

Striving For Excellence:

Our Council Plan 2025-2029



Walsall Council

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Foreword

Our Council Plan 2025-2029 echoes the voices and priorities of the people of Walsall. Together with our partners, we have listened carefully to over 10,000 of our community groups, businesses and people who live, work, study and invest in the borough. They told us the type of place they want Walsall to be in the future: that in 2040 Walsall will be the most improved borough in the region, a vibrant place where people are proud to live and residents in all neighbourhoods have the same life chances. That vision – *We Are Walsall 2040* – now needs to be realised.

This Council Plan sets out what we will focus on as an organisation over the next four years, continuing to transform Walsall for the better as we move forward on our journey to 2040. It has been developed in partnership with all our staff through an extensive engagement exercise, so that everyone who works for Walsall Council understands the role they play in achieving our long-term ambitions. It acts as a stepping stone on the route to 2040 and ensures we continue to push ourselves forward as a Council, building on the magnificent work that enabled us to win 'Most improved Council' in 2024. It highlights our ambition and pride in our borough, from delivering an ambitious £1.5billion regeneration programme, working with partners to make safer streets, ensuring our towns and villages remain green and giving our young people the best start in life – whilst also ensuring we continue to deliver value and balance the budget. Through this plan, we will strive towards excellence and help the vision for tomorrow become the reality of today.

Leader of the Council: Cllr Garry Perry

Introduction

Welcome to Walsall's Council Plan for 2025-2029. This sets out our vision and priorities for the next four years, where our resources will be prioritised and how we will deliver against the We Are Walsall 2040 vision. It details the principles that we will adopt in all we do to deliver successful outcomes for all in the borough.

Recent years have left a challenging legacy for everyone. However, during difficult circumstances we saw partnership working flourish; we want to continue strengthening those relationships even further. We have had to take a much more agile and flexible approach to how we deliver services and accelerate the pace of the changes we had already started making. The benefits of this are now being seen through improved satisfaction rates amongst residents and staff and increased morale and engagement across the Council.

Since the publication of our last Council Plan, Walsall has been on an improvement journey. We have modernised our workforce, skills, and ways of working, bringing in talented leadership, ensuring innovation and change, and we have made great progress working across the Borough. Like other local authorities, we are now seeing increased demand for services at a time of greater financial challenge. Despite this, we continue to deliver outcomes, and have the right leadership, structures, skills, and tools in place to generate the innovative solutions that we need.

Our 'Proud Programme' started in 2019 – a whole-Council transformation programme that has helped us to deliver significant improvements in satisfaction, financial efficiency, and organisational capability. The transformation focused on changing our ways of thinking, behaviours, and how we get things done. This progress was highlighted by the Local Government Association (LGA) in 2023 and recently by Walsall Council winning the Local Government Chronicle (LGC) award for 'Most Improved Council 2024'. The judges noted that:

"[Walsall's] impressive journey of improvement and savings through investment, while recognising the residents' voice as central to their journey, is nothing short of remarkable. With their focus on continuous improvement and new leadership, Walsall's communities can be assured of a bright future ahead."

These are tough times for many, but Walsall's record of accomplishment of continuous improvement gives us a solid foundation to build on and has equipped us with the tools we need as we work together to become the borough that people want to see in 2040.

Chief Executive: Emma Bennett

Our Borough

1 page to include:

Map / photos

Walsall borough is made up of six towns – Aldridge, Bloxwich, Brownhills, Darlaston, Walsall and Willenhall – and is home to 284,400 residents. Each of our **20 wards** has its own distinct identity and diverse characteristics. This brings a vibrant character to the borough, but also means we need to understand the range of needs faced by those living within all our communities.

Infographics to highlight key high-level challenges:

- Population growth
- Structure (younger/working age/older)
- Ethnicity
- Deprivation
- 3 or 4 relevant infographics within each ambition?

To be updated with map showing revised ward boundaries post-LGBCE publication.

Our Plan

We have adopted the *We Are Walsall 2040* ambitions as the overarching framework for our council priorities: Thriving & Happy; Healthy & Well; Prosperous & Innovative; and Proud of our Borough. In this way we can be sure that the Council's priorities are aligned to what the community told us is important for the future.

These 2040 ambitions are shared with our partners across Walsall, but we all have distinct roles to play in achieving success. For this plan we are outlining what the Council will do under these four ambitions, and to build on our transformation journey we have adopted a fifth internally focused ambition: Continuously Improving. This runs both alongside and throughout all our other ambitions.

