

# **Walsall Council**

## **Equality Information & Objectives**

**March 2023**

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## Introduction

The Council takes its duty with regard to equality and diversity very seriously and we believe that we should:

- treat people fairly, justly and with respect in both service provision and employment;
- find ways to support those who are disadvantaged or excluded;
- promote inclusion and celebrate diversity.

We are supported in our commitment to equality through the Public Sector Equality Duty of the Equality Act 2010. The Act brings together all the legal requirements on equality that the private, public and voluntary sectors need to follow and places the following duties on Local Authorities:

- eliminate unlawful discrimination and harassment;
- promote equality of opportunity;
- promote good relations between persons of different backgrounds;
- encourage participation in public life for people of different backgrounds.

This report details our objectives and information on issues the people of Walsall and Walsall Council employees face. The information will be updated annually and the objectives reviewed at least every four years.

The Council's ambitions for the Borough are set out in the Corporate Plan [Our Council Plan 2022-2025 | Walsall Council](#).

Our Council Plan:

- sets out ambitions for Walsall Council and for the borough
- sets out the outcomes that we will achieve
- explains how we will measure our progress towards those outcomes
- outlines how we will match resources to the delivery of outcomes in 2022/23

The global Covid-19 pandemic has presented us with many challenges. To meet them, we have changed the way we work. We've built on our relationships with local and regional partners to get positive results for residents. As we have seen communities respond to the pandemic, we have also responded. Covid-19 has accelerated changes to the way we work, and the delivery of our promises.

We aim to reduce inequalities and make the most of potential. Together, we are committed to:

- developing a healthier, cleaner and safer borough
- enabling residents, communities and businesses to fulfil their potential and thrive.

## Equality Impact Assessments

We have a set Equality Impact Assessments (EqIAs) procedure for carrying out equality analysis: checking the legality of Council decisions in relation to the impact on people with certain characteristics protected by the Equality Act 2010. The process allows us to look at evidence and consult as to whether the service or policy is discriminatory (actual or perceived) against people with protected characteristics. The benefit of EqIAs is not simply achieving legal compliance, but a means to best practice and to delivering more effective, appropriate and inclusive policies and practices. Best Practices are examples of outstanding contributions to improving the lives of people in Walsall. They can;

- have a demonstrable and tangible impact on improving people's quality of life;
- be the result of effective partnerships between the public, private and civic sectors of society;
- be socially, culturally, economically and environmentally sustainable.

In all EqIAs, details are required to show how it meets the Public Sector Equality Duty requirements:

- How does the proposal help to eliminate unlawful discrimination, harassment, victimisation and any other conduct prohibited by the Equality Act?
- How does the proposal help to advance equality of opportunity between people who share a protected characteristic and people who do not share it?
- How does the proposal help to foster good relations between people who share a protected characteristic and people who do not share it?

EqIAs are carried out on:

- all reports with financial or policy decisions that go to Council Cabinet;
- budget setting when there may be an unbalanced effect on certain groups of people, and may be contrary to the statutory equality obligations;
- changes to services, procedures, policies and projects when there may be an unbalanced effect on certain groups of people;
- new services, procedures, policies and projects when there may be an unbalanced effect on certain groups of people.

View the EqIAs information at [Equality impact assessments | Walsall Council](#)

## Equality Objectives

Walsall Council set 5 Equality Objectives for the 2022/23 business year from the Equality Impact Assessments (EqIA's), research, consultation and engagement with our diverse communities:

**Objective 1**

**We will promote inclusion and commit to understanding the individual experience throughout our work**

**Objective 2**

**We will engage and empower local communities to resolve equality issues**

**Objective 3**

**We will strive to have a diverse workforce at all levels**

**Objective 4**

**We will treat people and agencies that we work with, fairly, justly and with respect, by being open, inclusive and collaborative**

**Objective 5**

**We will find ways to support those who are disadvantaged or excluded**

The objectives help identify internal and external targets that enable the Council to improve the collection of equality information and address the most persistent areas of inequalities faced by both employees and customers.

Service areas from across the Council carried out a self-assessment of how they have been fulfilling these 5 Equality Objectives in the 2022/23 period. The following report provides evidence of key projects and initiatives aimed at reducing inequalities impacting our employees and customers and thus meeting the Public Sector Equality Duty.

## **ADULT SOCIAL CARE, PUBLIC HEALTH & THE HUB**

### **Adult Social Care, Public Health and Hub**

Equality, Diversity and Inclusion is important for the whole workforce, recognising the requirements of the Equality Act 2010 and the professional standards many of our employees sign up to.

As an employee of **social workers** in our directorate we are mindful of professional standards, ethics and values that drive practice. Sarah Blackmore, executive directive of strategy, policy and engagement at Social Work England, said, "One of

the biggest missing pieces in the development of the social work sector is data. We all know that so much more needs to be done to properly address issues of equality, diversity and inclusion, tackle racism and promote anti-racism. To do this properly we need to understand the size and shape of the challenge and one of our objectives as the regulator is to work in partnership with social workers and organisations to gather this vital evidence.” This work is progressing alongside the introduction of the **Social Care Workforce Race Equality Standard** ([skillsforcare.org.uk](https://skillsforcare.org.uk)). This is a national standard being tested in 18 local authorities and Walsall council are learning from regional colleagues about the impact of this and what is working well to support us to meet the objectives we have identified.

The weight of evidence for inequalities across health are visibly seen through the effects of the pandemic, which have not been felt equally across the population. Research has shown that some groups, especially those that already experienced inequality, have suffered the most. The latest government reporting shows that those from Black and Asian heritage, and those in higher deprivation, suffered significant health inequalities and higher mortality rates. Research from the Institute of Fiscal Studies in 2021 indicated that the pandemic had also caused more income inequality, more inequalities in education and skills, and more intergenerational inequalities.

Michael Marmot’s report, “**Build Back Fairer: The COVID-19 Review**” shows the scale of the challenge we face. The report says “there is an urgent need to do things differently, to build a society based on the principles of social justice; to reduce inequalities of income and wealth; to build a wellbeing economy that puts the achievement of health and wellbeing, rather than narrow economic goals.”

Across all objectives the **Public Health** team is working to develop more impactful and more effective service commissioning, policy development and community delivery through **Health in All** policies. These work to put considerations of health, inequalities, excluded groups, and the wider determinants of health to the forefront of any planned commissioning, policy writing or any other action the council undertakes. These policies will guide not only the actions of Public Health but of all council services with an intent to drive behaviour changes, improve accessibility, and address disparities across the borough

### **Objective 1**

***We will promote inclusion and commit to understanding the individual experience throughout our work***

In the **Adult Social Care, Public Health and Hub** directorate the **Black and Asian employee network group** is well established. This group is for all Black and Asian staff, this includes those of dual heritage, and is an opportunity for staff to come together to offer peer support and speak openly about any issues which are impacting on them. There are reporting links to Walsall Council’s ‘**Corporate Equality Group**’ and the Executive Directors management meeting to make sure there is representation and our employee voices are heard.

