



## Council Summons – 22<sup>nd</sup> February, 2024

You are hereby summoned to attend a meeting of the Council of the Metropolitan Borough of Walsall to be held on **Thursday 22<sup>nd</sup> February, 2024 at 6.00 p.m.** at the Council House, Walsall.

Public access via: [Livestream Link](#)

Dated this 14<sup>th</sup> February, 2024

Yours sincerely,

Chief Executive.

The business to be transacted is as follows

1. To elect a person to preside if the Mayor and Deputy Mayor are not present.
2. Apologies.
3. To approve as a correct record and sign the minutes of the meeting of the Council held on 8<sup>th</sup> January, 2024  
*(Enclosed - Page 9 to 23)*
4. Declarations of interest.
5. **Local Government (Access to Information) Act, 1985 (as amended):**  
To agree that the public be excluded from the private session during consideration of the agenda items indicated for the reasons shown on the agenda.
6. Mayor's announcements.
7. To receive any petitions.

Democratic Services, The Council House, Walsall, WS1 1TW  
Contact name: Neil Picken Telephone: 01922 654369 Email: [neil.picken@walsall.gov.uk](mailto:neil.picken@walsall.gov.uk)  
[Walsall Council Website](#)

**If you are disabled and require help to and from the meeting room,  
please contact the person above**

**8. Petition for a safer Chester Road at the Junctions with Stonnall Village.**

A petition with regard to this matter has been submitted by Mr Adrian Walters. The petition currently contains over 1,500 signatures.

**(Note:** The Council's petitions scheme states: "Council debate - If a petition contains at least 1,500 signatures it will be debated at a meeting of the Council. This means that the issue raised in the petition will be discussed at a meeting to which all Councillors can attend and speak. The Council will endeavour to consider the petition at its next meeting although on some occasions this may not be possible and consideration will then take place at the following meeting. The petition organiser will be given 5 minutes to present the petition at the meeting and the petition will then be discussed by Councillors for a maximum of 15 minutes. The Council will decide how to respond to the petition at this meeting. They may decide to take the action that the petition requests; not to take the action requested for reasons put forward in the debate, or to ask for further information. Where the issue is one where the Cabinet are required to make the final decision the Council will decide to make recommendations to the Cabinet. The petition organiser will receive written confirmation of this decision and this will be published on our website.")

*(Enclosed - Page 24 to 27)*

**9. To answer any questions in accordance with Council procedure rules:**

- a. From the public: None.
- b. From members of the Council:

**Councillor Smith**

Given the increasing media coverage on the subject of Artificial Intelligence (AI), can I ask the appropriate Portfolio holder to share with this Council and the public, information on:

- a) How AI is presently used by Walsall Council?
- b) What work has been/is being done by our Council's Political leadership and Senior Management as to the possible applications (opportunities and risks) of this type of technology to local Councils' decision- making processes and service provision and delivery in the future?
- c) What consideration is being given to the possible (maybe probable) impact of AI on the careers and jobs of the workforce, assuming that Councils like Walsall are allowed to exist for much longer, given Central Government's apparent determination to continue to starve them of funds?

### **Councillor Simran Cheema**

Flytipping is currently blighting many of our wards, and in many cases, it is persistent with the same areas getting targeted time after time.

Can the appropriate portfolio holder inform me:

1. How many Fixed Penalty Notices (FPN's) have been issued in the last year?
2. How many FPN's have been paid to date and how much has been collected in the last year?
3. How many people have been taken to court for non-payment of environmental crime fines?
4. What are the operating costs of flytipping removal against the income generated from fines?

### **Councillor Ward**

I welcome the recent announcement that this council is to ban the release of balloons and sky lanterns which can have a devastating impact on animals and wildlife.

The noise fireworks create also causes issues for animals, wildlife and many residents.