We have also identified cross-cutting principles that apply across everything that we do to enable us to deliver all our priorities more effectively. Embedding these principles across all our services will support our future success.

Our vision acknowledges that while we have transformed as an organisation over the past few years, we will keep striving for excellence in our services and ensuring that everyone living and working in Walsall is able to reach their full potential:

Vision: to be a continuously improving council, delivering excellence, reducing inequalities and improving life chances for all

Our Ambitions



Our Principles

These five cross-cutting principles apply to everything that we do as an organisation and will enable us to deliver all our priorities more effectively. They were developed through engagement with staff right across the organisation. By taking these principles into account when designing and delivering our services, we will have a solid foundation to underpin successful outcomes.

Focusing on Prevention	
<p>Reduced funding and increasing demands are leading to pressure across public services and a need to consider innovative solutions. Prevention is already at the heart of many of our services. Public Health is concerned with population-level initiatives that will benefit individuals' future health and wellbeing outcomes. Similarly, our Early Help service is designed to identify and support families before complex issues arise. All services must consider preventative rather than reactive approaches, to improve outcomes and yield financial benefits that can be reinvested.</p>	
Supporting strategies	<p>Health & Wellbeing Strategy Adults Prevention Strategy</p>
Ensuring Equity	
<p>Promoting equalities, tackling inequity, and fostering good relations across our diverse communities is at the heart of our work – with reducing inequalities and improving life chances forming the core of our vision. We have made great strides in recent years to support our workforce to represent the communities they serve, to strengthen our governance around Equality, Diversity, and Inclusion (EDI) and to ensure staff voice is heard at all levels. There is still more we need to do to understand the characteristics and needs of our communities and ensure services are designed to be equitable and accessible to everyone.</p>	
Supporting strategies	<p>Equality, Diversity & Inclusion Strategy</p>
Working in Partnership	
<p>Partnership working is central to our vision for the borough. We Are Walsall 2040 is owned by all our strategic partners who come together as the 2040 Partnership – aligning how we work to achieve the maximum impact for the borough. But partnership working happens at every level in our organisation: from macro-level partnerships like West Midlands Combined Authority or Black Country Integrated Care System; local partnerships including Walsall for All (community organisations), Walsall Together (health & social care) Children's Alliance or Team Walsall; right down to individual officers working with their counterparts in other organisations. This principle of looking 'up and out' is one that benefits everyone. Within the council, services need to work together to share learning and avoid duplication. And engaging our residents, communities, businesses and service users in the co-design of services that work for them will lead to better outcomes.</p>	
Supporting strategies	<p>We Are Walsall 2040</p>

	Co-production Strategy
Being Insight-led	
<p>The data and intelligence that we hold is one of our organisation’s most valuable assets. Harnessed effectively, it can drive evidence-based decision making, enhance service delivery, and improve the lives of the residents of Walsall. To achieve these benefits, we must nurture a culture that values our data and recognises the benefits of using it to inform insight. By investing in data infrastructure, promoting data literacy, and fostering collaboration, we can unlock the full potential of data to address complex challenges, focus on prevention, drive innovation, and create more sustainable and prosperous communities.</p>	
Supporting strategies	Data & Insight Strategy
Acting Sustainably	
<p>For all decisions we take, we must weigh any potentially short-term gains against the longer-term consequences. Consideration of climate change is well established, and the Council has committed to reach net zero by 2041, but the principle of sustainability goes further than this. Environmentally sustainable developments will enhance the quality of our local environment and not prove harmful to its future condition. Economically sustainable activities will not require additional financial commitments in the future, and ideally will eventually become self-sustaining or even return a profit. And socially sustainable policies will build capacity so individuals and communities can support themselves into the future, for example by equipping people with new skills or breaking inter-generational patterns of worklessness.</p>	
Supporting strategies	Climate Change Strategy Commercial Strategy

Thriving and Happy

Everyone feels safe, in communities where people are supported to help themselves and one another, and children have the best start in life.

Child-friendly borough

Experiences in childhood can set the blueprint for adulthood, so investing in the physical, emotional, and educational development of our children and young people will pay dividends for them later in life. Resilient children and thriving families are key to ensure Walsall's children and young people can achieve their potential and become successful now and into the future.

We want to provide services to support children and families, with access to a range of activities to have fun, grow, learn, and thrive locally. Walsall will be a place where all children, irrespective of background or ability, have access to good education and can lead fun, safe and healthy lives. We are taking a partnership approach through the Walsall Children and Young People's Strategic Alliance, because it is essential all organisations work together and align their resources and activities to support Walsall's next generation. Together we have listened to the voice of children, young people, and their families – over 500 of whom joined in the 'Big Conversation' – to inform our priorities and shape the delivery of actions that are meaningful to them.