There is a developing **LGBTQ+ network** meeting across all directorates currently and the executive director is keen to develop similar opportunities to have a voice at

the Executive Directors management meeting. An adult social care social worker was nominated for an outstanding employee corporate award in 2022 in recognition of how he has actively **raised the profile of the LGBTQ+ community** by the delivery of a staff training package. This has resulted in a better understanding of the issues faced by the LGBTQ+ community, raising the profile and aiding others learning. He have been invited to present to other directorates and continues to raise awareness and challenge oppression and discrimination.

Across all areas in **Public Health** the council is engaging local communities for feedback be it in fora, consultations, engaging lived experience or developing new services through co-development.

An example of a service commissioned in this manner over the past year is the **Positive Outcomes Project (POP)** a young people's wellbeing service commissioned based upon outcomes of a young people service identifying needs and gaps. Service design and delivery was co-developed to ensure the service met the needs of the target audience, and the service targets inclusion across all areas of need experienced by young people.

The Council continues implementation of effective and impactful services to support inclusion and support those in the community with the greatest need such as the **mobile Thrive unit** provides access to support in a mobile package to bolster inclusive access to wellbeing support.

The Wellbeing service currently under development, has specifications particularly driven by the equality objectives including the use of qualitative research on how certain factors impact wellbeing (specifically with those unemployed and for carers).

## **Objective 2**

### ***We will engage and empower local communities to resolve equality issues***

In **Adult Social Care, Public Health and Hub** we work with colleagues in Resilient Communities to aid our understanding of Walsall residents. Within the directorate we have contributed to a significant piece of engagement work with local diverse communities, including those 'seldom heard'. **We are Walsall 2040** have recently conducted the biggest piece of research ever done in the borough to get the views of the people who live and work in Walsall. More than 10,000 residents and businesses have shared their views about what they want Walsall to look and be like in 2040 and beyond.

As with the POP service, **Public Health** engages local communities to guide and steer support to areas of need. In areas of need Public Health works with local service providers and community organisations to strengthen delivery of local solutions. The Public Health team worked together with **Walsall Together** to identify and prioritise funding for VCSE organisations delivering local services with a focus on **Core20Plus5**.

**Making Connections** Walsall was co-designed with voluntary and community sector, enabling isolated and vulnerable residents to access a wide range of services, from befriending & mental health to prescriptions' and crafts, at the heart of

their locality. “**Growing up in Walsall**” research was used to inform the 2020 annual report and the **Walsall Best Start for Life strategy**, the “**Healthy Needs of Young Adults**” research has identified mental wellbeing needs, substance misuse needs, and sexual health needs across young people driving the aforementioned POP services development, **Health Watch Walsall** conducted a Young Peoples Mental Health Survey which enables our informed decision making on mental health policies for young people across the area, while similar research “**Understanding Mental Wellbeing of Adults**” contributed to the 2021 annual report and subsequent work on mental wellbeing programmes across the borough.

### **Objective 3**

#### ***We will strive to have a diverse workforce at all levels***

In **Adult Social Care, Public Health and Hub** we monitor employment data that evidences the diversity of our workforce.

A specific **Adult social care workforce strategy** developed in 2022 highlights our commitment to equality, diversity and inclusion. We recognise Walsall is a diverse place, and we want to embrace diversity, champion equality, behave inclusively and for our workforce to be representative of the communities we serve. The workforce strategy aims to promote equality, diversity and inclusion and ensure all staff can expect to be supported to challenge any forms of discrimination they encounter. The following actions in relation to recruitment have been identified:

- We will include a statement around equality and diversity in all adverts for Adult Social Care posts.
- All employees who are involved in recruitment will now need to attend Walsall Council’s Best Practice Recruitment and Selection training which covers equality, anti-discrimination and unconscious bias.
- Recruitment panels will aim to have a diverse membership, unless there are specific circumstances preventing this.

In relation to progression we want to make sure that every employee feels fully supported to grow and develop in Walsall and that we increase the diversity of our management teams by progressing and developing our staff. This includes into senior management roles. A new opportunity of an **Accelerating Diverse Talent Programme** has been introduced in 2023 and recognises the many benefits of having a representative workforce at all levels throughout the organisation, such as increased creativity and innovation, alternative views and perspectives, in turn influencing positive outcomes for our residents. Other opportunities including shadowing and mentoring are being developed and will be communicated to workforce.

Walsall **Public Health** commission services with a focus on inclusivity and of incorporation of lived experience, of engaging the relevant communities into service delivery and of both equal opportunities and of ensuring opportunities for developing experience and supporting the building of capacity within Walsall, especially where there may be opportunity to create opportunities for young people. Examples of this are present in many specifications, including those of the POP service which



required co-development with young people and the development of opportunities for those young people to gain experience through their work in the service.

#### **Objective 4**

***We will treat people and agencies that we work with, fairly, justly and with respect, by being open, inclusive and collaborative***

The **Public Health** team collaborate with dozens of organisations across a multitude of partnerships spanning numerous workstreams. Partnership work and engagement across workstreams is a central tenant of our service delivery approach and is evidenced through collaboration both within and without the council. As an example, the **Alcohol and Drugs service**, in addition to chairing the Walsall Combatting Alcohol and Drugs Partnership also engage in numerous fora, including but not limited to:

- Walsall Rehab Panel
- Walsall Under 25 Violence Stakeholders Network
- Walsall Violence & Harm Prevention Meeting
- Walsall Family Safeguarding Partnership Board
- Black Country CSTR Steering Group
- West Midlands Combatting Drugs and Alcohol Partnership Meeting
- West Midlands Community Safety Partnership Meeting
- Walsall Combatting Alcohol & Drug Misuse Partnership Board

#### **Objective 5**

***We will find ways to support those who are disadvantaged or excluded***

In **Adult Social Care, Public Health and Hub** much of our work seeks to support adults and children who are disadvantaged and excluded as we aspire to challenge health inequalities and improve outcomes for people. There are a number of services delivered and commissioned that offer care and support to maximise independence and inclusion.

In November 2022 we supported an in-person **Carers Right's Day** event accessible to all carers with good attendance and positive engagement. Stallholders who provide local support services to carers, information and advice were present. There was a recognition of how excluded and isolated informal carers can be as a result of their caring responsibilities and services are developing locally in response to this.

