

## Councillor Andrew Portfolio Briefing

### Deputy Leader and Regeneration

Area	Key achievement
<b>People</b>	
<b>Walsall Works</b>	<p>Launched in 2012, as a Council funded initiative designed to support local people of working age to improve their employability, help to find jobs, apprenticeships and access training. We work closely with local employers to understand the demands of the local labour market and match live vacancies to locally unemployed people. We continue to offer employment advice and skills support to residents of all ages, through funded employability programmes targeting key groups i.e. Restart, Kickstart, Impact and are now mobilising delivery on the Community Renewal Fund programmes, Works+ and the 50 Plus Partnership.</p> <p>Walsall Works uses a range of virtual methods to communicate support and opportunities, as well as using face-to-face delivery where necessary. Despite restrictions, we have maintained safe delivery in partner and community organisations, alongside a full calendar of virtual and face-to-face events, which aim to match employer vacancies with local people especially in the demand sectors of health and social care, construction, business admin and logistics. The team have used varied virtual communication methods and extensively used social media, our live website and digital weekly bulletins to promote events, jobs, apprenticeships, training, and partner support services.</p> <p>We continue to achieve good successes in supporting residents into employment and training. Since the inception of the programme, we have supported 4,766 with their employability skills resulting in over 1,050 young people accessing apprenticeships, and 246 into paid work placements or work experience, 2,062 individuals into work with a further 1,483 into training.</p>
<b>Black Country Impact</b>	<p>Black Country Impact continues to utilise the EU and Government funding available to support young people aged 16-29 into positive outcomes. Walsall Council, one of the programmes key partners has up to £8million available to support delivery across all council directorates.</p> <p>Through collaborative working the key aim is to maximise the chances of success for vulnerable young people who are not in education, employment or training (NEET). The programme offers personalised 1-1 support to remove significant barriers to help young people into training or work. Target groups include long term unemployed, care leavers, those with special education needs, health issues including disability and mental health etc.</p> <p>So far since its beginning over 2800 local young people have joined the Impact programme, with 1235 completing their participation plans, with 646 so far achieving successful outcomes, including; securing a place on a Further Education or Training programme or securing Employment or an Apprenticeship. The programme has secured funding to continue to support local people through to July 2023.</p>

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<b>Kickstart</b>	The Council is a registered gateway organisation for the DWP Kickstart scheme, and aims to bring forward 150 paid work placements for 16- 24 year olds universal benefit claimants. Employers are offered grant funding for a minimum of 25-hours per week for a six-month period, and to date over 100 work placements have been created within the private sector. The Council has also pledged 12 work placements in Leisure Services, Programme Management and Regeneration Services.
<b>Restart</b>	The Restart scheme is a DWP welfare to work programme, which has been contracted to Serco in the Central West region. The Council is a delivery partner to Serco for the Walsall area along with Steps to Work and Pathways Group who in total will support over 10,000 unemployed claimants over a four-year period. The Council contract aims to deliver employability support to 1,500 working age residents who have been unemployed and claiming a universal benefit for 12-18 months. The scheme will support individuals to tackle barriers that they may have and to help them prepare and access sustainable employment. To date, we have received 206 referrals, of which 155 participants have started their journey, and 13 have commenced employment.
<b>Works+</b>	Works+ has secured £500k grant via Community Renewal Fund, to be delivered in collaboration with Walsall Housing Group (WHG), who in partnership, will support unemployed and economically inactive residents to access training and job search support to prepare them to access to the labour market. The programme will target residents from our top seven deprived wards, those who are social housing tenants, and those at risk of redundancy, or who have been made redundant. The niche element of the project is the creation of fully paid work placement for adults over 25+ who are unemployed and seeking employment, especially those aged 50+ who have been impacted by the pandemic.
<b>50+</b>	This Community Renewal Fund programme led by Sandwell Council and Walsall Council has been awarded £200k as a main delivery partner for our area. The programme will appoint four 'navigators' based in community who will support the 50+ age cohort to access training and education that improves their health and economic wellbeing. The programme also offers £50k of grants to the voluntary sector for innovative projects to test new approaches and delivery, i.e. activities for this age cohort to address issues such as social isolation, anxiety, poor skills, so improving personal wellbeing, community engagement and promoting cohesion.
<b>Careers Information Advice and Guidance (CIAG)</b>	Offered to schools and NEETs prevention work with vulnerable young people, CIAG is funded by the Careers Enterprise Company. CIAG is offered into local schools to help young people of schools age become more empowered, employable and entrepreneurial. We aim to broker real business engagement and promote local economic development by informing students on local labour market changes, local provision and progression pathways to employment such as apprenticeships, T-levels, traineeships. We actively encourage the business community to engage with young people and participate in schools. There are funded traded service contracts with all four Special Schools and Joseph Leckie Academy.

