



Walsall Connected Annual Report Year Two



Walsall Council



BLOXWICH
COMMUNITY
PARTNERSHIP



Walsall Connected

A collaboration with the community

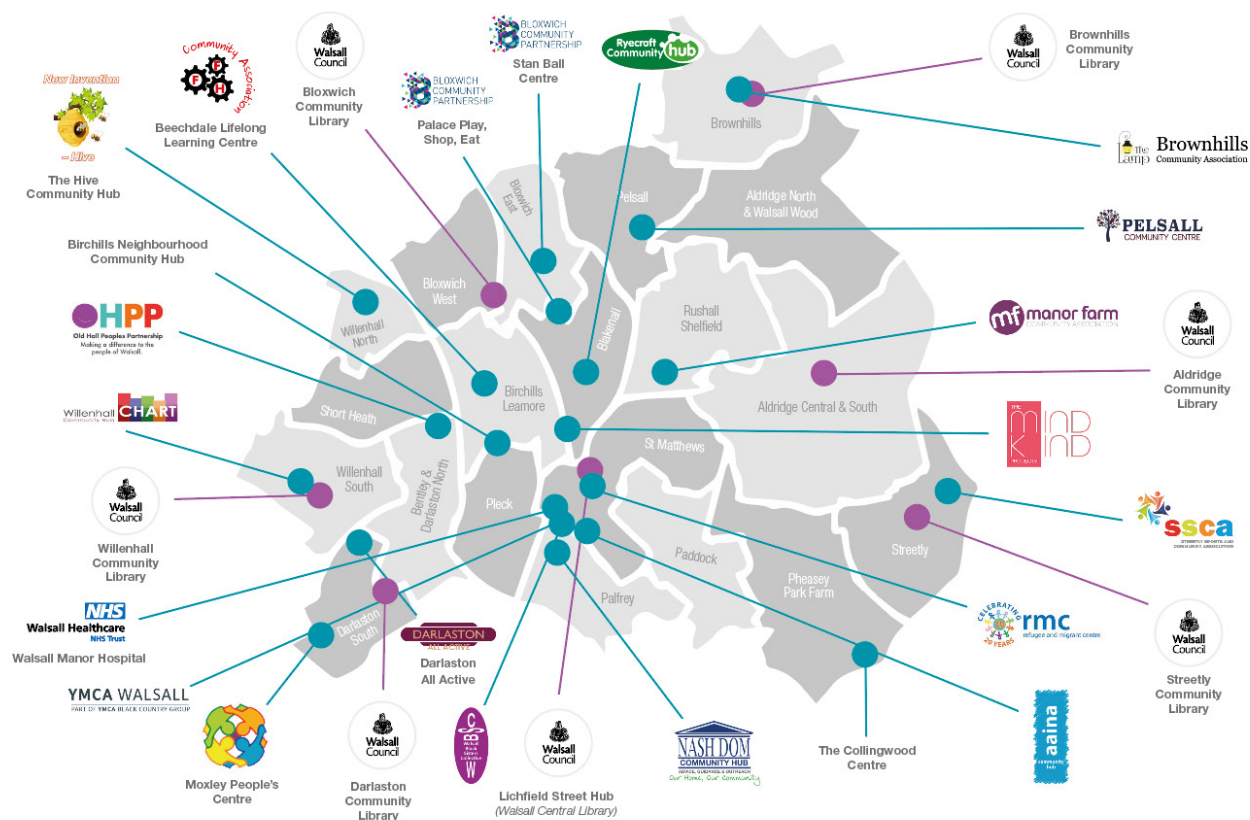
Walsall Connected is a successful collaboration between Walsall Council and Community Partner Organisations across the Borough.

Co-designed with Bloxwich Community Partnership, we created an offer of face-to-face digital upskilling, general support, signposting and access to first-line Council services. Walsall Connected comprises a collaborative network of 29 strategically situated sites, manned by trained staff and volunteers, situated in convenient locations easily accessible by our residents within their local area, reducing the requirement to travel to a single town centre location for in-person support and guidance.

