

Council – 8 January 2018

Portfolio report to Council: Councillor Ian Shires - Community, Leisure and Culture

The last year has been one of significant change and development within my portfolio.

Sport & Leisure

The two new Active Living Centres at Bloxwich and Oak Park have now been open for just over a year and are performing well. Walsall took the brave decision to invest in the future health and well-being of its residents by building these centres. I am pleased to report that attendances across the service are up, with more than 2.5m visits in 2017/18 and we are also on target to achieve £4.4m income.

Sport & Leisure now have more than 6,000 monthly direct debit members, including 3,000 paying discounted rates under the Council's "Move-it" concessionary scheme and are now able to offer on-line memberships. Payment and on-line booking will follow shortly.

We have re-launched our swimming lessons scheme and now have over 2,500 children enrolled on *Walsall Swim Academy* in partnership with Walsall-based Swimming Teachers' Association.

In June, the new 3G "third generation" artificial grass pitch was opened at Oak Park Active Living Centre by former Wolves Player Steve Bull. I am pleased to report that the pitch is already fully booked at peak times with a wide variety of hirers; including whg who funded a youth football project in conjunction with West Midlands police. In conjunction with the FA Foundation, we have developed the pitch bookings to achieve a predicted pitch income of £100,000 in the first year. Additional parking is also to be built shortly.

Direct Debit Gym memberships have increased from 1,000 customers to 2,800 at Oak Park. A further 970 families have taken out an annual £365 family membership and this equates to approximately 3,880 family members becoming more active.

We have hosted a number of large events including 5 toy fairs, a dance competition, karate competitions and 1 year anniversary and Halloween family fun days. A programme of 50 classes a week offers an extensive dance studio programme.

Overall the annual income at the old Oak Park Leisure Centre was around £575,000 a year. This has increased at the new Oak Park Active Living Centre and is on target to be £2 million per annum by the end of March this year.

Bloxwich Active Living Centre has also been successful having now achieved 1,843 gym members from a zero base, the old centre having closed eighteen months before. The centre provides swimming facilities for 12 schools every week and we have more than 400 children enrolled on swimming lessons. A range of programmes have been introduced to encourage people back into sport including; netball, badminton, swimming and basketball. Eighteen indoor bowls groups use the centre every week and provide older people with opportunities to socialise and keep active, and warm, during the winter months.

Work is currently being completed at the Darlaston Swimming Pool to improve the visitor experience to get *“more people, more active, more often”*. All the fitness equipment at the centre was replaced in December 2017 and we are replacing all the lockers, creating an exercise room and redecorating over the next two months. I am pleased to report that the pool now has almost 550 children enrolled on weekly swimming lessons, the highest number of children learning to swim at the facility since it opened 17 years ago.

Walsall's Gala Baths has been rebranded as the Walsall Gala Swimming & Fitness Centre following £1m refurbishment. The newly created 25m Gala pool has become an established aquatics event venue being used by a wide variety of clubs, associations, training squads and schools throughout the year. Income projections are the highest in the facility's recorded history.

The Sport and Leisure Development team have been busy with 123,000 attendances to a variety of activities. Of note being the specialised sessions, such as the exercise session for people with long term conditions which attracted 23,610 attendances.

We had a further 33,245 attendances to free community activities such as Walking, Cycling, Parkrun, “Couch 2 5k” running groups. Almost 50,000 attendances were recorded at the new community sport sessions through the use of aquatic, ball sport, outdoor activity and racket sports.

The 5km Arboretum Parkrun (5km) continues every Saturday with a regular 400 to 450 attendances. Although now run entirely by volunteers, the Sport & Leisure Development Team continue to help support them with advice and have brought them new finish-line equipment this year. www.parkrun.org.uk/walsall/photos/

A Junior 2km Parkrun also now takes place in Bloxwich's King George V park and takes place every Sunday at 9am. Started in May 2017 it has now delivered 23 runs with an average of 44 runners a week, again now managed by volunteers. www.parkrun.org.uk/bloxwich-juniors/photos/

Musculoskeletal pain or wider health issues that prevent residents from working is a common problem. Our “Back Pain Project” delivers a strength and conditioning programme for unemployed Walsall residents who suffer from back pain. Over first nine months 130 individuals have benefitted from this scheme.

We have also focused on tennis with “Tennis in Walsall” to a further six parks (Blackwood, Holland Park, Leamore, Pelsall Village, Pleck, Willenhall). The scheme has identified 850 playing contacts with 6,300 attendances.