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	<p>Careers Enterprise Company have awarded grant to pilot a project to support vulnerable young aged 15 who are at risk of becoming NEET, the focus is to re-enter into education those in elected home school environments, children in need, child protection orders and those referred from schools or early help teams. The target is to support 100 young people in this academic year.</p>
Place	
<b>Overview</b>	<p>The Council is working on a transformative place making programme, delivering interventions to create the conditions for increased investment, quality homes, the right jobs in the right places, and skills. While the Council is leading on several major projects to transform the town centre and wider borough, we recognise the importance of partnership working and we enjoy good relationships with a range of developers, businesses and providers to arrive at flexible solutions to place making.</p> <p>Across the Place priorities this year there has been significant investment in Walsall with four key housing sites under construction at Goscote Lane, Goscote Lodge Crescent, Caparo and Hollyhedge Lane with nearly 1000 new dwellings being delivered. These sites have been subject to intense work to support their development for a number of years and with partnership working with the Black Country LEP West Midlands Combined Authority and key public and private partner developers we have seen these key sites come forward.</p> <p>Across our key high quality employment sites we have seen work commence on Phoenix 10, Parallel 113 within the Black Country Enterprise Zone and at Reedswood and Impact Park in Leamore is completed, all sites that have been part of the Walsall Pipeline and subject to intense work to see them developed and all critical to the economic success of the Borough.</p> <p>The success of these sites coming forward has been supported by the transport infrastructure investment at Junction 10 and through investment in the rail infrastructure improving links to Birmingham and beyond and has set a tone for future investment in our housing and employment sites as part of the next phase of delivery across Willenhall, Walsall Gateway and in and around Station Quarter in the Town Centre.</p>
<b>Town Centre Masterplan</b>	<p>The Vision driving the Town Centre Masterplan states, that “Walsall will attract visitors based on its leisure and culture offers; including its internationally significant art gallery. The town centre environment will be easily navigable with healthy streets, which encourage walking and cycling and maximise the value of significant public spaces through regular events and activities”. The below activity, supported by the Future High Streets Fund, Towns Fund, Walsall Council and the West Midlands Combined Authority, is taking forward schemes which will make this happen.</p> <p><b>Connected Gateway</b></p> <p>Jointly funded by the Future High Street Fund (FHSF) programme and Walsall Council, the Connected Gateway scheme will create a landmark arrival into the centre of Walsall by improving the experience, better linking Walsall’s well-used transport hubs and</p>

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	<p>providing a new public square between bus and rail station. The project has advanced up to RIBA Stage 3 with a planning application expected in early 2023 and based on the current delivery programme, the project is anticipated to achieve full completion by 2025/26.</p> <p><b>Town Deal</b></p> <p>Walsall and Bloxwich town areas, from their Town Investment Plans, have each gained approval of their £21.3million allocations of Town Deal funding through the government's Towns Fund programme subject to business case approval. The Town Deal Board was set up in 2019 to oversee the Town Investment Plans for Walsall and Bloxwich and provides an opportunity for inclusive and strategic discussions on how to progress growth and transformation in Walsall and Bloxwich. The Board contains a wealth of knowledge and experience and includes Walsall College, the Vine Trust, Walsall Healthcare Partnership, University of Wolverhampton, Jhoots Group, Homeserve, GKN, ZF Lemforder, One Walsall, Fairfax Saddles Ltd, Mid Counties Co-Op, Karl Woodward (Reach All Ltd), Doug Wright (CEO, McDonald's franchisee) and West Midlands Combined Authority.</p> <p>Project activity is led by a number of local partners and managed through project boards and a local advisory group each for Walsall and Bloxwich, reporting into the Town Deal Board. The projects for each area are as follows:</p> <p><b>Walsall:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Construction Skills Academy:</b> Providing a range of construction skills training to ensure Walsall residents benefit from the investment in house building and construction in the town and the wider area. Led by Walsall College.</li> <li>• <b>Advanced Electric Vehicle Technology Centre:</b> The provision of a new training facility to provide learning opportunities in the new and emerging electric vehicle market, led by Walsall College.</li> <li>• <b>Town Centre Theatre:</b> An exciting new 1000 seater theatre and conference facility within Walsall Town Centre, creating a vibrant destination venue and reinvigorating the high street. Led by Walsall Council.</li> <li>• <b>Active Travel and Connectivity:</b> active connections including cycling and walking - between Walsall town centre, Bloxwich high street, and local employment sites such as Phoenix 10. Led by Walsall Council in partnership with Canals and Rivers Trust.</li> <li>• <b>Digital Skills Hub:</b> Creating a new digital skills hub in Walsall town centre. Aimed at accelerating digital growth and a 'ready to go' employable workforce with the skills, knowledge and experience to succeed in the changing workplace. Led by Mercian Trust.</li> <li>• <b>The Creative Industries Enterprise Centre:</b> Creation of a makerspace, creative incubator and skills development hub. Aimed at small enterprises and local</li> </ul>