The primary aim of Walsall Connected is to ensure digitally-excluded residents have access to consistent support and gain essential everyday transferable digital skills.

Walsall Connected is 'open to all'. Any resident can receive support through any of the 29 Walsall Connected centres.

Map of Walsall Connected Centres



Key
 Community Libraries ● Community Partners ●

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Bridging the digital divide

By providing in-person digital upskilling, assistance and access to Council services, Walsall Connected helps residents overcome the barriers and challenges of digital exclusion. Through this service, we hope to improve the digital skills and confidence of our residents, as well as their quality of life and wellbeing.

Walsall Connected is more than just a service to help residents access Council services online. It is also a way to build transferable everyday digital skills and empower residents to improve their quality of life and wellbeing through digital inclusion. Digital inclusion means having the skills, confidence and access to use digital technologies for personal and social benefits.

Walsall Connected aims to bridge the digital divide and enable residents to enjoy the benefits of digital inclusion such as:

Having **better access to information and services** can improve the health, finances, and education of Walsall's residents. For example, using NHS online services to book appointments, order prescriptions, and access health advice; applying for benefits, jobs, and courses online; and learning new skills and hobbies through online platforms.

Being able to **save money and manage their finances** more effectively by using online tools and resources. For example, comparing prices and finding the best deals for goods and services, banking online and managing their account.

Enhancing their social and emotional wellbeing by connecting with others and engaging in online activities. For example, keeping in touch with family and friends through video calls, messaging, social media, and joining online groups and communities.

Walsall Connected – Key Achievements Year Two



13,720 total residents supported July 2023 – June 2024.

9,515 of these residents built their confidence, enabling them to carry out the same process themselves independently in the future.



Creation of the Walsall Connected Link Centres. In addition to our **29** core centres, we now have an additional **23** locations across the borough trained to support with effective signposting and providing access to the network. Providing more places out in the community for people to get advice & support.



100+ additional staff and volunteers have received training to ensure they provide consistent support at a high level via Walsall Connected. This allows our partners to have a greater understanding of Walsall Council services and other offers, such as Barclays Digital Wings.



7,381 residents were supported to embrace self-service, reducing the need to contact a council service directly via traditional methods, such as by phone. This opens up valuable time for specialist council officers to focus on technical and specialist duties.



The Walsall Connected network and infrastructure has enabled us to secure external funding and deliver initiatives such as the WMCA Connected Services Programme. This enabled over **1,500** digital devices to be distributed across the borough to the most in need.



Our service user survey completed every month highlights the fantastic response rate that **96%** of residents surveyed would recommend Walsall Connected to their family and friends. This showcases the valuable service residents receive at Walsall Connected centres.



The Walsall Connected team regularly reviews feedback and uses it to shape the service delivery, which is continually evolving to meet the needs of the Council, our centres and the residents of Walsall.

The Bloxwich Community Partnership Team actively promotes Walsall Connected by attending various events and locations to inform residents about this service. We participate in formal events to share our work with other professionals and explain how Walsall Connected operates. We also attend public events and visit spaces across the Borough, such as local parks, 'Try-it Events' or spend time on the Thrive Bus or CASPER bus, to raise public awareness about Walsall Connected.



BLOXWICH
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A collaboration with the community co-designed and co-delivered with Bloxwich Community Partnership, we created an offer of face-to-face digital upskilling, general support, signposting and access to first-line council services.

The team at Bloxwich Community Partnership ensures the smooth daily running of Walsall Connected. They make sure that all centres are fully trained to the required standard, visited regularly, fully-supported, and kept up to date with any changes or new initiatives.

The team are also fully contactable each day or available via TEAMS to answer any questions or queries our centres may have, as well as actively encouraging links between centres and promoting partnership-working throughout the network.



Growth through collaboration

Over the past year, Walsall Connected has significantly expanded beyond its initial launch phase. This growth trajectory included partnering the NHS. Since then, the initiative has not only sustained its expansion but has also introduced the 'Walsall Connected Community Link Centres'. These centres serve as an extension of the main Walsall Connected centres, offering a certain level of support. Their primary function is to act as a referral service, signposting residents to our main centres.

