

# Review of Achievements 2020 – 2021



Walsall Council





## Introduction

The 2020-21 year has been one of the most challenging for individuals, communities and businesses as the COVID-19 pandemic dominated what people could and couldn't do and what support was needed. The Council had to adapt and review services after every Government announcement to ensure accurate information was shared with all customers and there was clarity regarding the support available and how it could be accessed.

The COVID-19 pandemic presented an additional challenge to those all councils already face. For example national austerity measures, the international challenge of climate change and the practical implications and opportunities of leaving the European Union whilst continuing to focus on delivering our Aim that "inequalities are reduced and all potential maximised".

The ongoing nature of the pandemic, with the long term impact unknown, gave rise to the review of our plans in readiness to 'reset' services. This review included a resident survey that considered residents experience of COVID-19 and their wellbeing. The survey responses provide a valuable insight into the impact of COVID-19 on various aspects of people's lives and also their concerns and priorities for the future. Cabinet will receive a report in June 2021 on this 'reset' work which will be informed by the findings from the resident survey. This report will highlight how the council will continue to respond to the impact of the pandemic and ensure we continue to use our resources efficiently in the service of all customers and communities.

As referenced in the 2019-2020 Review of Achievements we are not yet able to fully assess or understand the full impact of the pandemic on our communities and local economy. In the context of our aim and priorities this report provides some insight into what has been delivered during 2020-21 and, for clarity, separates out those achievements that specifically relate to our response to the pandemic. It is impossible for a document to adequately reflect the significant contribution of individuals and communities in supporting the most vulnerable. The resilience of communities in Walsall has been a huge part of how those most in need of support have been, and continue to be helped. Our Resilient Communities approach and work with partners in public, private and voluntary sector has enabled the timely matching of resource and capacity to need. This provides a strong foundation for our ongoing response to COVID-19 and to achieving our Aim.





### Outcomes for 2020-21

1. Creating an environment where business invests and everyone who wants a job can access one.
2. Education, training and skills enable people to fulfil their personal development.

A vibrant mixed economy that nurtures business growth, attracts businesses to locate here and supports local people fulfil their employment potential is vital to the delivery of our aim that inequalities are reduced and all potential is maximised. Having a great transport infrastructure is key to this as is working in partnership at the local, regional and national level.

### Key Achievements during 2020/2021 include:

- ✓ We have worked closely with rail operators to progress the reopening of the Walsall to Wolverhampton line including new stations in Willenhall and Darlaston with planning consent granted by the council for both stations in October 2020. Similar work is also underway – although at an earlier stage – to extend train services from Birmingham New Street through Walsall to a proposed new station at Aldridge.
- ✓ Commenced the main construction phase of the £78m major highway improvement scheme at M6 Junction 10 which will improve the infrastructure of the borough including new intelligent traffic signal installations along A454 and A4148.
- ✓ Secured £3.2m of additional funding from the Department for Transport to improve public transport routes across Walsall's unclassified highway network. The funding has been used to successfully deliver 14 carriageway and footway resurfacing schemes over a 12 month period to improve running surfaces for buses and improve footways that connect pedestrians to these routes.
- ✓ Commenced preparation of the Willenhall Masterplan with a focus on housing delivery as part of the Walsall to Wolverhampton Growth Corridor and building on the opportunity for greater levels of investment, presented by the new rail station in Willenhall following the reopening of the Walsall to Wolverhampton rail line to passengers.
- ✓ Completed Hatherton Street Phase 2, with the benefit of £800k grant funding from the Black Country Local Enterprise Partnership (BC LEP), providing 1,526sqm new office floor space in Walsall Town Centre and is another successful development within the ring road corridor known as the Walsall Gigaport.
- ✓ Supported the successful award of £11.4m of Future High Streets Fund grant to help deliver our ambitions for our town, focused on the Prominent Rail Station and Connected Hubs elements of the Masterplan.

- ✓ Delivered over £65k in funding through the AIM for Gold business support programme, with a further £55k in the immediate pipeline, ensuring that Walsall businesses can invest in the capital equipment that they need to improve productivity, efficiency and boost order books.
- ✓ Successfully secured £750k each for both Bloxwich and Walsall to deliver a programme of accelerated activity as part of the Town Deal portfolio. Activities included transport, public realm and green space improvements amongst others. This has been followed by the submission of Town Deal Investment Plans for both areas that include projects to support economic growth, skills and regeneration, which, if approved, will bring a further £50m into the two towns (£25m each) over a five year period. If secured this will support the development of local business, education and training facilities as well as improving transport infrastructure and encouraging more Active Travel opportunities.
- ✓ Trial of a number of new 'School Streets' across the Walsall borough, which provide safer walking and cycling routes for school pupils. School Streets involve closing roads near local schools to motorised traffic, at certain times of the day, to encourage Active Travel (walking and cycling).
- ✓ Agreed with all Black Country local authorities a joint ULEV (Ultra Low Emission Vehicle Strategy) strategy which sets targets across the Black Country over the next 10 years including for the installation of 490 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.
- ✓ Planning application submitted for the remediation and redevelopment of the Phoenix 10 site. The £100m employment regeneration project, including multi-million pound public sector investment, will deliver up to 620,000sqft employment floor space and 1,100 new jobs once completed. This is one of the most significant employment opportunities in the West Midlands and is being led by the Council and Homes England with support from West Midlands Combined Authority (WMCA) and BC LEP.
- ✓ As the single accountable body for the BC LEP, successfully administering a cumulative estimated £421m of funding across the Black Country, with in excess of £100m supporting regeneration activities and transport improvements that benefited the borough.
- ✓ Significantly improved communications and collaborative working with key strategic partners, including the Black Country Growth Hub, Black Country Chamber of Commerce, Federation of Small Businesses, other local membership organisations and at the operational level, our neighbouring Black Country local authorities. This has allowed us to share best practice with public sector colleagues and ensure fluid and efficient communication with private sector organisations and their respective membership bases. These kind of improved relationships mean that Walsall businesses get the support they need to navigate the world of local business support.
- ✓ Secured £1.5m European Union funding to deliver the Black Country Community Grants Programme and through the first round 44 grants were offered to Walsall community and voluntary sector (CVS) groups. This totalled over £579k of support that directly benefited 505 local residents to undertake activities to move them closer to achieving their economic goals.