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	<p>residents. Providing a high street presence, with the potential to create Walsall's version of the Digbeth Custard Factory or Bristol Engine Shed. Led by Walsall Council in partnership with Urban Hax.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Active Public Spaces:</b> Developing an inviting, engaging and quality public space which better links the high street to the New Art Gallery and edge of town retail. Led by Walsall Council in partnership with Canals and Rivers Trust.</li> <li>• <b>Community Capital:</b> Grants programme for local Voluntary and Community Sector (VCS) and social enterprise organisations to bid into, so they can expand their roles in supporting local people into employment and training etc. Led by Walsall Council.</li> </ul> <p><b>Bloxwich Schemes</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Active travel &amp; connectivity-</b> promoting healthy travel and links between the centre and employment area. A range of interventions to the road and canal infrastructure to improve the pedestrian experience and safety through improved footways, lighting, CCTV, signage. Led by Walsall Council.</li> <li>• <b>Promotion of construction skills through regeneration</b> -The fund will seek applications from local housing associations and developers to support the remediation of existing derelict brownfield sites, and the environmental upgrading of existing dwellings. To access support, applicants will be asked to make commitments to providing local jobs for local people, the use of local supply chains and the delivery construction skills and training for local people. Led by Walsall Council.</li> <li>• <b>Community capital fund-</b> A small grants scheme for Voluntary and Community Sector organisations. Led by Walsall Council.</li> <li>• <b>Incubation space and digital access centre</b> -A facility on the high street to provide incubation space for local start-ups and small businesses and allow access to digital connectivity for local residents who do not have home access to broadband. The facility will also include the provision of co-working rented spaces which allows the businesses to collaborate and provides an income stream for the facility. Led by Walsall Council.</li> <li>• <b>Green Bloxwich-</b> Improving community health and wellbeing, eg creating green outdoor spaces. Creating multi-use spaces which will incorporate new parks, sports arenas, allotment spaces for growing food and zones to attract and encourage wildlife. Including the refurbishment of heritage buildings with King George V park, to bring them into economic use. Led by Walsall Council.</li> </ul> <p>The Council and other scheme promoters have gone on to produce business cases for of the above projects that will deliver urban regeneration, green transport and economic</p>

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	<p>growth outcomes. Together these will create a transformative package, which will contribute to evolving, dynamic environments in the two key Walsall locations, focusing on the growth potential for the future economy.</p> <p><b>Levelling Up Fund</b> Earlier in the year the government launched Round 2 of the Levelling Up Fund, a £4bn fund designed to invest in infrastructure that improves everyday life across the UK, supporting town centre and high street regeneration, local transport projects, and cultural and heritage assets.</p> <p>The Council has submitted two business cases representing bids of £20m each for the Willenhall Framework project - our flagship borough regeneration project described below - and for the Town Centre Theatre which is set out above as part of the Town Deal portfolio. The Council awaits the government decision on these large and carefully constructed bids which if successful will drive real change in Walsall. The fund will support our projects which combat economic differences with real implications: a more successful borough economy will create the conditions to improve pay, work opportunities, health, and life chances.</p> <p><b>A Public Realm Investment Plan (PRIP)</b> Has been completed for Walsall Town Centre. This document is an important next step to further the transformation of the public spaces and key routes. The document provides a further layer of design information on key interventions developed in the Town Centre Masterplan. The next stage of work will involve the preparation of a Walsall Public Realm Manual which will set the parameters for future public realm schemes in the town centre and their ongoing maintenance. This will further strengthen the experience for residents, visitors and businesses in the town centre in the move towards a more competitive economy.</p> <p><b>Challenge Building</b> Demolition of the Challenge Building has completed and construction of a modern, purpose-built medical centre that will deliver GP services to more than 20,000 patients is now well underway. The £12.6million scheme, including grant funding from NHS England, is a strategic development opportunity in the town centre and complements the development plans for the wider area and the vision for the town centre through the masterplan. In addition work is underway to review potential options for the Council's adjacent landholding which can constitute a second phase of development.</p> <p><b>Station Quarter</b> Work has also progressed on Station Quarter, with detailed due diligence taking place to inform the future delivery approach. The project is focused on the opportunity to introduce new residential development in the town centre to compliment the investment in place making through the Connected Gateway and Town Deal projects.</p>
<b>Borough Regeneration</b>	Delivery of the Black Country Enterprise Zone sites has continued with construction commencing on 113,00sqft of employment floor space at Parallel 113 supported by funding from Black Country LEP.