The establishment of these Link Centres has been instrumental in bringing support and resources from Walsall Connected closer to the community at large. They have been pivotal in ensuring that assistance is accessible in more localised community settings. A testament to this outreach is the integration of Walsall Connected within the Romanian Community Centre, one of the many communities we've connected with through this initiative.

Walsall Connected Link Centres now include:

Pelsall Village School, Hands To Help You (H2HU), Be Well Walsall, Romanian Community Centre, Residents R Us, Street Teams, Midlands Langar Seva Society, Goscote Greenacres, The THOMAS Project, New Horizons Community Enterprise, Food Cycle, Ablewell Advice, The Thrive Bus, Family Hubs - North, Family Hubs - East, Family Hubs - South & Central, Family Hubs - West, St Johns Church Walsall Wood, Pelsall Village Centre, Rivers Academy, Goscote Palliative Care, Let's Chat - Walsall Community Transport, WATMOS.

Key:

- Walsall Connected **Main Centres**
- Walsall Connected **Link Centres**
- Walsall Healthcare
- Libraries



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Enhanced Community Infrastructure and Benefits

Walsall Connected has established a robust infrastructure that serves as the backbone of community support. The network benefits from:

- **Connectors on the Ground:** The BCP Team acts as the vital link between Walsall Connected and the community, ensuring services are delivered effectively.
- **Two-Way Communication:** A seamless flow of information from the Council to the community and vice-versa ensures transparency and responsiveness.
- **Feedback Channels:** Quick and effective consultation with key groups is facilitated through established feedback mechanisms.
- **Knowledge Access:** Residents have easy access to current knowledge and emerging offers, empowering them to stay informed.
- **Community Upskilling:** A mechanism is in place to support and upskill residents, enabling them to proactively seek information and self-serve.
- **NHS Partnership:** The effective link with Walsall Manor Hospital exemplifies the successful partnership working, enhancing healthcare access.

Centres and Outreach

The reach of Walsall Connected is extensive, with over 50 centres providing support or links to the initiative:

21 Core centres: These are the main centres of Walsall Connected, providing comprehensive support to residents.

7 Libraries: Libraries across Walsall have joined the initiative, offering resources and services as part of Walsall Connected.

Walsall Manor Hospital: A key partner, the hospital is integral to the health-related aspects of community support.

23 Community Links: Although not directly funded by Walsall Connected, these links are supported and provide vital signposting services to the main centres.



Conclusion

The expansion of Walsall Connected has significantly enhanced the community's ability to access support, knowledge and services. The initiative's infrastructure, combined with its extensive network of centres and links, has created a comprehensive system that not only addresses immediate needs but also fosters long-term community resilience and self-reliance. Through partnership working and a commitment to continuous improvement, Walsall Connected is set to remain a cornerstone of community support in Walsall. In total over 50 centres – places where residents can get support from or link in with Walsall Connected.



Partnership working with NHS

799
Total residents supported since launch

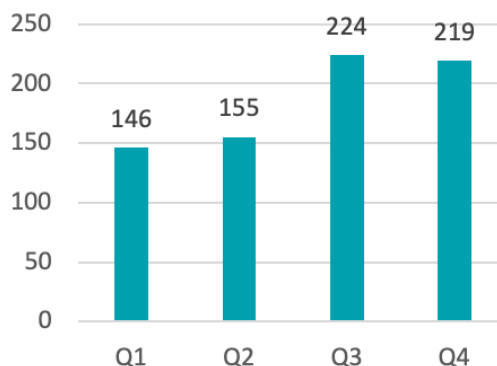
Walsall Connected, in collaboration with the NHS, demonstrates the advantages of partnership working.

The collaboration has been instrumental in enhancing the provision of help and support to the community, facilitating inter-service cooperation, and launching joint initiatives to ensure timely and widespread assistance.

A prime example of this effective partnership is the NHS Travel Support programme, developed in association with NX Travel. This initiative underscores Walsall Connected's commitment to providing digital assistance to link with essential travel assistance for medical appointments. Additionally, the MyPre-Op programme is another strategic alignment designed to offer residents preparatory support for their pre-operative needs.