We will:

- Continue to work with our partners through the Walsall's Children and Young People's Strategic Alliance to deliver the CYP Strategy and ensure that Walsall is a vibrant place where young people are proud to live.
- Work in partnership to focus on the early years, supporting the first one thousand days in a child's life to give them the best possible start.
- Work with families to ensure their children are school ready.
- Close the gap in child poverty and education inequalities, to help all children to reach their full potential.
- Continue to listen to our young people and their families, to co-design priorities and actions that matter to them.
- Further embed our Family Hubs and extend the impact these have for families in all localities.
- Ensure that we provide excellent support to children in our care to help them successfully transition into adulthood.
- Work with education providers and businesses to ensure young people have the right pathways to stay in education, employment or training.
- Work with all partners to develop a strong youth offer across the borough to give young people safe places to go.

Safer streets, safer people

Our listening and engagement activities tell us that being safe, and feeling safe, is the highest priority for people in Walsall. We want to create a borough where people feel safe in their homes, neighbourhoods and towns and are confident going about their lives day or night. As a member of Safer Walsall Partnership, we have a duty to collaborate with the police and other key partners to develop and implement local crime-reduction strategies. We will work together to address the root causes of crime (which include poverty and childhood trauma) and ensure people are safe from the effects of crime, disorder, and anti-social behaviour.

There are also opportunities for us to use our wider powers to shape safer streets and communities. We can consider how we use planning and regeneration plans to create secure environments by 'designing out crime', for example in the redevelopment within the Walsall Town Centre Masterplan – where people told us they feel particularly unsafe. And we can use our enforcement powers to maximum effect, for example by improving road safety or clamping down on illicit trading.

We will:

- Target interventions to reduce crime, particularly violent and knife related crime.
- Tackle the root causes of crime, particularly issues such as deprivation and adverse childhood experience.
- Make full use of the tools, technology and powers available to us to improve safety across the borough.
- Effectively safeguard children and vulnerable adults from abuse and exploitation.
- Identify and support young people at risk of becoming involved in youth violence and criminal activities.
- Develop action plans to address issues such as domestic abuse, all age exploitation and modern slavery.
- Continue targeted multi-agency work in communities when issues arise, focussing on short-term intervention and longer-term solutions.
- Use vehicle mitigation measures to improve road safety in town and district centres.
- Work with partners to reduce and address anti-social behaviour.
- Work in partnership to mitigate and reduce the threat of extremism.
- Ensure community safety perspectives are considered in our development and regeneration plans.

Resilient and empowered communities

Strong and empowered communities have been shown to help people live happier and longer lives. Being active in our communities and having a voice in shaping the world around us can help to anchor us to our neighbourhoods, foster feelings of belonging, generate trust, reduce feelings of isolation and loneliness, and create a sense of wellbeing. Empowered communities are more resilient to the challenges of everyday life; and by harnessing the assets available outside of the public and private sectors we can drive forward change and improvement in local areas. We want to create a Walsall where everyone has a voice and can get involved through volunteering and participating in community life.

We are fortunate to have a vibrant community sector in Walsall – which is integral to our partnership working – and it is important that we ensure sustainability of the sector. We have adopted a Resilient Communities model that focuses on harnessing the assets of our population: a citizen-led way of improving quality of life and reducing harm in our communities, allowing them to thrive and building capacity right across the borough.

We will:

- Work with partners to help our residents understand money and financial decisions.
- Explore how we as a Council can drive social value keeping Walsall money in Walsall and supporting community wealth building activities.
- Review how we work with and commission the community sector through a new local Compact
- Work to ensure the community sector is supported to develop, thrive and have a strong voice for local issues and people.
- Explore options for cross cutting prevention programmes that support and empower Walsall people and communities
- Connect more people to their communities and ensure they can be signposted about where to go when they need it.
- Work with partners locally to embed the Armed Forces Covenant across Walsall.
- Engage residents in the consideration, design and delivery of local initiatives and services to co-produce the Walsall we want together.
- Work with partners to encourage local volunteering and community participation.

Healthy and Well

A wellbeing-centred borough where people are healthy and live full and active lives, with the support they need to achieve a good quality of life, living in safe and suitable homes.