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<b>and Strategic Sites</b>	<p>A major milestone was reached with the start of remediation works at the borough's most significant employment site, Phoenix 10. It is anticipated that these works will complete in mid 2024 enabling development of 620,000sqft of new employment floorspace to commence which will provide a significant boost to local job creation.</p> <p>Work is also being undertaken to bring forward the Council owned former Gasholders site for employment use. This large site offers the opportunity for significant new floorspace and jobs.</p> <p>Construction of a number of strategic housing sites has followed funding support from the West Midlands Combined Authority and the Black Country LEP to redevelop derelict brownfield sites. These include the former Caparo site by Anthem Lovell LLP; former Goscote Cerro site by Taylor Wimpey; former Goscote Lodge Crescent by Keepmoat; and former Harvestime Bakery by Vistry. In total, these sites will deliver 1,010 new homes.</p>												
<b>Willenhall Framework Plan</b>	<p>Delivery of the Willenhall Framework Plan is a key part of our work to tackle derelict buildings and land in Willenhall and bring them back into use. The Framework Plan was supported by Cabinet in February 2022 and sets out a 10-year vision for Willenhall which provides an ambition for housing growth and healthy, prosperous communities. The vision is that Willenhall will grow into a vibrant, connected and welcoming town with a strong sense of place which celebrates its diverse communities and promotes safe, healthy and active lifestyles. Quality design and sustainable construction will move Willenhall towards a healthy, prosperous and sustainable future. There are four opportunity areas identified in the Plan, which are categorised for delivery over the short, medium and long term. In total the aim is to provide up to 500 new homes with associated environmental and connectivity benefits. The Moat Street/Villiers Street area of opportunity has been identified as Phase 1 and the initial focus for the Council. The proposed approach to delivery is that the Council undertakes land assembly, obtains outline planning approvals and procures a development partner to deliver high quality housing and public realm and work is underway to this effect.</p>												
<b>Planning and Development</b>	<p>Development management is a busy area of the service and has determined a significant number of applications since 1st January 2022 following investment in the service and implementation of a service transformation plan that has provided greater capacity and resilience in the teams. The following number of applications have been received/determined and presented to planning committee.</p> <table border="1" data-bbox="311 1641 1241 1924"> <tr> <td>RECEIVED:</td><td>1475</td></tr> <tr> <td>DETERMINED:</td><td>1524</td></tr> <tr> <td>Of determined that were GRANTED:</td><td>981</td></tr> <tr> <td>Of determined that were REFUSED:</td><td>113</td></tr> <tr> <td>Of determined that were ALL OTHER TYPES OF DECISIONS:</td><td>430</td></tr> <tr> <td>Presented to Planning Committee:</td><td>75</td></tr> </table> <p>Following investment in the service additional temporary roles have been recruited to support the processing and determination of planning applications, progress of</p>	RECEIVED:	1475	DETERMINED:	1524	Of determined that were GRANTED:	981	Of determined that were REFUSED:	113	Of determined that were ALL OTHER TYPES OF DECISIONS:	430	Presented to Planning Committee:	75
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	<p>enforcement investigations and prosecutions and monitoring of S106 Planning Obligations. Additional technical support officers have helped with validation of new applications, a Development Monitoring officer has been appointed to monitor and review S106 Planning Obligations and monitor progress of development on site and additional agency support from senior and principal planning officers to progress a backlog of more complex older cases. Additional enforcement resource has helped progress enforcement cases with high profile cases being reported in the press – “putting the force back into enforcement”. Since 1<sup>st</sup> January 2022 365 enforcement cases were reported and 456 cases closed.</p> <p>Two principal planning officers and two planning apprentices have been appointed to more effectively distribute workloads. Two additional planning enforcement case officers to review alleged breaches more speedily. This has increased the capacity in the teams although case officers are still dealing with high caseloads.</p> <p>Planning Services undertook a Peer Challenge Review with the support of the Planning Advisory Service in November 2021. The Peer Challenge team reviewed development management, enforcement, S106 processing, planning policy and planning committee. The review focused on four themes:</p> <p><b>Theme 1: Vision &amp; Leadership</b> – Deliver Leadership vision through Corporate Strategy, wider collaboration and judge risks and benefits in wider context</p> <p><b>Theme 2: Service Delivery &amp; Performance</b> – improve customer service, streamline processes, review delegation to empower officers, engage members sooner</p> <p><b>Theme 3: Community &amp; Partnership Engagement</b> – strong identity with communities, Region’s objectives need to align with Walsall’s objectives, improve engagement with developers to deliver regeneration</p> <p><b>Theme 4: Outcomes</b> – right resources in place to deliver jobs, housing, economic growth; clearer focus for planning service to improve consistency, consider approach to developer contributions, analysis of housing delivery</p> <p>The feedback report highlighted a series of measures where improvements could be made and these have now been implemented to improve the performance of the service. Measures include reviewing application and enforcement case processing, investment in upgrading the back office system, expanding officer Delegation, member training, updating S106 Guide, engagement with key stakeholders and setting up a Developer’s Forum to improve engagement with customers and speed up processes and allowing customers to self serve.</p>
<b>Walsall Local Plan</b>	<p>Following the announcement from Dudley’s Leader that Dudley wish to withdraw from the Black Country Plan (BCP), the BCP will no longer proceed and all four authorities will now be focused on preparation of individual local plans. Whilst the Council has been working on the joint Black Country Plan since 2017, work will now progress towards developing a comprehensive Walsall Local Plan (WLP) as agreed by Special Cabinet on 2 November 2022. Preparation of a WLP will make use of as much of the technical work undertaken to date for the BCP, in order to benefit from the resources expended.</p>