These initiatives reflect our dedication to meeting the community's needs through collaborative action and great work being carried out in the hospital's patient voice team.

Walsall Connected Manor Hospital Demand



Q1/Q2 2024 data shows a 44% increase in demand compared to Q3/Q4 23 due to effective signposting, marketing and proactive engagement across the hospital.

Continued efforts with next steps working to support discharge lounge and other wards to promote the offer and support patients digitally.

Further work is underway supporting the Patient Voice team who are setting up a similar model at Royal Wolverhampton NHS Trust.

WE ARE WALSALL 2040

Walsall Connected is an initiative that aligns directly with the priorities of We Are Walsall 2040 in fostering a thriving, proud, prosperous and healthy Walsall.

Here is a summary of how Walsall Connected is working to each of the core priorities of We Are Walsall 2040:



We are thriving and happy

Localised Support:

Walsall Connected offers local, in-person assistance for accessing council services, ensuring residents can easily get the help they need, when they need it.

Digital Inclusion: The initiative helps residents get online, improving access to digital services and fostering greater community participation and satisfaction.



Walsall Connected centres reinforce



Community Centres:

By setting up local centres, Walsall Connected reinforces the identity of different communities and supports local pride. We can support our residents in a way that suits them.

Increasing accessibility: Making council services more accessible locally empowers residents and promotes civic engagement.

We are prosperous and innovative



Building digital skills: Providing training and support to help residents access digital services and to become more digitally self-sufficient

Increasing service efficiency: Streamlining access to services digitally and locally boosts efficiency, supporting economic growth.

We are healthy and well



Enhanced access to services and support:

Local centres make it easier for residents to access health and well-being services.

Support for vulnerable residents:

Specific support for those less able to navigate digital platforms ensures inclusive access to health resources.

Walsall Connected Performance – Year Two



13,720

Residents were supported through Walsall Connected, receiving face-to-face support by trained staff.



1.7% of

interactions resulted in a referral direct to a service area for specialist support.



4700+

hours spent with customers providing face-to-face support.



669

Residents have been supported face to face with the Blue Badge process.



92% Residents fully supported at first point of contact. Providing a great customer service with their interaction dealt with first time.



70% Residents supported felt confident to complete the same process independently in the future following support.



180+ attendees to digital training and Connected Services Digital starter courses. Supporting residents to gain basic digital skills.



5,900+ Residents went on to use another service in the location they attended such as another service providers like groups, events or support networks.



Only **2,453** of residents are repeat customers who return for a future interaction.



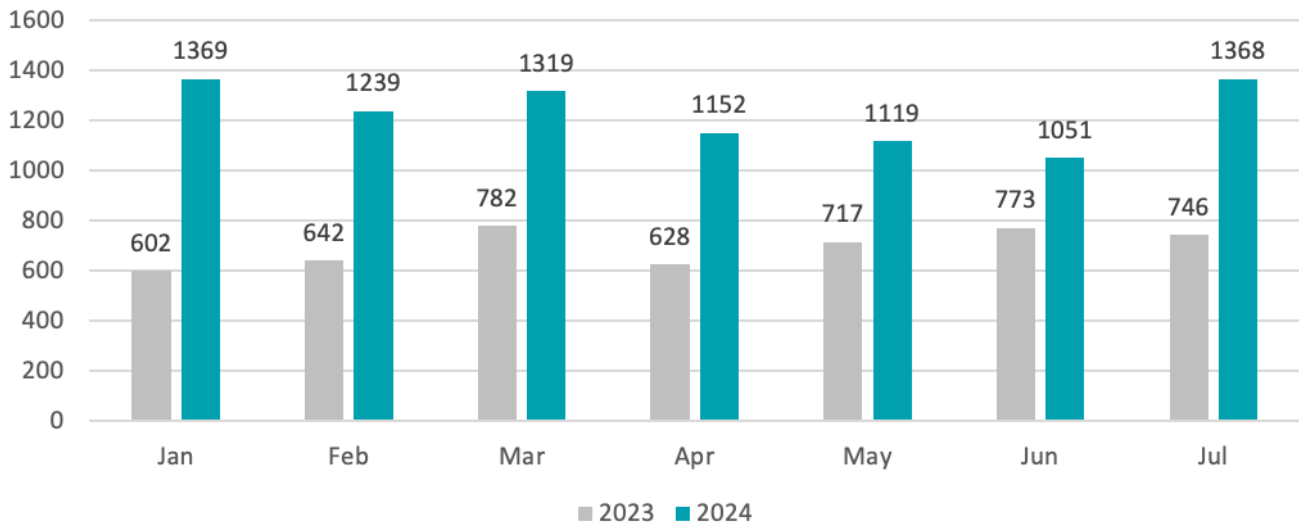
744 residents have been supported by Walsall Connected at Walsall Healthcare NHS Trust.