Living active and healthy lives

Walsall faces many challenges that impact on health and wellbeing. Healthy life expectancy is well below the national average and people in the borough spend a larger portion of their lives living in poor health. Creating the right environment to enable people to make healthy choices, (such as stopping smoking, eating healthily, maintaining a healthy weight, engaging in regular exercise, and reducing alcohol and drug intake) remains vital for the future health of our residents.

Mental health is just as important as physical health, and with local partners we have committed to focus on improving mental wellbeing for all our residents through increasing awareness and providing access to support. Mental wellbeing can be improved by exercise, being outdoors, engaging in cultural activities, and being part of a community – and the Council can help people to access those positive activities.

Residents' physical and mental wellbeing is not just important to them as individuals. Living in ill health creates barriers to employment, so promoting healthy lives is essential for the economic prosperity of the whole borough.

We will:

- Work with partners to recognise the importance of mental wellbeing and signpost to information and guidance – supporting people to find ways and activities that will improve their own wellbeing.
- Ensure excellent leisure facilities, parks and green spaces are available to support residents to live healthy and active lives.
- Consider health in all policies, decision making and service design.
- Work with our business community to support their employees' health.
- Provide public health support to enable Walsall people to consider stopping smoking, reducing alcohol consumption, and ending dependence on drugs.
- Provide opportunities and encourage our residents and communities to build exercise into their daily lives, be more aware of the foods they eat and maintain good sexual health.
- Use our enforcement powers to clamp down on licensing issues and the sale of illicit vapes, tobacco and goods, and new initiatives to tackle street drinking.
- Develop our wellbeing and early intervention offer.

Supported and cared for

People are at the heart of any community and in Walsall we want to put people at the centre of our services and decision-making. We want everyone to have choice, control, and flexibility – to allow people to live well, age well and die well. We will work with partners to ensure excellent care provision in Walsall that is designed and centred around the individual and their needs. We want people to be able to live independent lives and stay in their homes and communities as long as possible through provision of quality and timely support.

Nationally, carers contribute approximately £135billion in unpaid care and are the bedrock of social care support. One in ten Walsall adults provide unpaid care. Unpaid carers are more likely to suffer from poorer mental health and wellbeing, often struggling to manage their own needs alongside their caring responsibilities. We value our carers and recognise the vital role they play and want to support them to thrive.

We will:

- Ensure we have a clear and comprehensive carers strategy outlining how we will work with and support carers across the borough
- Work with partners to provide intermediate care and reablement to ensure more people can retain or regain independence.
- Work with partners to support people to leave hospital as soon as they are well enough.
- Communicate clearly with residents who need social care so they can understand the process, funding and are empowered to make choices that matter to them.
- Work with partners to ensure support to adults with learning or sensory needs so they are supported to thrive in their jobs, homes and communities.
- Protect and support vulnerable people at risk of harm and exploitation.
- Invest in technology and approaches that help people live independently for longer.
- Review the data we have and work with partners to understand how we can best reduce health inequalities across the borough.
- Work with our Walsall Together health and care partners to consider wellbeing outcomes in everything we do.
- Treat the bereaved with respect and dignity and provide excellent bereavement services.

Homes for all

Walsall residents should be able to live in a decent home that meets their needs and aspirations. A good home is fundamental to feeling safe and well. Good housing impacts on how people feel about where they live and the world around them. It impacts directly on people's mental health and poor-quality housing can directly affect people through ill health. Availability of quality homes of all types is also vital to ensure Walsall can continue to grow and flourish economically and socially.

Our Housing Strategy sets out our intention to deliver new homes, prevent homelessness, and help to improve the safety and energy efficiency of Walsall's homes. While the Council does not own or manage its own housing stock, we play an important strategic function, working closely with social landlords and private developers to ensure everyone has the home they need.

We will:

- Understand the changing housing needs of different groups – including those who need care – to promote independent living, health and wellbeing.
- Facilitate new home building, by bring together housing associations and developers with our regional and national public sector partners.
- Increase the number of long-term empty homes brought back into use – using our powers of compulsory purchase where appropriate.
- Seek to improve energy efficiency of new and existing homes.
- Work with landlords (especially the private sector) to make sure homes are safe
- Support those who are homeless, or at risk of being made homeless.
- Develop a new Local Plan by 2026 to ensure we have the right houses in the right locations.
- Work with developers to ensure developments are mixed tenures with a good supply of affordable homes across the borough.
- Continue to work closely with residents at risk of becoming homeless to support them to stay in their homes wherever possible.