Areas for Improvement:

- Development of a more diverse and representative workforce
- Awareness raising of the experience of employees and residents of oppression and discrimination

All actions across **Public Health** drive progress in supporting disadvantage or exclusion, through supportive health services, improving access and addressing the inequalities that lead to greater need in certain communities. A key area of work to tackle disadvantage and exclusion is commissioning of the **YMCA Glebe centre**. This service provides support with a focus on rough sleepers and those experiencing

or at risk of homelessness, but open to anyone in need. The service supports developing of wellbeing plans, assists with finding, securing or keeping accommodation, building skills, finding support with employment, accessing basic amenities like a shower and laundry facilities or support with any other need or challenge they may be facing.

Across the **Child and Young People work stream** numerous programmes provide support to those facing disadvantage or exclusion, including but not limited to:

- The **Healthy Child Programme**, which looks to target those most vulnerable including migrants, deprivation and additional need
- Special educational needs and disabilities are a focus across the partnership
- Transformation projects are funded to meet the Public Health Outcomes Framework and the key outcome is reducing inequalities fastest in deprived groups
- **Food for Life** is targeted at schools and early years settings in deprived areas
- We have a 12-month project encouraging physical activity (Beat the Streets) which is running in an area of Walsall with greatest deprivation and inequality
- Support is offered to **migrants and asylum seekers**.

All of these objectives are considered in the **Health in All policy** work which strives to develop guiding principals for council activity and steer all council activity to consider health actions a set of guiding principles for all services in the council to apply to their work are in development, these principles will guide on all of these objectives calling for:

- Meaningful engagement of the community early in planning or identifying needs to ensure a mentality of co-development.
- Continuing engagement throughout the lifecycle of the service, collecting feedback, internalising and applying that feedback and communicating the changes back to the community so they have ownership on services impacting them.
- Engaging internal staff groups, groups representing communities and champion groups to ensure inclusivity in thought and planning.
- Work to build a better, stronger, more supportive council together.
- Improve the data we collect and share.
- Increase our diversity and our transparency to ensure more viewpoints and experiences are present in our actions.
- Improve our support for one another, drive change where needed, and expand our training to ensure informed decision making across all areas of equality.

## **CHILDREN'S SERVICES**

**Walsall Children's Services** vision is to ensure that all children have the right support, in the right place, at the right time, for as long as it is needed to enable them to be safe from harm, happy and learning well with self-belief, aspiration and support to be their best. Promoting equality and inclusion is central to this vision for our children and families.

### **Objective 1**

***We will promote inclusion and commit to understanding the individual experience throughout our work:***

The **Virtual School** developed a platinum trauma informed programme for over 50 Walsall schools to help them understand the needs of children in care and achieved the **Alex Timpson award** for collaborative working. Staff in Access and Inclusion work with parents to identify appropriate education provision to meet the individual needs of our children and young people. The Virtual School was recently asked to identify an early years provision for a child with a spinal condition who required MAKATON and speech therapy. They identified a local nursery with ground floor facilities, a free flow garden area and Makaton trained staff.

The **Early Help** whole family approach is all about inclusion with children, young people and their families being at the centre of everything we do and the support provided. We make sure that their individual needs and experiences are considered throughout, their voice and opinions listened to and acted upon. Over the past 2 years we have worked closely with young carers, raising the profile and supporting the identification of young carers. As a result of this work Early Help have increase the support from 62 young carers up to 247. We have worked in collaboration to redesign and improve the support service and opportunities available.

The **Youth Justice Partnership** are working with the Local Authority Data Insights team to create a partnership data set, including case studies and voice of children, to understand issues of overrepresentation across multiple systems. This ambitious data set will influence a wider youth justice partnership strategy to address the overrepresentation in the system.

### **Objective 2**

***We will engage and empower local communities to resolve equality issues***

The **Early Help Service** identified a gap in support services for young people from the LGBTQ community and secured funding to provide training in the importance of language and how young people are perceived in society. We have upskilled practitioners and increased staff awareness legislation and the rights of the LGBTQ community. We worked with Walsall Art Gallery to arrange an LGBTQ art project where posters are designed to promote awareness. The Early Help team also established an **LGBTQ support group and create safe spaces**.

Working with fathers has been a focus for Children's Services. Following consultation with fathers, Early Help introduced a fathers parenting practitioner and secured funding for a **father's participation & support group**. This consultation in addition to a joined up audit of practice across Early Help, Youth Justice Service (YJS) and Social Care, helped create the new '**Working with Fathers Strategy**' across Children's Services. Early Help recognised the need to provide support to families once services step away and introduced a volunteers project where local people build resilience and 'community scaffolding' around the family.

The **Special Education Needs and Disability (SEND)** local offer continues to be co-produced with parents and carers of children with additional needs, to ensure

communities are engaged with inclusive activities for all children and young people. A parent consultation group has been set up in each locality for collaboration known as 'In Our Hands' SEND local offer.

**The Holiday Activity & Food Programme (HAF)** has worked with parents, carers and local providers to ensure no child is excluded from taking part. To support this the local community and voluntary providers are trained to understand children with a range of SEND and supported to ensure their provision is inclusive. The HAF programme works with local community groups and offers a bespoke programme for children from Ukraine & Afghanistan.

### **Objective 3**

***We will strive to have a diverse workforce at all levels***

Children's Services introduced a series of measures to support the development of equality, diversity and inclusion. These included the introduction of equality training and workshops on themes identified by the **Equality and Anti-discrimination Group and the YJS Disproportionality Forum**. Recruitment practices were amended to include equality and anti-discrimination and a commitment to diverse recruitment panels. Personal development plans have been established to focus on the professional development of staff with protected characteristics.

Children's Social Care has set up a new governance structure to support its work on Equality and Anti-discrimination, creating an **Equality, Anti-racism and Anti-discrimination Board** that will be chaired by Professor Gurnam Singh and internally recognised expert in Social Work who has worked with councils and organisations throughout his career. The work being undertaken has also been drawn together into an Equality, Anti-racism and Anti-discrimination Plan that sets out clear, concrete goals and activity to continue to take the service forward.

### **Objective 4:**

***We will treat people and agencies that we work with, fairly, justly and with respect, by being open, inclusive, and collaborative:***

Practice within Children's Services is based on restorative practice principles which promote fairness, inclusiveness and collaboration. Within each locality a '**Time 2 Talk' platform** has been designed to collaborate with local partners, including schools, police, health, voluntary services to ensure that Early Help support services identify gaps and strengthen the local offer.