The development of new “Couch to 5k” running programme has seen 162 people start new running programmes, with a view to eventually running 5km either through Parkrun, or as part of a charity event (Race for Life / Rotary fun run).

The development of a new social cycling programme in the Arboretum has seen Adult learn to ride programme commence engaging a wide range of adults wishing to learn to ride, as well as a social cycling group who ride from the park. Although the bikes were stolen, the good news stories that have come from the group, has seen three times the amount of bikes having been donated to keep the scheme going.

Forest Arts Centre

The Forest Arts Centre has had another successful year having earned c.£940k of income including a grant of £460k from Arts Council England to support the arts for young people in Walsall.

The A3 Arena is now complete and offers a first class facility for the provision of concerts, dance, circus skills, stand-up comedy and other art forms.

Forest has provided musical opportunities and tuition to over 7,500 young people, entertained the people of Walsall with over 120 events and sold over 20,000 tickets. Comedy highlights have included shows by Jennie Eclair and Lee Nelson.

The centre provides the infrastructure and support to over 30 resident groups and societies, provided 1,248 evening activity sessions for young people and created over 320 new ensembles and choirs working in partnership with Walsall Schools.

Bereavement and Registration Services

The Council's Register Office submitted its Annual Performance Report to the National General Register Office earlier in the year. We have a customer engagement strategy in place and customer satisfaction levels remaining at a very good standard. The Service attained good levels of performance for the timeliness of birth, death and still-birth registrations.

I am pleased to report that the national body, the General Register Office (GRO), has confirmed it has a sufficient level of assurance regarding our compliance with the Public Protection and Counter Fraud framework.

During the year the Registration service has provided a Nationality Checking Service for customers applying for British Citizenship. This service is used by applicants from across the country as well as Walsall residents. The application is checked for accurate completion and for meeting the required qualifications. It has received excellent feedback from the UK Visas and Immigration Service and customers alike. A European Passport Return Service is provided for European Economic Area nationals applying for permanent residency in this country. This service allows applicants to retain their documentation while waiting for confirmation of residency.

The Registration Service has recently started offering enhanced ceremonies for couples wishing to marry or enter into a Civil Partnership. The existing marriage room at the Civic Centre has been decommissioned as a Registry room and is now licensed for marriages allowing us to provide an enhanced service. This will give our customers improved choice and cater for couples who want the minimum legal ceremony through to one that can be personalised.

This council has been a member of the Federation of Burial and Cremation Authorities since the opening of the then Ryecroft Crematorium in 1955. It was therefore my pleasure to attend Streetly Crematorium on 21 November 2017 to receive the Federation's President, Councillor Ted Latham from Neath Port Talbot Council. He was accompanied by two of the Federations technical officers as well as a representative from the Ministry of Justice. The Federation carry out around 10 such visits to crematoria nationally each year. The purpose of the visit is to share national best practice and ensure compliance with their Code of Practice.

Earlier this year two new memorial schemes were introduced at Streetly Crematorium to complement the existing range of memorials available to the bereaved. The schemes were named after historical features in the area – the Hardwick and the Foley memorials - and have proved to be popular to date.

Preparation is continuing at the Local History Centre & Archive for the forthcoming relocation from Essex Street to the new Lichfield Street "Hub" in late 2018. Work includes the review and cataloguing of the existing archive collection and this will enable a rationalisation in the material which will need to be transferred.

New Art Gallery

Walsall's New Art Gallery staged a major solo exhibition by internationally renowned artist Idris Khan. A local artist who grew up and attended schools in Walsall, Idris also went to Walsall College. We also published a monograph (a piece of work on a single subject) with international publishers Hatje Cantz and with financial support from three galleries in London, Berlin and New York and the National Bank, Germany as well as the Walsall Museum & Gallery Development Trust.

Over the summer, three female artists were shown across the galleries. These included Iranian artist Soheila Sokhanvari who creates beautiful paintings that draw on memories of pre-revolutionary Iran using traditional techniques of miniature painting. We also hosted Birmingham-based Joanne Masding who created a new site-specific installation on Floor 4 and a major exhibition by Rachel Goodyear for which we commissioned a brand new three screen film installation.

Our current exhibition on Floor 3 is *Legacies: JMW Turner and Contemporary Art Practice*, the third project to be developed from a 3 year partnership with the Tate. The exhibition combines paintings, drawings, watercolours and sketchbooks by Turner from the Tate's Turner Bequest with contemporary works by artists engaging with Turner and his particular interests.