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	<p>The local plan (otherwise known as the development plan) forms the basis of decisions on planning applications and other matters relating to the use and development of land. It provides certainty for developers and protection for sites and buildings that are of value for environmental, economic and social reasons. The benefits of a preparing a WLP will enable the Council to shape its own plan to address the needs of the borough's residents and businesses. A comprehensive WLP would replace all the remaining policies of the Black Country Core Strategy, Site Allocations Document, Area Action Plan and Unitary Development Plan with a single document. It would avoid the risk of new policies clashing with remaining saved policies in older plans. A single local plan would be much easier for development management and developers to use, easier for members of public to understand, would help improve public engagement on a single plan approach and would better match other Walsall corporate priorities and strategies.</p> <p>Preparation of a WLP will continue to take a brownfield first approach aiming to bring derelict sites back into economic use but the process also allows further opportunities to review site selection criteria for proposed housing and employment site allocations in the green belt and focus on local needs. A programme of preparation for the WLP would also include time for reflection of representations and evidence received through various stages of consultation to shape the plan.</p>
<b>Digital Connectivity</b>	<p>The Council has been working with WMCA and the private sector to look at fibre/5G connectivity in the region to ensure that more residents have access to the best speed connections and that our employment sites are attractive to investors through excellent connection speeds. The Council is working with partners on a "Smart City" approach to use connectivity and digital enhancement to deliver on the priority themes of Smart Transport, Health, Energy, Fibre acceleration, Data store and exchange, Cluster development</p>
<b>High Streets</b>	<p>The Council is working with the West Midland Mayor's Town Centre Taskforce and the central government High Streets Task Force to consider the current challenges and how these are addressed. There has also been effective partnership working with West Midlands Combined Authority and West Midlands Growth Company to actively promote development and investment opportunities across the borough. In addition, there continues to be regular dialogue with landowners, developers and investors to help bring forward new development and secure job creation and economic growth.</p> <p>There has also been focus on softer interventions to support the town centre and is continuing to work with Shopappy Ltd. who provide an online resource for local independent shops and businesses.</p>
<b>General Business Support</b>	<p>The team continue to work with businesses of all shapes and sizes across the borough. For the calendar year 2022, the team have so far logged 232 Direct business engagements with Walsall businesses.</p> <p>The 'sweet spot' for engagements, remains Manufacturing &amp; Engineering businesses at 50% of all inquiries, with Transport &amp; Logistics and Retail and Wholesale Trades making up a combined 30%, with a further share of engagements from start-up businesses, training providers and service sector businesses.</p>

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	<p>In terms of why businesses are engaging with Walsall Council's Business Growth team, 50% are logged as general business support, 45% of all inquiries are focused on Access to Finance, whilst 7% are Recruitment focused. Post-pandemic, there has been a steady increase in firms engaging with the team around sites and premises availability, pointing to an uptick in growth with businesses looking to expand or move operations into the borough.</p>
<b>Aim for Gold</b>	<p>Business Growth team continues to deliver the AIM for Gold business support programme, which includes intensive business support, 1-1 engagement and until October 2022, the grant funding support element which has now closed.</p> <p>The team have committed the £660K worth of ERDF funding to local SMEs. We are currently awaiting confirmation of spend from a handful of businesses.</p> <p>The team have supported 30 businesses with C4 outputs (delivery of 12 hour business support sessions). A further 15 businesses have received 3 hours of support through the project.</p>
<b>Pathfinder</b>	<p>The Business Growth team has been heavily involved with the Pathfinder programme. The Pathfinder programme, part of the wider Levelling Up agenda, is a collaboration between DWP, DfE, Walsall Council, Walsall College, Black Country Chamber and private training providers and recruitment agencies to support the Government's policy aim of bringing greater alignment to the delivery of employment and skills interventions in Walsall.</p> <p>The key aim is to help unemployed people move into work or closer to the Labour Market as well as supporting employed residents in part-time /low wage work to increase their earnings. This will complement our employer engagement strategy in filling vacancies in Walsall's priority sectors.</p> <p>The aims and objectives will be achieved through an Action Plan focusing upon:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Collaborative partnership operational delivery</li> <li>- Collaborative partnership strategic delivery</li> <li>- Employer insight &amp; intelligence</li> <li>- Employer engagement</li> </ul> <p>In September, we organised and chaired a meeting of 20+ local training providers and business support organisations, working collaboratively to set out how deepening these relationships can help local residents into work. The session also saw RAC and Dunton Environmental answer key questions and brief partners on the recruitment and skills needs of their respective organisations. The team have also seen the wider collection of intelligence from local SMEs on why vacancies remain hard to fill.</p>
<b>Strategic Company</b>	<p>The team continues to work, alongside wider Regeneration teams, closely with Walsall's strategic companies. This year, we have held 1-1 meetings with Homeserve, Wedge</p>

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<b>Account Management</b>	Group, RAC, RF Blakemores, Walsall FC, ASSA ABLOY and Poundland. These meetings give Regen colleagues an opportunity to brief our strategic businesses on the work of the Council, as well as providing support wherever necessary, usually in terms of Recruitment or Sites & Premises support, as most of our strategic companies fall outside of the ERDF funded mechanisms for SME support.
<b>Strategic Relationships</b>	<p>The team continue to work hard to maintain and build key strategic relationships with local partners. This includes joint events held with the Black Country Growth Hub, sponsorship of the Black Country Chamber 'Excellence in Professional Services' award, continued work with the West Midlands Growth Company on the shared key account management of some of Walsall's foreign-owned businesses, working with Walsall College through the Council/College partnership forum and attending local Best of Walsall networking meetings to share information on town centre and borough-wide regeneration.</p> <p>We are also working closely with the WCMA on the recommendations from their Business Support Review, with Walsall marked for assisting delivery on Gap Analysis. The team also hold regular meetings with the Dep't for International Trade on the activity of our foreign owned businesses and potential FDI opportunities.</p>
<b>Events/Tours</b>	<p>As well as the aforementioned business engagement days, the team have held events at West Midlands House in Willenhall and a tour of the M6 Junction 10 site for local businesses. This tour saw representatives from Walsall Council, Black Country Chamber of Commerce, the Road Haulage Association, Haywards Transport, National Express and DX Logistics speak with John Sisk about the engineering work and ask key questions about the regeneration of the site.</p> <p>Other events included a Cash Flow &amp; Financial Forecasting workshop, with 8 attendees from the local business community and the first of our Business Surgery sessions, held in partnership with the Black Country Growth Hub and the Black Country Chamber, with 10 businesses, including start-ups, micro and small businesses engaged with.</p> <p><b>Business Intelligence</b></p> <p>Businesses continue to report the 'up-front cost' of doing business as a key barrier to growth. Through our weekly conversations with businesses, that includes: recruitment difficulties and long standing hard to fill vacancies, difficulty in finding suitable premises for expansion, national insurance increases, increased energy costs, increased fuel costs, a demand for increased wages, business rates and pension auto enrolment.</p> <p>Frequently, in our conversations we note that there is an urgent need for businesses to better understand their local business support landscape and which organisations to turn to for which challenge they face. Although Walsall Council plays a key role in helping businesses to understand the local eco system, capacity in the team means that we cannot act as proactively as is sometimes necessary to assist businesses with their needs.</p>

