

Council – 23 February 2023

Community, Leisure and Culture (Deputy Leader and Resilient Communities) Councillor Garry Perry Portfolio Holder

I am pleased to report to Council that the services within Community, Leisure and Culture have continued to deliver sterling work over the past twelve months. My services cover a wide variety of front-line services and I will start with those in Place & Environment:

Sports & Leisure Services

Fitness equipment improvements

It has been another exciting year for our leisure facilities as we continue to invest in our fitness offer, to support our residents to lead healthy lifestyles. Our fitness suites have been refurbished and now offer a wider range of equipment. This will help to retain current members and attract new users from a wider cross section of residents.

Service Developments

Our intensive fitness support programme, 'Fitness Journey', has been enhanced with the introduction of a health app and body composition measurements. This helps to motivate our customer as they can see and track the health benefits of their exercise.

As part of the service's ongoing digital transformation the leisure hub online booking system has been expanded and now facilitates online bookings for badminton and squash courts as well as all group exercise classes. The platform has around 10,000 registered users and is receive positive feedback from customers.

The service has social media engagement with over 17,500 residents per month. Extensive work has been done to improve our web design and content. The sport and leisure webpages are the most visited on the council website after recycling and bins and council tax.

Working with the North Walsall Primary Care Network, a pilot exercise referral scheme has been developed. This has created a pathway for local GPs to refer inactive residents whose health will benefit from exercise into the service at the cost of the PCN.

Birmingham 2022 Commonwealth Games

In the build up to the games Walsall was proud to host a visit from the queen's baton as it relayed through the country. A wonderful day saw thousands of residents be inspired to become physically active as physical activity providers from around the borough came together to showcase their offerings in a day of cultural celebration at Walsall Arboretum, and Walsall Gala Swimming & Fitness Centre.

During the games Sport England funding was obtained to enable residents to try Commonwealth Games sports and activities at our leisure facilities without charge.

As such over 1000 residents tried a new physical activity, and as part of the holiday activity and food programme groups of disadvantaged young people were inspired by trips to see live Commonwealth Games sports.

Underspends from the Commonwealth Games are to be reallocated through the region following consent from government, with the West Midlands Combined Authority leading the allocation of these resources. Walsall is bidding to secure a share of these monies but at the time of writing allocations have not been confirmed.

Workforce Development

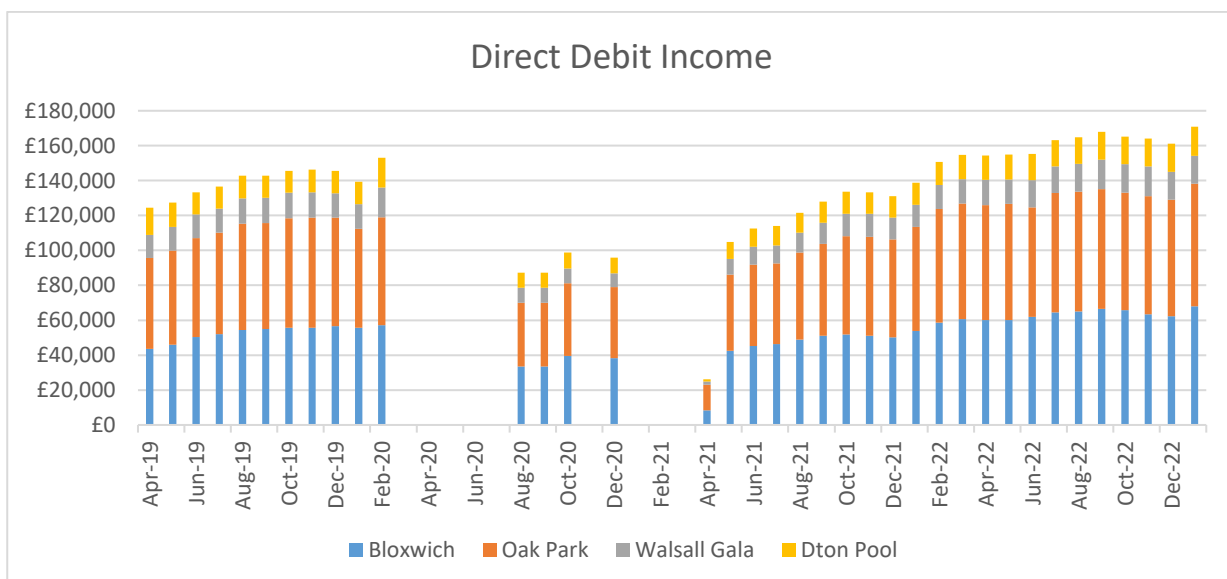
To help ensure a flow of talent into the authority, sport and leisure are now operating a rolling programme of aquatics apprentice recruitment and have introduced a leisure bursary. The bursary offers local people the opportunity to come to us to be trained as lifeguards and/or swimming teachers at no cost to themselves on the agreement that they will undertake voluntary work in our facilities to compensate for the cost of the training. To support the bursary and the ongoing development of the wider workforce in-house tutor assessors have been developed to enable cost effective in-house delivery of certified training.

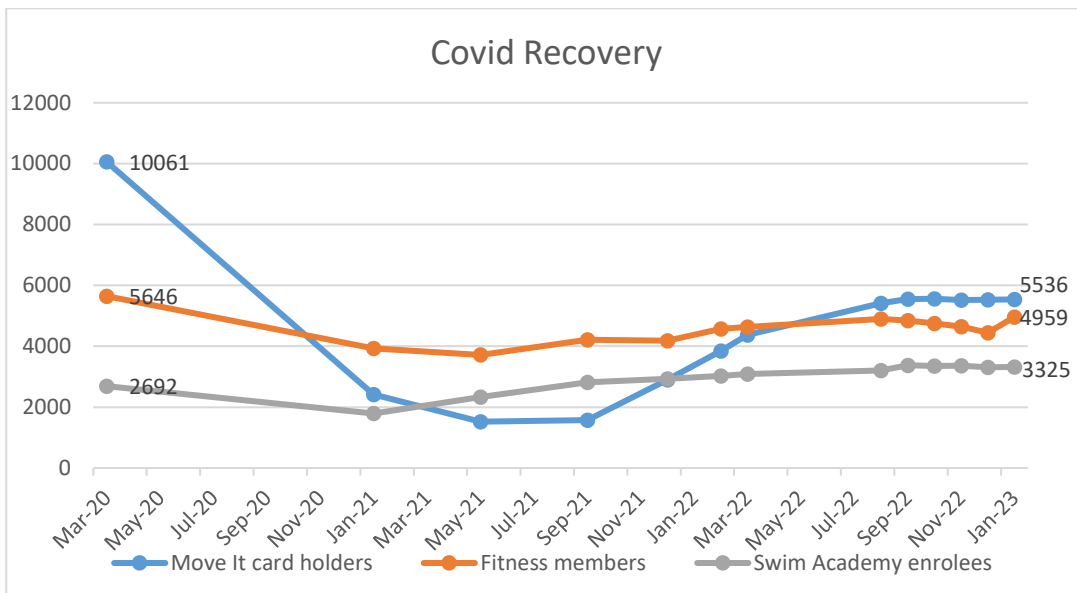
Energy Efficiency

A £2.6m project funded by the public sector decarbonisation scheme is underway to replace the failing gas boilers at Darlaston Swimming & Fitness Centre with air source heat pumps. Along with the installation of solar panels, LED lighting, improved air handling, and a new building management system, the project will save £20k a year in energy costs and an annual reduction of 400 tonnes of carbon. The target for full completion and commissioning is June 2023.

Performance Growth

Direct debit income, boosted by excellent growth in our Walsall Swim Academy (3300 children now learning to swim with us every week) has reached and surpassed pre-covid levels.





Bereavement Services

2022 brought higher level than expected of burials and ashes interments. Engineering work was completed at Streetly and North Walsall cemeteries to extend burial capacity for the service, with additional provision created for Muslim faith burials at Streetly, including the installation of preformed chambers, allowing families to have more options at the time of burial within their faith requirements.

Preparations are underway for a further capital bid in 2023 to add new ashes scattering areas and above ground memorial options at either North Walsall or Willenhall cemetery to the service. Using ground with no commercial value, extending the memorial options offered to residents at a wider number of locations across the service to offer burial options to residents that are still in the Walsall district.

Cremation numbers at Streetly have declined slightly following the pandemic. The hosting of an Annual Funeral Directors meeting at Streetly in December 2022 gathered valuable feedback and suggestions on improvements, particularly our cremation services. Work has commenced on reopening the customer reception at Streetly and establishing a showroom to promote the range of memorial options offered and to strengthen our community links.

One cremator at Streetly underwent a full reline in January 2023, with the other two scheduled for later 2023. Additional cosmetic work at Streetly, including replacing both chapel curtains and improving the appearance to our service users.

A comprehensive review of our annual cemetery maintenance was undertaken in 2022, identifying areas for improvement and a reduction in weed killer use on sites for 2023 by 30% and again by a further 20% in 2024 as part of a commitment to our environmental responsibility. This review has also identified options to improve the horticultural management of our cemeteries and to submit two Green Flag site accreditations in 2023 for North Walsall and Willenhall Lawns Cemetery.

The service recommenced its five-year cycle of statutory memorial safety inspections with over 1300 headstones tested at Ryecroft Cemetery. All ground staff are being trained to bring these inspections in-house in March 2023 to continue this work, developing their roles from ground staff to more specialised cemetery operatives and delivering a significant cost saving to the service.

An APSE (Association of Public Sector Excellence) service return was submitted (July 2021) for the first time, where a range of service data is collated and analysed. Performance indicator standings are calculated, ranking the service against other local authorities and giving valuable information in planning service delivery and future targets.

For the first time Willenhall Lawns Cemetery had a community Christmas tree, where families were invited to add a bauble or decoration in remembrance of a family member. A well-attended event by the local community, arranged by the newly formed 'Friends of Willenhall Lawns Cemetery Group', but it also demonstrated a strong link between the service and residents. This link with the community is a theme that the service is looking to improve on, inviting feedback and building relationships and encourage community groups to form at other sites as well.

The current cemetery and crematorium booking system (CAS) is being replaced by a new web-based system – GOWER, with extensive work by the administrative teams to model, test and implement the system. GOWER will also enable a much quicker transfer of information between office based and site staff including checking site maps, grave details and burial preparation requirements.

Registration Service

The Council's Register Office submitted its annual performance report to the General Register Office in April 2022, which confirmed that the Register Office continues to perform well in terms of performance against national standards. The General Register Office's audit of the service had an outcome of 'high assurance'.

We continue to see high volumes of service requests, for marriages / civil partnerships and the related legal activities. These activities reflect aspects of immigration policy regarding marriages and civil partnerships in this country. Over 400 Walsall residents have received British citizenship to date with ceremonies being offered within the required 3 months Home Office timescale.

Planning is underway for the Register Office to be moved to the front of the Civic Centre (First Stop Shop area). The plan includes new ceremony rooms allowing for choice of numbers of guests and options for ceremonies. The choices will be linked to a sliding scale of fees and affordability for our customers and maximising income generation.

We continue to work closely with the Manor Hospital to ensure a timely death registration service within statutory timescales. This also means we can deliver short notice registrations for same day faith burials, subject to capacity and the necessary medical examiner checks.

Regeneration & Economy

Walsall Arena & Arts (incorporating Walsall Music Education Hub):

Has this season:

- Sold 21,000+ tickets, including a record 6,000+ for its Pantomime.
- Generated ticket sales of £300,000 for Walsall Council – an increase of 152% on the previous best year.
- Attracted stars and shows such as BBC Question Time, Bill Bailey, Marti Pellow, Suggs, Milton Jones, Ed Byrne, G4 to Walsall
- Generated meeting hire income of £130,000 despite the rise of online meetings (Zoom & Teams)
- Partnered with Black Country Dance Hub to bring professional dancers and choreographers to work with Walsall young people
- Staged 12 professional contemporary arts dance shows, with integrated workshops, to encourage young people to see dance as an art-form.

Walsall Music Education Hub

- Teaches over 5,000 young people a month and supports schools across the borough.
- Has created a 13% uplift in music engagement over the last 12 months.
- Staged many events this year including the Walsall's Young Music Star, Primary Schools Singing Festival, Special Needs Summerfest, and Arboretum Showcase.
- Partnered with The Sixteen (a performing arts charity), to provide a free young artists' Partnered with the Virtual School to engage Looked After Children
- Has the Arts Council's lowest risk score in the West Midlands recognising its performance and management.

Town Centre

- The Town Centre Theatre project is a proposed 1000 seat Theatre that also includes a conference space and a bar/café facility. The project has been developed to RIBA Stage 2 but was put on hold to avoid significant abortive costs in advance of the LUF bid being announced.
- The outcome of the bid was received on the 18th January 2023 and, unfortunately, the bid was unsuccessful. The Authority is unable to deliver the Theatre without funding support so it is unlikely that this project will go ahead by utilising the Towns Deal funding stream.
- A Cabinet paper is currently being prepared to seek approval to develop the Theatre under a separate strategy, to allow an alternative Town Deal to progress and to agree, in principle, that the Town Deal funding and the associated match funding can be allocated to an alternative project.