- ✓ Working closely with local employment support services including IMPACT, Walsall Works, Fit4Work and the Job Centre, public health have helped to embed health and wellbeing into these services and to enable their clients to get support to address health barriers. Work included incorporating health and wellbeing conversations as part of discussions with clients.
- ✓ Through the Walsall Works programme, 414 people were supported into employment, training and apprenticeships, with 892 new clients registering for employability support since the start of the pandemic. The number of businesses committing to supporting local people to access jobs and training rising to 1,100.
- ✓ BC Impact continues to support 16-29 years old, with the programme engaging with 255 young unemployed and 819 inactive participants during 2020, focussing on vulnerable groups such as those with disabilities or special education needs, care leavers, ex-offenders, lone parents, teenage mums and homeless people.
- ✓ The Employment Growth Team has continued its outreach work and developed its work with high street businesses and retailers. This work has attracted the attention and support from Lord Wei and the team continues to map business activity to understand the longer term impact of COVID-19 to inform how they can best help and support the future town centre.
- ✓ Successfully delivered a virtual transport and logistics event with 27 attendees, focussing on the M6 Junction 10 project. The session saw key presentations from Highways England and John Sisk and Son, updating local hauliers and logistics firms on the progress of the project, how to stay up to date with key information and how to plan for potential disruption.
- ✓ Reengaged with a number of strategic Walsall businesses and raised awareness on how Walsall Council can help support businesses in the area to grow. This programme of important reengagement with the borough's larger businesses runs alongside our engagement with Walsall's foreign-owned firms, ensuring that we are talking to businesses in our key sectors about how their local authority can help assist them.
- ✓ Public health have continued to create a healthy environment supporting work on reviewing alcohol licencing, planning applications, making the town centre the healthiest high street and further embedding the consideration of health and wellbeing in all decisions the council makes.
- ✓ Health Chats training has been offered to internal and external partners for those having health and wellbeing conversations. This included signposting to health and wellbeing services as well as providing information and resources to inform their wider communications with both clients and staff. In addition, support was given to businesses signed up to the WMCA 'Thrive at Work' accreditation scheme.

**Specific achievements as part of our response to COVID-19 include:**

- ✓ Supported the council's interaction with businesses in response to the impact of COVID-19, including delivery of grants to businesses, business rates reliefs and other supplier support such as faster / immediate payment during the first lockdown period. In all delivered over £97m in financial support to Walsall businesses that included issuing 11,441 grants to businesses totalling £68.9m.
- ✓ Employment support schemes shifted the focus of support from face to face to virtual having delivered 12 roadshows and jobs fairs using electronic communication channels. The focus of events aligned with the growth in opportunities in health, retail and distribution sectors that arose as a response to coronavirus.
- ✓ Assisted 435 businesses in the borough on a range of issues, from COVID-19 support, to International Trade support, Access to Finance, and searching for new premises. Ensuring that businesses understand the support that is available to them, helped safeguard jobs and provide growth opportunities in businesses who had no idea that they are eligible for support.
- ✓ Held four crucial information sharing events, including successfully starting up a business, how to ensure your premises is COVID-19 secure and a transport event focused on M6 J10, with 100+ attendees. Events such as this are perfect for gathering business feedback and intelligence, ensuring a two way conversation; Walsall Council sharing information to help businesses maintain smooth operations and Walsall businesses telling us what conditions they need to grow.
- ✓ The public health commissioning of a Workplace Health programme to engage widely with businesses across Walsall applying different methods of engagement in order to deliver meaningful interventions and to support businesses and the wellbeing of their staff during the COVID-19 pandemic.
- ✓ Led on the primary business communication for Operation Eagle. Contacted 250+ businesses across Phase One and Two, to ensure that they were aware of the South African variant surge testing, why the Council was carrying out this work and most importantly, how they could effectively and efficiently ensure that their staff were tested and remained safe to work. Worked alongside colleagues from Public Health to ensure that tests were delivered and collected as quickly as possible.



**Have increased independence, improved health and can positively contribute to their communities.**

**Outcomes for 2020-21**

- 3. People live a good quality of life and feel that they belong.
- 4. People know what makes them healthy and they are encouraged to get support when they need it.

Working with residents to enable them to have greater independence and choices regarding their personal health and wellbeing is of key importance to people having a good quality of life and feeling they belong. Responsibility for the health and wellbeing of people is shared across a number of key partners such as the Clinical Commissioning Group (CCG), Walsall Healthcare NHS trust and agencies such as Public Health England and the Care Quality Commission (CQC).

