06.09.2021)
- The government temporary extension of free school meal eligibility to include some children of groups who have no recourse to public funds has resulted in additional 19 children being able to access the FSM scheme

Housing Benefit and Council Tax Reduction New Applications



Key Facts:

- New applications saw a spike in February to May 2020 as a result of Covid
- There are some seasonal ups and downs in the number of Claims and CTR will account for much of this as explained in slide 13.
- Live housing benefit applications continue to reduce as customers move across to universal credit when their circumstances change.

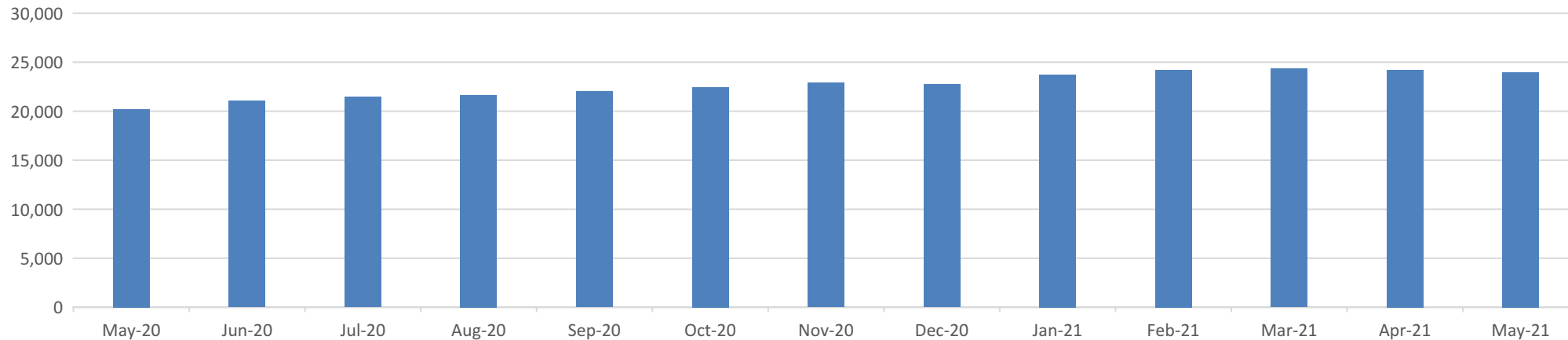
Gov.uk statistics – Walsall benefit data

- * Households in Walsall receiving Universal credit continued to increase until March 21 (*this data has been adjusted by DWP since previous slide*)
- * Walsall households receiving Universal credit increased 38% from March 2020 to August 2020 and corresponds with COVID 19 pandemic