The **Youth Justice Service** are working with a local media company to create a documentary with young people and parents to hear personal experiences of discrimination and how some people within communities have difficulties accessing services. The documentary collaborates with young people with lived experience to pull out themes and learning to develop a partnership strategy to address the drivers of disproportionality in the justice system.

The **Ethnically Diverse Workers Support Group** started this year. The launch included a keynote presentation by Dr Prospera Tedam, and was attended by 150 staff. The group has now been going for over a year and is generally attended by 10-

20 staff members. Staff who attend tell us that they find this an important, collaborative space for them to come together, share experiences, learn, and offer guidance and support.

### **Objective 5**

***We will find ways to support those who are disadvantaged or excluded:***

Education services have recently developed a vulnerability matrix to help us identify the most vulnerable young people who have an **Education and Health Care Plan (EHCP)** and are supported by a social worker, youth justice office or a registered young carer. We work closely with schools to ensure children are receiving the best education, are fully included in school life and not excluded. Last year we prevented the permanent exclusion of 20 young people.

The **Youth Justice Service (YJS)** has developed dedicated support for overrepresented children with black and mixed ethnicity within the justice system. The YJS are working with a community organisation to **coach and mentor black boys** to improve awareness of cultural identity and to improve education, training and employment outcomes. The YJS have also partnered with a local mentor with lived experience of the justice system to support overrepresented boys within the secure estate to improve their resettlement in the community when released.

Early Help identified children with additional needs at risk of school exclusion who were vulnerable to low level exploitation. Investment was secured to provide support to young people to educate them and their families in recognising exploitation and how to avoid risk. The **CARE Programme (Community Activities Reducing Exploitation)** provides locality support with positive diversionary activities, supporting 70 young people across the borough.

#### Areas for improvement

- Early Help are seeking to employ more **male support workers** to provide positive male role models to young people and ensure a diverse Early Help team represents the children, young people and families we support. Similarly, we recognise there is an **under representation of senior managers with black, Asian or minority ethnicity** across Children's Services.
- Children's Services are seeking to improve information and advice is readily available in a range of **languages, representing the diverse communities within Walsall**.
- We are seeking to provide training and awareness for Children's Services staff to understand our diverse communities and 'newly arrived families', to improve *cultural competence*

## **Economy, Environment and Communities**

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

significantly increased number of residents accessing support ranging from cost of living to recreational, physical and wellbeing activities.

The **Council's Community, Equality and Cohesion Team** has been a conduit for Council's input into regional and national equality and diversity strategies. They ensured that Walsall is influential and learning from best practice in the field of equality, diversity and inclusion. The current memberships include, but are not limited to:

- West Midlands Local Authority Equality Network – Chair
- West Midlands Combined Authority Race Equality Taskforce – member
- Belong – the Cohesion and Integration Network - Chair

We are proud to have recently signed up to **Race Forward: West Midlands Race Equalities Taskforce Independent Strategy 2023-2028** as an influential contributor and member of the taskforce, guiding other public sector bodies on the implementation.

### **Objective 1**

***We will promote inclusion and commit to understanding the individual experience throughout our work:***

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

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

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

**Hate Crime.** Remidi, through the Police and Crime Commissioner's funding and West Midlands Police have delivered an excellent service to victims of hate crime who have reported incidents to West Midlands Police. Remidi Hate crimes stats showed 135 referrals from April 2022 to date, including

Disability (16), Race (99), Religion (5), Sexual Orientation (13) and Trans (2). This compares to 191 referrals for the previous period from April 2021 to March 2022.

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

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

## **Objective 2**

### ***We will engage and empower local communities to resolve equality issues***

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

The service delivery in 2022/23 included:

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

**Cleaner Streets / Waste Disposal.** The Service in partnership with local elected members, **Nash Dom CIC** discussed in multiple languages with private rented tenants and owner occupiers in Chuckery the effective use of refuse collections. This challenge is very similar to many other streets in the borough where private landlords have tenants where English may be a second language and who are taking

residency in poor condition properties and landlords who are unsupportive in terms of education of waste management.

### **Objective 3**

#### ***We will strive to have a diverse workforce at all levels***

Corporate Equality Group meetings are coordinated by the **Community, Equality and Cohesion team** - held quarterly, and jointly chaired by the Chief Executive and Trade Union member. The priority of the group is on **Lived Experiences** of staff and raising awareness of equalities issues and it is closely linked with the topics identified at the Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Pledge Group (below).

In April 2022, we set up the new **Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Pledge (EDI) Group**. It is a space for staff from across all directorates to discuss and build psychologically safe space for engagement. Current feedback from the group is given to Corporate Equality Group (CEG), whilst maintaining anonymity for members as a safe space. The topics so far covered lived experiences of autism, dwarfism, hidden disabilities, micro-aggression, mental health and psychological safety.

**LGBT+ Staff Network.** This is a new cross-directorate network established in 2022 to assist the Council in creating and maintaining a welcoming, supportive, and inclusive environment for LGBTQIA+ staff, ensuring respect and dignity at work. The primary goal for the beginning of 2023 is to gain organisation-wide awareness so as to raise the profile of the group. The group is hoping to be an active voice in policy review, to contribute to the Council's EDI agenda, and to create visibility for LGBT+ staff, which will have natural benefits such as increasing declaration rates, which in turn creates greater visibility/representation.

**Collaboration with Black and Asian Staff Network (ASC).** The Community, Equality and Cohesion team are proud to be working closely with the Black and Asian Staff Network in Adult Social Care. Meetings are held regularly to listen to and better understand the concerns of minority ethnic staff, as voiced through the network, which we may then action where possible and further feedback to CEG. Discussion is taking place regarding preferred language around race and ethnicity to ensure that Council practices are led by its people.

### **Objective 4**

#### ***We will treat people and agencies that we work with, fairly, justly and with respect, by being open, inclusive and collaborative***

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

**Resilient Communities** held **4 locality events** in November 2022 engaging with the VCS and Adult Social Care (ASC). The aim of the workshops was to bring officers from ASC and the voluntary, community and faith sector together to meet and to



share information on the services that they offer. ASC referral processes and the different departments were highlighted and the Resilient Communities model and Making Connections Walsall project explained in more detail. The workshops were well received and practical ideas identified, resulting in purchasing **ferrules and anti-slip socks** to give out to residents to reduce slip, trips and falls. They have been given out free of charge through community centres and libraries. We continue to work closely with ASC around the preventative agenda.