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<b>Other</b>	<p>The team have carried out Engagement Days in Aldridge, Bloxwich, Willenhall, Walsall Wood and Darlaston this year. Our engagement days raise the profile of the work of the team, engaging with businesses who otherwise may not fully understand the work of the council and indeed, the existence of a business support function provided by their local authority. We have built some long lasting, positive relationships through the door knocking exercises, which ensure that Walsall Council are visible to the business community.</p>
<b>Transport</b>	<p>We have continued to work closely with West Midlands Rail Executive, Network Rail and train operators to progress the reopening of the Walsall to Wolverhampton line including new stations in Willenhall and Darlaston where construction has started. Some intra-regional train services have now been re-routed along this line in anticipation of the new stations opening. A business case has also been developed to extend train services to a proposed new station at Aldridge with funding ringfenced in the CRST (City Region Sustainable Transport) settlement.</p> <p>The main construction phase of the £78m major highway improvement scheme at M6 Junction 10 has significantly progressed, which will improve the highway infrastructure at this location in the borough, with much greater highway capacity controlled by new intelligent traffic signals. Scheme delivery has been extremely successful and been a brilliant example of positive partnership working and effective engagement with both stakeholders and the local community.</p> <p>Worked towards the implementation of the Black Country Ultra Low Emission Vehicle (ULEV) Strategy, which sets targets across the Black Country over a 10-year period including for the installation of vehicle chargers, and the purchase by councils of electric vehicles only for all new cars and vans to ensure that we are ready to comply with government targets to ban new petrol and diesel vehicles by 2030 and to be UK net-zero by 2050. Public consultation has been undertaken on installing the first phase of on-street chargers in residential areas to help people who do not have a garage or driveway to charge an electric vehicle.</p> <p>Broad programme of cycle training delivered to the national standard, Bikeability. Bikeability Level 1, 2 and 3, Learn to Ride, Fix, Bikeability Ride and Bikeability Family are all delivered through education establishments as well as outside of this. School holiday courses teaching Learn to Ride delivered from local parks have been hugely popular as well as the training of adults and whole families. All levels Bikeability modules improve safety awareness providing people with the confidence to cycle more increasing activity and health levels.</p> <p>The road safety team have been an active partner supporting West Midlands Police in their Multi Agency Road Safety Operations providing education to motorists on specific targeted campaigns to coincide with the TISPOL road safety campaign calendar, whilst also delivering targeted education to motorists for a particular offence. Road safety has now been brought back in house after a number of years shared services with Wolverhampton. The Council are reviewing all the current road safety schemes on the list, many of them historic, in order to develop a realistic delivery programme. In March</p>

Area	Key achievement
	<p>2022, the Administration approved the allocation of additional CRSTS funding to Road Safety, boosting the annual spend in the borough by over 40%.</p> <p>Delivery of the A*STARS programme to 77 primary schools and 13 secondary schools. A*STARS is a series of walking, cycling, scooting and road safety initiatives with training and support given to schools to help them develop and promote more 'active environments' which make active travel an easier and safer choice for all members of the community. Just some of the initiatives covered by this programme are, Pedestrian training, Bikeability, Transition training, 5 Minute Walk Zones, Let's Walk Together Events, Scooterbility, Be Bright Be Seen, Drive 2 Arrive. School travel survey data indicates the Walsall Active travel figure is 8% higher than the National average, with car use 1% lower than the National average.</p> <p>With the excellent work of the Scrutiny School Gate Parking working group, the Council has continued to tackle the challenge of school gate parking head on with an additional five School Streets trialled across the borough and partnership working with Derby City Council facilitating effective enforcement of school keep clear markings in a timely and cost effective way. These measures provide safer walking and cycling routes for school pupils and encourage walking and cycling.</p> <p>Delivered a variety of local network improvements including traffic calming schemes in locations across the borough. This includes installing or upgrading zebra crossings, the introduction of speed cushions and vehicle activated speed signs, and the operation of average speed enforcement cameras on certain 'A' roads in the borough.</p> <p>The extension of the cycle network in the Bentley area close to M6 Junction 10 has been delivered with Active Travel Funding. Improvements to National Cycle Network (NCN) Route 5 north of the town centre have also been completed to improve access to this route and better connect it through The Butts to the Arboretum.</p>
<b>Programme Management</b>	<p><b>Key Achievements 2021/2022 From the Resource &amp; Transformation Directorates Programme Management team:</b></p> <p><b>Economic Growth – Towns Fund</b>  Played its role in successfully securing £21.3 million for both Bloxwich and Walsall, a total £42.6 million of new funding from the <i>Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities (DLUHC)</i>. This will help to deliver the Town Deal Investment Plans for both areas these include projects to support economic growth, skills, employment and regeneration, the development of local business, education and training facilities as well as improving the green / open spaces together with transport infrastructure that encourages more Active Travel opportunities. Complimented through the establishment of the necessary governance arrangements, including the Town Deal board and Advisory Groups, and reporting into the Strategic Investment Board.</p> <p>The teams are now focussed on putting into place the required staffing and processes and procedures to ensure the successful delivery of the delegated Town Deal programmes for both Bloxwich and Walsall.</p>

