

 Walsall Connected  
**Annual Report**

Year One 13.07.22 – 12.07.23



Walsall Council

# Walsall Connected – Introduction






Walsall Connected was launched in July 2022 as a key deliverable in the Council's Customer Experience Strategy (2021 to 2026). In 2021, the Council gathered feedback from residents and other stakeholders, which helped us to gain greater insight about resident's experiences when accessing Council services and their preferences about how our services should be designed and delivered in the future.

Many residents and partners told us they needed our services to be more 'joined up', with increased digital self-service options, a more accessible and accurate website, and a more efficient and professional telephony support offer. Notably, our older population, disabled residents, and carers, frequently said they needed better access to face-to-face support to help address the rising levels of digital exclusion caused by the shift of many statutory services online.

In response, we launched our Customer Experience Strategy which aimed help deliver our three Proud Promises:

- **Improved Outcomes and Customer Experience**
- **Improved Employee Satisfaction and Engagement**
- **Improved Service Efficiency and Performance**

The Council's Customer Experience Strategy explains what this really means for our customers through our new Customer Promise which is to deliver GREAT services:

- G** **Get things done quickly** 
- R** **Respect** our customers and the communities we serve 
- E** **Excellent** customer service, first time, every time 
- A** **Align** the way we work with customers, partners and internal services 
- T** **Tell** people about our services and be clear about what we don't do 

# 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 to offer face-to-face digital upskilling, general support, signposting and access to first-line Council services.

Walsall Connected comprises a collaborative network of 28 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.

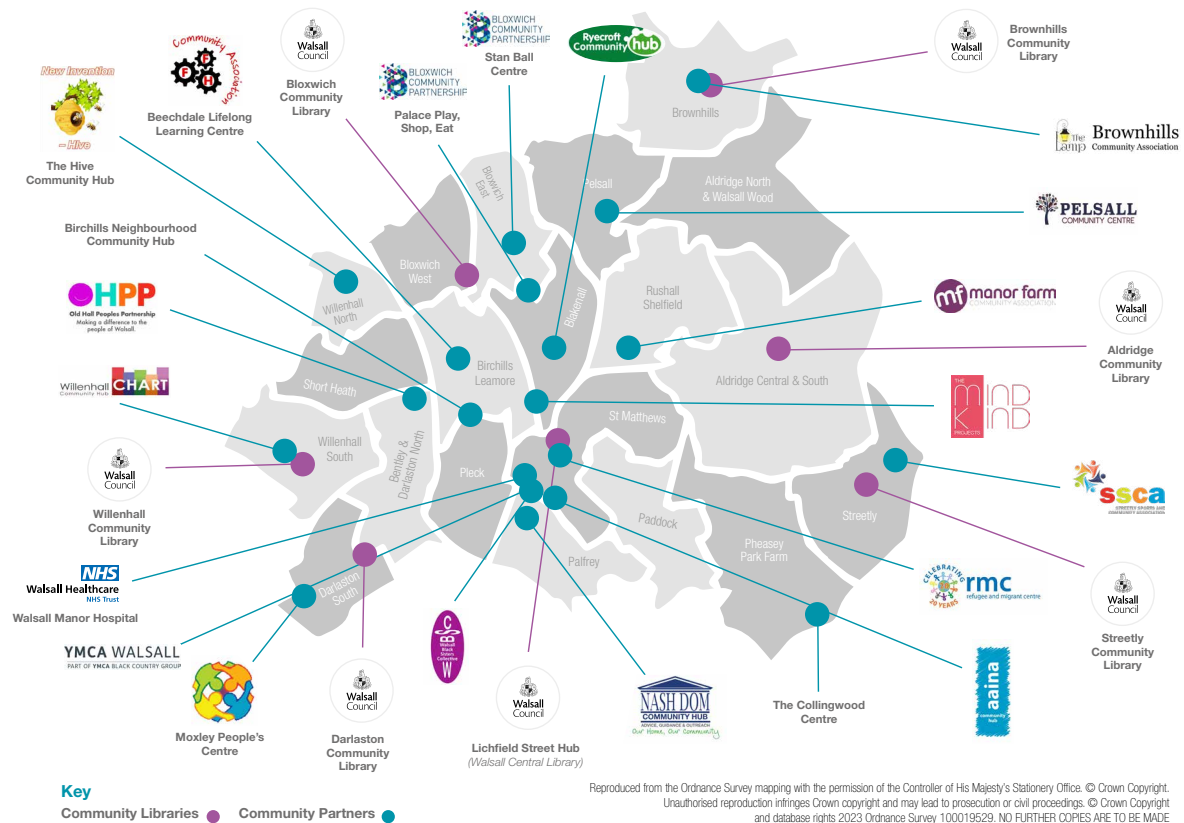
The initial aim of Walsall Connected is to ensure digitally excluded residents receive consistent support and gain essential everyday transferable digital skills.

Walsall Connected is ‘open to all’, any resident can receive support through any of the 28 Walsall Connected centres.