 Department for Work & Pensions | Stat-Xplore

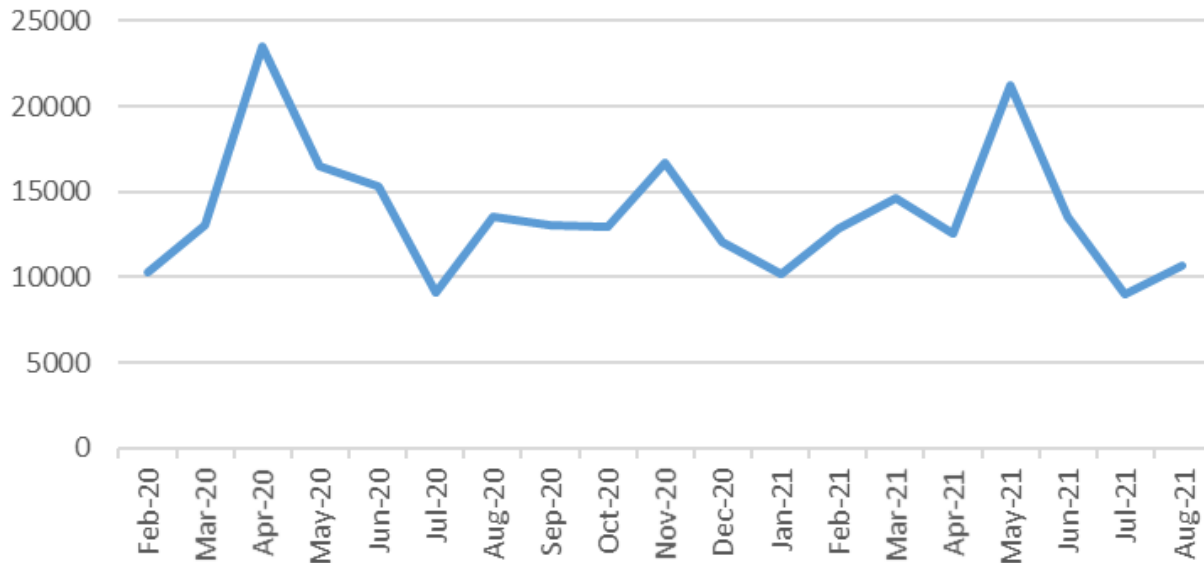
Data source

Households in Walsall on Universal Credit



Universal Credit Notifications Received

Universal Credit Batches Received Monthly



- UC notifications received **increased the week following the announcement of lockdown**, this shows customers were starting to report changes or make new applications following being financially affected
- By mid April we were, on average, receiving **3,000+ notifications per week which increased to over 6000 by the end of the month**
- UC workload doubled by the end of April 20 in comparison to earlier in the year and there have been subsequent spikes in notifications received
- Since July 2020 we have received on average 13000 notifications per week. This can be for a variety of reasons reflecting the constant changes in circumstances of UC customers

Council Tax Hardship

As part of the package of measures introduced to assist the economically vulnerable (caused by COVID-19) the government announced a hardship fund to assist with the payment of the 2020/21 Council Tax.

Walsall was allocated £3,879,239 from this fund, Although it is for each authority to make its own determination in respect of any hardship relief scheme the guidelines state that the government expects that local authorities reduces the council tax liability of each working age council tax reduction claimant by £150.

In addition to the award of the hardship relief the COVID-19 crisis has seen a marked increase in the number of households applying for council tax reduction. With the cost of Council Tax Reduction being borne locally, there will also be a call on hardship grant to fund this extra cost.

The situation at the end of December is as follows:-

- £3,446,723.99 awarded in hardship relief
- £1,509,076.86 increase in the amount of working age council tax reduction awarded
- £4,955,800.85 total of hardship relief and extra council tax reduction against an allocation of £3,879,239

In 2021/22 year these amounts are adjusting downwards as cases are updated and amended, £139,348 is the additional awards to working age CTR and it reduces month on month

Council Tax Payments

To assist the financially affected households, the Council offered three options to assist residents in paying their council tax liability. These options were:

Option 1

If you currently pay your council tax in instalments due April to January, you can spread the year's charge over 12 months; April 2020 to March 2021.

Option 2

If you currently pay your council tax in instalments due April to January, you can have instalments due June 2020 to March 2021.

Option 3

You can have April and May instalments spread over your remaining payments from June 2020 onwards.

Around 2,000 households took advantage of this offer.

- At the end of August 2021 94.4% of 2020/21 council tax liability has been collected totalling £133m. The collection of 2019/20 debt at the same point in August last year was 95%, so collection is around 0.6% down.

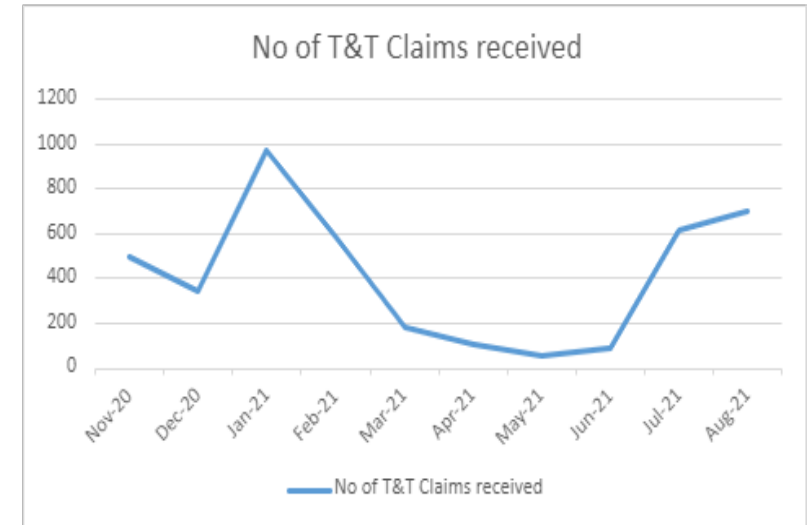
Test & Trace Isolation Support Payments

These payments came into effect from 28 September 2020 and are currently due to end 30 September 2021. Eligible individuals are entitled to a payment of £500 to support people low incomes and who are unable to work from home, if they are to self-isolate by NHS Test and Trace and will lose income as a result.