100+ Further people trained on Walsall Connected and have access to be part of the network.

Walsall Connected Performance – Year Two

January – June demand comparison 2023 v 2024



Infrastructure and Network

The data from the last 6 months highlights the increased demand for Walsall Connected as more residents become aware of the service or require support and access to our services.

This data only includes 408 repeat customers highlighting the success of the support provided. It indicates that residents are confident their enquiries have been effectively addressed or that they feel capable of accessing similar services independently in the future.



The demand being managed through Walsall Connected has resulted in a reduction in general enquiries directed at service areas, allowing staff to focus on back-office duties, such as application processing or handling enquiries from residents requiring specialised knowledge or more comprehensive support.

As demand changes, detailed analysis is conducted to ensure the correct support, training or assistance is provided to Walsall Connected locations.



Customer Satisfaction – Year Two

To listen to and understand our customer needs, it is important that we capture feedback from our customers about their experience of the service that they have received from Walsall Connected centres across the borough. To do this we collect monthly customer satisfaction feedback from all centres. Collating regular customer feedback is a fundamental requirement of the Walsall Connected and is part of the contract and our commitment to our customers.

96%

Residents would recommend Walsall Connected to their family and friends.

99%

rated it as being good/excellent when questions on the friendliness and helpfulness of the staff.

68%

of residents felt that they had gained some online knowledge, skills or understanding as a result of their visit.

98%

of customers were satisfied with the way they were dealt with while being support by Walsall Connected.

91%

of residents rated service as very good.

“For the first time I felt I was spoken to with kindness & given good help”

“No improvements, couldn’t believe such a service existed so close to home”

“The service was excellent, and the staff were so helpful with the enquiries I came in with”