The New Art Gallery continues to support the professional development of artists and curators in the region through its Studio programme and through Engine, a

programme delivered in collaboration with New Art West Midlands and supported by universities from across the region.

The Gallery's Diwali and Vaisakhi community celebrations continue to be successful with 1,311 visitors attending Vaisakhi 2017.

We have been developing our off-site offer and piloted a project working with Age UK, Sandwell, to offer regular free art classes to the elderly community within West Bromwich. We also continue to partner with the four regional art galleries (Barber Institute, Birmingham Museum and Art Gallery, Ikon Gallery and Wolverhampton Art Gallery) for the annual adult talk course; *Art Appreciation: A beginners course* in the Autumn and *Understanding Art* in the Spring.

We collaborated with local dementia services to create "Scenes of Walsall". This achieved *Dementia Friendly* status for the Gallery and created a friendly and welcoming exhibition space at the entrance (by reimagining the Family Gallery).

The People's Choice exhibition was put together to celebrate the 125th anniversary of the Permanent Collection. The public voted for their favourite works (online and by postcards in the Gallery) to go on display for a year-long exhibition. Over 30,000 votes were received. Walsall Arboretum Poetry group created responses to the exhibition and performed them at a public event.

Another exhibition was Seven Kinds of Magic where the Gallery collaborated with House of Illustration to show works from Quentin Blake's own collection. Quentin Blake then selected works from our Permanent Collection to go on display, each relating to one of the illustrated texts. The Walsall Young Writers' group were invited to produce their own texts relating to the works from our collection. These were then used in the exhibition interpretation and they performed at the opening event and worked with the Birmingham Conservatoire to deliver music inspired drawing workshops, attracting some 500 participants.

21st Century Information & Skills

To help meet the council's challenging four-year budget reductions, Cabinet took the difficult decision to redesign the borough's library service. We had to close nine sites however the new 21st Century Information & Skills service still retains the Central, the five District sites and Streetly Community Library.

You will know that that the Central Library is being temporarily relocated into the old Town Hall Restaurant whilst we renovate, restore and redecorate the Lichfield Street library. At the same time the borough's Archive will be moving into the E M Flint gallery building as part of the £4m scheme to restore the building and reduce the number of buildings that the council owns and manages.

Work is currently on-going so that the Open+ access control system can be installed into the other six libraries (Aldridge, Bloxwich, Brownhills, Darlaston, Willinehall and Streetly) so that authorised access by the public can be made during un-staffed hours. By doing this we want to increase the opportunities for our residents to get

better skilled for jobs, training, education, self-development and also reading. Additional ICT provision will also gradually be rolled out across each of the sites.

Through a shared procurement framework with the other Black Country local authorities, we are also improving the 21st Century Skills & Information service by replacing the Library Management Information System. Initial work is in-hand and this should be complete by late Spring.

Unfortunately the School Library Support Service is at serious risk of closure due to Head teachers deciding to un-de-delegate their £300k funding to the service at the end of March. Whilst this change would have happened in two years time, that it happened early is a reflection of the financial challenges that our schools are facing. I hope that our schools will be able to manage without this, hitherto, extremely useful and highly regarded service.

The Leather Museum

After thirty-two years at the Leather Museum the Senior Curator decided to retire at the end of November 2017. Before he left he organised one final event with the launch on Friday 17 November 2017 of a new Victoria Cross display. Walsall has three recipients of the Victoria Cross; two from World War 1 (Charles Bonner and John Carless), and from the 1857 Indian Mutiny, the lesser known James Thompson. Buried in the Queens Street cemetery in a pauper's grave, Mr Thompson now has his own commemorative Victoria Cross paving stone. The West Midlands' Deputy Lieutenant Colonel Tom Lloyd attended and I would encourage you to visit the Museum and see the display.

The Museum is consistently in the top five Trip Advisor tourist attractions in the West Midlands and last year attracted just under 40,000 visits.

Environmental Health

In 2017 officers in Environmental Health inspected over nine hundred food premises to ensure compliance with legislation and to enable the publishing of Food Hygiene ratings that consumers use to make informed choices about where they eat. Currently over 86% of food businesses in Walsall are rated at satisfactory or higher with over 700 businesses having the highest rating of 5 – Very Good.

For those failing to meet necessary legal standards Officers have issued twenty-five Hygiene Improvement Notices to remedy more serious food safety problems and seven Hygiene Emergency Prohibition Notices to close food premises which gave rise to "imminent risk of injury to health". These premises included four takeaways and three food retailers which were all subject to serious infestations of either rats or mice. Environmental Health successfully prosecuted four and issued cautions to six food businesses, including takeaways, food retailers and a cafe for similarly poor standards.

