



# Walsall Council

You are hereby summoned to attend a meeting of the Council of the Metropolitan Borough of Walsall to be held on **MONDAY the 23<sup>rd</sup> day of September 2024 at 6.00 p.m.** at the Council House, Walsall.

Public access via: [www.WalsallCouncilWebcasts.com](http://www.WalsallCouncilWebcasts.com)

Dated this 13<sup>th</sup> day of September, 2024.

Yours sincerely,

Chief Executive.

The business to be transacted is as follows:

1. To elect a person to preside if the Mayor and Deputy Mayor are not present.
2. Apologies.
3. To approve as a correct record and sign the minutes of the meetings of the Council held on 8<sup>th</sup> July, 2024– **(pages 9 –12)**
4. Declarations of interest.
5. **Local Government (Access to Information) Act, 1985 (as amended):**  
To agree that the public be excluded from the private session during consideration of the agenda items indicated for the reasons shown on the agenda.
6. Mayor's announcements.

7. To receive any petitions
8. To answer any questions in accordance with Council procedure rules:
  - (a) From the public: None.
  - (b) From members of the Council:

### **Councillor Smith**

As a result of the new Labour Government's announcement on the withdrawal of the Winter Fuel Allowance, worth up to £300 each year, for millions of pensioners, could the appropriate Portfolio holder share with me, this Council and the public, the impact of this decision on the pensioners of our Borough by giving a ward by ward breakdown of the numbers of pensioners who will lose the Winter Fuel Allowance as a result of the Chancellor's recent announcement?

### **Councillor Latham**

Exposure to asbestos fibres can cause lung cancer or another fatal cancer called mesothelioma which is a cancer of the lining of the lungs. According to the all-party parliament group on Health and Safety (Asbestos in schools) It is estimated that 75% of Britain's state schools contain asbestos much of which is badly maintained, meaning that staff and pupils are exposed to this killer fibre.

Having researched this issue, it seems there is a lack of awareness across schools and in particular amongst staff in relation to asbestos in school and the role everyone should play in keeping themselves and others safe. We support the call for asbestos removal in schools but in the meantime, we urge the relevant cabinet member to ensure the authority is supporting and ensuring that schools are managing the risk effectively.

Under a FOI request to all Local Authorities in 2015 Walsall local authority reported that 71 schools and 2 short stay units contained asbestos. Can you provide us with an update on this and the outcome of any recent audits or inspections the authority may have carried out in relation to management plans for schools where the LA is the employer? Can you also advise if any such audits or information is gathered for other schools in the borough, where there may not have a legal obligation but one would certainly hope, some kind of moral obligation and duty of care to the authority's children and young people?

This matter was brought to our attention by a former Walsall school teacher who dedicated her career to teaching in the borough and has recently been diagnosed with Mesothelioma and wants to raise awareness of the issue to prevent more people from going on to develop the disease unnecessarily. I commend them for bringing this to our attention at a time of extreme personal difficulty.

### **Councillor Russell**

Walsall is a much-maligned town but we do have some treasures, a rather neglected medieval church, St. Matthews, and our beautiful Arboretum Park.

As someone who walks in the park almost every day however, I am concerned that there is an accident waiting to happen between cyclists and pedestrians. Both groups of visitors use the park daily and in significant numbers. I myself have witnessed many close shaves between cyclists and pedestrians and was very nearly involved in one directly, not too long ago.

Will this Council undertake to review the safety arrangements for those using the arboretum both on foot and cycling, to ensure any required cycle lanes and signage is in place as needed in order to minimise the risk of a collision and potential injury? It would be useful to review the arrangements for cycling lanes across the town centre at the same time, as the issue also affects this area of the Borough, especially during peak times.

### **Councillor Ward**

Could the portfolio holder please confirm how much council tax was uncollected for the year 2023-2024? How many times bailiffs were instructed in 2023-2024 and at what financial cost?