## **Objective 5**

***We will find ways to support those who are disadvantaged or excluded***

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

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

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

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

**EU Settlement Scheme (EUSS)**. The objective of the project is to support Europeans from pre settled status to full status when eligible. Between 01 April 2022 and 31 December 2022, Nash Dom CIC supported 424 community members that were facing various issues related to their EUSS status. Some of these issues include: gather evidence required for pre-settled or settled status, contacting Home Office and asking guidance for more complex cases, help with making late applications, join a family member, change in personal details etc.

**Ukrainian crisis. Refugee and Migrant Centre and Nash Dom CIC** continue to offer support to Ukrainians that came to Walsall through Sponsorship or Family Visa. ESOL

provision for Ukrainians (delivered by Nash Dom) was very successful, helping people not just to improve their English skills but also to find out about available services in the area, learn more about Walsall and quickly integrate in the community. The provision also had a healing impact on attendees (considering the traumatic experience majority of refugees went through), as they were able to have 1 to 1 and group conversation around mental health, share their challenges/experiences and support each other.

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

## RESOURCES AND TRANSFORMATION

In January 2023, Walsall Council has undertaken the **Peer Review Challenge assessed by Local Government Association**. During the process, the Peer Review team concluded that 'they were presented with evidence of strong governance arrangements and effective financial planning. This corporate core provides a strong foundation for services, engagement, ongoing transformation, and is underpinned by clear financial reporting, effective engagement with audit, and appropriate internal scrutiny'.

The Peer Review team recognised that Walsall Council has undergone significant transformation and change in recent years. This has included the proactive design and delivery of the Council's "Proud Programme" but also the reactive response of the organisation to wider social changes and reforms. This will enable the Council to continue their journey of improvement, addressing outcomes through a convening and enabling role with wider partners. Ultimately, this will support the ambitions set out in the "**We are Walsall 2040**" (**WAW2040**) Programme over the coming years.

The vision of WAW2040 has been shaped by extensive engagement, with more than 10,000 residents and businesses contributing towards the development of a shared ambition to create a borough "that works for everyone". The Peer Team appreciate that further work is ongoing on the development of a framework for this approach but hope that the recommendations and findings set out in this report support Walsall Council with this process.

The Peer Review team viewed the Council's recognition of further work that is needed to strengthen their approach to equality, diversity, and inclusion (EDI) very positively. The recent introduction of value-based recruitment gives the opportunity to support the recruitment of under-represented groups and support the organisation's workforce to better reflect the communities it represents. This is issue is particularly true in the senior roles of the organisation, and thought should be given to how the Council can improve progression rates.

The Council's work to-date on EDI has included good progress through the introduction of the Corporate Equalities Group (CEG) as well as staff network

groups, but it is recognised that these are used differently in some Directorates and there would be a benefit to more corporate ownership of these issues and consistency of practice. The Council may wish to consider reporting against other 'pay gaps' as well as the gender pay-gap to support progress as well as wider public sector duties.

It has been recommended in the **Peer Review Challenge report** that the Council provides a coordinated approach to issues of EDI to support the workforce to better represent local communities: The Council has recognised that further work is needed to strengthen work on Equality, Diversity, and Inclusion, this has included good progress to date on your gender pay gap, and the introduction of staff network groups to support staff voices. This should be built on with reporting, publishing, and monitoring progress against other "pay gaps" (such as ethnicity and disability) as well as wider public sector duties. This will support the workforce to better represent the communities of borough. Full report can be viewed at [LGA Corporate Peer Challenge \(walsall.gov.uk\)](https://www.walsall.gov.uk).

The Council, as part of its "Proud Programme" has prioritised the **Enabling Communication and Culture workstream (ECC)** and this is a vital part connecting employee experience, EDI, and culture development alongside the workforce and OD strategies. EDI matters have been prioritised at regular **Senior Management Group** meetings. Based on engagement with **staff networks and EDI Pledge group** one recent SMG was dedicated to staff lived experiences, putting a spotlight on psychologically safe environment, hidden disabilities, ethnically diverse staff networks with managers taking away both learning and actions for improvement.

Below provides a summary examples of the Resources and Transformation Directorate work against the 5 Equality Objectives.

### **Objective 1**

***We will promote inclusion and commit to understanding the individual experience throughout our work***

#### **Human Resources (HR)**

**The Corporate Workforce Strategy (2018-2021)** recognises that the workforce are the Council's greatest asset and identifies the importance of attracting and retaining a highly talented and diverse workforce. The strategy outlines the council's vision, priorities, values and behaviours and sets out a range of key actions, including a number related to equality and diversity and a specific pledge, "We will strive to build a workforce which is reflective of the community we serve".

This Strategy is currently being refreshed to 'pick up' the actions from the 2021 survey and outcomes of other key employee engagement activity.

Activity in support of this objective in 2022 has included:

- Development of a **recruitment survey** to understand how job applicants experience our recruitment practices. We now have three quarters data and

intelligence which will be used to shape Recruitment and Selection policies, procedures and training for hiring managers.

- The review and reset of the **Corporate Equalities Group (CEG)** has seen a number of powerful presentations centred on understanding the individual experience. They have included: the impact of hidden disabilities and importance of psychological safety.
- Ongoing **Mentoring and Coaching opportunities**, affording person centred development opportunities.
- Ongoing provision/support of **Mental Health First Aiders** who are trained to listen and signpost individuals to appropriate support.
- Ongoing delivery of Mental Health First Aid and Suicide Prevention Training with an emerging bespoke offer for male employees.
- Development of a cohort of **Menopause Champions** who are trained to listen and signpost individuals to appropriate support, including line managers. Development of self paced learning resources around Menopause and face to face training of the Council's Senior Leaders in Menopause Awareness.
- Workforce policy development including the launch of a new menopause policy (March 2022), a refresh of the domestic abuse workplace guidance (February 2022), flexi-time (April 2022), confidential reporting policy (May 2022) and sickness absence guidance (April 2022) – all of which have a strong equality and diversity element.
- **Psychological safety** is a key thread that runs through all the training sessions delivered to managers including Corporate Equality and Senior Management groups.
- Building a Strong Team, Groundwork for change, Coaching as a Management Style part 1, Improving Communication, Growing the team, incorporates the Psychological Safety thread as well as how to support employees who are neurodivergent.
- Conscious and unconscious bias is a key thread that runs through training.
- Equality training i.e **Being your Authentic Self** and promotion of equality of opportunity that wasn't always actively linked to resources available.
- SharePoint page providing resources on EDI for all staff to access.