Prosperous and Innovative

An economy that works for everyone, with skilled residents able to take up the opportunities created by local businesses, in a place that it is easy to get around, where people are confident to access services digitally.

Supporting business and inclusive growth

Inclusive economic growth is vital to ensure good jobs locally that pay sustainable wages and lead to an improved quality of life across all our communities. Our Economic Strategy aims to build a positive future: increasing the number of local businesses, growing local jobs and skills, and harnessing our economic assets of geography, connectivity, strong industrial sectors, and partnership working across anchor institutions.

The private sector is a key partner for our 2040 vision. Strategic businesses are already working with us to shape regeneration schemes across Walsall. There are over 8,000 businesses across the borough that we are supporting to grow and thrive. We want businesses to build roots in Walsall and invest in their future in the borough. This includes investing in both physical premises and infrastructure as well as investing in their employees through continuing staff development or apprenticeships. But beyond that, corporate social responsibility schemes will help to ensure that businesses also invest in our local communities and become key partners in the future prosperity and wellbeing of Walsall.

We will:

- Build relationships with our strategically important businesses across Walsall.
- Work to attract investors and new businesses to the Borough.
- Look for opportunities for the private sector to be involved in partnership arrangements to strengthen their effectiveness.
- Develop a clear opportunity for businesses to support the borough's priorities through effective and targeted corporate social responsibility activities, including using our contracts with local businesses to drive local social value.
- Understand where businesses interact with the council and streamline the support offer developing a joined-up approach across all Council services.
- Work with partners to continue to develop Walsall as centre of excellence for manufacturing and green jobs.
- Review our procurement processes to make it easier for local business to deliver our contracts.

Skills and jobs for all

Poor economic growth over recent decades has resulted in fewer jobs in Walsall with the population increasingly dependent on out-of-work benefits. Walsall has higher than national average levels of unemployment, high numbers on ill health related benefits and our economy is vulnerable to external economic challenges. Our successful 'Walsall Works' programme has proven that providing investment and support can create the conditions for sustainable employment growth and help people move into employment. However, we must address a significant skills gap to progress – one in ten adults have no formal qualifications at all. Skills shortages, lack of aspiration and low educational attainment means we face barriers in the local economy.

The children in Walsall's schools today are the workforce of tomorrow. We must connect the learning children and young people receive to the skills they will need to be successful adults. We must work with education providers and businesses to match skills and training with local need and provide opportunities to work. We must support people to access a range of pathways including traineeships and apprenticeships. Walsall has the capacity to produce highly skilled people so working with employers to ensure there are jobs in the borough for them to take up is vital to ensure people can work and live locally. However, learning doesn't finish in early adulthood. We need to offer working age people the opportunity to continually develop in their careers by evolving and expanding their skill set to meet changing economic demands and to reach their full potential.

We will:

- Narrow the gap in educational attainment across the Borough working with schools to raise attainment levels.
- Work with education providers to ensure they are offering the right learning opportunities to meet our business' needs.
- Increase investment in the borough to increase jobs especially highly skilled jobs.
- Work with partners to establish clear pathways for young people and unemployed adults to retrain and access employment in sectors where there are skills shortages.
- Support partners to develop our adult education offer to ensure a whole life course approach to skills development
- Work with businesses and partners to champion inclusive employment policies and procedures to encourage access and opportunities for all communities.

Accessible services & connected places

Walsall needs a range of transport options to ensure we are connected to the wider Black Country, the West Midlands and beyond. We want Walsall people to move around with ease and convenience, ensuring high class connectivity to drive economic prosperity. Work has been completed on M6 Junction 10 to improve traffic flow on one of the region's busiest motorway stretches. By investing in the quality and condition of our road networks, we will reduce congestion and improve journey times. We need a mix of transport solutions, so we are not reliant on cars for shorter, local journeys and where cars are needed, we need to invest in EV infrastructure and technology. We must ensure that the infrastructure and routes are in place to allow people a choice in how they get around. Our new railway stations at Darlaston and Willenhall, opening the Walsall-Wolverhampton rail route, will serve two of our district centres. Similarly, the proposed Aldridge station will mean greater connectivity to the east of the borough. Our plans to link Walsall and Bloxwich via the canal network will open this important artery for walking and cycling. Investment in such routes across the borough will help people feel safe however they travel.

Services are increasingly being provided virtually. We will invest in the technology and infrastructure we need for the future, such as access to 5G networks. However, we also need to ensure all those who wish to get online are supported with the skills and training they need to be digitally confident, with the capability to access the services they need. A digitally connected Walsall where people are skilled in how to navigate online will drive prosperity for the borough improving quality of life.