**Key Achievements during 2020/2021 include:**

- ✓ Supported the council's programme of benefit review and maximisation for social care clients, which aimed to ensure the people are aware of and receiving the full range of benefits they are entitled to.
- ✓ Implemented a risk enablement toolkit in April 2020 that enables people to manage their own risks wherever possible. Through having open and honest discussions with individuals to identify possible options and the risks and benefits of each option from their perspective. The approach also supports our strengths based practice approach which focuses on the abilities of the client.
- ✓ Making Safeguarding Personal continues to be embedded in practice. This is an approach that is about having conversations with people about how we might respond in safeguarding situations in a way that enhances involvement, choice and control, as well as improving quality of life, wellbeing and safety, with a key focus on understanding and identifying what an adult wants to achieve and their outcomes.
- ✓ The One You Walsall's Healthy Lifestyle Service have received approx. 4,000 referrals and evaluation has shown a 78% increase in scores for mental wellbeing (WHO-5) for those that completed the support programme.
- ✓ The One You Walsall's Healthy Lifestyle Service also made over 2,000 wellbeing calls to service users, particularly targeting those who are most vulnerable and were able to signpost to appropriate support, for example to Making Connections Walsall and Talking Therapies.



- ✓ The integrated drug and alcohol service has, working in partnership with GPs and pharmacists, maintained the clinical support to the 1,600 individuals who require treatment to address their addiction. They continue to work closely with public health and children's services to support and safeguard vulnerable families and pregnant women offering a full range of harm reduction, structured and clinical services.
- ✓ 57 residents classified as 'having had or being at risk of having a fall' were assisted to stay on their feet by completing a 12 week community based Falls Prevention intervention programme in a COVID-19 safe environment.
- ✓ The Health Switch takeaway awards that promote and provide healthy options for customers has been expanded to include mobile traders and soft play facilities.
- ✓ Both Black Country IMPACT and Walsall Works provide employment support to high volumes of people with a health barrier or learning difficulty, including poor mental health (32%), other medical or physical disability (23%), dyslexia or dyspraxia (14%), autism spectrum disorder (11%) or moderate learning difficulty (7%).
- ✓ Developed a single point of contact and pathway for all Adult Safeguarding concerns to be raised and screened. This provides a clear point of referral for agencies, partners and the community, whilst supporting effective and robust decision making and advice provision for where contacts are received.
- ✓ A strategic aim of Making Connections Walsall (MCW) was to develop the provider sector. The MCW community hubs have grown in knowledge and confidence and developed links with a wide range of charities, services and wider organisations. There has been praise for their knowledge of local services. Alongside this, the funding invested in grass-roots organisations has provided new activities for clients and the wider community. MCW's approach has fostered genuine partnerships, including with statutory services.
- ✓ When national restrictions permitted we safely opened the doors of the council's four leisure facilities to over 200,000 visitors despite operating restrictions due to the pandemic. During difficult times this provided a vital service in helping residents to remain physically active as well as to gain a sense of community belonging and improve mental wellbeing.
- ✓ Launched online membership joining and an online book and pay system to make sport and leisure services easier for residents to access and ensure the necessary operating restrictions were in place and customers didn't make unnecessary trips.
- ✓ Implemented contactless card payments across the borough's four leisure centres.
- ✓ Extended existing Bikeability cycle training programmes with introduction of Bikeability Family, Bikeability Adult and Bikeability Plus, all aimed at improving safety and encouraging people to become more active and healthy.
- ✓ Provided free swimming in any public sessions for children paying monthly for swimming lessons with our Walsall Swim Academy to encourage increased participation and practising of this potentially life-saving skill.

**Specific achievements as part of our response to COVID-19 include:**

- ✓ Distributed 26,631 isolation and emergency hardship payments totalling £1.736m.
- ✓ A number of teams including leisure services and cleaning and caretaking are working outside of their normal practices to support the delivery of food, the distribution of PPE and the creation and maintenance of vaccination and Lateral Flow Centres.
- ✓ Sport and Leisure Services extended their use of social media channels to continue to support residents during times of closure and restricted access with over 130,000 social media engagements.
- ✓ Key to our resilient communities approach is Making Connections Walsall and our community hubs. They have aided the delivery of over 6,000 food parcels to those most vulnerable and helped over 2,000 people with shopping. In addition a further 5,500 befriending requests have been responded to.
- ✓ We extended our on-line information and resources to support those coping with isolation or remote learning to support mental wellbeing.
- ✓ Cabinet have approved an action plan to address the short, medium and long-term mental wellbeing impacts of the pandemic. A key priority being to ensure the larger statutory and voluntary organisations worked together in planning recovery to optimise their efforts. A mental health and wellbeing group has been set up with partner agencies across the health and social care economy and the voluntary sector. Work has commenced on aligning support at local level for residents experiencing anxiety, ensuring access to financial support and strengthening the voluntary sector. Training in mental health first aid has been delivered to over 300 people (including volunteers, housing, fire officers, and the self-employed). Specific training for 150 teaching staff across the borough was also completed.
- ✓ Following a generous donation from Barhale and West Bromwich Building Society we have purchased and issued computer tablets to all care homes in the borough to enable virtual conversations between residents and carers / family members. The tablets have also been utilised to provide games and interactive activities which have been invaluable to those residents that have dementia.
- ✓ Staff whose substantive roles couldn't be delivered because of lockdown restrictions have been utilised to coordinate the supply and distribution of Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) through a central 24/7 Hub at Goscote, servicing over 164 Care Providers in the borough. An enhanced offer of weekly PPE drops to residential and nursing homes was introduced mid-March. The range of support has been expanded to sourcing and distribution of additional sundry items to support every aspect of infection prevention and control.
- ✓ As part of our ongoing COVID-19 response we continue to support our Adult Social Care market when in crisis by pooling our resources with health partners and the voluntary sector to provide the necessary care or support to ensure continuity of service by redeploying our staff to the external care sector.



### Internal Focus

**All council services are efficient and effective.**

### Outcomes for 2020-21

5. Internal services delivery quality and adapt to meet the needs of customer facing services.
6. Services and efficient and deliver value for money

Putting the customer first is one of our guiding principles and so ensuring all services are aligned to meeting the needs of customer is key to delivering our vision. Resilient, modern services and service delivery models that can adapt to changing needs of communities and residents are key to ensuring all council services are efficient and effective. Significantly our ambitious Walsall Proud Programme is transforming the way we work to:

- Improve outcomes and customer experience
- Improve employee satisfaction and engagement
- Improve service efficiency and performance.