The Council's *Health Switch* Scheme delivered in partnership with Public Health continues to help raise standards in food businesses. Its aim is to encourage businesses to prepare food in a healthier way as well as provide healthy alternatives

to the usual food they produce. Currently one hundred and twenty-four businesses have engaged with the scheme this year, twenty-seven have achieved the Gold Standard, six businesses have the Silver Award, twelve have the Bronze Award and twenty-four are working towards an award. The scheme has proved popular on social media with many positive comments and will continue to develop in the year ahead to cover a broader range of premises and review the benefits to those businesses involved and the public in general.

During the summer Officers investigated a serious food poisoning outbreak which resulted in nine confirmed cases of salmonella. Officers worked in conjunction with WMBC Public Health colleagues and Public Health England to establish that the outbreak was linked to kebab meat and salad which was purchased from a local takeaway. The Officers interviewed confirmed cases, inspected / monitored the takeaway, took food / environmental samples, instigated enforcement action and implemented control measures to remove the risk to public safety.

Officers from the Health and Safety team have inspected twelve high-risk non-food premises, investigated thirty-seven work related complaints and have served eighteen Improvement and sixteen Prohibition Notices relating to dangerous work place activities and equipment.

Officers also investigated one hundred and forty-five accidents at work. This included a tragic accident where the manager of the Bloxwich Stafford Road Sports Club sustained fatal injuries after falling from a roof. Investigating Officers were required to present evidence at the Coroner's Inquiry. Officers have also arranged twenty-four Public Health funerals, requiring investigation of family situation and finances including a search of the deceased's property and liaison with partner agencies before funeral arrangements can be made.

The rise in the number of skin piercing activities in the Borough has continued this year with sixty-one new tattooists and seven skin piercers registered. In response, the Health and Safety team has actively promoted safe tattooing and body piercing in Walsall by working in conjunction the Public Health Infection Control Nurse Consultant and visiting five well established premises to review their infection control practices and to help ensure the safe sterilisation of their equipment. It is planned to roll this project out to more premises next year.

Walsall's first tattooing convention at the Bescot Stadium in July also presented a number of challenges for the Health and Safety team. Approximately one hundred tattoo artists participated in the two day event which required a review of the Council's registration procedure in order to ensure that the event complied with current legal requirements and that all those participated were registered. The Health and Safety team worked with the event organisers, both in advisory and regulatory capacities, to ensure that appropriate infection control process were in place. Officers attended the event which successfully took place without incident.

Taxi Licensing

This year Taxi Licensing have invested significant time and effort in modernising the systems they operate including the use of on line DBS and DVLA verifications.

Technology has been upgraded for the production of drivers' badges and a new texting service has been tested for future contact and communication with the taxi trade. A great deal of effort has been put into a review of how information is recorded, stored and archived and ensuring information placed before the Licensing and Safety Committees in relation to applications is robust, enabling them to make fair and proportionate decisions in relation to those persons licensed by this Authority.

Over six hundred drivers have received training in key issues relating to Child Sexual Exploitation, disability and other issues affecting the trade in order to further safeguard vulnerable members of our community and this training will remain ongoing. A full review of all Private Hire and Hackney carriage conditions and fees is underway again with a view to modernising this important service.

General Licensing

After a period of quite intense pressure, the Team dealing with general licensing matters such as alcohol, gambling, street trading and scrap metal has stabilised with recruitment of some excellent staff members to complement those already in post. The team have maintained a good level of service for applicants and have made very positive steps to investigate and resolve longstanding and in some cases contentious applications. This team are also reviewing how they record, store and archive the information they receive with a view to going 'paperless'. They have worked very closely with Public Health colleagues to better understand how licensing may contribute to the improvement and protection of the health of Walsall residents and this is helping to inform a review of Licensing policies and procedures.

Trading Standards

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

An intervention was undertaken in relation to unsafe cosmetics where sixty-seven incorrectly labelled and unsafe products were seized and removed from sale. A project concentrating on premises selling E-cigs was arranged resulting in thirty-six visits; seventeen premises were failing to comply with safety and labelling requirements for E-cigs and over five hundred products were seized or voluntarily handed to Trading Standards staff for destruction. The service has supported West Midlands Police both in terms of a knife crime awareness initiative where underage sales advice was given and modern day slavery visits were made as those involved in this heinous crime are often also linked to the illegal import of tobacco and alcohol.