New Art Gallery

Exhibitions, Studio and Artist Development

A number of exhibitions have been held or are planned, including:

- **Floor 3, Keith Piper, *Jet Black Futures***, Until 24 April 2022
<https://thenewartgallerywalsall.org.uk/exhibition/keith-piper-jet-black-futures/>

- **Floor 3, *West Midlands Open***, 20 May – 25 September 2022
<https://thenewartgallerywalsall.org.uk/exhibition/west-midlands-open/>
- **Floor 3, *A Generous Space 2***, 20 May – 25 September 2022
- **Floor 3, *Breaking the Mould: Sculpture by Women since 1945***
An Arts Council Collection Touring Exhibition from Southbank Centre, London
21 October 2023 – 16 April 2024
<https://thenewartgallerywalsall.org.uk/exhibition/breaking-the-mould-sculpture-by-women-since-1945/>
- **Floor 4, Karen McLean, *Ar'n't I a Woman!*** Until 3 July 2022
<https://thenewartgallerywalsall.org.uk/exhibition/karen-mclean-arnt-i-a-woman/>
- **Floor 4, Sutapa Biswas, *Lumen*** 20 July – 30 October 2022
<https://thenewartgallerywalsall.org.uk/exhibition/sutapa-biswas-lumen/>
- **Floor 4, Billy Dosanjh, *The Exiles*** 11 November 2022 – 5 February 2023
<https://thenewartgallerywalsall.org.uk/exhibition/billy-dosanjh-the-exiles/>

Studio Programme and Artist Development

- This programme provides valuable development support for artists, from the West Midlands region, through provision of a studio, access to the Gallery's resources including the guidance of staff, and an external adviser. Over the last year, we have supported artists Caitlin Doherty, Sarah Byrne, Naoibh McNamee, Henry Jones, Alex Billingham.
- The Sophia-Layla Afsar residency was supported by £16,765 from the British Council's International Collaboration Grants. We worked with two transgender women artists in Walsall and Karachi exploring the idea of trans joy.

Learning & Engagement

Schools:

- Pre-Covid levels of engagement with schools reached, peaking at 690 school pupils visiting in November 2022 (average of 34 pupils every weekday).
- New, formal partnership with Walsall Music Education Hub and Service – Composing Pictures Project I (2022) and II (2023) – 600 children worked with artists and musicians to create musical responses to artworks in the Garman Ryan Collection.
- B2022 School Festival Days – in July 2022 – engaged 200 children with artist-led creative workshops inspired by the Commonwealth Games.
- INside Outside – AJ worked with artists Benny Semp and Yasmin Agilah, 3 local schools, 270 pupils, from Sept 2021 – July 2022, 40 workshops, to explore themes of Body, Health and Wellbeing, Place Making and Environmental Activism.

Further Education

- Renewed partnership agreement with Walsall College and development of a strong working relationship with weekly engagement with students and lecturers through tours and talks at the Gallery.

Adults

- Walk and Draw – monthly sessions for adults incorporating the 5 ways to wellbeing. Extremely popular, fully booked every month with excellent feedback from participants.

Families

- Implementation of Sunday Art Club – new, weekly, free, artist-led art club implemented for all ages. Excellent feedback and 50+ children taking part every Sunday.
- Partnership with The Play House – storytelling sessions offered for children on the autism spectrum 4 times per year.
- Partnership with Fantastic Journeys – multi - sensory sessions inspired by the Gallery's Collections and temporary exhibitions, developed exclusively for children and young people with profound and multiple learning disabilities and complex support needs. Excellent feedback from families during pilot project. Commitment of 4 family days per year.
- Diversification of the pool of Artist Educators in terms of protected characteristics, skills, lived experiences and artistic practice. We now work with Nilupa Yasmin, Yasmin Agilah, Daya Bhatti, Amrit Singh and Egle Petrauskiene.

Community

- New links with: Walsall Creative Factory, Afghan Community and Welfare Centre, Walsall Young Carers Group, Match Foster Group, Urban Hax, Creative Cohesion CIC, Mettaminds CIC, INsight, D/deaf community via Deaf artist Olivier Jamin.
- Vaisakhi 22, Holi Hai 22, Diwali 22 – each attracted 200+ visitors and excellent feedback.

Volunteers, Work Experience Placements and Recruit-Ability

- A team of 18 volunteers to support the family and schools programmes. Supported 21 work experience students (GCSE, A Level, HE & FE) since September 2021.
- Commitment to annually host a placement student from BCU – 2nd Year Fine Art and to annually host a placement student from Wolverhampton Uni- 2nd Year Primary Education.

Collections

Community Panel/Here & Queer:

- Worked with consultant Jon Sleigh to build relationships with the LGBTQ+ Community, including consultation with Walsall College LGBT Society and LGBT Sparkle social group. Formed an LGBTQ+ Community Panel to co-produce a Collections project: Here&Queer, which launched on 7 June 2022.
- Community feedback has been incredibly positive:
"I've never felt as much at home in my own hometown than I did today. Thank you."

“Thank you for this exhibit. Walsall has been a site of much queer pain for me, so seeing queer community and joy gives me strength.”

“One of my mummies brought me here. We are a proud gay family.”

“I have had some very bad moments as a gay youth, and now adult, in the Walsall area. Seeing an exhibit like this in Walsall is a great step in the right direction. There is always more that can be done, but to steal a supermarket slogan ‘every little helps’. I look forward to seeing more projects like this in the future.”

A Sense Of Place

- A Sense Of Place looks to connect local people with their communities, cultural spaces and collections following the pandemic. Workshops are now underway, continuing until June 2023, groups such as those from Aaina Centre, LGBTQ+ community, Wolverhampton Service Users Involvement Team, Afghan Centre, Refugee and Migrant Centre and Caldmore Community Garden were invited to participate in the project, with a particular focus on improving participation of LGBTQ+ groups and refugees and migrants.

Twenty Twenty Collection

- January – August 2022 we presented this new aspect of our Collections in the Community Gallery. 32 works by 30 West Midlands artists which were produced on the key themes of the difficult times that we had gone through. Issues addressed included Covid19 and Lockdown, Brexit and Black Lives Matter, Cost of Living, Family, Nature, Loneliness and Climate Change. There was a dedicated newspaper to commemorate this collection and this time period, alongside a programme of events co-produced with the artists in the collection, connecting them with the public.

Yasmin David

- Exhibition celebrating Kathleen Garman’s niece and the daughter of Laurie Lee and Kathleen’s youngest sister Lorna Garman had never before publically exhibited, though was a talented painter. Previously unknown works were discovered at the family’s farm over lockdown and exhibited for the first time. Story really captured our visitors imagination. Family members came for a special closing event in July, and we were able to connect with new generations of the Garman family, with over 50 in attendance.

Collections Management

- With the support of the Front of House team we were able to complete a full Collections Audit and make more accessible our onsite Collections Store.
- We acquired 4 works from the A Generous Space 2 exhibition. In October 2022 we received Full Accreditation for our Collections from ACE. We lent Van Gogh’s ‘Sorrow’ to an exhibition in Detroit, USA, in Autumn 2022.

Leather Museum

- 2022 was a year of continuing post-pandemic recovery for the Leather Museum. Individual visitor numbers continue to increase again slowly, whilst the return of coach parties and organised tours has been a boost, together with the return from the start of the autumn term of school visits, which had been paused again earlier in the year, owing to the Covid situation at that time.
- The conference room also had a particularly good year, with bookings up near to capacity, and even an all-day booking by a film unit.

Entrance enhancement

- In welcoming visitors back, the ageing planters which covered the former entrance steps to the Leather Museum have been totally replaced and rebuilt more sustainably using railway sleepers, with a solution giving better drainage and increased longevity. The more substantial flower beds resulting have given a more welcoming view to the Leather Museum as a whole.
- The entrance hall itself has been re-painted and the new promotional video installed on a large screen to entice visitors through the doors.

Events and activities

- The museum re-commenced its events and activities programme early in the year, including both its popular monthly craft group activities and range of special events. The year saw a significant ongoing increase in bookings, with sessions repeatedly over-subscribed.
- New activities included a new leathercraft workshop for young people, giving them experience of putting together and stitching an item, which they can take away as their own creation. In partnership with Libraries to support the Borough's Holiday Activities & Food programme, the museum delivered two such events for teenagers at Bloxwich and Brownhills Libraries to enable them to create their own personalised leather purses.
- The summer activity programme was especially successful, with the return of the popular Tuesday, 'Have-a-Go Leathercraft' sessions. The five sessions welcomed over 470 children and nearly 300 adult carer/family members. Each week children made a simple leather item such as a notebook, purse, bookmark etc. and decorated them with hand-sewing. Participation was across the age range from around 2 years plus and also included weekly visits from an Adult Day Centre who bought a number of supported adults. This group travelled to the activity from Wolverhampton each week as they could not find similar provision in their own locality.
- Although the activity was offered at a low cost to the attendees (the materials all being on-site already) it raised over £600 (activities in total for the summer holidays brought in over £1.1k) for the museum. The feedback from parents was entirely positive and they were particularly vocal in their thanks for the affordability of the activity and the high quality of the items made. This meant that larger local families returned week after week to take part. A postcode analysis of attendees shows that over 70% were Walsall residents many of whom were first-time visitors to the museum.

- The museum also offered a combination of drop-in and workshops on Wednesdays throughout the break. The total number of people attending activities over these 10 Tuesday/Wednesday sessions was nearly 1,000 making this one of the Leather Museum's most successful summers ever, despite the impact of the pandemic.
- The Leathercraft Halloween have-a-go drop-in proved especially popular, succeeding in attracting a majority of people who hadn't visited the Leather Museum before, and coming from a wide range of Walsall and Birmingham postcodes – and from as far as Oxfordshire.
- The Christmas leathercraft drop-in sessions attracted many local families, giving them the opportunity to create decorations that would become lasting family keepsakes with a particular relevance to the local area.

Education

- The nature of the Leather Museum with its narrow corridors and staircase made it difficult to accommodate school visits of up to 90 children at a time while keeping all visitors and staff safe while Covid numbers were again rising at the start of the year. The Leather Museum staff demonstrated agility by switching to a "roadshow" offer, taking a variety of museum activities into schools and academic settings, from "Discovery Box" and traditional leathercraft activities to a first-person interpretation of Sister Dora, an account of the 1916 Zeppelin raid on Walsall and taking the diversity exhibition out to schools. With Covid transmissions in retreat, school visits were welcomed back to the museum from the start of the autumn term.
- Wolverhampton University funded a two-week residency at the Leather Museum for five trainee-teachers in November/December. The museum benefitted from a new perspective to its educational work, as they brought a critical eye to the museum and its current school provision; they also worked on the creation of a range of new activity and workshop packages for schoolchildren that will support the National Curriculum.

External Funding

- The Arts Council-funded Digital Confidence project resulted in a new digital interactive installation to bring a multimedia introduction to the three historical workshop settings of bridlery, saddlery and light leather goods, as well as highlighting some of Walsall's significant historical leather companies. The approach uses algorithms to colourise and sharpen historical photographs to make them more accessible, and is able to mix images, text and audio via a large 46" touch-screen module. It has also for the first time enabled the display of "illuminated manuscript" pages from a unique item in the museum library which visitors would not otherwise get to see.
- In testing, visitors have responded very positively to the interactive, described by one customer as "breathtaking" in how the photographs are brought to life. Work is now in progress to re-develop part of the bridlery workshop to showcase the interactive in its new permanent location.
- Less successful this year was a bid to the Arts Council's Museum Estate and Development Fund to have the Leather Museum lighting completely overhauled for the first time since the museum opened more than thirty years ago.

The museum lighting was highlighted during the creation of the demonstrator videos for the Culture Recovery Fund project the previous year. Disappointingly the bid did not make it through, but other funding routes will continue to be pursued.

- The assessment committee of the National Lottery Heritage Fund visited the Leather Museum in November, where they were able to view the improvements and innovations to the museum that have been funded by the Heritage fund in the wake of the coronavirus pandemic.

Exhibitions

Royal Walsall (28 May – 31 August 2022):

- To celebrate the Platinum Jubilee, the Leather Museum mounted a special exhibition highlighting the contribution of Walsall's historic leather trades to the Royal households. The exhibition featured items from the town's Royal Warrant holders past and present, together with newly-acquired video footage showing molten metal being hand-heated and poured into moulds to make buckles in the traditional manner, reflecting the historic lorinery trade that led to the establishment of the town's leather industry.

