

Cabinet Member Briefing – Wellbeing, Leisure, and Public Spaces



Introduction

‘Our Council Plan’ – Priorities

The Wellbeing, Leisure, and Public Spaces portfolio covers the council’s health, leisure, and cultural services. By prioritising community wellbeing, promoting health and embracing diversity in our borough, they deliver against this council’s commitment to improve the lives of residents and create vibrant, inclusive communities. The portfolio covers a wide spectrum of services from free to access through to subsidised and paid for services, ensuring we provide according to need, recognising the barriers to access that people can experience.

Over the past year the team has established new and improved public health services, including a new wellbeing service “Be Well Walsall” and a new sexual health offer at the Heatherton Medical Centre. In addition, our leisure centres and green spaces have seen investment in their facilities and new programmes for residents and visitors, including the new BOX12 studio, launched at Oak Park in December.

The New Art Gallery, Walsall Arena, Leather Museum, parks and Arboretum have continued to offer programmes of events for residents and visitors of all ages. Music education has been provided to over 4,000 students and the Arena has continued to deliver a range of well-attended performances. The New Art Gallery has provided professional development sessions, art clubs and a range of exhibitions and events through the year including Vaisakhi, Eid a Fitr, the King’s coronation and Diwali. Finally, our teams, once again, excelled in their provision for the Holiday activities and Food programme, which was a great success during the school holidays.

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Our Service Delivery

Public Health

Children and Young People

The Public Health team has undertaken a range of important health initiatives, including redesigning a Children and Families Healthy Eating Programme, set to launch in April 2024, alongside detailed work with our Healthy Child Programme. The Healthy Child Programme 0-19 services reached 97% of pregnant women at 12 weeks, and provided a reinstated 6-week baby visit to 90.31% of families between July and September 2023. The team have improved accessibility through ensuring fully staffed 0-19 advice lines, and the Dadpad app reached the equivalent of 28% of new fathers in two months since its September launch. Consultation with young people on what impacts their emotional wellbeing was also undertaken with 192 individuals in the summer of 2023, and the Positive Outcomes Project expanded to a third hub, serving 384 users in the first 6 months of 2023/24. Finally, external NHS funding was secured for a new Oral Health Improvement team, and oral health resources, further demonstrating the council's commitment to community health.

Wellbeing

The One You Walsall Lifestyles service had a significant impact, generating 8000 universal and 2600 targeted support referrals. Notably, WHO-5 mental wellbeing scores increased from 51.9 to 60.5 within 12 weeks. Our new Wellbeing service “Be Well Walsall” commenced in November 2023, offering adult-focused support for smoking cessation (a digital stop-smoking pilot is also live), healthy weight, community NHS health checks, and mental wellbeing. Alongside this NHS Health Checks through primary care saw a 40% increase in activity between quarters 1 and 2 of 2023/24. As part of our wider commitment to physical activity, £37,000 pledges through Crowdfund Walsall's 'Tackling Inactivity Fund' generated £144,000 for 10 projects.

The Thrive mobile wellbeing unit continues to be successful, and supported 4759 individuals over the course of the year, with 495 people assisted through Citizen's Advice yielding a substantial financial benefit of £472,623 for Walsall residents. As part of our wider wellbeing commitments, a men's mental wellbeing programme has been established and a number of wellbeing grants issued to community sector partners. Additionally, the team completed a piece of research on workplace health with the National Institute for Health Research.

Sexual Health, Alcohol and Drugs, Health Protection

Cabinet approved the extension of Sexual Health services through Walsall Healthcare NHS Trust until 2027, inaugurating a new site at Hatherton Medical Centre. As part of wider service redesign work, primary care contraceptive services for 26 GP practices

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were also refreshed and brought back under council oversight within the Public Health team.

To support our ambitions around alcohol and drug misuse, Change Grow Live (CGL) unveiled a new hub in The Quarter in January 2024, having worked hard over the course of the year with partners to increase the numbers of adults in treatment. Additionally, CGL introduced a nationally-funded employment support service in October 2023.

The Public Health team also continue to meet our statutory requirements to deliver a health protection response to infectious disease incidents. In 2023, the team responded to 581 incidents involving over 1000 cases.