**Liza Jackson - Walsall Connected Partnership Manager within Bloxwich Community Partnership:**

*“Walsall Connected is a successful collaboration between the Council and the voluntary sector and has been a real opportunity to bring the local community and the Council closer together by delivering in the heart of the community.”*

Bloxwich Community Partnership lead and support the community partners, co-designing the service.



# Walsall Connected and Walsall 2040

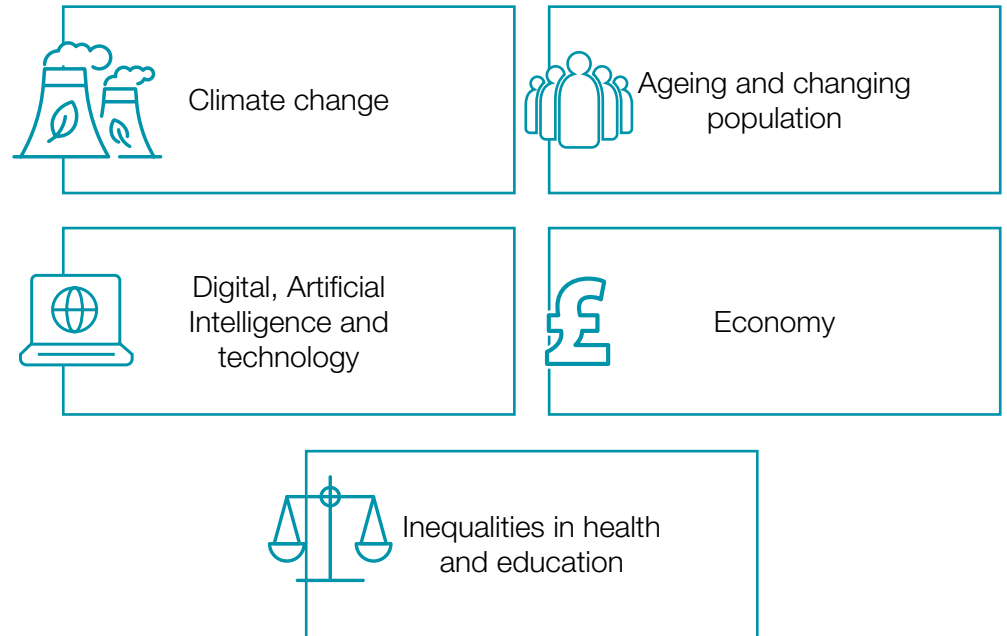
Throughout this year Walsall Connected partners have helped to co-design engagement activities to gather more views and opinions from residents, which has been used to help create a shared partnership vision about what Walsall should look like by 2040. Integral to the vision for Walsall in 2040 is the idea that:

*“Community is the glue that helps keep us together, fosters good relations, and creates a sense of pride and place”.*

*Cllr Bird – Leader*

This annual report aims to showcase how Walsall Connected has supported the Council to deliver the ambitions outlined in the Customer Experience Strategy (2021-2026) and to demonstrate how the Walsall Connected network is now evolving to support the delivery of the shared ambitions for our Walsall 2040 vision.