### Key achievements during 2020/2021 include:

- ✓ Attracting additional funding in excess of £3m through developing detailed financial modelling for bids to set up Family Drugs and Alcohol Court (FDAC) and Strengthening Families, Protecting Children (SFPC) initiatives.
- ✓ Strengthening our Apprenticeship Programme with currently 394 staff (Corporate – 226, Schools – 168) accessing our Apprenticeship Levy, spent on improving the skills / qualifications of the workforce, ensuring they are fit for the future. In addition the Council had 2 apprentices that reached the national Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic (BAME) Apprenticeship Awards 2020 of which one was declared the overall winner.
- ✓ Delivered a balanced budget for 2020/21 and 2021/22 to address financial pressures and the impact of the pandemic whilst providing significant service revenue and capital investment and an appropriate level of reserves.
- ✓ Production of the annual Statement of Accounts, which, whilst the COVID-19 pandemic has seen the national extension of the deadline for completion of the draft accounts were still produced by the original deadline of the end of May, and following the completion of external audit has received an unqualified opinion.
- ✓ Successfully implemented the Finance and HR modules of the council's new integrated core business system - One Source. Good progress is being made regarding the remaining Payroll and Procurement modules. This system has expanded electronic processing and replaced a number of standalone systems with a single, more efficient cloud based system.



- ✓ Centralised the Corporate Landlord Services (CLS) and brought together the functions of Estates and Assets, Hard and Soft Facilities Management, Commissioning, and Office Moves to provide wider service delivery in a more efficient way.
- ✓ Utilised the reduced occupancy of buildings to progress planned essential statutory and compliance maintenance work to ensure safe working environments (for example electrical rewiring) and to implement COVID-19 safe occupancy and, where needed, adaptations. For example repurposing current use of First Stop Shop to support Registrars service clearing a back log of cases created by national measures during the first lockdown.
- ✓ Refreshed various employee policies, procedures and frequently asked questions notes to support managers and staff in the delivery of services in an adapted way that considered individual wellbeing as part of the increased remote working in many areas.
- ✓ There have been a number of service improvements and efficiencies across a variety of areas as part of continuous improvement. For example a review of processing statutory complaints between corporate and customer facing teams, the strengthening of emergency planning by merging resources and teams and the embedding of new technologies such as Office 365 to improve service delivery and make efficiency savings.
- ✓ The use of technology has delivered many efficiencies, for example the use of MS Teams for online meetings and video calls has greatly reduced the need for elected members and staff to travel, saving both time and travel expenses.
- ✓ Increased the number of services accessible to customers 24 hours a day via our on-line customer platform with additional functionality, enabling customers to interact with the council when convenient to them, making it simpler for customers to resolve their queries.
- ✓ Progressed the development of a new digital design for our website that complies with government standards and will provide customers with clear access to service information.
- ✓ Procured a partner to develop a new Customer Relationship Management system to help facilitate a 'whole council' approach to customer engagement.
- ✓ Introduced a new service channel management system into key frontline services to improve the management of customer contacts to improve the customer's experience.
- ✓ Improved our efficiency in dealing with housing benefit applications, processing these quicker than the national average (6.4 days compared to 17 days nationally) meaning residents are less likely to fall into rent arrears. Changes in entitlement to housing benefit are also managed quicker than the national average.

### Specific achievements as part of our response to COVID-19 include:

- ✓ Our investment and approach to enabling technology meant we were able to maintain service delivery whilst implementing organisation wide remote working to minimise travel and significantly reduce the spread of coronavirus.
- ✓ Our resilient communities approach has led to Making Connections Walsall and community hubs playing a key role in the support of the most vulnerable with the co-ordination of food parcels, assistance with shopping and befriending services via a volunteer network that has grown and strengthened throughout the pandemic.
- ✓ We moved swiftly to implement changes to service delivery as part of the national response to the pandemic. As Government restrictions changed we protected our staff and service users by finding alternative locations for services, such as expansion of space for Registrars to overcome backlogs of birth registrations due to Government directives to support the initial 'lockdown' and one team managing all physical correspondence in and out of the building. These measures helped contain the risk of the virus spreading.
- ✓ Promotion and support for online services to support residents during COVID-19 restrictions:
  - Making it easier for people to claim Housing Benefit and/or Council Tax Reduction with 85% of applications now received on-line, speeding up the process.
  - Online functionality for Council Tax, Business Rates and Benefits has increased the opportunities for customers to interact with the council when convenient to them. This has seen a 34% increase in the last six months in the use of online facilities.
  - £14.3m support administered via Council Tax Reduction, an increase of 5.98% from previous years due to the ongoing pandemic.
- ✓ Processed over £236k in Test and Trace Support payments to support residents experiencing financial difficulties due to COVID-19.
- ✓ Our Corporate Communications team developed and regularly published a COVID-19 resident's newsletter which has an average readership of 25,000 residents.
- ✓ Administered the payment of £3.45m of support provided through COVID-19 hardship payments for residents receiving the Council Tax Reduction Scheme.
- ✓ Supported the council's response to the COVID-19 pandemic by monitoring the financial impact and cost to the authority, identification of financial support available to it and to local residents and businesses, and regular reporting throughout the year of the overall financial impact of COVID-19 to both strategic management and to Cabinet. Whilst connected to our response to the pandemic this has supported all operational activity and guided the authority to effectively plan and manage resources.
- ✓ Implemented the roll out of digital committee meetings to maintain openness and transparency in decision making. Meetings are streamlined live via YouTube and also available as recordings, increasing access to local democracy.