The RSPCA say " Animals affected not only suffer psychological distress but can also cause themselves injuries – sometimes very serious ones – as they attempt to run or hide from the noise"

The National Autistic Society say "For some autistic people, the unexpected nature of displays can cause anxiety and stress, and for those with sensory issues, fireworks can be very distressing.

With this in mind, Can the portfolio holder confirm if this council uses quieter or silent fireworks at its public displays, if not why not?

### **Councillor Smith**

Could the appropriate Portfolio holder give me, this Council and the public, the Council's most recent information & figures in relation to:

- a) Outstanding Council tax owed to Walsall Council,
- b) Outstanding Business Rates owed to Walsall Council.

## **Councillor Ward**

In February 2021, cabinet approved the construction of a temporary transit traveller site in Pleck. Since the site has opened, could you confirm how many times bailiffs have been used for any unauthorised encampments and how much has this cost?

As the site in Pleck was envisaged as a “temporary site” can you confirm what work has been done to identify a more suitable, permanent transit site?

10. To confirm the following recommendations of the **Personnel Committee**:

**a) Pay policy statement and living wage 2024/25**

- 1) That the Pay Policy Statement for 2024/2025 be approved; and
- 2) That the continuation of the living wage as detailed in the Pay Policy (section 6.5) and section 4.2, (option a) of the report (appended) be approved.

(Note: Report to Personnel Committee held on 22<sup>nd</sup> January, 2024 reproduced for this meeting)

*(Enclosed - Page 28 to 64)*

**b) Designation of Section 151 Officer**

That Council be recommended to change the permanent designation of the statutory post of Section 151 Officer to the Director of Finance, Corporate Performance and Procurement.

11. To confirm the following recommendation of **Cabinet**:

**Corporate Budget Plan 2024/25 – 2027/28, incorporating the Capital Strategy and the Treasury Management and investment Strategy 2024/25**

To approve the recommendation as set out in the report [annexed].

(Notes: In accordance with Council procedure rule 17.8 “A recorded vote will be taken on any decision relating to the Council’s budget or Council tax”. Cover report and report to Cabinet reproduced in the reports booklet for this meeting)

(Note: Cover report and report to Cabinet held on 7<sup>th</sup> February, 2024 reproduced for this meeting)

*(Enclosed - Page 65 to 275)*

12. **Portfolio holder briefings** - To receive a 5 minute presentation from the following portfolios:

a. **Deputy Leader and Resilient Communities** – Councillor Perry

*(To Follow)*

b. **Wellbeing, Leisure and Public Spaces** – Councillor Flint

*(Enclosed - Page 276 to 282)*

(Note: A member of the Council may ask the portfolio holder any question and another associated question without notice upon each report. Questioning by members is limited to 10 minutes for each report presented.)

13. To consider the following motion, notice of which has been duly given by **Councillors Elson, Jukes, Harrison, Waters, Hicken and Worrall.**

#### **Care leavers as a Protected Characteristic**

The Independent Review of Children’s Social Care headed by Josh McCallister published in May 2022 included a recommendation that:

“Government should make care experience a protected characteristic” and “New legislation should be passed which broadens corporate parenting responsibilities across a wider set of public bodies and organisations.”

At its meeting held on 9<sup>th</sup> January, 2024, the Councils Corporate Parenting Board received a report noting that whilst this had not been enshrined in law, over 58 councils have since introduced care experience as a protected characteristic, recognising the disadvantages faced by those with care experience when it comes to health, education, housing, employment, and criminality amongst other inequalities.

Making care experience a protected characteristic would provide greater authority to employers, businesses, public services, and policy makers to put in place policies and programmes which promote better outcomes for care experienced people. It will make the UK the first country in the world to recognise care experienced people in this way, which should be fully supported.

Council recognises that:-

- Every elected member and employee of this Council is a corporate parent to the children and care leavers in our care.
- We are all responsible for providing the best possible care, safeguarding and outcomes for the children who are looked after by us.
- That Councils have a duty to put the needs of vulnerable people at the heart of decision-making through co-production and collaboration.