**Digital and Transformation (D&T)** are extremely proud to be champions for equality and inclusion in everything we do. D&T play a critical part in enabling residents and employees to access council services in an accessible way. The service is focussed on ensuring delivering projects that contribute to achieving our Proud promises:

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

All transformation and change activity (including digital) is conducted in partnership with our Council's Community, Equality and Cohesion team – adhering to processes and maintaining an EQIA, where appropriate. Digital and Transformation ensure that all our staff are aware of the importance and impact, which Equality and Diversity has and to ensure that this is maintained at the forefront of work as it is being designed. Our service design principles are focussed on user centric design and

ensuring both functional and system requirements take into account both our diverse workforce and our diverse borough, ensuring the voice of the customer is at the centre of everything we do.

### Connected Working

- **Psychological safety** is a key thread that runs through all the training sessions delivered to managers
- Training on Psychological Safety delivered to managers in the Corporate Equality and Senior Management Groups
- Training offers including: ***Building a Strong Team, Groundwork for Change, Coaching as a Management Style Pt 1, Improving Communication, Growing the team***, incorporate the Psychological Safety thread as well as supporting employees who are neurodivergent
- Training offers including ***Being your Authentic Self*** actively linked to equality of opportunity and signposted to resources
- **SharePoint** page providing resources on Equality, Diversity and Inclusion (EDI)

### Black Country Impact and Community Grants

Black Country Impact supports Black Country residents aged 16-29 who are not in employment, education or training (NEET). The programme addresses the **barriers faced by unemployed individuals** aged 16-29 years, supporting them to secure a brighter future through employment, training and education. At the heart of the approach is the ability to tailor a package of support and opportunities that meets the needs of the individual, this could be through trainee-ships, apprenticeships, coaching, work placements, self-employment advice, including social enterprises, customised training or more depending on what works best for the individual. Black Country Impact takes referrals to the programme from a number of internal and external partners including, but not limited to:

- Job Centre Plus
- Transition and Leaving Care Team
- Adult Social Care
- Teenage Pregnancy Unit
- Probation Service
- Youth Offending Team
- Local Community and religious organisations

**Black Country Community Grants** programme supports participants above the age 16 to beyond retirement age, into employment and education. The programme provides various interventions based on individual needs and the recognised needs of the local communities. The community organisations who have been awarded grants understand the local needs and identify the appropriate project to address these needs. Participants who engage with the project have come through various external partners, including the care team, youth offending, probation service, health services and employability services.

## **Objective 2**

***We will engage and empower local communities to resolve equality issues***

### **Human Resources**

The Learning and Development Team provide and promote a portfolio of learning and development opportunities which are specifically related to promoting, highlighting and resolving equality issues. These are available both to the internal workforce and to externally commissioned providers. Most recently this includes a wide variety of self paced learning resources on topics such as: **Unconscious Bias, Disability Inclusion, Dignity and Respect, Modern Slavery/Human Trafficking, LGBT+ inclusion.**

The Council's Recruitment Team actively engages in outreach activity, attending local careers/jobs fairs to promote employment opportunities, this includes the very successful Recruitability programme, which offers paid work placement opportunities for individuals who have a disability in order to provide individuals with valuable experience leading to a permanent job with the Council or another employer.

**Digital and Transformation** provide a critical enabling role in enabling council officers to engage with local communities - The ability to channel shift and put automated processes into the digital arena, gives easier and prompt access for those customers who choose to use them, but it also means that where necessary other channels of contact can be maintained for those customers who cannot use online services. As an example, the Information Governance Team seeks to enable equal access to information rights by providing the opportunity to make requests via a number of methods including telephone, face-to-face, email, Web, paper leaflets.

### **Connected Working**

- **Anonymised Psychological Safety surveys** are conducted with teams to identify any areas of concern, so that action can be taken to provide psychologically safe teams

### **Black Country Impact and Community Grants**

**Black Country Impact** offers a bespoke tailored support package to eligible participants, working with a dedicated advisor, participants are able to access a large number of training or support service to help them break down their barriers to employment or education. The local communities can add real value to the programme by referring participants to join or event support an individual's journey by offering work placements, volunteering opportunities. The programme works closely with local community organisations and employers supply marketing material, invites to events and by using local venues for advisors meet participants.

The programme also attends local employment events and **job fairs in the community** to promote the opportunities available through Black Country Impact.

80 projects in total have been funded since 2019 via Black Country Community Grants and have been delivered holistically, ensuring to support participants with a combination of issues such as housing, mental health, disability, financial issues, digital exclusion etc. As many of the of the Community organisations are well established, they have developed key partnerships within the communities to draw upon specialities and vital services. Due to Covid, many residents became more isolated and at greater risk exclusion, with many businesses closing locally.

Therefore community organisations have been working hard to develop and enable digital access and support, giving residents greater access to basic services such as online shopping, doctors' appointments and employment opportunities. The programme was designed to improve economic growth, but to also improve resilience and independence within the local communities. Many participants who did not progress into an outcome of employment or education have stated that the programme has still developed their skills and/or confidence.

### **Objective 3**

***We will strive to have a diverse workforce at all levels***

#### **Human Resources**

This year has seen the introduction of a newly established **Workforce Equalities Board** to provide a platform for action and consistent engagement with the organisation as a whole but also local staff forum groups.

The annual **Employment Monitoring Report (EMR)** provides a statistical overview of the Council's workforce and provides in-depth analysis based on a number of protected characteristics, identifying trends and demographic comparisons to inform future decision making and support the Council to promote and maintain a diverse workforce. The EMR can be found by clicking this external link [Equality documents | Walsall Council](#).

The Council produces an annual **Gender Pay Gap Analysis** as part of the EMR which shows the difference between the average earnings of men and women at the council expressed as a percentage. The currently published gender pay gap (based on data as at 31<sup>st</sup> March 2022) shows a vastly reduced gender pay gap of 1.8% compared a figure of 9.8% three years earlier.

The Council have a vast **library of employment policies** through which EDI is embedded including Recruitment & Selection, Dignity at Work and an annual Pay Policy Statement, all of which formalise our equal and consistent approach ensuring fairness and equality and emphasising that we have a zero-tolerance approach to any form of discrimination. The Council's employment policies can be found by clicking this internal link [A-Z Directory of HR policies and procedures \(walsall.gov.uk\)](#) alternatively if you are external please contact the equalities team at Walsall Council.

We engaged an external consultant to **review our approach to EDI** and are currently reviewing the resultant action plan.

As an organisation we have made a commitment to having a workforce representative of the community we serve. A key piece of work to underpin this commitment is development of an Equality, Diversity and Inclusion action plan.

The Council currently operates a self-service portal '**One Source**' which provides employees with the opportunity to update their personal and sensitive data in order to support the Council's ability to capture, monitor and report on employment and equalities data.