- ✓ Our internal Schools Consultancy and Health and Safety Teams have supported Schools, working closely with Children's Services deciphering Government advice on the pandemic in relation to schools and feeding into the daily updates that have been sent out to schools. The delivery has been carried out online and where needed in socially distanced meetings including ensuring health and safety risk assessments are complete and adhered to.
- ✓ Our Public Health team set up a seven days a week 8am to 8pm COVID-19 helpline to support businesses, organisations and schools as well as providing proactive engagement with Care Homes. Since April 2020 over 4,500 enquiries have been managed.
- ✓ Extended, developed and extensively promoted our Mental Health First Aiders and Employee Assistance Programme to provide mental health support to employees experiencing a mental health episode, particularly important during 2020 as a consequence of the worldwide pandemic.
- ✓ Continued to utilise tools introduced as part of our Walsall Proud Programme such as Connected Working and huddle boards to maintain team morale and health and wellbeing during COVID-19 restrictions.
- ✓ Having up to date and accurate information regarding the pandemic has been essential to how the council has been able to support residents, communities and businesses. The Public Health Intelligence Team have been instrumental in monitoring the rapidly changing situation and in providing detailed information to support all decision makers, all communications and the Local Outbreak Engagement Board.
- ✓ Our Corporate Communications team quickly created and continue to maintain more than 20 new external COVID-19 webpages providing a centralised information hub for residents, communities and businesses regarding all activity and support relating to the pandemic. The team continue to collaborate with Walsall for All to ensure this information is accessible in translated and accessible formats so to widen the reach.



**Children**

**Have the best possible start  
and are safe from harm, happy,  
healthy and learning well.**

**Outcomes for 2020-21**

7. Children thrive emotionally, physically, mentally and feel they are achieving their potential.
8. Children grow up in connected communities and feel safe everywhere.

Children that have the best start in life, are safe from harm, happy, healthy and learning well are more likely to achieve their potential and we are committed to providing opportunities for children to aspire and achieve. Our Walsall Right 4 Children transformation programme has been fundamental in supporting children and families and in developing supportive environments.

**Key achievements during 2020/2021 include:**

- ✓ Made significant progress in implementing the actions outlined in our Walsall Written Statement of Action which outlines how services for children and young people with Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND) will be improved, including clearing a backlog of over 340 assessments for Education Health and Care Plans.
- ✓ Developed our Inclusion, SEND and Accessibility Strategies as the blueprint of our plans to secure the best opportunities for all children and young people in Walsall and our vision for inclusion across the whole borough. We are also working with stakeholders to co-produce Walsall Right 4 SEND, a comprehensive guidance document for schools, which provides clear expectations for the support we expect them to provide for children with special educational needs and disabilities to ensure all children receive the right support at the right time, so that children have their needs met, achieve good outcomes and are prepared for adulthood.
- ✓ Continued to provide our Keep in Touch programme, established in 2017, to provide enriching activities, group work sessions and parenting workshops to vulnerable children and families over the summer. The programme was developed in consultation with 200 children and young people (CYP) aged 6 to 18. This year 156 sessions were delivered to 710 children, including sessions for families with children eligible for free school meals including Cooking and Eat Sessions and Family Brunch Clubs.

- ✓ Provided 'Things to do, Delivered to you' Activity Packs to an extended group of families. Along with partners, we secured a range of funding to deliver a variety of activity packs to 336 CYP across the borough which aimed to encourage positive activities, reduce vulnerabilities and risk of exploitation and crime. Delivery of the pack included an initial home visit and a follow up telephone call as a 'check in' over the summer period to discuss the activities, offer of additional support and raise concerns. The packs, developed with children and young people included activities such as:
  - Cooking together as a family
  - Pamper packs promoting health & wellbeing and self esteem
  - Craft packs, encouraging family time together as well as an opportunity for children to express themselves, what they are happy about, what they are proud of or what they are worried about
  - Movie 'night in with the family'
- ✓ Continued to implement and strengthen our 'Right Help, Right Time' guidance with staff and partners to ensure that children and families receive the appropriate level of support and intervention when it is needed. This has resulted in more families being supported through universal and Early Help services and fewer families receiving referrals into statutory services.
- ✓ Launched our Family Safeguarding model as part of the Department for Education Strengthening Families, Protecting Children programme. The model focusses on supporting the whole family where children are at risk and there are issues of domestic abuse, mental health or substance misuse. As at the end of January 174 children are being supported through the programme.
- ✓ Launched our Family Drug and Alcohol Court (FDAC) programme in partnership with Dudley and Sandwell which will support 32 families each year over the next three years. The programme is supported by public health and commissioned integrated drug and alcohol services and works with parents who have alcohol or substance misuse issues, which are affecting their ability to provide good enough parenting for their children. It provides support through a range of holistic wrap around support from a multidisciplinary team and regular reviews with judges to support families and track their progress across a 26 week programme.
- ✓ Partnered with First Class Legacy to address the overrepresentation of black, Asian and ethnic minority young people in the Youth Justice System. Following an in depth disproportionality needs analysis, the work has focussed on ensuring that families who have experienced the justice system are consulted with and listened to and this will feed into plans to address the issues identified over the next 12 months.
- ✓ Robustly monitored and reported throughout the year on the Education capital programme of around £40m to ensure value for money is achieved, provide reassurance that funds are spent in line with grant conditions to the Department for Education and capital projects are managed within the budgets available.
- ✓ Monitoring, reporting on and implementing the full spend of the £164m Dedicated Schools Grant ensuring the conditions of the grant were met, giving children in Walsall access to suitable education and working to provide schools with an accurate estimate of future year allocations to allow them to plan for the future.