Council notes that:-

- Care experienced people face significant barriers that impact them throughout their lives;
- Despite the resilience of many care experienced people, society too often does not take their needs into account;
- Care experienced people often face discrimination and stigma across housing, health, education, relationships, employment and in the criminal justice system;
- Care experienced people may encounter inconsistent support in different geographical areas;
- As corporate parents, councillors have a collective responsibility for providing the best possible care and safeguarding for the children who are looked after by us as an Authority;
- All Corporate Parents should commit to acting as mentors, hearing the voices of looked after children and young people and to consider their needs in any aspect of council work;
- Councillors should be champions of the children in our care and challenge the negative attitudes and prejudice that exists in all aspects of society;
- The Public Sector Equality Duty requires public bodies, such as Councils, to eliminate unlawful discrimination, harassment, and victimisation of people with protected characteristics.

Council requests that Cabinet receive a report to determine whether Care Experience should be a protected characteristic to include the following recommendations:-

- Recognise that care experienced people are a group who are likely to face discrimination.
- Recognise that Councils have a duty to put the needs of disadvantaged people at the heart of decision-making through co-production and collaboration.
- Agree that future decisions, services and policies made and adopted by the Council should be assessed through Equality Impact Assessments to determine the impact of changes on people with care experience, alongside those who formally share a protected characteristic.
- Agree that in the delivery of the Public Sector Equality Duty the Council will include care experience in the publication and review of Equality Objectives and the annual publication of information relating to people who share a protected characteristic in services and employment.
- Agree that this Council will treat care experience as if it were a Protected Characteristic.
- Formally call upon all other bodies to treat care experience as a protected characteristic until such time as it may be introduced by legislation.
- Commit to continue proactively seeking out and listening to the voices of care experienced people when developing new policies based on their views.

14. To consider the following motion, notice of which has been duly given by **Councillor Smith**.

This Council has been faced with years of reductions, mainly from 2010/11, in Central Government funds that has resulted in the loss of many millions of pounds which in turn has resulted in increases in chargeable services, cuts to service provision across a range of services and Council tax rises year on year. In a nutshell, the local residents and taxpayers of Walsall seem forever to be paying more Council tax and charges for decreasing levels of service.

This seemingly never ending cycle of Council tax rises and cuts to services have been justified by both Conservative and Labour controlled Walsall Council in past recent years on the grounds that legally the Council must vote through a “balanced budget”, and hence faced with central government reductions in support, there is little room to do anything other than cut services, increase chargeable services and raise Council tax.

Despite the financial pressures councils, like Walsall have faced since 2010/11, this Council has met its statutory responsibility to balance its books annually. But this does not mean that service provision and sustainability have not suffered: Services have changed and are not sustainable in the long run.

Council spending is increasingly concentrated in fewer services and on fewer people. There are growing concerns over the quality and scale of service provision. There are, arguably, increasingly unsustainable workforce challenges and there is reduced spend on preventative services.

If this seemingly never ending cycle continues in the future, and there is no sign from either the Government or the Labour Opposition that it will not continue, then the sustainability of Councils like Walsall will be under severe threat, possibly existential threat.

Councils like Walsall are being increasingly stricken by shrinking resources and the costs of rising demand for adult social care, child protection, homelessness and special educational needs provision.

Council tax rises, particularly the adult care precept, have never been the solution to the long term pressures faced by Councils like Walsall. This is particularly the case for social care where increases in costs and demand, do not align with the capacity to raise Council tax. Increasing Council tax raises different amounts of money in different parts of the country, unrelated to need.

Given the above,

This Council resolves to write to the appropriate department/s of Central Government to inform them of:

- \* The Council's grave concerns about the present funding arrangements and the threat to future sustainability.
- \* This Council's view that the present funding system is broken.

- \* The Council's view that there is a need for an urgent review of what councils do and how local services are paid for, including an overhaul of outdated and regressive council tax.