We will:

- Work with regional partners (West Midlands Combined Authority) to ensure large scale transport infrastructure projects are designed and delivered to benefit Walsall.
- Invest in better cycling and walking routes across the borough to enable people to choose transport options.
- Communicate and encourage our residents to choose cleaner and greener forms of travel where they can.
- Implement our EV strategy to ensure electric vehicle infrastructure and charging points are available across the borough.
- Work with digitally excluded residents to get them the support and skills they need to get online.
- Refresh our Digital Strategy and continue to roll out digital infrastructure and technology to make Walsall Digitally connected.

Proud of our Borough

Vibrant, clean towns with quality green spaces, where everyone takes responsibility to respect the environment and be climate ready, with communities that come together to celebrate our diverse heritage and culture.

A clean and green future

Clean, green, safe streets with strong communities help our residents feel pride and encourage people to live active healthy lives. We want Walsall's streets and neighbourhoods to be thriving and welcoming places where people want to live, participate, and enjoy being in the borough. The Council cannot create and maintain these streets and neighbourhoods alone; we need to work with our partners, residents and communities to create vibrant streets and neighbourhoods and to reduce, re-use and recycle our waste. Residents have told us how much they value and take pride in the parks and green spaces across the borough. Maintaining and promoting these as places for relaxation, leisure and community activities will play a vital role not only in protecting the quality of our environment but also in supporting the health and wellbeing of our borough.

Climate change will impact on the day to day lives and wellbeing of Walsall residents with climate effects such as increased rainfall and extreme temperatures increasingly becoming a lived reality. Walsall Council declared a climate change emergency in 2019 and we have committed to becoming a net zero carbon authority by 2041. Considerable progress has been made by reducing energy use and improving the efficiency of our buildings. However, to achieve the target we will have to go further and ensure that reducing emissions and increasing resilience is central to all we do (as set out in our principle of 'acting sustainably'). Our Climate Change Strategy will set out how we work alongside our partners, businesses and communities to build climate resilience into all we do – working to address the causes and mitigate the effects.

We will:

- Educate and raise awareness of how our behaviour can improve the world around us.
- Invest in our street cleansing tools and equipment to maintain clean streets.
- Enforce to curb fly tipping, dog fouling, environmental crime and unauthorised commercial activities that can impact the environment, and work towards eliminating unsafe behaviours that negatively affect our neighbourhoods.
- Invest in our waste management infrastructure to modernise, enhance and future-proof our recycling and waste disposal facilities.
- Effectively manage our designated sites (such as Local Nature Reserves and Sites of Special Scientific Interest) to safeguard the natural environment and promote biodiversity.
- Look for opportunities to create new habitats where flora and fauna can thrive, through initiatives such as rewilding.
- Develop and deliver an annual Climate Action Plan to remain on track towards our 2041 goals.

Celebrating our culture and heritage

Celebrating who we are is important: recognising our culture, our beliefs, our stories, and our history is central to creating pride, fostering cohesion, and driving forward prosperity and wellbeing. As the 'town of a hundred trades', Walsall has a rich industrial heritage, and our residents live amongst historic buildings, parks, and cultural sites. But they also have countless personal stories to share, of longstanding roots in the borough or more recent migration. So 'heritage' acknowledges not just our collective connections with the past but also what we chose to take forward as we look towards the future – celebrating our vibrant and diverse communities and places, with the aim of creating opportunities for present and future generations.

Our vibrant creative and cultural sector will be at the heart of our visitor and tourism strategy, celebrating the borough's eminent attractions – including Walsall Arboretum and the renowned New Art Gallery. The heritage and cultural sectors will also play a key role in Walsall's future by bringing residents and partners together to unlock new economic, environmental, health and wellbeing, and community benefits.

We will:

- Celebrate our Walsall history in the leather trade and safeguard the skills for future generations.
- Develop a Visitor and Tourism Strategy to maximise Walsall as a destination in the region.
- Promote the legacy of the Arboretum and maintain impact for future generations.
- Continue to support museums, galleries and libraries as important community assets.
- Develop a programme of cultural and arts events and activities across the borough.
- Celebrate and champion the diversity of peoples, cultures and faiths across the borough through our art, culture and community initiatives.
- Support and promote integration and cohesion of all communities across the borough

Vibrant towns

Through working with our partners and the private sector, and developing our Walsall brand, we have a £1.5billion investment programme underway to regenerate and transform the borough and create thousands of new homes and jobs. Residents, businesses and visitors have told us that they want Walsall town centre to be a focal point for the borough – a destination for shopping locally and participating in activities, sport, and leisure. Our Town Centre Masterplan sets out how we will improve Walsall, respond to economic challenges and shape our economy for the future.