- ✓ Our commissioned 0-19 healthy child providers (health visiting and school nursing teams) adapted their ways of working including offering digital lessons to Walsall schools and digital appointments so to continue to support children and families. This included a series of on-line sessions for parents and carers including behaviour support, self-esteem and confidence building and transition from primary to secondary school.
- ✓ The partnership campaign with Active Black Country and the other Black Country local authorities, prioritising the wellbeing of all young people, asks schools to commit to provide all pupils with access to one hour of wellbeing and physical activity each day, building confidence and strengthening support to young people. In total 9 books have now been published and Public Health England recently recognised this work as good practice during the pandemic.
- ✓ The Food for Life programme now has 82 schools enrolled in their programme, 26 of whom have achieved a Food for Life award. This demonstrates that they are providing healthier meals and food education. Walsall Council catering continued their commitment to serving quality healthy food using ethically sourced food seeing, for a second year, a 'Food for Life Served Here' bronze award.
- ✓ A 'Growing Up in Walsall' study listening to the children and young people of Walsall and obtaining their views about what it is like growing up in the borough, providing fine examples of how we can engage with the people of Walsall and gain their trust and confidence to open up. This can help us better identify their needs in the long term and will inform a new long-term strategy 'Best Start for Life'.

#### **Specific achievements as part of our response to COVID-19 include:**

- ✓ Provided significant support to children and families in Walsall throughout the COVID-19 pandemic including:
  - Delivering, in partnership with schools, over 4,500 digital devices including laptops, tablets, iPads and wireless dongles to disadvantaged and vulnerable children to support home learning.
  - Delivered over 50 online parenting support interactive sessions with a follow up Q&A session to further support parents/carers. All resources continue to be available both on line and converted to picture format for those without internet access.
  - Held virtual coffee mornings for parents and carers with children who have additional needs, providing opportunities for support and to share information.
  - Ensured that families who were being supported by social care received regular contacts from a social worker, over and above statutory requirements so that additional support could be offered where needed including shopping and collection of prescriptions.
  - At the start of the first lockdown we worked across children's services to understand and identify children who were most vulnerable. These children continued to receive face to face visits where possible and have been contacted most frequently throughout the pandemic.



- We have utilised technology to ensure that we have been able to continue to work directly with children during lockdown and workers have implemented creative approaches including:
  - ‘My Covid’ time capsules to help children tell their story of the pandemic.
  - Reading story books to children, and creating their own cartoon strips and stories.
  - Going on socially distant walks with children, playing games outdoors where they can talk openly.
  - Using messaging games and talking via messaging so children and young people can talk openly.
  - Adapting communication for disabled children.
- Supported care leavers by organising shopping deliveries, going on socially distanced walks and holding virtual sessions including cook-a-longs and ‘how to assemble flat pack furniture’.
- ✓ Provided significant support to schools and staff in Walsall throughout the Covid-19 pandemic including:
  - A focus on staff welfare has been key and a range of approaches have been used to support staff and keep them safe including:
    - Shared guidance and policies.
    - Recognition of individual support needs and agile working with regular check in sessions.
    - Staff receive a weekly briefing with service changes, key updates, resources, and good news stories so communication all comes from one place where possible.
    - Moved child protection conferences and Looked after Children reviews to a virtual setting at the start of the pandemic, later moving to a hybrid model where families were onsite with the conference chairperson or reviewing officer so that support could be provided, with other professionals contributing virtually.
    - Providing a number of opportunities, via virtual live sessions and webinars to connect, reflect and plan across a range of organisations, teams, and professionals. All of our webinars have been recorded and are now available as an online learning resource on the Safeguarding Partnership website.
  - Implemented weekly virtual meetings with Walsall teachers to provide support, advice and guidance and to support schools in their delivery of home learning.
- ✓ Worked with schools and education providers to identify additional financial support available to them in response to COVID-19.
- ✓ Assisted schools to remain open with services working throughout the pandemic to ensure that our schools are accessible and thoroughly cleaned and that children’s meals are catered for either by supplying a cooked meal, packed lunch or a food parcel.

- ✓ Proactively raised awareness of free school meals during COVID-19, and 647 additional children can now receive free school meals.
- ✓ 7,624 additional free school meals voucher cheques have been issued through our own local scheme providing £114k of support to households since the implementation of the first national lockdown in March 2020.
- ✓ 23,815 children have been supported in the borough through COVID-19 Winter payments.
- ✓ Due to COVID-19 restrictions the council has introduced 'school street' restrictions to prohibit access to non-essential vehicles on roads immediately outside a school entrance. In force during the start and finishing times of each school the restrictions help manage social distancing requirements as well as improving road safety and children's health by encouraging sustainable modes of transport for the school run. Restrictions were introduced across six sites and extensions to other locations are planned for 2021.
- ✓ The health protection team has supported schools and early years' settings throughout the pandemic, to reduce the impact and numbers of COVID-19 outbreaks. This has developed closer working arrangements between the team and schools, which led to the team being awarded a 'Walsall Right 4 Children' award.



**Communities**

**Are prospering and resilient with all housing needs met in safe and healthy places that build a strong sense of belonging and cohesion.**

**Outcomes for 2020-21**

- 9. Housing meeting all people's needs, is affordable, safe and warm.
- 10. People are proud of their vibrant town, districts and communities.

Our varied, strong and vibrant communities are the basis of why Walsall is the place it is and we are committed to working with these communities to continue to build a strong sense of belonging and cohesion.