From City of Empire to City of Diversity: A Visual Journey (6 September – 31 October 2022):

- The museum hosted this touring exhibition featuring beautiful images from the important Dyche Collection which documents post-1945 migration to the region. The Leather Museum mounted its own display to accompany this, telling the story of one of the museum's own volunteer's personal story of his family's migration to Walsall in the 1960s. As part of Black History Month, the museum welcomed the Mayor of Walsall, Councillor Rose Martin, to view the exhibition.
- In preparing for the exhibition, the museum worked with a number of schools, including Croft Academy Primary School who created a visual display in response to the subject matter of the exhibition. Banners made by the children of Croft Academy School were displayed alongside the exhibition.
- Also demonstrated was the use of leather across different cultures, including both African and Sikh leatherwork and work from a British/Pakistani tradition, as well as examples of craftwork, which includes carpet and Islamic textiles.

New video features

- A new video facility was added to the Temporary Exhibition gallery for the Platinum Jubilee exhibition. Another has been added to the Made in Walsall gallery that tells the story of the leather trade in Walsall, and its origins in lorinery. The video showcased features a local factory continuing to manufacture lorinery by hand, so demonstrating both traditional and contemporary Walsall skills.

Collections

- The museum was fortunate in being able to purchase a rare collection of Victorian lantern-slides showing an extensive range of leather-working processes, and illustrating them in unusual detail.

Museum Shop and coffee shop

- The combined museum shop and coffee shop approach proved particularly successful in its first year for accommodating large groups, as well as for boosting sales.
- Earlier in the year, Whitehouse Cox, the high-end leather goods manufacturer based in Walsall, generously supplied the Leather Museum with around 300 leather items for sale in the museum shop, made up primarily of purses, wallets, etc, that were no longer required by the company.
- Sadly, the Whitehouse Cox company was itself forced to close down in December, so the museum shop was forced to source new locally-made leather goods suppliers. As part of this, the Leather Museum was able to commission, for example, a range of belts from a local bridle-maker, together with range of high quality kits which offer visitors the opportunity to create their own leather goods at home. This will prove a good fit for the museum, with its focus on craft.

Resilient Communities

Community Safety and Enforcement

This service consists of Environmental Health, Community Protection, Licensing, Trading Standards and Community Safety and is a high demand and high priority area of work protecting the public from a wide variety of harms including anti-social behaviour, rogue traders, fly tipping, litter, unhygienic food premises, unsafe workplaces and products, counterfeit and illicit goods, infectious diseases and stray dogs. The Services also inspect and administer licences regarding a wide range of businesses to ensure legal compliance.

Environmental Health

Food Safety

During 2022, Environmental Health worked towards meeting the Food Standard Agency's Recovery Plan, which prescribes a post-Covid inspection and intervention regime. This work has been captured in the Food Law Enforcement Service Plan which was received at Council on the 9 January 2023 and has led to discussions (which are ongoing) about the level of resourcing available to comply with statutory requirements.

The chart below provides a summary of Food Safety activities undertaken during 2022 regarding the number of inspections of rated and unrated food businesses, the investigation of complaints relating to hygiene, practices and premises, and the registration of new food businesses.



Food Hygiene Rating Scheme

Food Safety Officers implement the Food Standards Agencies Food Hygiene Rating Scheme and since its introduction in 2011 ratings have generally improved year upon year. The proportion of businesses that are ranked “Broadly Compliant” (scoring 3, 4 or 5) has increased from 72.5% in April 2013 to 95% at the end of December 2022. In January a letter was sent from Walsall Council to the Chair and the CEO of the Food Standards Agency asking for Government to prioritise implementation of mandatory display of food hygiene scores. A response has since been received stating that the FSA is keen to implement but are awaiting parliamentary time; as a result, I have arranged for Wendy Morton MP to table a question to the minister to keep the pressure on this issue for the people of Walsall.

Emergency Closures of Food Premises

Where Environmental Health Officer assess that the conditions at a food business present an imminent risk of injury to health, a hygiene emergency prohibition notice may be served. The service of such a notice will prohibit the food business operator from using the premises or equipment for the purposes of any food business and normally results in the closure of the premises.

- In February 2022 Officers issued a Hygiene Emergency Prohibition Notice to close Lazeeza Hayat Sweet Centre, 136 Caldmore Road, Walsall following the discovery of rat and mouse infestations.
- In April 2022 Officers issued a Hygiene Emergency Prohibition Notice to close Unique Jamaican Food Store, 34 Caldmore Green, Walsall following the discovery of a mouse infestation. Subsequent to the closure of the premises a Simple Caution was issued to the Food business Operator in August 2022 for a failure to have adequate procedures in place to control pests.
- In September 2022, Officers issued a Hygiene Emergency Prohibition Notice to close the Tannery Fish and Chip shop, Unit 5, Day Street, Walsall following the discovery of an active rat infestation.
- In October 2022, Officers issued a Hygiene Emergency Prohibition Notice to close Chicken Palace, 33 Caldmore Green, Walsall following the discovery of an active cockroach infestation. Subsequent to this closure. Subsequent to the closure of the premises a Simple Caution was issued to the Food business Operator in December 2022 for a failure to have adequate procedures in place to control pests.

- In October 2022, Officers issued a Hygiene Emergency Prohibition Notice to close SM Butchers, 86B Stafford Street, Walsall following the discovery of an active cockroach infestation.
- In December 2022, Officers issued a Hygiene Emergency Prohibition Notice to close Pit Stop, 19 Market Place, Willenhall following the discovery of an active mouse infestation.

Prosecutions

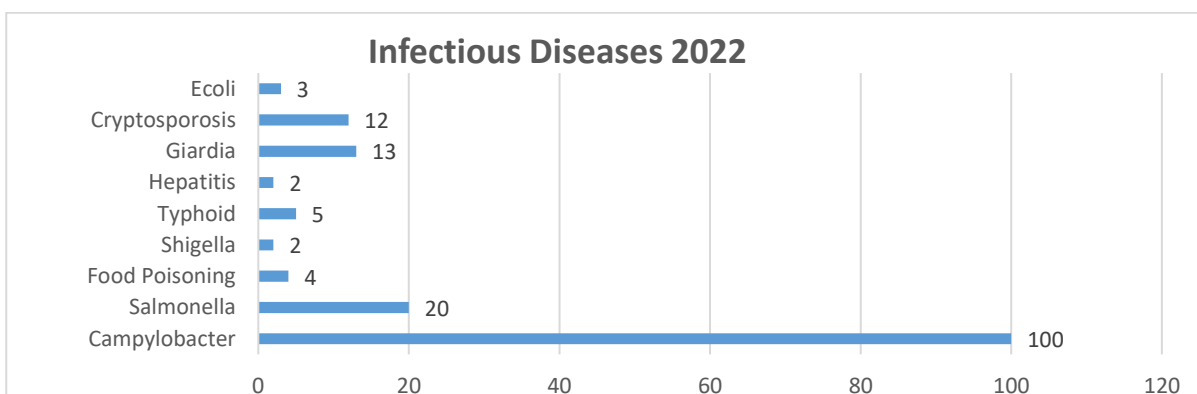
Following the emergency closure of the takeaway Dixy Chicken, 30 Bradford Street, Walsall, following the discovery of a rat infestation throughout the premises, the Food Business Operator was prosecuted in August 2022. He received a custodial sentence of 4 months suspended for 12 months; no fine or VSC was awarded as a custodial sentence is the highest level of sentence which can be imposed. The Council was awarded costs to the sum of £3,000.

Sandwich Manufacturers

The Environmental Health Team have visited all sandwich manufacturers in the borough. Sandwiches are a high-risk foodstuff and have been associated with deadly Listeria food poisoning outbreaks in England in recent years (not attributable to Walsall food businesses). Officers carried out inspections which focussed on temperature control, stock rotation and 'use-by' dates – all of which must be under control to prevent the growth of listeria in food. The team linked with the UK Health Security Agency to microbiologically test a range of sandwiches from each manufacturer it was positive news that all test results were satisfactory.

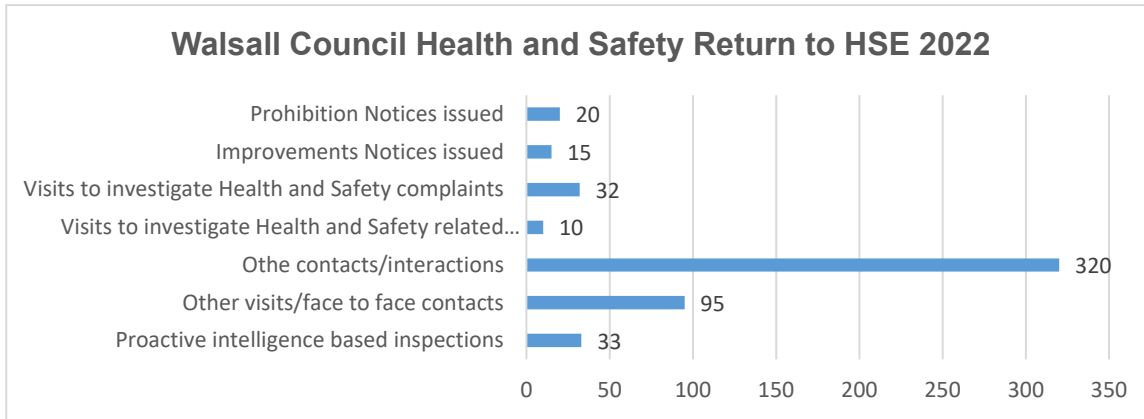
Infectious Diseases

The UK Health Security Agency (UKHSA) notifies Environmental Health of infectious diseases and cases of food poisoning and the service has a statutory duty to carry out an investigation to ascertain the source of the illness and check to ensure that there is no risk of the illness spreading further. The chart below details these notifications. Additionally, Environmental Health received 56 allegations of food poisoning where persons have been ill but have had not had a formal diagnosis.

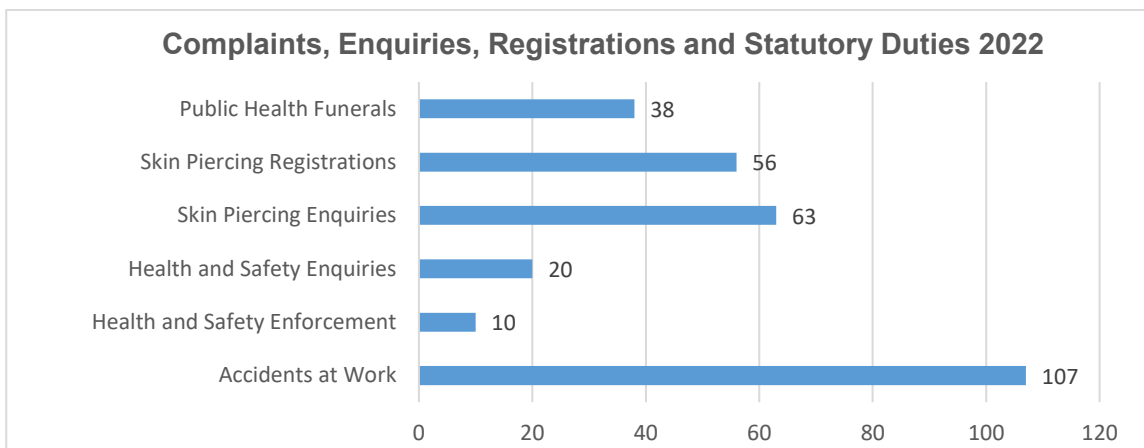


Health and Safety

The chart below details activities and interventions undertaken by the Health and Safety team reported to the Health and Safety Executive in the national Local Authority Health and Safety Return 2022.



Additionally, the Health and Safety team responded to other complaints, enquiries, registrations and statutory duties in 2022 detailed in the chart below.



Double Deuce Firing Range, 3 Fryers Road, Bloxwich:

The Health and Safety team dedicated significant resources to the investigation of a complex and serious case of lead poisoning following the receipt of a notification, in July 2022, from UK-Health Security Agency that workers associated with the above premises were suffering from lead poisoning. Some workers were hospitalised and others had elevated blood lead levels. The exposure to lead had allegedly arisen from the use of lead bullets. Do Not Disturb Notices and Prohibition Notices were issued to prohibit the use of the firing ranges. Officers are continuing to investigate the matter and are working with the owners of the firing range to secure its safe reopening.

Operation Aidant

In March 2022, Officers working in partnership with the Police and a Vietnamese interpreter visited nail bars in Walsall town centre as part of Operation Aidant. This operation is a national intensification operation around the themes of modern slavery and human trafficking which on this occasion had a focus on the beauty industry. Council Officers conducted health and safety inspections and Police Officers considered safeguarding issues. Officers issued letters and HSE leaflets specific to nail bars during these visits.

Commonwealth Games Legionella Initiative

Officers provided an advice letter to hotels in Walsall prior to the Commonwealth Games on water management to reduce the risk of Legionella outbreaks in the borough. During this initiative, advice was also provided to hotels relating to window restrictors, asbestos management and general health and safety obligations.