### **Councillor Smith**

Given that the most recent "Blakenall Ward Profile 2024" though admittedly based on statistics from 2021 to 2023, reveals some alarming findings, such as that:

- Blakenall is the most deprived ward within Walsall, with every neighbourhood falling within the 20% most deprived areas in England, facing challenges across domains, particularly: • Adult Skills • Education and Training • Income • Children and Young People--- and ranking within decile 1: the 10% most deprived areas in England for those specific domains.
- Almost half of all households (45%) in the Blakenall ward are families with limited resources who budget to make ends meet..... mainly low earning families with limited educational qualifications, multiple children, poor quality housing and little disposable income. This group is most vulnerable to economic shocks like fuel/energy/cost of living inflation.

- 70.2% of households by working age and before pensionable age, in the Blakenall ward claim Council tax reduction, this being the 2nd highest of Walsall's 20 wards and higher than the Borough average of 64.1%.
- The general level of development for children (GLD) living in the Blakenall ward is 7% lower than the Borough average and 13% lower than the national average.
- In terms of recorded crime, Blakenall ward ranks 5<sup>th</sup> highest in the Borough.... considerably higher than the Borough average.
- Blakenall ward ranks 4th highest in the Borough for recorded ASB.

Given all of the above, which are specifically mentioned in the "Blakenall Ward Profile 2024" and given also that my subjective recollection of being on this Council for much of the time, over the last 42years, is that hardly any change of significance has taken place in the Borough's wards' "pecking order" of deprivation and all that this entails, despite refreshed Reports on a regular basis during this time... a time when we have had both Labour led Governments and Conservative led Governments, **can the Leader of the Council inform me, this Council and the citizens of Blakenall ward and beyond:**

- a) To what extent will the Ward Profiles influence/shape/determine, future policy of this Council especially in respect of tackling the inequalities that have continued to beset particular neighbourhoods within wards for many decades and still do,
- b) How will measures to address such inequalities and levels of relative socio-economic deprivation be assessed as to their success or otherwise and how will this be made clear to all Councillors,
- c) Whether you agrees with me that the fairly regular regurgitation and refreshing of similar previous Reports that have been telling us much the same story for half a century is a basis for but no substitute for identifiable, measurable and successful action, and;
- d) To what extent, do you think that the Council's success in tackling socio-economic inequality and deprivation locally is very much restricted by, dependent on and determined by, the macro-economic and social policies of central government?

### **Councillor Ward**

The draft 2025-29 Council Plan commits to:

"Explore how we as a Council can drive social value keeping Walsall money in Walsall and supporting community wealth building activities".

Social Value and Community Wealth Building are mentioned in the recent Commercial Strategy report considered by the Cabinet.

Given that the 2022 Walsall Council Peer Review recommended it had much to learn from other councils about keeping the pound in Walsall and achieving Social Value the Labour Group is concerned that could just be a tick box exercise and that residents of Walsall will not experience the benefits of CWB.

Against this background the Labour Group is asking for:

1. A breakdown of social value required for and achieved by Council service departments, including contracts connected with the Borough's £1.5 billion regeneration programmes, since the Council last reported on this.
  2. Could you confirm how much in financial terms of the Council's contracts go to business/organisations go to those based in Walsall?
  3. Will the Council commit to a more robust corporate social value strategy which includes staff and member training?
  4. Whilst achieving social value is an integral part, community wealth building goes much wider. Harnessing not only what a council spends but it's public sector partners, amounting to millions of pounds, procuring services in a council area. What actions will this Council take to ensure officers and members are informed about this approach and how it can be achieved in Walsall?
9. **Committee Appointment** - To confirm that Councillor Burley be appointed Vice Chair of the Standards Committee for the remainder of the municipal year.
10. **Black Country Consortium Limited** - To confirm that Councillor Perry be appointed as a member to the Black Country Consortium Limited for the remainder of the municipal year
11. **Appointments Panel** – to establish an Appointments Panel (**Pages 13 - 23**)
12. To confirm the following recommendations of **Cabinet**:

**(a) Treasury management Annual Report**

To note and forward to Council, for consideration and noting (in line with the requirements of the Treasury Management Code of Practice (2021)), the Annual Treasury Management Report 2023/24 including prudential and local indicators (Appendix A).