Leisure and Public Spaces

Healthy Spaces

In 2023, the council's Healthy Spaces Team achieved significant successes, emphasising the commitment to community well-being and recreational spaces. The Holiday and Food programme, active during Easter, Summer, and Christmas, featured successful events at multiple parks, including a boxing fitness programme at Reedswood Park. Noteworthy accomplishments include two successful bonfire events and a thriving School Games engaging 250 pupils from 21 schools.

Volunteer community participation increased by 14%, totalling 18,264 hours, valued at £190.3k, with litter volunteer activities reaching 6,000 hours annually. Further, the team secured £1.1m from 12 external funding sources and successfully obtained Levelling up funding for play equipment at Reedswood Park. Both Reedswood Park and Pelsall Common earned recognition among the 10 Green Flag parks, while The Black Country Geopark received UNESCO accreditation for an additional four years. These diverse achievements highlight the council's dedication to enhancing the community's well-being and recreational spaces.

Leisure Services

The installation of new fitness equipment and modernisation of fitness suites at all sites has offered our residents and visitors an upgraded service for 2023. In December, a service transformation plan at Oak Park Active Living Centre introduced the BOX12 studio in a remodelled office space, aiming to boost physical activity levels and revenue growth. Walsall Gala Swimming & Fitness Centre also received £262k from Sport England's Swimming Pool Support Fund to tackle escalating energy costs, and a completed decarbonisation scheme at Darlaston Swimming & Fitness Centre has been successful in achieving energy efficiency. In addition to these achievements, the 'Fitness Journey' programme and Pulse Trakk app supported 1800 customers in

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achieving fitness goals and over 15,000 customers registered for the Leisure Hub online booking system.

A strategic review of leisure services has delivered new service and business plans which will put the council in a strong position to grow and develop our offer to the people of Walsall. Plans for the future include continuing the aquatics apprenticeship programme and bursary scheme, which has helped to address recruitment challenges, with 17 individuals benefiting in 2023.

Walsall Arena and Arts

This year has been another exciting year at the Walsall Arena with over 70,000 visitors and 25,000 tickets sold to see over 150 performances. As we strive to embrace the talents of the borough's young people, the Walsall Music Education Hub has provided music lessons to over 4,000 children and teenagers, delivering 32 events with 2,200 participants, performing to a total audience of nearly 8,000.

The New Art Gallery

Throughout the year, the art gallery has hosted a breadth of learning and engagement activities. These have included family days for children with complex support needs, a creative careers day, events for Vaisakhi, Eid al Fitr and Diwali, World Book Day and formal learning opportunities for over 1,000 students. The Gallery also lent its support to the Knife Angel visit, opening its doors to host the unveiling and demonstrating our cross-council commitment to overcoming challenges that threaten the health and wellbeing of our communities.

Leather Museum

The Leather Museum achieved significant growth in the past year with a 45% increase in visitor figures and a notable 28.4% rise in total income, reaching just under £30k. Shop income surged by 15%, while workshop and activity income experienced over a 30% boost. Meeting room bookings saw a remarkable 75% increase, attracting new returning clients, and educational visits by children rose by an impressive 154%, hosting 1500 youngsters. The museum successfully hosted 50 events, including craft workshops teaching traditional skills, and ran 19 diverse activity sessions during school holidays, engaging over 2000 participants. Updates to display areas are underway, and collaborative efforts with The New Art Gallery Walsall aim to market a joint day visit package to groups outside the region as part of a new marketing strategy.

Bereavement Services

The council's cemeteries and crematorium at Streetly are continuing to work towards offering an enhanced standard of service to the borough's families and communities.

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Adaptations based on industry benchmarking and feedback also include increased chapel times, further site improvements, and early morning services. Burials remain popular, and the service is working to expand memorial choices and the reopening of Streetly reception will see the service offer continue to grow in 2024.

Registration Services

In 2023, the Register Office has continued to operate efficiently amid high service volumes for marriages, civil partnerships, and related legal activities. Despite elevated death rates, the team has maintained timeliness by fostering relations with medical establishments and adopting an agile approach to appointments. Notably, 82% of all deaths were registered within the 5-day target, the second-best figure in the West Midlands and a national average of 50% of deaths registered within that time.