Our Discretionary Scheme was relaxed 23 September 2020 to try and support more households in Walsall. Since we have relaxed our policy to date we have helped 351 residents which is an increase of 90% on the same period prior to the change.

New ruling came into force 16 August 2021 that anyone who is a contact and has been double vaccinated or is under 18 no longer needs to self-isolate.

2816 cases have been rejected due to not meeting the eligibility criteria, the main reason being lack of information, income too high or do not have 8 digit ID from NHS Track & Trace.



4851 Test & Trace claims received
1095 residents helped through the Standard Scheme and 561 via the Discretionary Scheme.

We have been allocated funding of £333,000 for Standard Claims and £543,000 Discretionary Funding.

Business Grants 1

- The Government has provided a wide range of support for business throughout the pandemic, with support towards payment of Business Rates as well as business grants which have been administered by the Council's Business Rates Team
- Figures as at the beginning of August 2021 for all grant types are shown on the next slide.
- Update from (BEIS) Department for business, energy and Industrial Strategy - as of 6th August 2021: The deadline for the payments of Restart Grant has now passed. Therefore, we are now only collecting data on payments made under the ARG (Additional Restrictions Grant) scheme. The final deadline to submit evidence for an ARG top-up has also now passed.
- [Local Restrictions Support Grants \(LRSB\), Restart Grant, Additional Restrictions Grant \(ARG\): guidance for local authorities - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](#) Gives details on all grants provided

Business Grants 2

Grant Programme - Name	Support Available to Businesses	Applications Processed for Payment (so far)	Value Paid out (so far)	Budget	Status
Local Restrictions Support Grant (Closed)	Grants of up to £3,000 per 28-day period	1885	£2,434,825	£4,410,708	Closed for applications and payments
Local Restriction Support Grant (Sector)	Grants of up to £3,000 per 28-day period	8	£6,572	£6,572	Closed for applications and payments
Local Restrictions Support Grant (Open)	Grant allows local authorities to make discretionary payments	313	£291,815	£319,118	Closed for applications and payments
Christmas Support Payment (CSP)	One-off grants of £1,000 to wet-led pubs	116	£116,000	£108,800	Closed for applications and payments
Tier 4 / Level 5 (Lockdown) Grants Programmes	One off (up to £9000) grant payment to retail, hospitality and leisure business	1395	£12,920,828	£25,131,890	Closed for applications and payments
Restart Scheme	Payments to Non- essential retail £2667 - £6000 and to - Hospitality, accommodation, leisure, personal care and Gym's, from £8,000 to £18,000	1245	£8,728,106	£11,172,591	Closed for applications
Additional Restrictions Grant (ARG)	Provides discretionary funding for local authorities to administer.	4908	£9,305,562	£9,661,176	Closed for applications
	Totals	9870	£33,803,708	£50,810,855	



Domestic Abuse – Deaths Double Nationally

“Coronavirus may exacerbate triggers, though I might prefer to call them excuses. Lockdown may restrict some women’s access to support or escape and it may even curtail measures some men take to keep their own violence under control” Karen Ingala Smith, the founder of Counting Dead Women,

<https://www.theguardian.com/society/2020/apr/15/domestic-abuse-killings-more-than-double-amid-covid-19-lockdown>

Walsall stats to date show the expected increase in Domestic abuse homeless applications:

Walsall has seen an increase of 44% from April – 9th July 2020 compared to the same period in 2019, current analysis is being carried out to understand the outcome and what led to the application. The service hasn't seen a cause for concern in the case increase and believe it's mainly due to the impact of the lockdown and should reduce as easing of restrictions are introduced

Homelessness – Increases expected to be slightly masked

We are finding demand is remaining reasonably static at present, this is mainly due to the time lag on lifting the government suspension on evictions during the COVID 19 pandemic, although we expect to see a peak from the end of October, please see below other factors that will mean an increase will be experienced in the future:

- Ability for landlords (private and social) to issue Section 21 evictions had been suspended but now applications to the courts have now restarted.
- The block on Section 21 evictions is also unfortunately likely to lead to an increase in rent arrears as households either choose or struggle to make regular rent payments
- Some people are tending to 'stay put' through these very 'new times'
- Legislation was in place from 17 November 2020 until 31 May 2021 to prevent the enforcement of lender repossession action except for in exceptional cases (such as a borrower requesting proceeding continue) now this has ended there will be an expectation to be an increase due to those who have struggled to maintain payments / agree payment terms.
- Increase in domestic violence cases during lockdown is likely to lead to a surge in applications as lockdown is lifted

Impact of Covid-19 on Vulnerable children in temporary accommodation

Lancet article 31 March 2020. Significant extra risks to children 5 years of age and younger. "Many children already do not reach development potential or struggle to grow and develop because of multilevel barriers, including those resulting from poverty or homelessness. However, COVID-19 has added a whole new layer of risk. "

Article identified range of areas of concern. Many are not as relevant for Walsall as we continue to provide temporary accommodation for families principally in self-contained properties some concerns remain including:

- Critical need to ensure sufficient additional resources for soap and disinfectants for families;
- No face-to-face contact with general practitioners and health outreach services is available, including health visitors, limits routine checks such as early identification of need and risk, health and development reviews with screening assessments, immunisations, promotion of social and emotional development, support for parenting, promotion of health and behavioural change, prevention of obesity, and promotion of breastfeeding
- For these families, access to basic essentials (eg, food, nappies) is scarce, with no resources to shop online and many charities and dropins now closed.
- Risks to parental mental health are increased, especially among single mothers, given that housing instability is associated with an increased risk of depression in mothers.

Inequality of access to food and healthy food for vulnerable families

Online shopping: Most vulnerable families have no / limited access to online food and essentials shopping facilities which require:

- ICT
- Internet / WIFI
- Credit or debit cards or similar via online banking
- ICT skills to navigate systems

As many vulnerable households would not have previously made use of on-line shopping even if they had all the above their ability to quickly access / benefit was limited due to the significant growth in demand from other households and the competing demands upon their time. Making Connections Walsall supported a significant number of households during the lockdown and continues to do so.

Access to shops: Vulnerable households especially single parents will have been more severely impacted by the changes in retailing. The pressures that all of us have faced to access food shopping will have been exacerbated for those who must also consider / have to take their children with them to queue to access shops for food.

Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic (BAME) residents and communities

There's a disproportionate percentage of BAME people getting ill.

“We have heard the virus does not discriminate between individuals but there's no doubt there appears to be a manifest disproportionate severity of infection in BAME people and doctors. This has to be addressed – the government must act now.”

Statement by Chair of British Medical Association

Not only are BAME communities disproportionately impacted by health inequalities, the economic impact is likely to hit them harder too, with [rates of poverty in BAME communities being twice that of their white counterparts](#).

BAME residents in Walsall comprise 23% (2011 census) compared to 14% of the population of England and Wales.

Tackling fuel poverty

MHJ undertake a range of work to tackle fuel poverty in the borough (which is at a rate of 19.4% compared to 113.4% for England) in 2021 this work has included:

- **Securing ECOflex investment for vulnerable:**

97 approvals issued for heating and insulation estimated value of £246,000

- **Securing major funds to help retro-fit homes of those in fuel poverty**

Local Authority Delivery scheme secured £4.5M to help households

- **Securing First time gas connection and gas central heating investment:**

60 park homes and 85 dwellings were provided with full gas central heating at a cost of £345,000

- **Working with Private Landlords to improve their properties:**

143 private rented dwellings have been improved by their landlords who have now secured Energy Performance Certificates (EPC) higher than the worst rated of F and G. A further £85,000 of grant secured to help with enforcement.

- **Future work**

Bids for £9.4M of additional funding to help with retro-fit have been submitted to government



Help with utility costs

Water bills:

Since Autumn 2020 we have been working with South Staffs Water to enable beneficiaries of Disabled Facility Grants and families within our dispersed temporary accommodation to access:

- a 60% discount on their water charges in the first year
- and a 40% discount in the second year

for their water bill using their Assure Social Tariff.

We continue to work with South Staffs Water to see how we can support other low income families benefit from these discounts and identify vulnerable customers to be added onto their Public Services Register (PSR)

Collective Energy Switch

In spring 2021 residents were supported to consider switching for cheaper bills through the councils Big Switch. The next Auction is at end of October 2021.