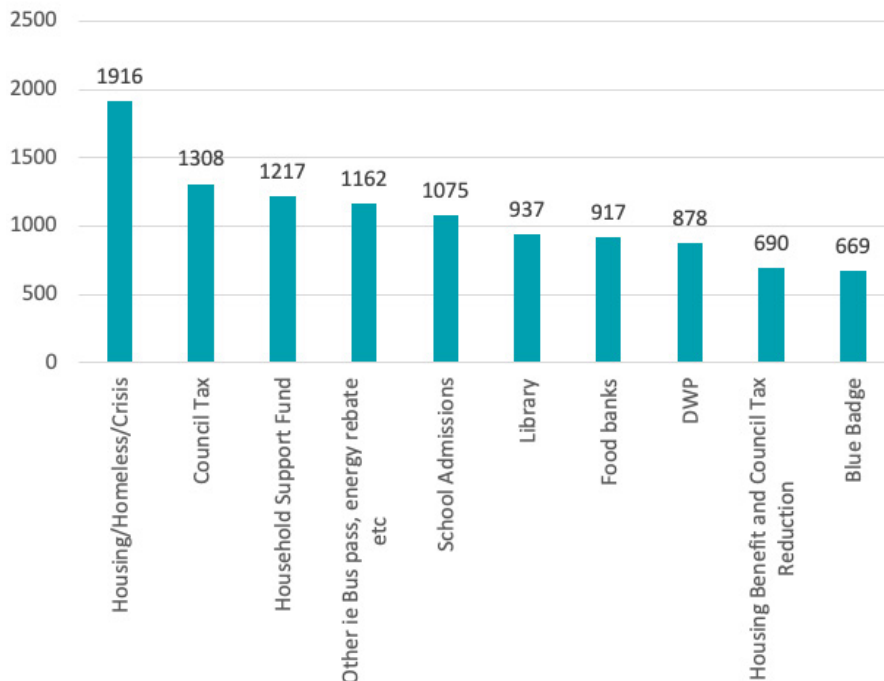
Data based on 304 surveyed residents



“Since Covid, it has felt as though Walsall Council has put their trust in the Voluntary Community Sector – the pandemic proved our sector could step up and run with things and we have been included and listened to. The VCS in Walsall is successfully working with the Council with each organisation retaining their own identities, supporting local communities across the Borough by offering a variety of areas of specialism in a non-competitive collaborative approach.” The team at Old Hall People’s Partnership.

Top Demand by Service & Process

Top 10 demand by service type



Data by Process	Customers
OTHER	1649
Housing/Homeless query	1252
Household Support Fund	1232
School Admissions	1080
Food banks	937
Other -Printing photocopying	791
Blue Badge	633
Universal Credit	460
Other DWP benefits	449
Council tax bill	428

Steps taken to support locations

We collaborated with council service areas that are in high demand at our centres. This initiative aimed to support and enhance skills by providing training on topics such as Council Tax and School Admissions. Representatives from these services attended our managers' meetings to offer on-site support, with the information subsequently shared across all centres. Having a Council representative at these meetings has significantly strengthened the relationship between the Council and Voluntary Sector locations. It has provided an opportunity to understand the services, meet the staff, and learn about their constraints, thereby improving our ways of working together.

Next steps are to continue data analysis and work with service areas to understand ways to continue to support residents and deal with as many enquires at the first point of contact as possible. This will result in a rework of training material and to create or update existing material.

As new processes go live online for Council Services, we will ensure support, guidance and training is provided alongside rollout timelines.

12 monthly managers meeting held covering

- Monthly performance
- Share knowledge and current information
- Council updates
- Sharing knowledge across centres
- Overviews from centres sharing what's going on in their organisations
- Council Service area attendance and training: Benefits, Council Tax, Elections, Family Hubs and School Admissions
- External partners such as Citizens Advice Sandwell and Walsall visit also attend.



Connected Services Programme Background

The Secretary of State for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities awarded £4 million to the West Midlands Combined Authority (WMCA) to provide digital devices and software to residents in the region. The grant was intended to support residents who need access to digital and to support residents for education, employment, health and wellbeing purposes.

The WMCA Connected Services Programme has made significant strides in enhancing digital inclusion and connectivity within Walsall. By leveraging existing infrastructure, collaborating with local partners, and distributing devices strategically, we've achieved tangible outcomes that positively impact residents' lives.

When the programme was announced, it naturally aligned with our pre-established Walsall Connected infrastructure.



Walsall Connected centres are strategically spread across the borough, deeply embedded within the community, and dedicated to supporting residents digitally and were able to provide the required assistance to link these devices to residents most in need.

It also aligns to our Walsall 2040 objective to be a 'Connected Borough - We will: Improve access and skills so our residents are digitally confident.'



90% of total devices received have been allocated to residents

10% of total devices received have been allocation to locations to provide digital support to residents ongoing and for digital business growth and support

156

of total devices received by Walsall Council have been allocation to locations to provide digital support to residents ongoing and for digital business growth and support



93% of referrals made were agreed for award to be granted

Residents expected to use devices allocated to locations for use within centres over a 12-month period ongoing. This will provide continuous digital support and upskilling

1,500+

480 Fitbits purchased to support health related programmes as part of Public Health initiatives



130+ attendees of the Connected Services Basic Digital Courses. With this programme's funding we have been able to set up 8 locations that have run basic digital skills courses for residents

225



Dongles provided to support NHS initiatives and Black country impact. These will support residents with access to internet for virtual ward support or gaining a device to reinforce continued efforts against digital exclusion