Monkey Pox

In June and July 2022 Officers worked jointly with colleagues from the Public Health team and made a series of infection control visits to commercial premises in the Borough where sex is known to take place in response to the national Monkey Pox outbreak.

West Midlands Regional Special Treatments Group

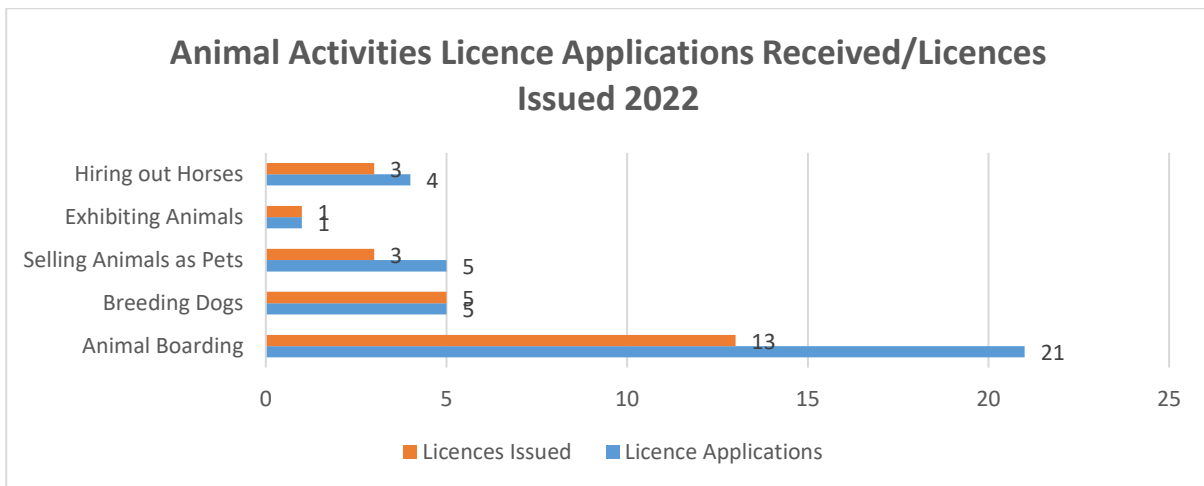
An Officer from the Health and Safety team represented the Council in 2022 on the West Midlands Regional Special Treatments Group. This group has responsibility for considering the introduction of the new licensing scheme for all aesthetic and cosmetic treatments such as Botox.

Animal Activity Licensing

Local authorities are responsible for issuing animal activity licences to carry out licensable activities that involve animals. The table below shows the number and breakdown of licences in effect at the end of 2022.

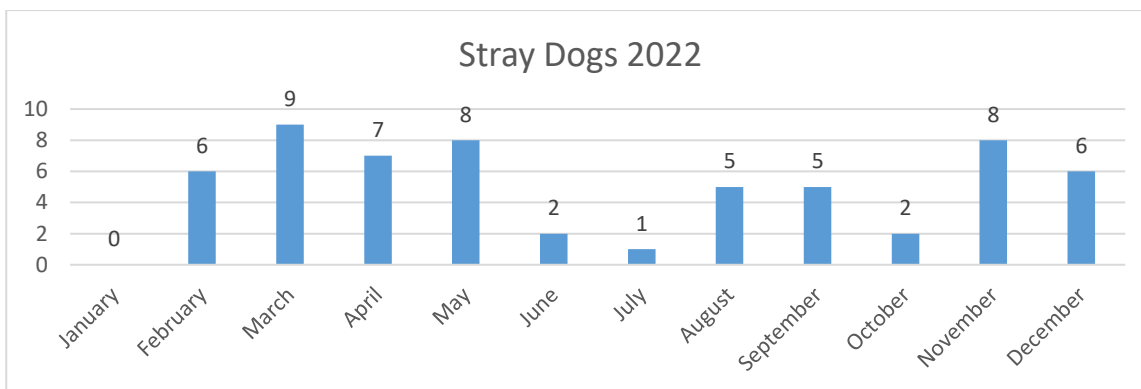
Animal Activities Licences in effect on 31st December 2022	
Licensable Activity	Total
Selling Animals as Pets	8
Home Boarding of Dogs	23
Kennel Boarding	2
Cat Boarding	4
Dog Breeding	5
Hiring out Horses	3
Keeping or Training Animals for Exhibition	1

The chart below shows the number of Animal Activity Licence applications received and licences issued during 2022.



Stray Dogs

Environmental Health is responsible for ensuring that any stray dogs are taken to kennels. A contractor Noah's Ark collects stray dogs on behalf of the Council and takes them to the Council's designated kennels Sunnyside. During 2022, Noah's Ark collected 59 stray dogs. The chart below shows the monthly breakdown of the number of dogs collected.



Trading Standards

Prosecutions

- APO supermarket. Seizure of 6000 counterfeit cigarettes and 1000 g of counterfeit tobacco. The director was fined £120, ordered to pay a victim surcharge of £34 as well as a contribution to legal costs of £500.
- Adz Vapes, Bits & Bobs and King Vapes all sold vapes to a child (working undercover for Trading Standards).
- Adz Vapes were ordered to pay a £2000 fine plus £821 in costs and a victim surcharge of £190. The seller was handed a fine of £120, victim surcharge of £34 and costs of £300.
- The seller from Bits and Bobs, was given a 12-month conditional discharge and ordered to pay £300 towards costs and £22 victim surcharge.
- King vapes were ordered to pay a £833 fine plus £700 in costs and a victim surcharge of £83. The seller was handed a fine of £205, victim surcharge of £34 and costs of £415.

Consumer complaints

Trading Standards received 1600 referrals from Citizen's Advice Consumer Helpline ranging from simple civil complaints to major frauds and scams. Officers have obtained over £35,000 in financial redress for consumers relating to fraudulent goods and services with thousands more being saved by officers preventative actions. Sixty seven vulnerable scam victims have been advised and Enterprise Act action has been initiated against a nationwide problem trader. Investigations are also ongoing into two major fraud cases, one involving counterfeiting and the other a convicted rogue trader who continues to prey on vulnerable victims.

Business Advice

Trading Standards Officers continue to support local importers, distributors and manufacturers to ensure their businesses are compliant and able to trade across local, national and international markets. For example, assistance has been provided on potentially unsafe imported bicycles and scooters, choking hazards in toys, food labelling and food composition and average weight marking. Advice is also provided to a large number of small manufacturing start up's and "back bedroom importers" especially relating to product safety, food labelling and pet food labelling.

Social Media (@savvyshopper6)

Trading Standards regularly use social media to promote the work of the service and to provide business and consumer advice. It's Facebook page is followed by 820 people and has had 29,000 views, whilst Twitter has 552 followers and 55,000 impressions over the past year. Officers have also written business advice articles for Trading Standards Business News and help to promote the online publication to businesses.

Targeted all out days

Intelligence identified three hotspot areas for Trading Standards infringements, Caldmore, Pleck and Walsall Town Centre. Officers conducted a total of five 'all out' day inspections with police and immigration support. A range of offences were uncovered including weights and measures, safety, food safety, counterfeiting, illegal vapes and prescription medicines. Officers continue to work with some of the retailers to reduce non-compliance.

Illegal vape pens

Trading Standards continue to investigate the supply of brightly coloured illegal vape pens sold by vape shops and other retailers across the Borough. 8,200 illegal vape pens, worth over £75,000, and containing up to 10 times the permitted volume of nicotine, have been seized by officers. A small proportion of these vape pens were supplied by legitimate wholesalers outside of the Walsall area but the majority are being supplied by the black market with retailers hiding illegal vapes away from the sales counter to avoid easy detection. A graduated enforcement approach is being taken, with habitual offenders being investigated for further action. One retailer has been raided a number of times with over 3000 vapes being seized worth £36,000 and also a machete type knife that is being investigated by the police. Investigations into this business are ongoing and it is anticipated that legal proceedings will be brought.

Food Standards

During targeted inspections officers have discovered and seized unsafe and unlabelled food together with over 269 unsafe out of date food items, some as much as 14 days out of date. Thirty one food samples have been sent for analysis by the Public Analyst 32% of these samples were reported as incorrect for labelling and allergen contamination. Follow up action has been taken to ensure future compliance.

Counterfeit vodka and wine. Following on from a major project in 2021/22 investigating the sale of counterfeit wine in Walsall, Trading Standards found that the availability of the wine has now greatly reduced, with only a further 49 bottles seized. Investigations into the counterfeit wine sellers has resulted in one Simple caution being issued and nine officer cautions.

Product Safety

Interventions by officers have resulted in the removal from the marketplace of over 100,000 unsafe products imported by Walsall businesses. Examples include dangerous heaters, unsafe toys and imitation food. A total of 51,000 unsafe cosmetic products were destroyed in one consignment alone with a number of the items being referred to the Medicines and Healthcare Agency due to medicinal claims being made by the business.

Underage sales test purchasing exercises

The following covert exercises have been carried out using underage volunteers

- Knives, 12 attempts, 0 sales
- Cigarettes 2 attempts, 1 sale
- Alcohol 4 attempts, 1 sale
- Vapes 14 attempts, 6 sales

These exercises have so far resulted in three successful prosecutions and two simple cautions with investigations ongoing on other sales. It is also concerning that two of these sales to a child involved illicit cigarettes and vapes.

Illicit tobacco

Regional funding has again been provided by HMRC to conduct quarterly illicit tobacco exercises under the operation name CeCe, Walsall Trading Standards Officers have so far seized more illicit tobacco than any of the other 14 central region Local Authority's with a further 114,084 cigarettes and 76,000 g of tobacco seized this year. Officers also seized illicit tobacco during routine inspections and targeted all out days.

Following a tobacco seizure the landlord of the business is advised to consider termination of the premises lease and stronger warnings are issued if further sales are made. This has resulted in the eviction of several illicit tobacco sellers. Often business operators will disappear following a major seizure in order to evade prosecution. It is widely recognised that a high proportion of illicit tobacco sales are co-ordinated by organised crime groups. As such, business operators are often untraceable and easily replaced with another 'stooge'. Nonetheless, Trading Standards are actively pursuing a number of operators and it is hoped that appropriate formal action will be instigated.

Other items including out of date food, illegal shisha, counterfeit Apple and Samsung products have also been removed during illicit tobacco operations. A mouse infestation was also discovered during an illicit tobacco operation and reported to Environmental Health which resulted in the closure of a premises in Willenhall. A large number of foreign antibiotics and painkillers have also been discovered for sale in some convenience stores and reported to the MHRA and Walsall Public Health.

Due to the criminality involved in illicit tobacco the police provide support for all targeted operations and this has resulted in the seizure of weapons, cash and drugs. During one Trading Standards operation the police seized £1000 under the Proceeds of Crime Act. During another operation a male was arrested for Possession with Intent to Supply a Class A Drug and Possession of Offensive Weapons including an air pistol, knife and knuckleduster. The police conducted a further search of his home and found a firearm. He is awaiting a charging decision from the CPS.

Partnership Working

Trading Standards have conducted over thirty enforcement operations with the police during the year. These have been instigated by both Trading Standards and Police led priorities and this partnership has been highly valued by both agencies.

A good working relationship has also been established with Immigration officers who regularly attend illicit tobacco and “all out” operations. Nine illegal workers have been discovered during the year. The owner of one business found to be employing an illegal migrant received a Civil Penalty Fine of £15,000. Further fines are pending.

Counterfeiting at Bescot Market

Throughout the year Trading Standards have pursued a two-pronged approach to tackle the counterfeiters on Bescot Market. Firstly, enforcement operations are continuing with brand holders and Trading Standards Officers carrying out regular monitoring at Bescot Market. This culminated in the seizure of over £1 million of counterfeit goods from 3 stalls in the run up to Christmas.

Secondly there is an ongoing initiative to ensure the Market Operator is taking all reasonable precautions and exercising all due diligence to prevent counterfeiters from trading on the market. To this end Trading Standards have held regular meetings with the Operator and the Football Club, together with representatives from the Police, the National Markets Group and the Intellectual Property Office.

Community Protection

Environmental Crime Prosecutions

- Jan Tokar: Found guilty of Flytipping at Dudley Magistrates Court on 26 October 2022. Mr Tokar pleaded guilty to the offence of Flytipping a vanload of household waste in Crook Lane, Aldridge. Fine: £6,667.00, Officers costs: £1009.26 .Total: £7,676.26
- Darren Sneyd: The case against Sneyd was heard in his absence at Dudley Magistrates Court on 09.11.22. He was found guilty of Fly Tipping and ordered to pay the following. Fine: £1,760, Officers costs: £985.62 Total: £2,921.62

- Andrew James Evans: Found guilty of Flytipping at Dudley Magistrates' Court on 21/12/22. Caught on CCTV depositing black bags and cardboard from a vehicle in Woodward's Road, Walsall. Fine: £2,640, officers costs: £291.98 TOTAL: £2,931.98
- Martin Cawley: Found guilty at Dudley Magistrates Court on 09/11/2022 of offences under 108 of the Environment Act 1995. Failed to co operate with officers following a fly tip in Bray Street, Willenhall from a vehicle registered in his name. Offence was captured on privately owned CCTV. Fine £1,769, officer costs £985.62, VSC £176 Total £2,921.62
- Nathan Yombo: Single Justice Procedure (SJP) for non-payment of a littering fine on Pelsall High Street, Walsall, a court hearing on 21st December 2022. Fine £220.00, Officers costs £199.00 Total £339.00.