**Key Achievements during 2020/2021 include:**

- ✓ In support of the provision of affordable, safe and warm homes a variety of services have been delivered including:
  - Worked with energy partners to help over 250 households with insulation and heating works at an estimated value of £585k.
  - Worked with private sector landlords to ensure that over 200 homes now have energy performance certificates (EPCs), and over 300 EPCs have been renewed, meaning the tenants homes are more energy efficient, saving them money on heating costs.
  - Providing first time gas central heating for homes previously not on the gas network with a total of 116 households being provided with full gas central heating.
  - Issued 25 statutory enforcement notices to secure improvements to private tenants homes.
- ✓ Working in partnership with the borough’s largest social housing provider, Walsall Housing Group (whg), to highlight to their tenants the need for the annual gas safety inspections. This has included being directly involved in 109 cases where we have helped whg resolve access issues (including where necessary securing warrants for entry) to ensure gas supplies and appliances are safe.
- ✓ Inspected 14 ‘unregistered’ children’s homes occupied by 60+ children to ensure relevant housing safety standards were in place and assessed and issued 14 licences for houses in multiple occupation (HMO).
- ✓ A total of 557 disability facility grants (DFG) for adaptations were approved with an average cost of just under £5k and 568 grant schemes were completed with an average cost of just over £4k. The service, due to their continued success, were requested to present at a national DFG event.

- ✓ Worked with South Staffordshire Water who are helping DFG customers secure lower annual water bills through their direct funding, so far 268 households have switched to lower cost providers saving over £71k.
- ✓ Work has continued on a number of new housing development schemes across the borough, with multi-million pound investment secured from the WMCA and BC LEP. This includes strategic sites at Wards Keep, Primrose Lodge, Raleigh Street, Lockside, and Goscote Lane, which in total will deliver 1,195 new homes, including 270 affordable properties.
- ✓ We significantly reduced the use of bed and breakfast accommodation for families, from 23 to just 1 and have a higher than national rate of preventing people becoming homeless (37% of presentations).
- ✓ Our Outreach Team, Night Shelter and Housing First projects have resulted in the numbers of rough sleepers in Walsall reducing significantly from 26 in 2016 to 4 in 2020.
- ✓ Through our flagship Housing First programme we have helped 85 rough sleepers into their own homes, with ongoing support through our partner FryAccord. We are the only council in the region to have exceeded our target of 80.
- ✓ Developed and launched Crowdfund Walsall, an alternative local giving model for community projects in the borough. With a backdrop of an increasingly challenging financial position, crowdfunding provides the council with a unique and exciting opportunity to invest in new projects that are citizen-led and garner support from the community according to the value that they perceive the project to have.
- ✓ Commenced preparation of a Public Realm Investment Plan for Walsall Town Centre utilising an Accelerated Funding contribution secured from the Town Fund, which will build on the catalytic interventions highlighted through the Walsall Town Centre Masterplan.
- ✓ Four strategic local companies (Barhale Construction, Midcounties Co-operative, Lovell Partnerships and Starting Point) have achieved the Walsall Works Gold Partner Award for demonstrating leadership in creating innovative social value. We have worked in partnership with these major local employers to embed the values set out in the council's Social Value Charter in their day-to-day work, ensuring Walsall residents benefit from businesses that are actively supporting their local communities.
- ✓ Supported the complete overhaul of the kitchen facilities at Old Hall People's Partnership, a vital community hub that amongst other activity provides meals for the local elderly and vulnerable community residents.
- ✓ More than 4,000 people had their say on a wide range of issues including parks and open spaces, road safety schemes and the budget. Many consultations have also taken place with specific service user groups and with particular communities on issues that directly affect them.
- ✓ Secured nearly £250k of National Lottery Heritage Funding to preserve, enhance and celebrate Walsall's unique heritage. With a Walsall Council Heritage Working Group established aiming to develop heritage sector opportunities to tackle inequalities, improve environmental and economic indicators and build pride in the borough.



- ✓ Won the British Parking Association's Parking in the Community award for working directly with the DVLA, taking on devolved powers to enforce on untaxed vehicles parked on the highway. We work in partnership with Penham Excel to help rid Walsall highways of nuisance vehicles.
- ✓ Adapted our A\*STARS sustainable and safe travel programme by creating a bespoke 'A\*STARS at home' section of the website with links for students and parents to utilise whilst unable to attend school. This includes transition training / information for children starting school and transitioning to secondary school as well as daily lockdown exercise records for children to complete and virtual pedestrian training.
- ✓ Delivered a huge variety of traffic calming schemes in over 15 locations across the borough. This includes installing or upgrading zebra crossings, the introduction of speed cushions and vehicle activated speed signs and the introduction of average speed enforcement cameras on a number of 'A' roads around the borough.
- ✓ Our Walsall Community Litter Watch has gone from strength to strength and won the prestigious Keep Britain Tidy Network Award for Community Engagement. The number of volunteers continues to grow and in the last year almost 400 volunteer hours have supported a variety of clean-ups, collecting almost 1000 bags of litter. The growth in volunteering illustrates how proud and resilient individuals are and builds a sense of belonging.
- ✓ In addition to maintaining the collection of 105,000 bins per week of household waste and recycling, work on reducing the amount of contaminated recycle waste has progressed, which is both more cost effective and better for the environment.
- ✓ As part of a sponsored national campaign services have worked with volunteers to plant thousands of trees in aid of environment and climate change mitigation.
- ✓ Street cleansing and grass cutting have continued to help build pride in communities and district centres. In addition to the programmed maintenance teams have quickly responded to reports of fly-tipping and graffiti.
- ✓ Recognising the importance of parks and green spaces to communities and health and wellbeing we contributed to the Local Government Association (LGA) report on the impact of COVID-19 on our parks. As well as acknowledging the impact of the pandemic it was an opportunity to celebrate the way services and volunteers adapted their work to remain connected and committed to the protection and promotion of green spaces across the borough. Use of green spaces has significantly increased.
- ✓ We launched the 'Love Exploring' mobile phone application, a way to reach new audiences to encouraging people to use their local green spaces at the Arboretum, Willenhall Park and The Swannies. Dinosaurs, fairies and dancing skeletons for Halloween were used as discovery tools for people to find and explore their greenspaces. 3,500 people had downloaded the app by the end of October 2020.
- ✓ Four years in development the Black Country Geopark designation was approved by the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation. Having this designation of an international geopark will provide opportunities to promote tourism and to develop sustainable travel opportunities to connect communities across the Black Country.