Residents have also told us they want to retain the unique identities of our district centres, while strengthening the local offer for employment, retail, leisure and housing. There are a range of regeneration schemes planned that aim to rejuvenate these places and help them to thrive. In Bloxwich, £21million of Town Deal funding is being used to establish an incubation and digital access centre, enhance parks and open spaces and improve housing and skills. Darlaston is a recipient of long-term Town Deal funding, with a plan that will be shaped by the local voluntary and community sector. Our Willenhall framework will deliver our 10-year ambition for housing growth and healthy, prosperous communities. Darlaston, Willenhall and Aldridge are also locations for new planned rail connections to link them to Walsall town centre and the wider region.

The next few years will be devoted to the development of our Walsall Borough Local Plan – the overarching spatial and planning framework for Walsall. This long-term plan provides an opportunity to shape the geography of the borough so that we can realise our ambitions for the future and ensure there is space for homes, jobs, leisure and the environment.

We will:

- Continue to create a strong Walsall brand that attracts investors and developers to our towns and encourages retailers and leisure providers to the borough.
- Deliver the next phase of our regeneration programme: £500m to create 2,000 jobs and 1,000 homes.
- Support a range of cultural events and activities to draw people into our town and district centres.
- Realise the vision set out the Walsall Town Centre Masterplan to transform accessibility and public realm at the heart of the borough.
- Deliver the Willenhall Framework Plan to promote the town as a place that people aspire to live, work, and spend leisure time.
- Work with our public, private and voluntary sector partners to deliver successful Town Deal projects in Walsall, Bloxwich and Darlaston.
- Carry out a consultation process on our Local Borough Plan that ensures all residents, businesses, and partners can shape the borough for the future.
- Continue to develop a pipeline of development and regeneration schemes and look for opportunities to work towards successful delivery.
- Provide an effective and timely planning service to support our local growth ambitions.

Continuously Improving

Striving for excellence by providing efficient and effective services, supported by a skilled and engaged workforce to provide a high-quality experience for all those engaging with the council.

A quality experience for all

Walsall Council has put residents at the heart of everything we do, ensuring they can easily contact us when they need us, and they get good outcomes first time, every time. Our new digital offer means residents now have a variety of channels to engage with the Council. People can get online to request, book, and pay for a variety of services and our new telephony system and website makes it even easier to get clear and timely information. Our Walsall Connected programme ensures we have locality-based hubs across the borough for those that need them, offering residents advice and support and help with digital skills. We will ensure our services continue to be accessible and we will make every contact count. We will use available technology and data and work with our staff to ensure how we deliver our services is as important as what we deliver. We will invest in the right infrastructure to ensure our data and records are effective and that we work as one across the Council to ensure you only need to tell us once.

As a Council that has Ensuring Equity as a key principle, we will work to ensure all our diverse communities can access services, are treated fairly and where needed we will make reasonable adjustments. We will continue to deliver our Customer Experience Strategy ensuring we learn from what works, create a culture that puts residents and customers first and when things need to improve, we do so quickly. We will ensure we understand what residents need, their behaviours and choices and we will design our services from their perspective.

We will:

- Implement, review and refresh our Customer Experience Strategy.
- Ensure our residents and businesses have high quality interactions with the Council whatever channel they use.
- Ensure our Council website is clear, easy to use and accessible for all.
- Use behavioural science insights and approaches to redesign our customer communication and processes as appropriate.
- Ensure we have access to translation and interpretation services for those who need them.
- Ensure we work with staff to put customers and residents first in how we work.
- Continue to implement our customer access transformation activities to improve how residents can contact us and get support.
- Deploy technology, tools and models to improve customer channels and processes.

A skilled and engaged workforce

Walsall Council has gone through significant challenges in recent years. Our staff too have felt these challenges and have delivered tirelessly to ensure service continuity in a time of need. Our journey towards excellence is not possible without our staff, an outstanding workforce that is motivated, understands our vision and how to realise that for the benefit of Walsall. We need to ensure that we have the right staff with the right skills, talent, and passion to make a difference. We must attract, recruit, and retain excellent staff that yield results and deliver value for money. We aim to be an employer of choice, a place where staff feel valued, can be empowered and nurtured to develop, and where we cultivate a culture of innovation, co-operation and creativity. We want to ensure that all levels of the Council reflect the diversity and makeup of the Borough- that we know and understand our communities. Our workforce Strategy 2023-2026 outlines our aims to develop our staff and create the right culture and space so they can thrive and deliver excellent services tailored for Walsall's needs.