Over **25%** of people have gone on to sign up for other training or education following the participation of the Connected Services Digital Course



30 devices provided to our Towns Deal to support the implementation of that service to support a device to loan for residents' employment/business journey



Quantifiable Impact

- **Over £500,000 Invested:** The programme's investment in providing digital devices has directly improved digital skills and connectivity.
- **Increased Digital Literacy:** Residents gained confidence in using technology, accessing online services, and participating in the digital economy.
- **Support to residents and voluntary sector:** 90% of devices received have been allocated to residents. 10% of devices received have been allocated to locations to provide ongoing digital support to residents and for digital business growth and development.
- **Health of Walsall residents:** The Connected Services Programme is designed to have a lasting impact on the health of Walsall residents. The devices provided through the programme support wellbeing and mental health. The capital funding has been used to purchase items that support physical health in Walsall.
- **Links to NHS Walsall:** Mobile Wi-Fi units, allowing access to data, have been issued to support local NHS programmes and virtual wards.
- **Allocation of devices:** We were able to identify the primary purpose as during the device allocation process, we captured the below information:



Testimonial



"I have seen the Chromebook boost health and see first hand, many of the POP young adults have gone on to achieve their goals with the Chromebook."
POP – Positive Outcomes Project



"I believe we covered a vast area within these communities and know we have reached some of our most vulnerable people. We have given (with the help of the West Midlands Combined Authority) residents the chance to access key services and develop their skills on a computer whilst gaining confidence in their own ability to tackle life. We thank everyone for making this project a big success." Ryecroft NRC



Walsall Connected Offer

Apart from the initial support to get digital access, Walsall Connected has grown and developed to offer so much more. From key signposting thanks to the shared network, an infrastructure ready to adapt and be part of change to support residents at locations that can provide further digital training through other initiatives or link to NHS to collaborate in the most effective way.

Digital Support

- Access to devices and internet access in centres
- Support and guidance from Walsall Connected staff
- Guides and process flows to support understanding of processes
- Monthly meetings sharing information, training and support across centres
- Other work to support the process of supporting residents to reduce digital exclusion in Walsall
- Digital training offer at certain locations

Signposting

- Knowledge in locations to signpost to appropriate services
- External signposting to locations such as CAB or internal signposting to Council services
- Joined up network of all centres to share knowledge and support across locations when needed so residents can be signposted to other activities or support

Referrals

- Internal links to CXC and service areas to provide a consistent referral system for all residents across services
- Internal referral process to service areas when non-digital customers need extra support or specialist support is required from a service area
- Citizens Advice Sandwell & Walsall referral and links to ensure correct support and signposting is in place

Other benefits

- Infrastructure in place linking Voluntary locations
- Ability to gather data from different groups to understand needs across the borough
- Ability to support in development of sites and offer with extra support or programmes or initiatives such as Connected Services Programme.
- Training packages being designed with external provider in key locations for digital support

Case Study: C

Supporting Blue Badge Application for a Gentleman with Mobility Challenge.

Background

A gentleman visited Walsall Connected at Walsall Manor Hospital, seeking assistance with his application for a Blue Badge. He had been referred by Macmillan due to his mobility issues. The gentleman faced challenges related to mobility, eyesight, and breathing. Walking from the main atrium to the island where Walsall Connected is based was a significant struggle for him.

Situation and Initial Concerns:

- The gentleman found the entire process of filling out the online Blue Badge form and attaching necessary documents daunting
- He lacked confidence in navigating the application process independently
- He expressed uncertainty about how to proceed.

Assistance Provided

- On site tablet used to initiate the Blue Badge application process to showcase how to use digital device
- The team patiently guided the gentleman through each step and explained the importance of uploading relevant documents as evidence



Additional Services

- Recognising the gentleman's needs, the team signposted him to other relevant services:
- Old Hall's Gardening Service: For outdoor support and maintaining green spaces
- Silver Service at Manor Farm Community Association: A resource for additional assistance for older residents to support with socialising



Outcome

- Successful completion of application on site with support
- Supported with digital fear
- Effective signposting to support independent living
- A few months later, the gentleman expressed his gratitude via email once a success application was confirmed saying "I convey my heartfelt thanks to you for helping me with this; I really can't thank you enough."