- ✓ Attracted a substantial amount of external funding for green spaces across the borough. This ranges from the £180k Black Country Blue Network for investment in green infrastructure along waterways and linked greenspaces to the National Endowment for Science, Technology and the Arts (NESTA) funded Rethinking Parks project.
- ✓ Committed to investment of £260k to support the infrastructure of allotments across the borough, recognising their importance to local communities and the opportunities they provided for supporting community cohesion and resilience.
- ✓ Maintained Green Flag quality status for seven sites across the borough and developed management plans for three more sites ahead of the 2021 awards.
- ✓ Moved to online booking for tennis courts, despite various lockdown restrictions throughout the year and received over 6,000 bookings during times when restrictions were lifted. Whilst lockdown restrictions impacted on the number of sessions that could be held, when permitted a variety of walking sessions were delivered, everything from Nordic Walking to Health Walks.
- ✓ Developed and delivered site audits across a number of parks and greenspaces that considered the needs of people with disabilities so that new programmes and projects can be developed.
- ✓ Our Bereavement and Registration Services were significantly impacted by Government restrictions throughout the pandemic and by the increased demand that the pandemic created. Through adapting how services were delivered they were able to cope with increased demand and introduce a number of improvements including:
  - Issuing / receiving statutory, and non-statutory, paperwork for deaths and funerals electronically.
  - All payments are now taken remotely, either on line or over the phone by card.
  - Completing death registrations over the phone.
  - Families being able to book birth registration appointments online.
  - Upgrading facilities at Streetly Crematorium.
  - Improved the resilience of services with colleagues from other areas gaining their Cremator Operator's licence whilst deployed at Streetly Crematorium and being trained in the opening and closing of cemeteries.
- ✓ Quantifying the social value of Making Connections Walsall (MCW) shows that for every £1 invested in it by Public Health Walsall, the programme has generated a social return of £3.35m. The strength of the MCW infrastructure has been critical in connecting with and supporting the most vulnerable during the pandemic.
- ✓ Installed live web-cams at Household Waste and Recycling Centres (HWRC) to aid customers in their planning of visits and to try and minimise queueing impacting on traffic management.

### Specific achievements as part of our response to COVID-19 include:

- ✓ We have supported communities to ensure food deliveries are managed at our food store and food parcels were delivered across the borough to those in need and vulnerable. Also provided an 'on call' team to collect vital PPE from the Ministry of Defence at the NEC as required by the resilience team.
- ✓ The strengths of the MCW infrastructure has been demonstrated during the pandemic, connecting support services to the most vulnerable in the communities across Walsall. It has demonstrated how the statutory, private and community voluntary sectors, supported by a significant number of volunteers, can be a real asset to connect people together in support networks. The pandemic has placed MCW under tremendous demand with over 12,000 people being supported in a variety of ways.
- ✓ In October 2020, nearly 2,400 people responded to the COVID-19 residents' experience and wellbeing survey. This critical piece of research sought to understand how COVID-19 had impacted aspects of people's lives including health and wellbeing, employment and finances, as well as understand people's concerns and priorities for the future. The results of this survey have directly informed the council's COVID-19 reset and recovery plans and Corporate Plan 2021/22.
- ✓ Where possible Walsall Works have maintained face to face employability support, and in particular to vulnerable residents, from the town centre and community venues in each of the four locality areas.
- ✓ Developed a COVID-19 specific road safety campaign to encourage only necessary travel and promote a sharing of the road ethic between all road users to facilitate with social distancing as well as developing and delivering a 'Back to School' toolkit post lockdown for secondary and primary schools, promoting safer travel whilst social distancing, including guidance on the wearing of face coverings.
- ✓ Developed COVID-19 safe measures across a number of sites using signage to promote social distancing, providing hand sanitising stations and conducting regular risk assessments to protect the health and wellbeing of employees and customers. As an example the additional cleaning between services at the crematorium to reduce the risk of virus transmission
- ✓ When the lifting of national restrictions allowed we moved swiftly to 're-open' services in a way that ensured safety for customers and staff. Services ranged from birth registrations and marriages to active living centres and household waste recycling centres.
- ✓ To support the delivery of the ambitious regeneration plans set out in the Walsall Town Centre Masterplan, as the town centre seeks to recover, adapt and evolve as a result of the pandemic, the Future High Streets Fund will focus on the Prominent Rail Station and Connected Hubs masterplan interventions to drive long term growth.
- ✓ Delivering an "Everyone In" approach to supporting homeless individuals during the pandemic, resulting in all rough sleepers being offered temporary accommodation while they are supported by the council's housing homeless team in partnership with Accord Housing and Walsall Housing Group to offer permanent accommodation with ongoing support.

- ✓ Set-up the borough-wide network of Lateral Flow Test Centres in line with government guidance and expectations.
- ✓ Supported health colleagues to set up vaccination centres at Oak Park Active Living Centre, Bloxwich Active Living Centre and in the Saddlers Centre. The council continues to support the ongoing operation of these vaccination centres.









**Resources and Transformation**

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