Area	Key achievement
	<p><b>Community Grants</b> - Continued to deliver the successful Black Country Community Grants programme, from which 13 Walsall Community and Voluntary sector groups secured £242k. This enabled them to support 190 local residents who received the support, advice and training they needed locally. Examples of this included; CV development, soft and employability skills, confidence and problem solving, jewellery making, radio production and media training, so they can move into further education or employment.</p> <p><b>Accountable Body Services</b> – By successfully delivering a range of Accountable Body roles and responsibilities for almost 10 years. This has assisted us to secure over £151million of external funding into Walsall, with £67m claimed, this service is currently active and successfully deployed to support the delivery of outcomes throughout Walsall Borough. This meets the requirements of the Governments Local Assurance Framework and Value for Money criteria, essential if we are to continue to secure additional / future funding.</p> <p><b>External Funding Team</b> have led on the strategic area of focus relationship with the National Lottery Heritage Fund and in 2020 received a £249K grant to develop and deliver Walsall Heritage Strategy, and a programme of engagement with local stakeholders and communities to improve capacity of the sector. During 2021-22 the following was achieved:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Development and adoption of new Walsall Heritage Strategy 2021-2026 <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Funding secured across external projects ranging from capital feasibility to nature-based engagement schemes.</li> <li>- Created new monitoring and management framework.</li> </ul> </li> <li>- Delivered £10,000 Community Heritage Fund grant fund, via Crowdfund Walsall, across 5 projects to meet Strategy outputs.</li> <li>- Delivering MHCLG funded Black Country Local List project with local authority partners.</li> <li>- Supported WMCA Black Country Cultural Investment Proposal.</li> <li>- Supported colleagues in development of the Love Willenhall Masterplan.</li> <li>- Supported colleagues in development of the Walsall Public Realm Investment Plan.</li> <li>- Supporting colleagues with Council-led project grant applications.</li> <li>- Prepared for launch of new Walsall Heritage Forum.</li> <li>- Supported Walsall Leather Museum with delivery of Cultural Recovery Fund and Digital Confidence Fund projects.</li> <li>- Advocated for Walsall's heritage across stakeholder forums, including Walsall Cultural Compact, One Walsall, WMCA, Historic Environment Officers, and the wider sector.</li> </ul> <p><b>Resource &amp; Transformations External Funding</b> team are supporting / leading on the drafting of bids for the authority, including;</p> <p><b>External Funding</b> – During 2021-22 circa £12M of funds were secured including:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Public Sector Decarbonisation Programme - £2.6M Salix funding to decarbonise Darlaston Leisure Centre.</li> </ul>

Area	Key achievement
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Changing Places - £300k secured to deliver 7 Changing Places Toilets.</li> <li>• Veolia Environmental Trust - £57,319 to resurface the NCN5 Cycle path around Ryecroft Cemetery, making the path accessible for all cyclists including those less confident/lower cycling skills, walkers, wheelchair users and parents/carers with pushchairs. Also installing wildflowers and bird/bat boxes to increase biodiversity around the track.</li> <li>• Respite Innovation Fund - £965,888 to deliver short-break respite activities for young people with SEND who are identified as being at risk of exploitation</li> <li>• National Archives - £3k scoping grant to assess the condition &amp; details of 2 collections to inform a possible future Heritage Fund bid.</li> <li>• Green Recovery Challenge Fund - £260,324.25 as part of a £1.7M project focusing on improving nature recovery network in and around the canal network in Walsall and the Black Country.</li> </ul> <p><b>Crowdfund Walsall</b> (<a href="https://www.spacehive.com/crowdfund-walsall">Crowdfund Walsall - Home (spacehive.com)</a>), an alternative local giving model that supports community projects across the borough, in February 2021. There were 3 funding rounds in 21-22 with £70,000 made available to the voluntary and community sector over 3 funds: Crowdfund Walsall Fund (linked to corporate priorities), Walsall Community Heritage Fund (supported by National Lottery Heritage Fund) and a Platinum Jubilee Fund.</p> <p>During this period Crowdfund Walsall supported 18 projects that improve the spaces, places and residents quality of lives in Walsall. The projects have fundraised in excess of £126 000. 8 projects overfunded on their original targets and local businesses have pledged £22 516 towards this total. The leverage rate is 256%.</p> <p>Examples of projects include the Nectar Room by Pelsall Village School who raised £20, 267 from 124 backers including the Council to create a learning and activity hub within school grounds which is accessible to the public and is focussed on the environment and health and well-being. Grenfell Road Allotments raised £4301 from 28 backers to establish a craft centre to turn bees wax into products that will fund the site going forward while giving local residents new skills and interests. Bloxwich Community Partnership raised £3509 from 17 backers to equip 2 youth buses to reduce anti-social behaviour in the local area. Bostin Creative Arts &amp; Theatre CIC raised £7, 645 from 25 backers to deliver the Walsall Memory Jar project, publishing a website and running local events to capture memories of 'Going Down the Arbo' <a href="#">The Walsall Memory Jar</a>.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• "Heritage Champion programme".</li> </ul> <p><a href="#">Discover Projects in the Crowdfund Walsall (spacehive.com)</a></p> <p><b>Supporting People</b> - Through continued delivery of the Impact Youth Employment Initiative, throughout 2020/21 371 Walsall people aged between 18 and 29 have been recruited. Participants received advice and guidance, linked to targeted training with access to the equipment and tools they needed to fulfil their goals. So far 263 people achieved positive outcome including, but not limited to; employment, training, work experience and apprenticeships.</p>