Vehicle Seizures

- Ford Transit Flat Bed seized from an Industrial Estate on 6/10/22. Had been involved in three large fly tips across the Borough in the previous fortnight.
- Hino Hiab crane wagon (largest vehicle seized to date) seized from an Industrial estate on 17/11/22. Had been used in a major tip in Willenhall which blocked the highway. Was on false plates and exact identity of vehicle was unknown. Not claimed and in the process of being crushed.

Both vehicles were unclaimed and in the process of being crushed.

Fly Tipping Fixed Penalty Notices and Vehicle littering

In total, 229 fixed penalty notices have been issued covering fly-tipping and vehicle littering, including work undertaken in 2022 to train the Councils CCTV Team to issue Fixed Penalty Notices for littering from vehicles captured on our CCTV systems.

ASB & Nuisance

- On the 22nd June 2022 at Dudley Magistrates Court Jonathan Ricketts a 40 year old man, was fined a total of £614 for 4x episodes of urinating in the town centre.
- On the 2nd November 2022 at Dudley Magistrates Court Peter Pinder aged 60 years, was fined a total of £637.89, for refusing to stop drinking alcohol when instructed to do so which was a breach of the Walsall Public Spaces Protection Order (PSPO).
- On the 2nd November 2022 at Dudley Magistrates Court Richard OBrien aged 37 years, was fined a total of £632.45, for refusing to stop drinking alcohol when instructed to do so which was a breach of the Walsall Public Spaces Protection Order (PSPO).

Community Protection Enforcement Officers are engaging with the town centre drinkers on a daily basis enforcing the PSPO the vast majority of drinkers comply and stop drinking when required to do so.

CPEOs are also using Community Protection Warnings/Notices to deal with ASB. One recent example is when a CPW was successfully used to deal with two dogs that were causing nuisance to neighbours in Palfrey. The dogs were not being adequately cared for, were damaging neighbours fences, escaping from their confined rear garden and also on one occasion bit a neighbour. The owners were persuaded to rehome the dogs as they could not care for them adequately.

During the year the Community Protection, Legal Services and Highways have worked to provide evidence for a Black Country wide injunction to stop car cruising/street racing. This has meant collecting and providing evidence alongside the other Black Country Councils to prove the issue is a continuing problem and has also meant the erection of signage on all key routes advising the injunction is in force so that enforcement by West Midlands Police can take place.

Through Partnership arrangements the service has also worked closely with Police and other Partners on operations including the new and innovative use of drones and fixed wing aircraft to tackle off road vehicles, significant anti-social behaviour and criminality in Walsall Town Centre, Blakenall and Willenhall including the recent sad death of Bailey Atkinson in Walsall Town Centre.

Licensing

Taxi and Private Hire Enforcement during 2022 – 2023

102 Vehicles have been suspended on the grounds of public safety largely following road traffic collisions reported by the vehicle licence holder and presented to the Council for Inspection.

The team have been involved in at least two road safety operations alongside Police, VOSA, other partners and neighbouring local authority enforcement staff. During the exercises vehicles, including taxis, are pulled over and a variety of checks are undertaken to ensure they are insured, fit to be on the road, there are any outstanding warrants etc.

On the most recent exercise 6/1/2023 six private hire vehicles were dealt with five from Walsall Council and one from Wolverhampton Council:-

- No Internal ID
- Advice regarding tread on both rear tyres
- Informed to remove 3 brackets from roof (previous been fitted with roof rack)
- No Seatbelt, not wearing ID Badge (Wolverhampton)
- No Issues

Fifty-seven referrals have been made to management for decisions about driver behaviour or new applicants with concerns raised through the DBS process.

As a result of these referrals

- 27 licences suspended primarily for failure to provide evidence of medical fitness to drive
- 9 licences were revoked for serious allegations or convictions for example drink driving, sexual misconduct etc.
- 16 complied with management request by producing outstanding documents etc.
- 3 referred to Licensing and Safety Committee for a decision in line with delegations
- 2 drivers surrendered their licence.

The Licensing service have been working on the hackney Carriage and private hire driver Fit & Proper Policy and Criminal Convictions Policy following the release of Statutory Guidance in 2020. The aforementioned policies will help members in making robust and fair decisions at Licensing committees.

A second consultation around best practice measures in taxi licensing took place last year and local authorities are awaiting publication of the best practice guidance by the Department for Transport. Wok has continued in the background to ensure Walsall policies are in line with the fundamentals of the best practice guidance and if it is not published soon we will continue with updating and publishing our own Policies.

The taxi licensing team is now partially based at the Council Depot in Brownhills. This move was made to improve customer experience and inter service efficiency. When a vehicle has been tested at the council MOT garage, the applicant then walks across to the taxi office (same building) to hand over the MOT and pick up the vehicle licence plate. The change to the process was welcomed by the trade along with members at the Licensing & Safety committee.

Scrap Metal

Last year following a request by the leader of the Council Licensing introduced a Scrap Metal Collector identification plate for licence holders to display on their vehicles. The licensing department worked with our print and design team and put together a new ID that was issued to all licensed collectors at no extra cost to the licence holder. This will make it a lot easier for members of the public and regulatory bodies to identify unlicensed scrap metal collectors.

Licensing Act

The team work closely with Police colleagues and other responsible authorities to ensure premises failing in their legal duties are held to account through licence reviews and other interventions such as agreed action plans and voluntary conditions on licences. Operation Argonite is a joint operation between the authority and the Police continues to meet at both an operational and strategic level to ensure Walsall night time economy is monitored and actions taken to ensure it is safe as possible given levels of resources.

There have been three residents meetings held with the team, Police and Business owners over concerns about premises in regards to noise nuisance and anti-social behaviour and these meetings are continuing to ensure that residents are aware of how and who to report issues to.

The team with the support of Environmental Health have been able to show evidence and support the issue of two counter notices for temporary events where the events taking place would impact on the public nuisance within the community.

Community Protection Team supported the Review Application made by West Midlands Police in regards to Lexx Bar and Grill Review in submitting a representation in relation to Public Nuisance being breached. The Committee took to revoke this licence based on the evidence provided to them.

Below is a table of the number of matters that went before committee for a decision. There are also some pending which are awaiting to be put before committee.

Type of Application	Sub-Committee	Refused/ Revoked
Licensing Act 2003 New Premises	3	1
Review of premises licence	2	2
Variation	1	Pending
TEN	2	1
Gambling Act 2005 New Premises	1	Pending

The council is required to have policies in place which detail how it administers applications for licences and the decision making process it uses at officer and Committee level. The Statement of Principles (Gambling Act 2005 Policy) is required to be reviewed every 3 years. The service has drafted the policy and presented it to Licensing & Safety Committee (October 2022) for approval to go out for six weeks consultation. At the end of the consultation the final Policy will be put before the Council for approval.

Premises Licensed under the Licensing Act 2003 are required to pay an annual fee each year. Majority of the annual fees are due in November each year. Following the issue of 359 invoices in November 2022, a total of 160 invoices still remain unpaid. Licensing have taken on the role of chasing these fees by telephone/email. Should the applicant fail to pay following the request, the matter will then be referred to our community protection team to take enforcement action.

Unauthorised Encampments (UEs)

Transit Site:

During 2022 the Council opened a six berth Transit Site in Pleck for use by the Travelling Community. This was the culmination of a great deal of planning and community engagement to ensure as far as possible that the site was in an appropriate location and fit for purpose those using it. The site has significantly better facilities than many others of its nature and has temporary planning permission for three years when its use will be reviewed. It is presently managed by a private firm contracted to the Council and Community Protection manage the occupancy and relationship with the contractors.

The site was occupied almost immediately upon opening and has largely been occupied since. There has been one incident where Travellers were accused of a potentially alcohol fuelled violent incident toward local traders and were promptly evicted from the site.

However, the majority of families that have been on site have caused few issues and 2022 has seen the smallest number of UEs recorded in the Borough for several years. This is likely to be a combination of the swift action on the injunction sites and the provision of the Transit Site.

Community Safety

The existing Localities and Partnership team underwent a restructure in 2022 to create a new Community Safety Team. This has been a period of change with staff settling into new roles and new ways of working. The service is interwoven with many key strategic aims for the Safer Walsall Partnership and supports partners in achieving those aims for the benefit of the communities of Walsall.

Prevent

In terms of strategic work the following documents have been updated and prepared in response to the 2022/2023 Counter Terrorism Local Profile (CTLP Walsall):

- Walsall Prevent Delivery Plan 2022/2023.
- Walsall Situational Risk Analysis 2022/2023.
- Walsall Corporate Risk Assessment 2022/2023.
- Walsall Communication Plan 2022/2023.

The latest Walsall Schools Prevent Single Point of Contact (SPOC) Event took place at Manor Farm Community Centre, Rushall, Walsall, on Tuesday 15th November 2022. Guest speakers included, Chief Superintendent Phil Dolby, Walsall Borough Police, Detective Constable Adrian Bacon, (Cyber Crime, ROCU, West Midlands Police), Mr Tim Hill, (Ofsted Midlands Region) and Katie Harrison (Picture News). The event was again well attended (110+ delegates) with representation from in excess of 80 of the 119 Walsall schools.

Other work the service has contributed to includes

- Quarterly Walsall Prevent Delivery Group Meetings (Teams)
- Quarterly Walsall Contest Board Meetings (Teams).
- West Midlands Police - Force Prevent Meetings (Teams)
- Walsall Police Prevent Meetings (Teams)
- Midland Region Prevent Coordinator Meetings (Teams).
- Monthly Walsall Channel Panel Meetings (Teams)

Education

Staff Prevent-related training in schools continues and every school request for refresher training has been arranged and delivered by the Prevent Coordinator

Between 1st October 2022 and 31st December 2022 the Prevent Coordinator delivered Prevent related training to the below schools:-

- 1 x Secondary (79 staff attending)
- 3 x Primary (110 staff attending)
- 3 x Special Schools (156 staff attending).

In November the Prevent Coordinator commenced a programme of Prevent training programme to be delivered to all staff within Adult Social Care (ASC). At this point in time in six organised training sessions (a mixture of face to face and Teams delivery) Prevent refresher training have been delivered to a total of 162 members of ASC workforce. This programme continues in January.

The Walsall Prevent Newsletters continues to be circulated and the Walsall Prevent website is regularly updated at www.saferwalsallpartnership.com.

Domestic Abuse Coordination

Power to Change training has been implemented – aimed specifically for refuge staff as well as health visitors who are working with the Roma communities in Walsall. A four day training scheme that is aimed at staff who work directly with victims. This scheme equips the staff with the knowledge and skills required to set up and run support groups for survivors of domestic and sexual violence/abuse. Although only a small number of staff have been trained (five) this course will be run again if another suitable source can be found to run it for Walsall victims, for instance staff from Adult Social Care or Children’s Services.

Men at Work – this training is for staff who work with youths and young boys to facilitate constructive dialogues with them about being safe – for themselves – and being safe to be around – for their male peers and for women and girls. Specifically aimed for senior school staff for this period, two teachers per school were given the opportunity to complete this training, although the entire staff from New Leaf school were also given the training.

Local police officers were also given the same opportunity to attend. Feedback from the staff has been excellent and for the coming business year there is now consideration to offer the same training to teachers from junior schools.

Domestic Abuse Champions – This scheme was set up to encourage staff to be able to support victims of domestic abuse within the workplace. However, it has expanded and now includes 40 staff from Walsall College who are based across the various campus' and is also part of Walsall Manor Hospital's Safeguarding Champions scheme. Walsall College have requested this scheme expands to include their students union members and I am currently in negotiation with the senior management team for further training to be made available to the younger team.

A&E IDVA – An IDVA (Independent Domestic Violence Advocate) has been considered a vital part of the link for victims that attend A&E at Manor Hospital and during late 2022 SWP had a successful bid with the OPCC to have an IDVA to be based there. The IDVA is managed via Black Country Women's Aid although she is based directly within A&E.

Domestic Abuse Needs Assessment & Strategy – Due to the Domestic Abuse Act 2021 it is a requirement that all LA's have both a domestic abuse needs assessment and a strategy. Walsall's previous needs assessment was very out of date and there had been no strategy available. Before the end of 2021 a needs assessment and strategy had been completed and approved. However, a further requirement of the DA Act insists the needs assessment is reviewed annually and the strategy published, a copy of which must be sent to the DA Commissioner. Currently, the DA needs assessment is under review and the strategy will follow. A copy of the strategy can be found on the SWP website.