The Learning and Development Team support manager and employee development around issues of Equality and Diversity by offering a wide range of classroom and self-paced learning opportunities and access to other resources. In 2022 **mandatory EDI training** has been agreed for 3 key groups; new starters, hiring managers and senior leaders. Alongside this the Council has purchased a new comprehensive modular EDI self paced learning package which will be highly recommended to the workforce.

**Career Development Workshops** have continued to be offered primarily to those from under-represented groups. 2022 has also seen the development of an Accelerating Diverse Careers Programme for launch in 2023. Whilst open to all, cohort one will include colleagues from multicultural backgrounds.

Sponsorship has been offered on the regional **Breaking Through Programme** for individuals from under-represented groups wanting to elevate their careers.

We have also sponsored a number of senior leaders on the regional **Allyship Programme** – the aim being for these individuals to mentor/support those on the Breaking Through Programme and bring back learning around what it means to be an inclusive leader.

We have developed an informercial on how to apply for Walsall Council's job vacancies so the expectations are clear and transparent.

We have developed video case studies '**Talented People Like Me**' to showcase our talented employees and to inspire others to develop their careers here at Walsall.

We once again nominated our apprentices in a number of regional and national awards. These included the **Multi-cultural apprenticeship awards** where we had two finalists and the Black Country Ladder apprenticeship awards where we had 3 finalists, two category winners and overall apprentice of the year. These nominees included a former care experienced young person and a partially sighted apprentice.

**Digital and transformation** commit to ensuring we have a diverse workforce at all levels – this is evident throughout our structure and we have achieved this through ensuring we focus on career progression, diverse recruitment panels and appropriate training. The directorate promotes the learning opportunities available within the council such as apprenticeships and course available through one source. An awareness of and an ability to ensure that we follow the principles of the Equality Act 2010, when performing our duties, are written into our job specifications and are



embedded within the recruitment and selection process. All lead recruiting managers within the service will have attended the in-house recruitment and selection training.

The service actively seeks to develop all employees by regularly offering development opportunities to work in other departments, reducing silo working and removing barriers to effective Team working. Reasonable adjustments are considered as part of new start inductions.

## **Black Country Impact and Community Grants**

**Black Country Impact's** delivery is made up of advisors and officers from across all of the council directorates, with specialist advisors supporting those clients with specialist needs such as adult social care, care leavers and probation services.

To ensure we have a diverse workforce, BC Impact follows the council standard recruitment processes, which is an open and fair process that's sees successful candidates selected based on competency based interview questions and assessments.

Participants who were supported on the project developed a wide range of skills, some of which are accredited. These skills will help to grow the economy.

## **Objective 4**

***We will treat people and agencies that we work with, fairly, justly and with respect, by being open, inclusive and collaborative***

### **Human Resources**

All procurement contracts managed are done so within specified procurement rules ensuring fairness and transparency and in addition have a strong focus on **Social Value**. The Council's contract with Starting Point Recruitment (SPR) for example delivers against a number of Social Value commitments, many of which are aligned to equalities and diversity (supporting those in the local community who are disadvantaged or excluded).

HR aims for all employment interactions to meet this objective by developing best practice employment policies and providing thorough, fair and consistent advice including comprehensive training to its managers. All employment policies are regularly reviewed on a maximum three yearly cycle and can be found by clicking this internal link link [A-Z Directory of HR policies and procedures \(walsall.gov.uk\)](https://www.walsall.gov.uk/hr/policies-procedures) alternatively if you are external please contact the equalities team at Walsall Council.

As an organisation we continue to give the mental health of our workforce the same priority as physical health, making it safe for individuals experiencing a mental health episode to talk to their line manager or an independent **Mental Health First Aider** about what they are experiencing and how they might be helped/signposted to relevant agencies. This includes delivery of training to the workforce, elected members, schools, community organisations and wider workforce in the Borough and regionally.

Anonymised psychological safety surveys are conducted with teams to identify any areas of concern, so that action can be taken to provide psychologically safe teams.

**Digital and transformation** operated with our PLATE values at the heart of what we do – we focus on increasing transparency in our processes and work with partners where appropriate throughout – as part of our procurement processes, we ensure that our partner's values match the council's and adhere to all our guidelines and processes.

**Information Governance** ensures that advice and guidance is provided to all services to ensure that information collected and processed by the Council is treated in accordance with GDPR regulations.

### **Black Country Impact and Community Grants**

Impact Walsall works with a number of training and support services that are procured via a dynamic purchasing system managed by the Lead accountable body. External organisations go through a open and fair tendering process, with standardised questions which are scored against a strict marking criteria.

There are four partners across the Black Country Impact programme, Walsall Council, Sandwell Council, Wolverhampton Council and Dudley Council. All partners work collaboratively to meet the programmes financial and performance profiles and meet regularly at both operational and strategic level. At Walsall we continue to work on our **Social Return on Investment report** that showcases the work the programme achieves and the impact made to young people and our stakeholders.

Black Country Community Grants programme contract with community organisations via a fair and open tender process. Rounds were communicated to the sector and applications were assessed via two stage board panel, drawing upon the expertise of officers and community network members. We collaborated with Sandwell Council to provide our success projects with loan of IT devices to assist with delivery. We continue to develop our Social Return on Investment report that showcases the work the programme achieves and the impact made to young people and our stakeholders.

### **Objective 5**

***We will find ways to support those who are disadvantaged or excluded***

#### **Human Resources**

As part of the Council's contract with Starting Point Recruitment (SPR), they have committed to delivering a number of social value commitments across the Walsall Borough which focus on a number of initiatives to support those who are disadvantaged or excluded. A full report of our collective achievements against these commitments can be found by clicking this internal link [Social Values \(walsall.gov.uk\)](#) alternatively if you are external please contact the equalities team at Walsall Council.

In addition our in-house Recruitment Team have developed a twitter campaign to share tips and techniques with individuals wishing to apply for a job with the council and have launched a longer infomercial.

We continue to encourage applications for our **Proud Manager programme** from under represented ethnic groups.

Our **Endless Possibilities Apprenticeship Programme** continues to support our Care Experienced Young People/care leavers to access employment opportunities in the form of work tasters, pre-apprenticeships, support with making applications etc. In addition we continue to engage in events aimed at school leavers and promote STEM occupations to girls with support from our apprentices in non-stereotypical roles.

We continue to be members of the **Movement to Work initiative**, the aim being to get young people who are NEET into work.

Activities are provided to managers to carry out with their teams to improve psychological safety.

Networking with other equality professionals within the local area or within the sector.