Promotional campaigns have been undertaken to further raise the issue of illicit tobacco in the borough. The initiative introduced the public to the tobacco sniffer dogs and material showing the grotesque impact of smoking tobacco on health. During one presentation in Palfrey a tip off revealed a lock up containing over £20,000 worth of illegal tobacco and alcohol which was duly seized by Trading Standards Officers and Her Majesty's Revenue and Customs (HMRC).

Working alongside the National Markets Group, Walsall Football Club and the markets operator key interventions have taken place at Bescot Sunday Market to ensure counterfeit and unsafe products are removed from sale. This forms part of an ongoing desire to ensure that the public are protected from unsafe products and that legitimate traders are protected from illegal and unfair trading practices.

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

There have been sixty-three Unauthorised encampments (UEs) set up on Council land (compared with seventy-one in 2016) and sixteen on private land (compared with twenty-seven in 2016).

In 2016, Walsall became the first Council in the region to obtain a County Court injunction to protect a number of areas from incursions. This has subsequently been used as a model by other local authorities who have followed Walsall's lead. Three additional injunctions were obtained in 2017: two urgent injunctions near the Oak Park Active Living Centre and a further multi-site injunction in November 2017. This brings the total number of injunctions to four covering twenty-four sites.

Work is ongoing with Police and other partners to further improve the response to UEs in the Borough.

Anti-Social Behaviour

A new Public Space Protection Order (PSPO) was brought into effect in September 2017 to help the Council and partners to deal with a range of matters in Walsall town centre. A number of joint patrols with the police have taken place to ensure good awareness amongst prolific offenders.

So far there have been fourteen referrals from police for formal action and a number of Fixed Penalty Notices and warning letters have been issued. Reasons for referral include begging, consumption of alcohol and drugs and urination.

Statutory Nuisance

There has been a change in delivery of the out-of-hours statutory nuisance service. Rather than an on-call service operating fixed days and times only at weekends, the service is more flexible to be able to investigate complaints regardless of day and time of occurrence.

Environmental Crime

A fly tipping task force has been set up. Work is ongoing in conjunction with Clean & Green supported by other services to make the Borough cleaner and take action where there are offences. During 2017, the authority started to use the new provision of issuing £400 fixed penalty tickets for fly tipping as an additional tool to prosecutions.

As a result of an investigation by the CP team, in August 2017 Jamie HUMPAGE is believed to be the first person in the region sentenced to imprisonment for fly tipping, being given 24 weeks in custody, 2-year ban from driving, £2,000 costs and £115 victim surcharge.

Licensing Enforcement

In December 2017, a man pleaded guilty to a number of charges relating to assuming his brother's identity to fraudulently obtain a licence to drive taxis and private hire vehicles in Walsall. The matter is very serious and has been adjourned for sentence to Crown Court this month.

Operation Silver Moon was recently initiated. This consists of a series of targeted interventions aimed primarily at the night time economy with high emphasis on the Hackney Carriage / Private Hire trade, as well as on premises with late night refreshment licences. Joint stop checks have been carried out with the police on vehicles checking for safety and compliance with vehicle and driver conditions as well as plying for hire test purchases.

There have been a number of visits to licensed premises relating to non-payment of annual fees (Late night refreshment, pubs and off licences) to ensure compliance with suspension notices.

The Community Protection team has been working with colleagues from the Home to School Transport section within Children Services. Naturally, the focus here is to ensure the safeguarding of some of the most vulnerable individuals/groups within our Community. Over a two-week period, officers attended five 'Special' schools across the Borough, carrying out stop checks on vehicles, drivers and pupil attendants/escorts. Forty-seven vehicles were inspected and it was pleasing to note that the general levels of compliance were quite high. However, some non-compliances were identified, including one which resulted in the vehicle being immediately suspended.

CCTV

2017/18 has seen the transfer of our CCTV operations to Transport for West Midlands. Over 90 cameras have transferred with responsibility for monitoring. The use of CCTV has been used in the identification of perpetrators for a wide range of crimes including high profile crimes. 2018/19 will see further investment in the quality and positioning of cameras

Victims of Crime

Supporting the victims of crime is a significant area of work as there are fewer and fewer organisations able to deliver the practical support needed to victims especially in the area of domestic abuse. This has led to an increase in our work as demand has risen with particular emphasis on target hardening.