Localities & Partnerships

The Adult Exploitation Delivery Group has been working on developing a comprehensive referral pathway to ensure that victims of modern slavery human trafficking (MSHT) are provided with the right support at the right time in order to avoid victims being compromised in the future. An action plan will be approved at the next meeting in February.

There are two key themes that the Group are reviewing, being MSHT and home invasion/cuckooing. To kick start awareness raising a double sided leaflet will be included in all council tax and business rate bills.

These themes will also be included in the developing Exploitation Conference for professionals due to take place in March 2023.

Community Building & Cohesion

Lichfield Street Hub (Central Library & Archive)

LSH Archives:

Visits	Enquiries	Archives Produced	New Archives Card Users	Cash/Card Sales
636	732	445	111	£1,117.24

In 2022 Walsall Archives continued rebuilding the service from the closure enforced by the pandemic. The early part of the year was impacted upon by the restrictions that remained in place, and we maintained our adapted working practices throughout this period to provide the best service possible to both internal and external users.

After the removal of 'Plan B' restrictions by the government usage of the service has slowly continued to increase and the final quarter of 2022 was our busiest of the year.

Our brand-new microfiche/film scanners that were purchased in 2021 have proven extremely popular with our users, they have offered a much-improved experience as they have allowed us offer use of multiple resources in our research room from just one machine. We have also continued to support with work experience placements – the past year has seen us host 16 pupils from 8 schools. These pupils have all received tours of the Archives and been tasked with assisting with some of our routine work in the public research room.

We celebrated the late Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth's Platinum Jubilee in June with a display of material relating to the Queen and Walsall sharing images of her visits to the Borough over the years of her reign. We will also preserve the books of condolence to Her Majesty in the Archive collections for the years to come.

We also commemorated Remembrance Day in November with a display of 'Walsall in the Great War' which highlighted the material in our collections that reflected the experiences of the people of the Borough both on the home front and abroad. A copy of this display was used in the Town hall so that it could be viewed at the reception following the Remembrance Sunday parade.



We appointed a new Archivist in September 2022 giving both the team and researchers access to professional advice regarding the collections. A great deal of work has been carried out by the Archives team in indexing material to improve accessibility to the public and the Archivist has made a good start at tackling the cataloguing backlog to make even more of the Borough's history available to our users. Some of the material accessioned this year includes:

- The Personal Papers of the Rubery and Wilkes Families of Darlaston and Rushall. The Patriarch of the Rubery family, John Tunner Rubery was the founder of the famous Rubery Owen Works in Darlaston, and this collection of papers, letters, diaries, and various other documents gives an insight into the lives of a family of industrialists in the late 19th and early 20th centuries.
- Documents relating to Joseph Griffin, Lime master. Joseph Griffin leased land in Walsall to mine Limestone at the site of Walsall Arboretum.
- Coroners' records relating to Walsall from the Black Country Coroners Court, as part of our remit as a recognised place of deposit for Public Records

- An internal deposit from Walsall MBC planning department covering the planning appeal relating to Great Barr Hall and St Margaret's Hospital.



The Archivist has also been working on developing policies and procedures for the service to ensure that these are all relevant and up to date. This will allow us to offer a better framework in which to offer the best possible service to our users and put strong foundations in place for when we make our application to become an accredited Archives Service to the National Archives. This is an important step for the service and will raise the profile and reach of the Archives Service, opening up further opportunities for celebrating and conserving Walsall's rich and diverse heritage for future generations.

We have dealt with a range of enquires over the year. These have included connecting relatives of former Walsall mayors with their family's history, Alison Poulter travelled from Scotland to see material we had preserved relating to her Great Grandfather Mayor A.J Stanley. Assisted with an enquiry from Australia about Mary Allport, born in Aldridge but emigrated to Tasmania and thought to be Australia's first professional female artist, as well as providing a large amount of information, maps, plans and records for internal enquiries – particularly with regards to the development of the Borough.



LSH Library

We continue to offer our core services of book loans whether this be physical, audio or via our electronic platforms, our ICT provision which includes printing and scanning facilities in addition to the PC's onsite and the ability for customers to use their own devices and connect to the council WIFI and our enquiry service.

We have increased our physical book issues in 2022 compared to 2021 as the below chart shows:

	Issues	Renewals	Returns
2021	27,601	9,164	26,915
2022	40,978	18,425	42,962
+/-	+13,377	+9,261	+16,047

For several months of 2021, our number of available public access PCs was restricted due to Covid19 precautions, however they were well used. As restrictions eased the PC usage increased as can be seen in the chart below. In addition to this we have had increased numbers of people (June to Dec inclusive 11,709) using the library for study or work, in many cases using their own devices to connect via the Wi-Fi provided.

	Sessions	Minutes
2021 (Apr-Dec)	8,441	294,995
2022	30,474	1,280,738

Prior to the start of Walsall Connected LSH was a first point of call for members of the public who found the Civic Centre closed. LSH staff continued to signpost customers to the correct council service, providing the contact information for the customer or in some cases making the initial contact with the service on their behalf. Other examples of signposting included to the Citizens Advice service, Foodbank provision and the Jobcentre.

When Walsall Connected came on board at LSH alongside additional support from Money Home Job, Library staff were able to direct customers with more complex enquiries to those teams to who were able to provide information and guidance to them. Walsall Connected within the Library has provided support to local people who require it and are not able to or are unsure of how to access the facilities at home. Support is provided in a range of ways; this could be in the form of digital support and accessing their My Walsall accounts, signposting to other organisations or providing contact information for a relevant team.

We have continued to support Walsall Residents through our groups and activities. Many of our groups aim to support the mental wellbeing and the educational and social development of people of all ages.

- Under 5's Groups: Caterpillar Club for children aged 0-18m, and Tiny Tots for children ages 18m-3yrs and their parents/carers. These groups on Wednesdays and Fridays weekly during term time provide stories, rhymes, play and crafts. The purpose of the groups is to help establish a good relationship with books and the library for children alongside development through play, and a safe place where parents can share and discuss parenting challenges. **Children: 376, Adults: 390**

- Saturday Story time a weekly story session for children. **Children: 90, Adults: 61**
- Saturday Children's board game group a weekly session for children to engage with others within the library space, make friends and develop social skills. **Children: 159, Adults: 87**
- New Monthly Lego Club started in October 2022. **Children: 21, Adults: 13**
- Adult Reading Groups – **Adults 146**
 Loose Leaves and Murder they Wrote meet monthly. Members have discussed a wide variety of titles including Richard Osman: Thursday Murder Club, Val McDermid: Last Temptation, Mo Hayder: Gone and Michael Rosen: Many kinds of Love: a story of life, death, and the NHS.

During the school holidays we have offered a variety of story and craft sessions alongside our HAF (Holiday and Activities Food) provider sessions. Our Library run activities have reached 210 Children and 156 Adults (excluding HAF attendance)

We have been working on establishing links with sections of the community whom we may not reach in the way they would wish.

We have started to host Zebra Access each month for a coffee morning and information drop in. We have facilitated introduction to the library visits from the Additional Needs classes at Walsall College. We have been re-establishing contacts with local schools and have been out to do an assembly at one. We have visits from two schools booked in for the early part of 2023.

We attended the Carers Rights Day at Walsall Town Hall where we promoted the services and groups we offer while engaging with carers to hear from them that they may want from the Library Service. In addition to this, we were able to make connections with other council services and local organisations who were looking to work with Libraries on projects in the future.

We have established a relationship with Autism West Midlands and in the New Year we will be starting a monthly Autism Group at the library where Autistic Adults can meet to socialise, make new friends, play games and other activities. Staff from Autism West Midlands will also be in attendance to provide help, support, and guidance to those who may need it. We will then look to see if we can develop a group for autistic children as well. These group will allow people to engage back into the community, encourage other adults who need a safe space to join and participate.





LSH is also involved in some longer-term initiatives and projects:

- During 2022 we hosted 16 students from 8 different schools on work experience placement introducing them to all elements of our service, supporting them to feel part of a team and giving them an excellent experience of customer service in action.
 - “Everything was well organised and there was plenty of work to do. All the staff were helpful and polite.”
 - “I found this placement valuable and enjoyable...was inclusive and interesting.”
 - “It was an amazing week for me to learn and experience things around the workplace”.
- We have continued to offer placements for young people undertaking their Duke of Edinburgh Award; three students completed a six-month volunteer placement with us during 2022. We currently have one young person on placement who volunteers at our Saturday Story session and another at our Children’s Board Game group.
- Computer Classes in partnership with Walsall College have continued. We offer Computer Basics classes and one to one session. These continue to be popular, and we have increased our capacity for the Basics course.
- We continue to be a provider for Walsall HAF with activities at Easter, Summer, and Christmas School Holidays.
- Walsall Works continue to be based at LSH providing support for local people to find jobs, apprenticeships and access training and supporting local businesses. This has also brought in new customers for LSH who join and then are able to utilise the PCs for Job searches etc.

Library Service

It has been a year of continuing and promising recovery for Library Services in Walsall.

In the immediate years before Covid, Walsall had been bucking the national trend of declining library loans, but in line with the national picture, there has been a more hesitant return to cultural services since re-opening after the pandemic. However, there has been a significant increase in take-up over the past year.

In the year ending 31 March 2022, more than a quarter of a million books were borrowed from Walsall's libraries – a total of 285,825 loans – with the Mobile Library the biggest-issuing library.

The calendar year, January to December 2022 has seen a remarkable increase of 31.6% in library loans on the 2021-22 year, with a total of 376,053 loans. If Darlaston's loans are removed from the total for a fair comparison (It was closed from March 2020 until April 2022), the figure is 354,616, so still an increase of 24%.

The top three biggest-issuing libraries in 2022 were:

1. The Mobile Library (60,214 loans)
2. Aldridge Library (59,949)
3. Lichfield Street Hub Library (57,113)

The Mobile Library's 2022 loans included 16,200 large-print and audiobooks, by far the highest of any library, and 44% of all the large-print and audiobooks borrowed from all of Walsall Libraries put together – demonstrating the particular importance of the Mobile Library to residents with visual impairment and disability.

In addition to these loan figures, the Library Service provides a Home Library Service (HLS) directly to people's homes, where people are unable to get to a library and are usually housebound, for example as a result of disability, illness, lack of mobility or where someone is a full-time carer.

In the last full financial year, the Home Library Service users got through a total of 44,712 loans – more than all but one of the Borough's static libraries, despite being a much smaller customer base. This reflects perhaps the greater reliance and fewer options of people with conditions affecting mobility, dexterity, sight etc. Of these loans, 25,828 were large-print or audiobooks, which is more than the combined large-print and audiobook loans from all of the static libraries in Walsall.

Returning to "Business as Usual"

At the start of 2022 Walsall's libraries had been open again for some months, but still with numerous health and safety restrictions. For most libraries it was only in February/March that soft furnishings were fully restored so that people could once again sit down to read, study or socialise; that computer chairs were re-instated, PC sessions restored, newspapers and magazines reinstated on open access, and library activities such as Rhymetimes and story times again resumed.

For the Home Library Service, although it was the one library service which continued consistently through the pandemic, since July 2020, staff had not been able to enter the homes directly of people who were not able to get to the door or have a carer do so.

This was given the go-ahead to resume in March, so that staff were again able to deliver to those most dependent on library services.

Also as library activities returned more closely to “business as usual”, the annual programme of computer training sessions resumed in January for the first time since the pandemic, with sessions at all libraries. These cover the basics of getting online, using e-mail, internet safety, etc, as part of the key role of libraries in supporting the development of functional digital skills in the community.

A new Computer Course Programme commenced in September, providing courses at libraries across the Borough until June 2023. These include Beginners ICT courses (2 week courses) and 1-2-1s – which will support the Walsall Connected initiative.

Re-opening of Darlaston Library

Darlaston Library was officially re-opened by the Mayor, Cllr Rose Burley, on Friday 20th May 2022, following a lengthy refurbishment delayed by flooding linked to the new boiler.

The refurbishment has brought all first-floor services down to the ground floor, to increase accessibility and staff availability to provide assistance. As Darlaston Library manages the Children’s Reserve Stock and Adult Reading Group Collections for the service as a whole, access to the full range of stock on shelves has become possible for the first time.

The new-look library has shelving with end-bays that were designed specially for Darlaston Library, to help showcase the books available; while as one of the busiest libraries in the Borough for computer-use, all of Darlaston’s computer chairs and other seating are wipe-clean – a lesson learned from the pandemic.

For the first time, the children’s library now has its own PCs, together with tables for homework, and a much improved range of children’s books and picture-books for under-fives. An additional large, touch-screen computer for smaller children was installed for the launch, which proved immensely popular with toddlers and their parents.