**Workplace equality champion** – with a commitment to equality and PSED within the Connected Working team, that can help explain the importance of equality and assist in gathering information needed to demonstrate compliance.

## **Digital and Transformation**

Recognising the diverse nature of the Council's service users, all change activity being undertaken will be support through an **Equality Impact Assessment** where the equality and diversity of customers will be captured and will feed into the design of the future service.

By designing new services interactions through engagement with customers and design of the customer journey, new processes will ensure that inclusion is designed rather than being an afterthought. As part of our digital transformation work, we have relaunched the website with a critical focus on accessibility. Throughout our transformation, we consider the impact on those who may be excluded due to their digital skills and focus on ways to upskill but also include other channels for customer's to access services.

Although D&T focus activity on ensuring we adhere to our statutory public sector equality duty, we also recognise that this is the right thing to do and should be promoted. We are striving to continuously improve on our efforts in this area and would like to focus on improving our service design process to ensure our user feedback includes a wide cross section of both resident's and employees. A second area of improvement will be around how we develop, attract and retain diverse talent – we will utilise the Council's connected working offer to ensure all our management are trained in ensuring a psychologically safe environment.

## **Connected working**

- Activities are provided to managers to carry out with their teams to improve psychological safety

- **Networking with other Equalities professionals** within the local region/sector
- **Workplace Equality Champions** within the Connected Working team – with a commitment to Equality, Diversity and Inclusion together with the PSED, Champions are equipped to support co-workers on matters of EDI

### **Black Country Impact and Community Grants**

Walsall's delivery teams have supported 4820 participants to date with some of the following disadvantaged groups:

- Inactive: 1911
- Long term unemployed: 1205
- Number of single parents engaged with: 496
- Migrants, people with a foreign background, minorities (incl. marginalised communities such as the Roma), supported: 1352
- Disable participants supported: 1581
- Number of Ex-Off: 244
- Looked after Children: 182

Black Country Community Grants has supported 80 Community Voluntary sector organisations across the Black Country to directly support their communities who are disadvantaged or excluded. Over 1142 participants across the Black Country, who have been unemployed for at least 6 months have been supported by this programme with 136 gaining employment and 23 gaining further education or training as a result. Many of the participants who have been supported have declared one or several of the following (list not exhaustive):

- they have never worked
- homeless
- single parent family
- live with a disability, learning need or mental health issue
- low or no qualifications
- English not the first language
- digital exclusion

*Community Grants have supported priority groups*

Priority	Contract Target (Transition area)	Performance at R3
Ethnic Minority	25%	63%
Over 50	14%	32%
Disabilities	22%	32%
Female	36%	66%

*“NM joined our Pathways to Employment project funded by Community Grants in June 2022. She was referred to us from an organisation that supports people who are on probation. Due to a history of abusive relationships and a breakdown after the death of her mother she was severely lacking in confidence and direction.*

*NM received in depth IAG, diagnostics and mentoring from the project and completed 4 workshops covering Mentoring, Mental Health Awareness, Dyslexia Awareness and IAG. NM achieved a L1 nationally recognised training certificate for each of these programmes. NM's confidence grew greatly and felt she wanted to support other people in similar situation to hers. She has been offered a place on a Peer Mentoring training programme through the Probation Service.” – **Pathways to Employment***

## **BUILDING SOCIAL COHESION AND INTEGRATION IN WALSALL**

### **Walsall for All**

Since 2019, Walsall has been part of the government led Integrated Communities strategy through our **Walsall for All partnership**. Walsall for All published their first **evaluation and communication** reports in June 2022, highlighting 7819 participants in school linking and social mixing projects, 800 participants in Community Dialogue, 2832 participants in English as a Second Language learning and access to jobs. During the Covid-19 pandemic, 4400 residents were reached through Covid Champions in different languages and formats. The evaluation was followed by a release of the celebration video capturing stories of Walsall residents whose life has changed as a result of the programme. The video can be accessed here: [Walsall For All - A Celebration of The Town That We've Built](#)

Walsall for All featured as a **best practice** on a number of national conferences, including **Belonging 2022** in Manchester, **Faith in Action by the West Midlands Combined Authority** and **Race Equality Task Force** with West Midlands Mayor Andy Street. The work has been referenced as best practice in national research **Beyond Us and Them** <sup>1</sup>. Walsall Council is committed to further investment in the **Walsall for All Partnership**, having set new objectives in the conference on 2 March 2023.

### **Walsall Pride**

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

On the back of the event improved partnerships are currently being developed with Public Health with outreach surgeries to be held in community venues. A new

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<sup>1</sup> [Beyond Us and Them: societal cohesion in the context of Covid-19 Archives - Belong-The Cohesion and Integration Network \(belongnetwork.co.uk\)](#)

partnership is currently been developed with a local faith and race minority based LGBTQ+ service which offers support and understanding in culturally sensitive service delivery.

## **Shaheedee Sports Weekend**

Walsall Asian Sports Association Shaheedee delivered again the nationally acclaimed football and hockey weekend in May 2022 (one of the biggest Asian focus sport events in UK). The annual event year on year is becoming more inclusive. The journey from a traditional Sikh male led and participation has evolved to now have female support in planning, delivery and participation. Young people, people with disabilities and a broad range of faiths now are integral to the successful delivery and the event is attended by people from around UK.

## **Walsall Wellbeing Programme**

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

## **Young People**

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

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

## **ESOL Intelligence Unit**

The unit has been one of the key successes of the Walsall For All programme receiving national recognition in the development and delivery of outcomes and outputs that no other local authority nationally has been able to equal. The units approach of matching need to developing high quality provision by local voluntary sector supply has been the key to the successes.

The key challenge now is for national and regional recognition to adapt current funding rules to ensure effective local delivery. The demand for community-based ESOL continues to increase and concerns remain in the reduced funding and current approach of well funded provision which is not meeting that demand.

## **English as a Second Language**

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

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

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

## **St Nicholas event and Ukrainian concert**

In partnership with Money Home Jobs and Nash Dom CIC a well-attended and highly appreciated concert was delivered. Focusing on the **Ukrainian community** that recently arrived in Walsall the event raised awareness about Ukrainian culture and traditions as well as providing the space for Ukrainians to meet and mix with other communities living in Walsall. Being forced to flee their country because of the war and uncertainty, this year, Ukrainian refugees celebrated Christmas away from their loved ones. St Nicholas' was one of a few opportunities for them to come together, practice their Christmas traditions, connect with friends, other members of local communities, as well as make new contacts/connections. The event has gathered approximately 270 residents from different backgrounds and was a great opportunity for social mixing and integration.