Progress in digitalisation now allows online appointments for registering births and deaths, and self-serve check-in screens enhance customer experience. Plans to relocate the Register Office to the front of the Civic Centre, with new ceremony rooms offering flexibility and linked fees, are underway, reflecting the council's commitment to take a customer centric approach to service delivery.

Our Strategies

Strategies, Frameworks & Consultations

The council has made significant strides in well-being and mental health, supporting the launch of Walsall Together's Wellbeing Outcome Framework in July 2023. The framework aids partners in measuring the impact of services and activities. A wellbeing service directory, led by Walsall Together and Walsall Council IT, soft-launched in Jan 2024. Public health are progressing work with partners on a 10-year Mental Wellbeing Strategy and newly published 5-year Alcohol and Drug Strategy, while advancing its Health Protection commitments.

A strategic review of the council's leisure services presented an opportunity to validate the council's approach and explore areas for development. The completed review, service plan and business plan strive to deliver a continuously improving service that promotes active lifestyles, empowers visitors to make healthy choices and does so in a way that is financially sustainable for the long term.

Partnerships

Public Health efforts are characterised by collaboration, and partnership work. The team have: supported the Family Hubs programme (and lead the Infant Feeding workstream), reconvened the Walsall Sexual Health Alliance, and established a new Walsall Air Quality Alliance. Significant partnership activity will also be required to

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deliver on the Tobacco Control Plan, which was approved by Cabinet in December. Partnerships with housing and regeneration/employment colleagues have been strengthened, and as part of this, a proposal for a Healthy Levelling Up partnership was submitted to DHSC.

Our Projects

Our residents have told us that they recognise that their surrounding environment and access to green space is an important factor for their wellbeing. Opportunities for **rewilding** are now finalised and a refreshed grass cutting regime will be implemented from the spring.

The **play areas improvement** project has progressed well along with improvements to a number of our tennis courts.

The **Purple Horizons nature recovery** project received accolades and won the WMCA Local Authority Award.

Work is ongoing to develop a **town centre theatre**, offering a facility with conference space and a bar/café facility. Concept designs have been developed with the next step being development of funding opportunities.

Future works

Next year, I want to see enhanced visibility of our fantastic wellbeing, cultural, and green space offers. We have the skills and facilities at our disposal to celebrate the borough's diverse culture, improve health outcomes, create positive opportunities for our young people, and tackle social isolation.

We will be establishing new partnerships to boost physical activity, and will also be further developing our programmes linked to, food, air quality, and alcohol/drug challenges in the borough. Crucially, we will work with partners to realise the Smokefree 2030 ambitions, and refresh our efforts to reduce infant mortality. Whilst we look forward to seeing the benefits of our reconfigured sexual health services, and newly established wellbeing service, the Public Health team will also work hard to make sure we are meeting national ambitions for our alcohol and drug treatment services and increasing the numbers of people in structured treatment. The recent measles outbreak has also shone a light on the ongoing need for us to continue and intensify our efforts to increase childhood immunisation uptake rates in the borough, as the threat of communicable disease remains a present-day risk.

With a review of our leisure services completed, we will be continuing to develop our programme of activities in terms of both free to access and paid for activities.

Our drive to deliver a net-zero and more biodiverse borough by 2040 will continue. Investment in on-street vehicle charging will be delivered at over 30 locations,

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improvements to council buildings and fleet will reduce our own carbon footprint and management of our green spaces will provide access to nature for all.

We look forward to opening the new Registrar's office with a new venue for marriages, civil partnerships and citizenship ceremonies. A new reception at Streetly Crematorium and investment in our cemetery sites will also ensure we continue to grow our offer to residents and families, providing valuable services and fitting places to celebrate milestones and remember loved ones.

Over the next year, I aim to continue to improve the connectivity between our services, support the implementation of key strategies, and ensure a streamlined universal service offer for our communities.

Thank you

I would like to express my thanks to the teams involved in delivering what is essential work to improve the lives and wellbeing of our residents.

I have witnessed the incredible dedication of our council staff, active communities, and professional partners in promoting and supporting the health and wellbeing of Walsall residents. Our collective efforts have not only strengthened our delivery but have also contributed to building healthier and more resilient communities.



Councillor Gary Flint, Portfolio Holder for Wellbeing, Leisure, and Public Spaces