2022 marked 35 years since Darlaston Library first opened in 1987, and this refurbishment was its first big overhaul, which is hoped will improve the visitor experience and significantly enhance this important community facility for the people of Darlaston.

Summer Reading Challenge 2022

The Summer Reading Challenge plays an important part in keeping up children’s reading ages over the summer break. The 2022 Challenge was “Gadgeteers!” – a special science-themed Challenge to inspire children to use their imagination and creativity.

1,498 children joined the Reading Challenge in Walsall Libraries this year, with a range of activities and events, including a Summer Reading Challenge party event at Streetly Library on Saturday 30 July which drew in some 500 people.

Holiday Activities and Food Programme (HAF)

As part of the Holiday Activities and Food Programme (HAF) in Walsall, there were sessions at libraries over the Easter period – including partnership-working with the Leather Museum to deliver a leather craft activity at Bloxwich – and some 48 sessions across the Borough’s seven libraries throughout the Summer.

Children came together both under the HAF programme to enjoy various educational/recreational sessions e.g. working as a team to build an advanced Lego Bookshop. Stories at the Library inspired children with ideas to design their own creations; Fizz Pop Science sessions complemented this year's 'Gadgeteers' Summer Reading Challenge; while ZooLab sessions involving mini-creatures linked with a story based on Gadgeteers. Rainbow Rhymes sessions at Aldridge, Streetly and Brownhills libraries were very well received; while staff and library volunteers designed and delivered various story and craft activities across the library network. The focus was around children's books: 'Shark in the Park', where they designed a telescope to look for the shark, children made robots at Brownhills or inventions using recycling materials at Brownhills and Darlaston.

Adhoc children's events took place across various sites across the summer period, including mindful colouring, story times and drop-in board sessions.

Walsall Libraries participated again in the Winter Holiday Activities Fund programme. Gillian the Lowe Ranger visited the libraries at Aldridge, Willenhall and the Lichfield Street Hub; while 'Fantastic Journeys' ran a SEND music and movement session at Bloxwich Library for children with a range of disabilities. These educational events prove very popular with both children and parents, as well as great wellbeing events for parents to come together, and are boosted by the healthy snack box for all participants.

Walsall Connected

All Walsall's Libraries were launched as Walsall Connected centres in 2022, building on the key role of Libraries over the past twenty years as places in the community to assist people with PC access and in gaining functional digital skills. Staff have been able to bring national libraries training and their day-to-day working experience to support this transformational approach to getting access and support to Council services out into communities.

Libraries Improvement Fund

Walsall Libraries were successful in getting through the first level of Arts Council England's Libraries Improvement Fund applications in 2022, with a full application submitted in September. It represents a rare opportunity for Walsall Libraries to bid for £200k of funding. A successful outcome would enhance the digital offering to residents that the Council provides through its network of libraries across the Borough, as well as responding to an increasing need for study space in libraries, with both all-year and seasonal requirements catered for with collapsible tables and chairs. This would also assist libraries with expected increases in library visits and dwell time as warm and welcoming public spaces, particularly in the light of current fuel price situation.

Particular benefits of a successful application would be the introduction of more efficient and accurate visitor monitoring; and also the ability to increase the digital offer to enable printing from people's own devices while in the library.

Black History Month and South Asian Heritage Month

Libraries across the Borough celebrated Black History Month in October, with focused displays of books and audiobooks at every library. On the service's BorrowBox platform, there were special Black History Month shelves of eBooks and eAudiobooks – with the latter proving especially popular - and demonstrating the value of library stocks carefully selected to cater for the wide-ranging needs of diverse communities.

South Asian Heritage Month was also celebrated in July 2022 with special collections of ebooks and eAudiobooks highlighted on digital shelves on the Walsall BorrowBox platform.

1921 Census

Library subscriptions to online family history resources like Ancestry and Find My Past can be a real driver to encourage even the most digitally diffident to get started with using a computer; and in this regard are an important part of how libraries incentivise people to nurture and develop the functional digital skills they increasingly need.

From 1 November Walsall Libraries started providing free access for our residents to the 1921 Census – which until now has been quite expensive for individuals to access. As the last Census that will be released before 2052, this is likely to prove particularly helpful and popular for people as both social history and personal heritage.

Get Online Week (17-23 October)

As part of the Library Service remit to encourage and support digital uptake and skills, all Walsall libraries took part in this year's Get Online Week, with drop-in sessions to support customers in making use of digital opportunities that libraries provide, such as Ancestry, PressReader and BorrowBoxm and promoting computer courses in libraries to help people get started with digital.

National Literacy Trust and BookTrust Storytime

Walsall Libraries have been working with both the National Literacy Trust and BookTrust to get children engaged with books and reading from an early age.

BookTrust Storytime is a programme supporting libraries to inspire low-income families with children aged 0-5years to share stories together and make visiting their local library a part of their everyday life – so giving children that important early-years start in engaging with books and reading.

All of Walsall's libraries were equipped with a BookTrust StoryTime kit, including specially-selected books for use as part of their storytime sessions, with Brownhills, Darlaston, Willenhall and Lichfield Street libraries having an enhanced offer including collectors books and voting stickers – to generate feedback for the programme through November and December 2022.

Warm Welcome

All Walsall libraries have each been registered as 'Warm Welcome' spaces for people who are need of warmth and wellbeing this winter. Anyone can come in to their local library, where they will be welcomed by staff and have the opportunity to make the most of the leisure, cultural and digital opportunities the local library affords, while benefitting from the warmth and comfort of its facilities.

Replacement RFID self-issue machines

An award has been made to D-Tech International Ltd to replace the ageing estate of RFID (radio frequency identification) self-issue machines in Walsall Libraries.

The new kiosks will include a facility for card payments, including contactless. They will also have a facility to link with iCAM, the PC and Print Management system, to enable customers to manage and pay for their own printing from the kiosk, which will also ensure greater privacy.

New contract arrangements for supply of library books

The four-year stock contracts for the provision of mainstream library books for adults and children ended on 31 December 2022, following a one-year extension.. A fresh tendering process was managed by Wolverhampton procurement on behalf of the three Black Country authorities of Sandwell, Walsall and Wolverhampton, and a new four-year contract for supply of library books for both adults and children was awarded to Peters Ltd, our existing children's book supplier, which is located in Birmingham.

Community, Equality & Cohesion

Voluntary and Community Sector

The VCS continue their **resetting agenda (the Great Reset)** encouraging more residents to access the services and activities available to them within their community centres. **Walsall Community Network (WCN)** has secured firm representation on a number of strategic boards including Walsall Together Partnership, Resilient Communities group, Walsall for All, Town Centre Board and Walsall Safer Borough Partnership. WCN has significantly increased number of residents accessing support ranging from cost of living to recreational, physical and wellbeing activities.

During 2022/23 **new funding aimed to improve the mental health wellbeing** of residents was secured to encourage residents to access services within their local community. Activities funded included coffee morning, physical activity classes, luncheon clubs, counselling, bereavement support and much more. Organisations continue to support vulnerable residents who do not feel comfortable leaving their homes so meals are being delivered to homes as well as reading books.

The sector continues to support Walsall's **vulnerable residents**. VCS organisations received funding through the **Housing Support Fund** to provide financial support to residents in crisis. The funding has been distributed twice this financial year and during the summer allocation there were 2,337 beneficiaries. Residents were also referred to ongoing support including **Making Connections Walsall, The Thrive Bus, CAB and Money Home Job**. There were also 213 referrals made to the **Energy Efficiency** review with Ryecroft Community Hub.

Another allocation to the sector is currently coming to an end but the community organisations have noticed a huge increase in the number of residents needing **access to immediate crisis support particularly food vouchers and energy cost support**.

Resilient Communities held **4 locality events** in November 2022 engaging with the VCS and Adult Social Care (ASC). The aim of the workshops was to bring officers from ASC and the voluntary, community and faith sector together to meet and to share information on the services that they offer. ASC referral processes and the different departments were highlighted and the Resilient Communities model and Making Connections Walsall project explained in more detail.

The workshops were well received and practical ideas identified, resulting in purchasing **ferrules and anti-slip socks** to give out to residents to reduce slip, trips and falls. They have been given out free of charge through community centres and libraries. We continue to work closely with ASC around the preventative agenda.

Bloxwich Community Partnership along with Council colleagues in Customer Engagement are leading on the new **Walsall Connected project**. Walsall Connected is a partnership between the Council, VCS, libraries and other trusted partners (17+ organisations). All the staff/volunteers working on the project have completed training and as the project gets more promotion, residents are accessing the centres for digital support. Working in partnership **Manor Farm CA it is planned to get Walsall Connected into the Walsall Manor Hospital** to compliment the volunteering support that Manor Farm CA staff currently deliver.

Resilient Communities continues to support the Holiday and Food Fund Programme with Children Services. (HAF) The Christmas **HAF programme had over 65 local providers** delivering a festive holiday provision for children and young people who access benefit related free school meals. The programme has allowed numerous VCS groups deliver new services and gain experience in offering activities for C&YP.

Between April 2022 and December 2022, **Making Connections Walsall (MCW)** received 413 referrals to the service which resulted in 230 ongoing referrals being made to other community organisations. The below is a case study received from Manor Farm CA (MCW East lead)

MAKING CONNECTIONS WALSALL – helping a vulnerable resident/financial abuse case

An elderly vulnerable resident was referred in to the Making Connections Walsall service in February 2022 by Adult and Social Care, following a crisis call he made to their Initial Intake team. At the time they were suffering financial debt problems, had no family contact and didn't have any food in their home. Through the Housing Support Fund we were able to help straight away with an online food shop.

Initially, it was difficult to contact the resident, but with perseverance over time, trust developed and unfortunately a picture of financial abuse developed. The resident felt defeated, actually saying they wanted to temporarily be taken into care and that they didn't know what they would do if it weren't for organisations like ours to help them. The residents had also suffered a stroke in 2010.

The resident was in debt, credit cards had been taken out without their knowledge and their property was unkempt. Through regular contact and support from MCW and liaison with a Benefits Advisor, Step Change, the Nationwide Building Society and agencies to whom they owed money, they are no longer being held accountable for fraudulent cards and will be debt free by the end of 2023.

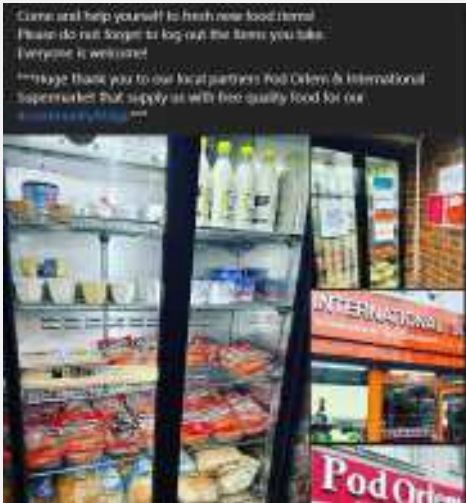
The MCW connectors have helped them clear and clean the property, so it is now more manageable and they are a regular attendee to Silver Service activities. They enjoyed a Silver Service trip to Barmouth in the Summer of 2022 and wore their Christmas jumper to the Silver Service Christmas Dinner. MCW have also accompanied the resident to Brownhills Community Centre to their indoor bowling and to make them aware of activities nearer to their home.

MCW continue to support the resident but they are more aware of their financial situation now, has friends and a place to go that they trust and can ask for support if they need it. What a difference a year makes!

There has been an increase in the number of food banks and community food provision opening within Walsall which is in line with the increase in residents needing access to food. Willenhall CHART and Nash Dom CIC have both opened community fridges within their centres and food banks within Residents R Us and Hands 2 Help U are increasingly seeing more residents access their support.

Community Fridge at Nosh Dam

Community Fridge project is a purpose built fridge and shelves placed outside of Nash Dom where donations of food products are displayed. Anybody can take items from it and anybody can leave or donate items to it. There are no criteria for people to be eligible to take the free food and no questions asked. On average we bring and distribute 30-50 kg of food products per week. We have seen local residents of diverse backgrounds passing by accessing the fridge, people referred to us coming to access the products, residents asking if they can take items and distribute them further to vulnerable people they know. We have also seen local residents coming with donations to give products to the fridge for wider group access. We have successfully established a link with two shops which are giving regular donations through a Romanian person who has in the past volunteered and worked with Nash Dom and is now managing the shop.



Social Cohesion and Integration Team

The **Walsall for All** (Integration Area Programme) **evaluation and communication** reports were published in June 2022, highlighting 7819 participants in school linking and social mixing projects, 800 participants in Community Dialogue, 2832 participants in English as a Second Language learning and access to jobs.

During the Covid-19 pandemic, 4400 residents were reached through Covid Champions in different languages and formats. The evaluation was followed by a release of the celebration video capturing stories of Walsall residents whose life has changed as a result of the programme. The video can be accessed here: <https://youtu.be/hP0X0sOtt8U>

Walsall for All featured as a **best practice** on a number of national conferences, including Belonging 2022, Faith in Action by the West Midlands Combined Authority and Race Equality Task Force with West Midlands Mayor Andy Street. **Walsall for All Partnership is** setting its new objectives in its re launch conference on 2 March 2023.