In 2023, our regular staff survey showed improvement in levels of employee engagement and satisfaction. We want to build on these successes. We will focus on ensuring equity for all staff and develop clear opportunities for their voices to be heard through creating channels for staff to raise issues, produce suggestions for change, and challenge conventions. Our new Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Strategy outlines how we will ensure equity in everything we do – championing equalities with and through our staff. Our new Council values and behaviours have been developed with and by staff and we will embed these across everything we do – designing values-based recruitment, values led leadership and values inspired service delivery.

We will:

- Continue to rollout and support staff networks to give all staff a voice.
- Embed our 'Ensuring Equity' EDI strategy across the Council to champion equalities across everything we do.
- Continue to implement digital 'change agents' programme to ensure our staff are digitally confident with the skills to thrive.
- Ensure our staff have access to effective training and skills for the jobs now and for the future.
- Continue to implement our Workforce Strategy and Organisational Development plans to ensure we have the right staff and are representative of the communities we serve.
- Review the findings of our employee engagement programme to drive greater engagement, motivation and positive morale in our staff.
- Communicate and embed our Council values to all staff.

Efficient and effective services

Our 'Proud' transformation has yielded dividends for the Council and has proven we have the capability to deliver services in a more efficient and effective way. We need to safeguard the outcomes we achieve despite reducing budgets. To do this we must re-design the Council, exploring the services we deliver, our processes, our governance and procedures to ensure they are fit for purpose, modernised, and add value. We are reviewing governance to free up capacity and streamline our decision-making. We continue to strengthen our legal, audit and scrutiny processes and we will continue to have effective internal controls to safeguard our resources, achieve value for money and deliver ethically against every pound of Council tax. Alongside this we will ensure we have appropriate levels of support functions to help our front-line services across the Council deliver what matters most.

We will be astute with resources reducing spend, investing to save where it makes business sense and increasing commercial opportunities. Our new Commercial Strategy will help us engender a more entrepreneurial and commercial culture. The council has a good record of balancing the budget and financial sustainability is at the forefront of thinking across the Council. We have delivered approximately £255m of savings from 2010/11 to 2022/23. We will continue to have a razor-sharp focus on how we spend money. We will ensure we derive procurement value by reviewing all contracts, commissioning innovative approaches for service delivery particularly in Adult Social Care and Children Services, and exploring cost effective partnerships.

We are implementing technology solutions and recent advances in AI to increase value and free up capacity to deliver. We are already at the vanguard of IT solutions within local government and will continue to rollout our technology platforms and implement plans to use data more effectively. Our Digital and Data & Insight strategies look at how we deliver digital services and how data is captured, stored and used so we can become better at understanding residents' needs.

We will:

- Implement our Data and Insights Strategy to review the data we have; map the data we need and share intelligence to help us understand the needs of our communities.
- Invest in the infrastructure and technology we need to effectively manage our data and information and create a single view of customer.
- Explore use of technology and AI to transform how we work and generate efficiency and value.
- Finalise and implement our new commercial strategy including development of a clear multi-year pipeline for commercial activities.
- Continue to rollout the Walsall transformation programme focussed on adult services, children services and back-office support.
- Continue to balance our budgets – making circa £40M savings over the period 2025/26-2027/28.
- Review all our contracts and spend to ensure efficiency and value for money.
- Review Council officer governance to generate efficiency and agility of decision making and align with our Local Code of Governance.
- Continue to maintain effective audit, scrutiny and legal processes to ensure compliance and excellence.

Measuring Our Success

Setting out our ambitions is only meaningful if we also evaluate and measure our progress. We have designed a dashboard and report that will go to Cabinet quarterly for discussion and highlight our progress against this plan. In addition, there will be an annual review of achievements that sets out the progress we have made.

The new approach will be insight-led. It will seek to include a wide range of information, (such as ward-specific data) on a variety of different measures, trend analyses, and benchmarking against our neighbouring Councils. It will draw out which outcomes are on target and allow for a robust “deep dive” into outcomes where there are challenges. We will seek to understand how other places, including those with similar characteristics to Walsall, are performing and where we can learn from best practice happening elsewhere.

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