(Note: Report to Cabinet held on 17 July, 2024 reproduced for this meeting (**pages 24 to 47**))

**(b) Walsall Youth Justice Plan**

- a) That Walsall's Youth Justice Annual Strategic Plan is recommended to Council for approval.
- b) That Cabinet delegate authority to the Executive Director of Children's Services, in consultation with the Portfolio Holder for Children and Young People, to make any future minor amendments to the plan as required.

(Note: Report to Cabinet held on 11 September, 2024 reproduced for this meeting (**pages 48 to 53**))

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

- a. Adult Social Care – Councillor K. Pedley (**To Follow**)

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

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

**Winter Fuel Payments**

Given that the Winter Fuel Payments, have been made available to everyone above State Pension age in the UK (most recently, this included those born on or before 24 September 1957) – which will no longer be the case from this winter as a result of a statement recently made by the Chancellor, Rachel Reeves, and that,

Until this winter approximately 11.4million pensioners were entitled to a winter fuel payment of between £100 and £300 per year but as from this year only about 1.5 million pensioners on pension credit and other benefits will be eligible to receive this allowance, thus taking the allowance away from approximately 10 million pensioners nationally and thousands of pensioners locally, and given further that

The Energy Price Cap is likely to rise by 10% this October and stay high across the winter, leaving most energy bills nearly double those before the energy crisis at levels unaffordable for millions,

**Walsall Metropolitan Borough Council calls on the Government to review, in time for the forthcoming winter, its recently announced plans to scrap the winter fuel allowance for all pensioners other than for those who receive Pension credit and other benefits, which will deprive over 10 million senior citizens, nationally, and potentially thousands of pensioners in the Borough of Walsall, of between £100 and £300 per year.**

15. To consider the following motion, notice of which has been duly given by **Councillors Murphy, Gill, Flint and Elson**

**Funding Children's Hospice Care for Life-Limited and Life-Threatened Children in Walsall**

**Background:**

Acorns Children's Hospice provides essential care and support for children with life-limiting and life-threatening conditions, as well as their families, in Walsall. This care includes respite, end-of-life care, and bereavement support, among other critical services. However, Acorns is facing significant financial challenges due to rising costs and stagnant local NHS funding, which has not increased since 2021/22. Currently, Acorns relies on fundraising, donations, and profits from charity shops for two-thirds of its income.

Without sustainable funding, Acorns may be forced to reduce services or turn away children for the first time in its 36-year history, which would have a devastating impact on local families who depend on their support.

**Motion:**

This Council notes that:

1. Acorns Children's Hospice is a vital resource for children with life-limiting conditions and their families in our constituency.
2. The Children's Hospice Grant, a ringfenced NHS fund, is crucial for the continued operation of children's hospices like Acorns, enabling them to provide essential services.
3. There has been no increase in local NHS funding for children's hospices since 2021/22, despite rising operational costs, which has led to increased reliance on external fundraising efforts.
4. The current Children's Hospice Grant is only guaranteed until 2024/25, leaving future funding uncertain.

This Council believes that:

1. The UK government must ensure equitable and sustainable long-term funding for children's hospices, including Acorns, to safeguard the essential services they provide to local families.
2. Maintaining and protecting the Children's Hospice Grant as a centrally distributed, ringfenced grant is critical to ensuring that children's hospices can continue to support the health and well-being of life-limited and life-threatened children.

This Council resolves to:

1. Support the campaign led by Acorns Children's Hospice, calling on the UK government to:
  - Protect and maintain the Children's Hospice Grant as a directly distributed, ringfenced grant.
  - Guarantee the Children's Hospice Grant for at least five years.
  - Increase the Grant annually by the rate of inflation.
2. Write to the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, urging the government to commit to the above actions to secure the future of Acorns and other children's hospices.
3. Engage with local MPs and stakeholders to advocate for the continuation and enhancement of funding for children's hospices.
4. Raise awareness within our community about the importance of Acorns Children's Hospice and encourage local support and engagement with their fundraising efforts.

**Action:**

The Council requests that the Leader of the Council writes to the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care and local MPs, expressing this Council's support for the campaign led by Acorns Children's Hospice, and urging them to take immediate steps to secure sustainable funding for these vital services.