The **Cohesion and Integration team** continues to build its reputation as the key 'culturally competent' service for engagement and consultation with diverse, inter-faith and seldom heard communities of Walsall. Different service areas of the Council (We are Walsall 2040, Clean and Green, Public Health, ASC) as well as external organisations, such as Walsall Together, Housing Group, Police, College, NHS have requested support with cultural advice, organising consultation and engagement in different languages and formats, involving diverse VCS. Cultural insight are key to developing more effective solutions to some complex and 'stubborn' issues potentially generating inequalities or community tensions.

The service delivery in 2022/23 included:

- direct work in schools – school linking and cohesion
- community tensions network - early identification of potential tension risks
- human trafficking cultural advice
- partnership with the Violence Reduction Unit
- Palfrey Big Local Lionheart Challenge in partnership with Joseph Leckie and Bluecoat school
- Public Health consultations/focus groups
- NHS promotion of Welcome Pack
- Walsall Connected engagement and consultation
- Youth Connect
- Agenda "1 at Reedswood park
- Nash Dom CIC further development – focus on new communities
- Black County Innovate hate crime focus
- Union of Muslim Organisations engagement on Youth Violence
- Gurdwaras, mosques and Temples engagement on cost of living and ESOL agendas

Walsall Pride

The annual LGBTQ+ event funded by the Integration Service this year moved to Walsall Arboretum from the historic New Art Gallery. It was a resounding success with a large increase of young people and families attending. It was clear that the event is welcoming and safe and attracts many people who would not fall into the LGBTQ+ groups. The event attracted many private sector businesses, WHG, NHS and the Unions. More services from Walsall Council and West Midlands Police are missing opportunities to directly engage with the LGBTQ+ and will be a key objective for this years Pride.

On the back of the event improved partnerships are currently been developed with Public Health with outreach surgeries to be held in community venues. A new partnership is currently been developed with a local faith and race minority based LGBTQ+ service which offers support and understanding in culturally sensitive service delivery.



Walsall Wellbeing Programme

The Cohesion and Integration Service has been an integral partner of the approach to Walsall wellbeing. Offering an insight into cultural norms, challenges and a more inclusive approach to personalised wellbeing offering a nuanced approach to challenges that exist.



Young People

The integration service working in the Palfrey and Caldmore locality has developed a drugs research project in partnership with the Union of Muslim Organisation and Base 25. The research will work with young people and local stakeholders to understand attitudes towards drug use, the impact of such use in communities and how best to minimize the take up of using drugs and disrupt supply.

A project currently been developed around the international challenge of Israel and Palestine with two secondary schools to discuss human rights and develop critical research and dialogue. Due to the sensitivities of the issue and the emotive responses it is felt young people can develop tangible skills to allow discussion in a safe and meaningful way.

ESOL

Demand still exceeds supply with new and existing partnerships with local faith and community partners to deliver more ESOL to local residents. This academic year has seen to 402 learners accessing ESOL provisions; three based in the South locality and one being delivered online. The online delivery model piloted over the period of the pandemic proved to be immensely successful with over 800 learners accessing the provision in the comfort of their own homes. There is still an appetite for online provisions for participants, who are employed, have mobility issues or have childcare responsibilities.

Within the last 4 months of our ESOL provisions being delivered, we have seen 15 students go into employment and another 6 of becoming volunteers. One of the ESOL students from Romania has become a classroom assistant across two of our ESOL provisions, as she has enrolled to become to an ESOL teacher and requires teaching hours to complete her course.

Case Study ESOL Classes

Seema arrived from war torn Afghanistan earlier this year. She fled with a few members of her immediate family. Seema is an advanced learner and upon initial discussion, she directly refused to move to another class. Her mother and aunt are also attendees of the course but both are at pre entry level. She explained that she needed to be in the same class to ensure they were happy and comfortable. Something we totally understood, given the situation she had come from.

We worked with all three of them during the course of a few sessions to build that much needed rapport. Eventually we suggested Seema 'try out' the advanced class, which she reluctantly did. She enjoyed it but it was evident she was still stressing about leaving her family members 'behind'.

Over the next few sessions, Seema took on more of a 'tutor' role; where we encouraged her to micro teach a few sessions within the basic class. This proved invaluable. She felt she was a part of supporting her family members and the rest of the group learn English.

Seema wanted to find part time work in order to take the pressure off her father. We supported with her CV, carried out mock interviews where the ladies from the group asked her questions about what made her 'her' – why she was so driven and what she aspired. All this with the view of prepping her for her upcoming job interview at TK Maxx. Seema is now working part time at the TK Maxx warehouse!

Seema still attends classes during the morning as she feels without them, she would not be in the position she is today.

Equally Yours Training

An interactive Equality and Diversity based online learning platform, which is being delivered by the integration service to Council employees and external agencies. The training has been adapted by the service to discuss localised prejudices, misconceptions and current legislation through an innovative learning experience, which seeks to educate and stimulate honest conversations amongst participants to help individuals navigate equality, diversity and inclusion. It challenges everyone to look at themselves first and then at others. It allows participants to explore a range of diversity matters in a way, which is challenging but safe. During 2 months, 5 sessions were delivered and 25 staff members were trained. The feedback from the sessions was very positive and more sessions are planned for the following months.

Travellers/Gypsies

Pleck Temporary Site caused some concerns for the local community, particularly the Sikh community, as a Gurdwara is directly opposite the site. Through excellent dialogue and listening to concerns, providing facts and busting misinformation the site has experienced no issues of concern. The Gurdwara has been satisfied with the level of integrity and communication from the Council, and feel confident to get a quick, factual and professional service from the Integration Service. Nationally and locally the site has built up a reputation as a well-managed site, with excellent amenities and co-designed to meet the needs of the service users

We are Walsall 2040

The integration service has been a key resource to engage with faith groups and seldom-heard communities, such as LGBTQ+, European, African, the Ravidassi minority faith community such as the Hindu's, Muslims and Sikh communities of Walsall.



Cleaner Streets/Waste Disposal

The Service in partnership with local elected members, Nash Dom CIC discussed in multiple languages with private rented tenants and owner occupiers in Chuckery the effective use of refuse collections. This challenge is very similar to many other streets in the borough where private landlords have tenants where English may be a second language and who are taking residency in poor condition properties and landlords who are unsupportive in terms of education of waste management.

EU Settlement Scheme (EUSS)

Ukrainian crisis:

Refugee and Migrant Centre and Nash Dom CIC continue to offer support to Ukrainians that came to Walsall through Sponsorship or Family Visa. The support includes help with documents (apply for bank account, BRP, College enrolment, support with employment etc.) ESOL provision for Ukrainians (delivered by Nash Dom) was very successful, helping people not just to improve their English skills but also to find out about available services in the area, learn more about Walsall and quickly integrate in the community. The provision also had a healing impact on attendees (considering the traumatic experience majority of refugees went through), as they were able to have 1 to 1 and group conversation around mental health, share their challenges/experiences and support each other.

The integration service helped identify talent from new arrivals and build capacity by providing one to one and group coaching. Through this a fully qualified Ukrainian speaking trauma psychologist has been delivering one to one sessions and in partnership with the VERA group empowerment sessions to build confidence and reduce trauma impacts.

CASE STUDY – NEWLY SETTLED UKRAINIAN SERVICE USER

A Ukrainian learner who fled the war between Russia and Ukraine was desperate to improve her English. Learner A went to Walsall College to enrol onto an ESOL course to better her English but was told her language skills were not proficient. She lacked confidence in herself and felt that she was not good enough. Learner A contacted the ESOL Intelligence Unit, who referred her to one of the ESOL provisions. She attended and engaged in every session. There she build her language skills, confidence and employment skills. Her dedication and perseverance to improve her language skills and find employment has led her gaining employment with the British Army as a Ukrainian translator.

Trading Standards

Through community conversations early identification of 'illegal' prescription type medicines was reported to our health partners and trading standards. Research in community and social media managed to identify the demand of a specific category of medicines (antibiotics and strong painkillers) increasing in the period of December 2022. Concerns were raised that organised criminal gangs may exploit the demand. Due to the increased demand been observed the supply of illegal and harmful drugs required a quick and effective communications strategy and identifying local pharmacies who may be at risk.

Hate Crime

Remidi, through the Police and Crime Commissioner's funding and West Midlands Police have delivered an excellent service to victims of hate crime who have reported incidents to West Midlands Police. Remidi Hate crimes stats showed 135 referrals from April 2022 to date, including Disability (16), Race (99), Religion (5), Sexual Orientation (13) and Trans (2). This compares to 191 referrals for the previous period from April 2021 to March 2022.

Hate Crime research in partnership with De Montfort University and Black Country Innovate has been extended to broaden participants after West Midlands Police recognised the advantages of increased numbers participating. The findings will be available in the first quarter of 2023. Initial findings showed the devastating impact hate crime has and the need for an empathic and timely response.

Discussions with Remidi and Black Country Innovate to offer a service to those who do not report to the police are ongoing.

REMIDI – HATE CRIME CASE STUDIES

Case study 1: Sexual Orientation/ Gender Identity
Homophobic, Sexual Orientation 1 Victim, Walsall

Emotional support was provided to the victim via phone. The victim originally came through triage, when speaking to the victim they were in high spirits and explained that they would not be letting the Hate Crime have an impact on them. We had a conversation about how it made them feel at the time and reflected upon this and I was proud of how they handled this. When ending the conversation, the victim said the following “I was absolutely satisfied”.

Case study 2: Disability
Disability, MH, 1 Victim, Walsall

Signposting for mental health and emotional support via phone call. I made a triage call to the victim who was being harassed by her neighbours due to her disability. This severely impacted the victim's mental health. The victim already had a support worker supporting her from the council but needed more support. I signposted her to Birmingham & Solihull Mental Health Trust so she could get professional help for her mental health. I also provided her emotional support myself during our conversation. The victim was referred in for long term support. The victim really appreciated my time and thanked me multiple times.

Equality Impact Assessments (EqIAs)

EqIAs continue to be carried out across changes and developments in policies, procedures, services, and organisational changes across the Council. The Equalities team have been effective in promoting the principles behind EqIAs and their importance, whilst also offering support regarding their development, completion, and review across all directorates.

Policy Reviews

The Equalities team have been working with Strategy and Planning to review various policies from an equalities perspective such as those relating to EDI, Pay and Grading, Corporate Debt, and more.

Councillor G Perry
Portfolio Holder for Community Leisure and Culture

23 February 2023

Community, Leisure and Culture Portfolio (Deputy Leader and Resilient Communities) Annual Council Briefing 2022/23



A **£2.6m** project funded by the Public Sector Decarbonisation Scheme is underway to replace the failing gas boilers at Darlaston Swimming & Fitness Centre with air source heat pumps. The project will **save £20k a year** in energy costs and reduce carbon emissions by 400 tonnes per year.



Events were back at the Leather Museum in 2022, with **1,000+ participants** at the Jubilee & Summer drop-ins & workshops.



3,068 births and **2,380 deaths** during 2022/23 (at end of January 2023).



Over ¼ million unsafe, counterfeit or illegal goods worth over **£1m** to criminals exploiting consumers in the Borough were seized by Trading Standards.



NAG acquired **32 new works** by 30 West Midlands based artists.

Displayed **7 nationally recognised** exhibitions.

Over 11,000 enforcement investigations were undertaken by Regulatory Services.



Lichfield Street Hub holds: **14,951 library stock items**, **64 public PCs**, the Borough's Archives consisting of **1,710 collections**, including the records of Walsall MBC and the predecessor authorities, equating to **2,100 linear metres** of records.

In **2022** producing **445 Archives**. We had **6,819 user visits** to our online catalogues on the National Archives Discovery Platform.

The hub also delivers Walsall Connected, Walsall Works, work experience, Duke of Edinburgh and have a multifunctional space, ICT suite.



£300k is generated from the Arena staging **250 events** a year, selling **20,000 tickets**.

£518k of external funding is secured for music support for Walsall children.

30,000 music lessons per year are delivered across the borough **10 dance events and 5 dance projects**, for children, are run each year.



The Local Authority Support Officers continue to patrol the borough and issue Fixed Penalty Notices for littering offences they witness. **1,440 tickets** have been issued financial year to date (since 6 April 2022).



WALSALL COMMUNITY NETWORK

17 community organisations supported **2,337 residents** with crisis support funding from the Housing Support Fund.

During 2021/22, Walsall Community Network supported over **4,000 residents** who still didn't feel comfortable leaving their homes. Meals and books were delivered and door step befriending took place.



A total of **376,053** books & audiobooks were borrowed from Walsall's libraries in 2022 – **an increase of more than 30%!**