Prevent

We continue to be a PREVENT priority area delivering projects to the national agenda. That said we deliver a more local response to national and international atrocities by monitoring community tensions and providing reassurance through our community contacts. We have extended the support we give to schools by recruiting a dedicated Schools Prevent Co-ordinator. This new resource is maintaining and developing relationships with schools and other educational providers. This built on the success of our earlier work with Schools.

Reducing re-offending

As we move towards the development of a regional community safety partnership there are key themes in which we are already working at a regional level. One of these is reducing re-offending which is a statutory priority for all Community Safety Partnerships. This is still a work in progress and is being developed with the support of the Community Rehabilitation Company and the Office of the Police and Crime Commissioner.

Localities and Partnerships

For some years now we have recognised the importance of the voluntary sector and its ability to create strong social networks and provide support and guidance to our residents. I am pleased that the delivery of the new locality model will help strengthen this sector and provide the sector with a steadfast 'seat at the table' at an operational and strategic level. The four locality managers will ensure that communications between partners remains fluid and will continue to work hand in hand with communities and business partnerships to address key issues collaboratively.

In recognising the value of the voluntary sector I can also confirm our intention to provide this sector with a clear framework that will enable organisations to take advantage of more commissioned services and bid for external funding to help shape and support local areas and deliver services to those most in need. Our partner, One Walsall will continue to develop social action, making the most of locality assets and capacity building within the voluntary sector.

Finally, it remains imperative that we continue to deliver against our priorities to ensure we build resilience in our communities and empower our residents to make independent decisions to shape their own futures and take positive action in their local areas. To help us all focus on local priorities a Locality Plan will be developed in each locality which will be underpinned with the collection of local data from our partners and the third sector. Each locality plan will encompass local need and

reflect partnership priorities for each locality and aims to promote cohesion and reduce inequalities.

Cohesion

Indeed, cohesion has been a significant focus this year. After the findings and initial recommendations of the Scrutiny Working Group on Cohesion from 21 July 2016, the full Cohesion and Integration Strategy was approved by full council on 13 November 2017.

The Strategy contains 8 areas of focus:

1. Improving understanding and challenging myths in communities;
2. Parallel lives, reduced opportunity and parochialism;
3. Extremism and hate crime;
4. Indigenous communities and minority communities;
5. Changing demographics;
6. Faith communities;
7. Representative workforce and workforce development;
8. Gypsy, Traveller and Roma communities.

The Strategy includes an Action Plan outlining the activity that is planned against each area and expected performance indicators. The Action Plan also specifies the stakeholders and partners that Council seeks to work with in order to achieve these indicators.

One of the key aspects of the Strategy is designing and supporting community events that bring different communities together on common causes. The events supported in 2017 include:

- The Great Get Together in June 2017
- Party in the Square – June 2017
- Remembering Srebrenica July 2017
- Darlastone Community Festival – August 2017
- Place of Refuge Church, Delves community event – August 2017
- Caldmore Village Festival – September 2017
- Moto-Neurone Disease fund raising events in September 2017
- Anne Frank event – November 2017
- Roma movie screening at Light Cinema – November 2017

Further planned events include St Nicholas Feast and children gift giving aimed at newly settled communities in December 2017, promotion of positive cohesion messages through media planned for January 2018, as well as the annual

Holocaust Memorial Event in the same month and a Black Country wide arts event planned for March 2018.

In terms of gathering intelligence about newly settled communities, we continue working closely with voluntary sector organisations providing multi-lingual support either directly to service users or agencies, delivering engagement opportunities, education and, where necessary, supporting enforcement. Our initial project with them has brought together officers from Money, Home, Job, Clean and Green, West Midlands Police and members of the community, all working together to provide sustainable solutions to complex issues.

Community use of buildings.

I am happy to report that we currently have three book exchanges in operation in Walsall. These are not part of our existing Library and Community Library network. The facilities at New Invention, Pelsall and Pheasey are operated by the community for the community. In addition two further buildings are in the process of being transferred to the community in Rushall and Pleck. I am committed to ensuring we support community groups to grow. Each facility has its challenges but we will work through these with the community groups involved and I am sure they will all be successful.

One Walsall.

The Community and Voluntary Sector is very important to the Council and to Walsall. The Council and partners have supported the growth of One Walsall and the sector in general. One Walsall is delivering against its plan and I am delighted with the new organisation. It is bringing together many different voices and is an integral part of our thinking. It is bringing together many people who want to help the community. It is ensuring the sector is heard within the Council. There is more work to be done but I am committed to supporting One Walsall as it matures and I can already see the benefits coming through.

Councillor Ian Shires
Portfolio Holder
Community, Leisure and Culture

22 December 2017