Area	Key achievement
<b>Asset Management</b>	<p>As part of the transformation of the management of the Council's property portfolio to a Corporate Landlord model, the Corporate Landlord team has prepared the Strategic Asset Plan 2022-27, which was approved by Cabinet in December 2021. The Strategic Asset Plan is a key document to the Corporate Landlord model as it sets out the objectives and strategies for the Council's property portfolio.</p> <p>The Asset Management team has been working hard on the disposal of surplus assets and has transacted approximately £3.7million of property sales in the current financial year, which helps to support the Council's capital programme.</p> <p>In addition to disposal work, the team has been actively supporting the Regeneration team with a number of key projects, including Connected Gateways and other Town Centre projects.</p>
<b>Housing Strategy</b>	<p>Housing Strategy and delivery remains in this portfolio with other aspects of Housing and Homelessness now part of the Customer Services Portfolio. Working with Registered Social Landlords such as WHG, Greensquare Accord, WATMOS and Friendship along with private sector developers to get the housing needed in the areas we need. This will be vital with the New Walsall Plan</p> <p>We are also ensuring a good quality private sector housing stock in the borough. To this end, the Council has since November 2021 served 14 statutory notices against rogue landlords and letting agents and issued £104,000 in civil penalties for housing law breaches.</p> <p>After listening to local concerns, the first Additional Licensing scheme for Houses in Multiple Occupation (HMO) was launched in September for the wards of St Matthews, Pleck, Palfrey and Paddock. Following another statutory consultation scheme cabinet has approved the introduction of the second scheme for a further 5 wards (need the Wards named) from spring 2023.</p> <p>The planning services teams are investigating potential means to better control the location of Houses in Multiple Occupation taking into account legislative requirements including permitted development.</p> <p>These schemes provide the same statutory protection to tenants of all HMOs not just those with 5 or more occupiers.</p> <p>Tackling long term empty homes is also key and we have made a Compulsory Purchase order for 6 such properties. Since making the Order one home has been re-occupied and the other CPOs are progressing.</p> <p>To provide further protection for private sector tenants the Council as secured funds to tackle and educate private landlords who have failed to update their Energy Performance Certificates (EPCs) and ensure they are not F and G rated ones. In 2022, this has led to a further 71 new valid improved EPCs being secured by landlords bringing the total since August 2021 up to 138.</p>



Area	Key achievement
	In addition, £3.54m of grants have been awarded to 533 households to ensure disabled residents can stay safe in their homes.
<b>Providing Assistance to Businesses</b>	<p>The Council have administered the various business grants scheme introduced by central government to assist affected businesses. This mammoth task involved getting the grant money out to qualifying businesses as quickly and easily as possible whilst still ensuring the necessary security measures were in place to identify fraudulent applications. In total, the service paid out 14,322 grants worth circa £80.6million to help struggling businesses within the Walsall area.</p> <p>In addition to the grants, the service has awarded around £36.6million in additional rate relief for 2020/21 and 2021/22. This relief was awarded to businesses within the retail, hospitality and leisure industry where the premises was wholly or mainly used by visiting members of the public.</p>
<b>Awards</b>	<p>While still under this portfolio -In the 2020/21 Staff Recognition Awards both the rough sleeper team and business rates team were highly commended in the 'Proud to Serve' category. Also, highly commended was the manager of the tenancy support services in the 'Outstanding Leader' category.</p> <p>As regards National awards, Walsall Council had an excellent night at the 2021 Institute of Revenues Rating and Valuation Performance Awards ceremony. The Council were announced winners of both the 'Revenues Team of the Year' award and 'Excellence in Innovation (Operational)' award. In addition, the Council received a Highly Commended award in 'Excellence in Partnership Working'. The latter two related to the Council's work around the administration of the business grant schemes.</p>