Conclusion

This case study highlights the importance of personalised support, patience, and empathy when assisting individuals with complex needs. By addressing technical challenges and providing additional resources, Walsall Connected made a positive impact on the gentleman's life. From the need of support with a Blue Badge due to the knowledge shared across the services this allowed quality signposting to the gentleman who now has a further understanding of what is available in the borough to maintain independence and continue to live independently.

Case Study: YMCA Small Street

Supporting benefit applications and links to other Council services.

Background

Service user was referred to YMCA Small Street by their GP's social prescriber for support with digital support to complete a Personal Independence Payment (PIP) form. Service user lacked previous experience or knowledge of applying for a DWP benefit.

Situation and Initial Concerns:

- Service user was signposted for digital support to complete online process for PIP
- He lack skills or understanding to complete application process independently.

Assistance Provided

- PIP Form Assistance: We assisted in completing the PIP form, leading to its approval
- Blue Badge: We supported PS in obtaining a Blue badge from Walsall Council
- Council Tax Reduction: Due to PS's health diagnosis of COPD, Osteoarthritis, and cognitive impairment resulting from a Functioning Neurological disorder, we helped PS receive a Council tax reduction



Additional Services

- Recognising the service user's needs that lead to support with other services, such as Blue Badge and Council Tax support
- Through information provide this highlighted support for extra requests that can be made such as a Disabled Facilities Grant (DFG)



Outcome

- Volunteer Opportunities: Impressed with the help received at the SSC, PS is now in the process of joining YMCA Small Street as a volunteer translator (to support residents who speak Punjabi) and a befriender on the Making Connections project
- Financial gains for the resident by receiving benefits eligible for
- DFG Adaptations: PS applied for the Disabled Facilities grant to adapt their bath to a walk-in shower, as getting in and out of the bath had become increasingly difficult



Conclusion

This case study highlights the variety of support that's received at locations. YMCA has an officer who is trained to provide further support with things such as PIP claims. The knowledge available means she was also able to support resident with other things they were eligible for and increased income for this resident. With ongoing training and support to ensure sites have understanding of services available. This ensures that when a resident attends a location for support, other things that may be eligible for are highlighted and signposted to or supported to claim.

Walsall Connected – Annual Review

Year Two priorities and next steps for key priorities July 2024 to June 2025

Walsall Connected met or exceeded Year Two's key priorities by:

- Encouraging customers to get online, further supporting and increasing resident access, familiarity and confidence in the digital world
- Building residents' resilience by digital upskilling residents to self-serve and access Council services and beyond, with the support of libraries and community partners
- Continuing to align with the way we work with residents, partners, and internal services, continually improving the service provided through regular review and appraisal
- Beginning to scope out the landscape of volunteering across the borough and how we can encourage more opportunities through the Walsall Connected network.

As we continue to build upon the successes from Year Two, **Walsall Connected will focus on three key overarching outcomes in Year Three:**

1. Improving resident's access to Walsall Council services.

2. Providing an excellent customer experience for residents and all Walsall Connected stakeholders and partners.

3. Bridging any gaps between the Council and community to ensure appropriate information, access, and support for our residents.

Walsall Connected will work toward these outcomes in conjunction with Walsall Council's GREAT customer promise:

- **Get things done quickly** – Our aim is to support residents at first point of contact where possible
- **Respect our customers and the communities we serve** – 99% of surveyed residents rated the friendliness and helpfulness of the staff as good/excellent
- **Excellent customer service, first time, every time** – 96% of surveyed residents recommend Walsall Connected to their family and friends
- **Align the way we work with customers, partners and internal services** – our collaborative partnership working delivers training across all centres ensuring consistent messaging and knowledge in how to access council services
- **Tell people about our services and be clear about what we don't do** – our comprehensive network distributes accurate council and community information in a timely and effective manner