## Walsall in 2040 – challenges and opportunities

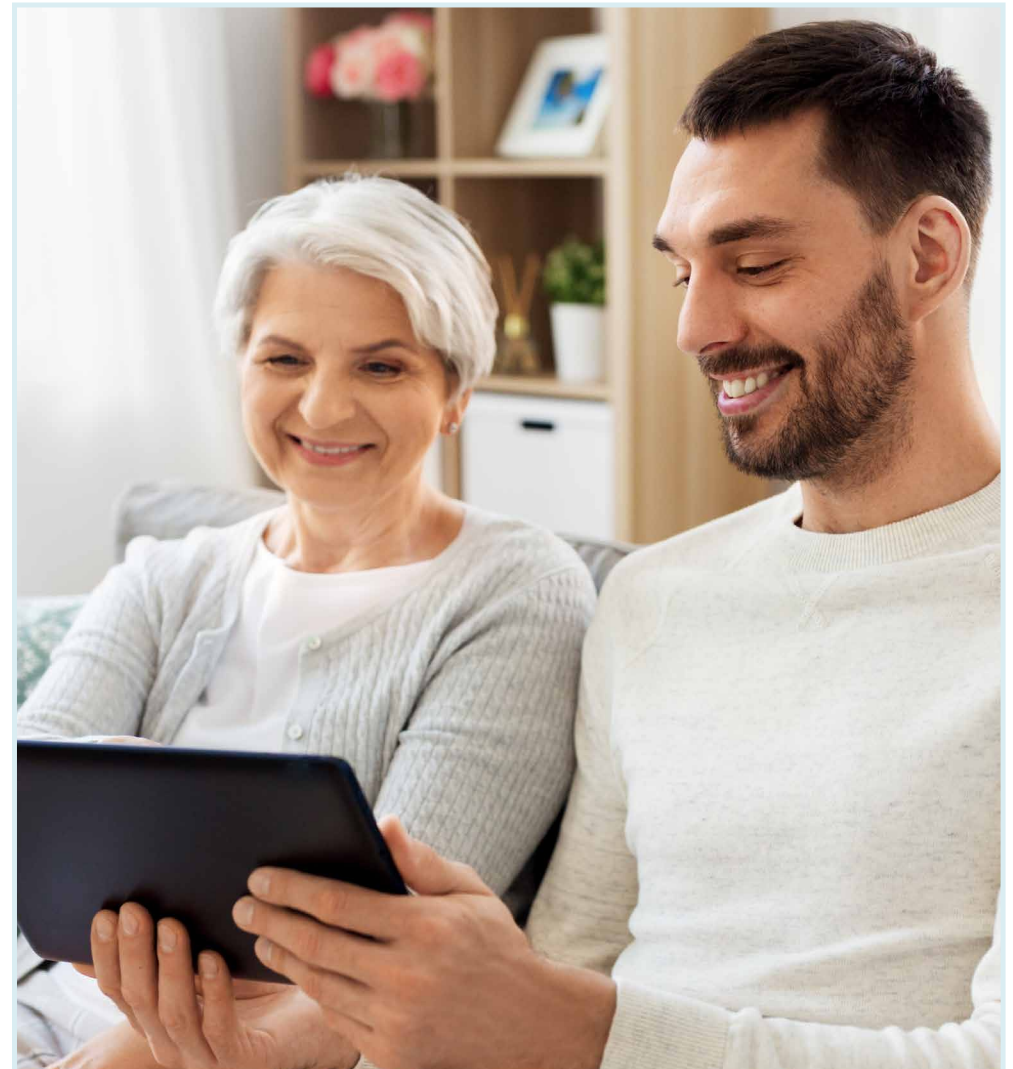


# Walsall Connected – Building Resilient Communities

Evidence shows that empowered neighbourhoods are more resilient to the challenges of everyday life and better equipped to harness opportunities, and overcome issues, to help drive change and deliver sustainable improvements. Stronger communities also help people to live happier and longer lives.

Walsall Connected is helping to achieve this outcome by facilitating:

- A strong and sustainable voluntary and community network that can play a key leadership role in shaping and delivering services vital for the future.
- More aligned partnership infrastructure, through which volunteering is encouraged, celebrated, and residents gain greater understanding about how they can take part.
- Vibrant and sustainable community spaces that act as hubs for community life.
- Walsall becoming a wellbeing borough where those with disabilities are enabled and supported to live active lives.
- Lifelong digital learning opportunities that are helping to increase adult skill levels.
- A digital borough where all residents can access digital services and are confident and capable in a digital world.
- A partnership approach, through which residents are confident to consent to sharing their data, which can then be used across Walsall partners to help drive insight and improve lives.
- Investment in new digital technology, to help improve customer services and give residents and communities a greater voice, and choice in how they access services, and get involved in local decision-making.
- Improved support to help residents to access online advice, benefit tools, and calculators, to maximise their income, reduce debt and enhance financial literacy.





# Walsall Connected – The importance of the Voluntary Community Sector



The Voluntary Community Sector is at the heart of our communities within Walsall.

With a significant presence across all wards and regions and extensive experience of engagement and outreach – the Voluntary Community Sector is a trusted support facility and offers easy access for residents.

Funding provided through Walsall Connected supports participating community organisations to reach out to, and offer in-person support, to those who may be digitally excluded for whatever reason – this could be due to lack of awareness and ability, or it may be due to access issues both practical and more complex. As frontline support, community organisations will have insight into the specific needs of their local area and can become immediately aware of issues and changing requirements, offering hands-on direct support in real time.

## Walsall Connected – Offering a GREAT service

A top priority of Walsall Connected is to ensure digitally excluded residents have access to Council services while also offering support to gain essential transferable digital skills. Walsall Connected is available to all residents, with the acknowledgment that there will be some residents more adversely affected by the channel shift toward online self-service not only in accessing council services but also in many day-to-day activities. It is designed to be an inclusive service, jargon-free, and geared toward supporting in a way which builds community resilience, digital confidence, and capability.

Walsall Connected offers in-person upskilling, however it is recognised not all residents will have the willingness or ability to self-serve online. It is anticipated that this will be in the minority of customer interactions and there is an effective referral procedure in place to support customers in these circumstances. Specialist support is available via contact from council officers for customers who need telephone or face-to face support. In addition, referral and signposting to other appropriate organisations is offered through Walsall Connected such as requesting support from Citizen's Advice Bureau.

Walsall Connected is operationally managed by a core team who continue to work on ensuring Walsall Connected is recognised, understood and utilised by customers, staff and stakeholders.

As a new service, as different situations and customer scenarios arise, we have had to adapt, review and amend procedures and implement quickly to meet our strategic promise of offering a GREAT customer experience.

From ongoing customer satisfaction surveys conducted, Walsall Connected achieves a 100% recommendation rate to friends and family from those customers receiving support.

Consultations were conducted (and continue to be conducted) with Walsall residents to assess the impact of Walsall Connected on equality, taking into consideration feedback on how to deliver effectively and ensure inclusivity.



## Walsall Connected – From launch to present day

Walsall Connected initially launched with 2 centres at the end of June/start of July 2022. Since September/October 2022 a further 26 centres have officially come onboard.

**7017**

Residents have been supported through Walsall Connected receiving face-to-face support by trained staff.

**87%**

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

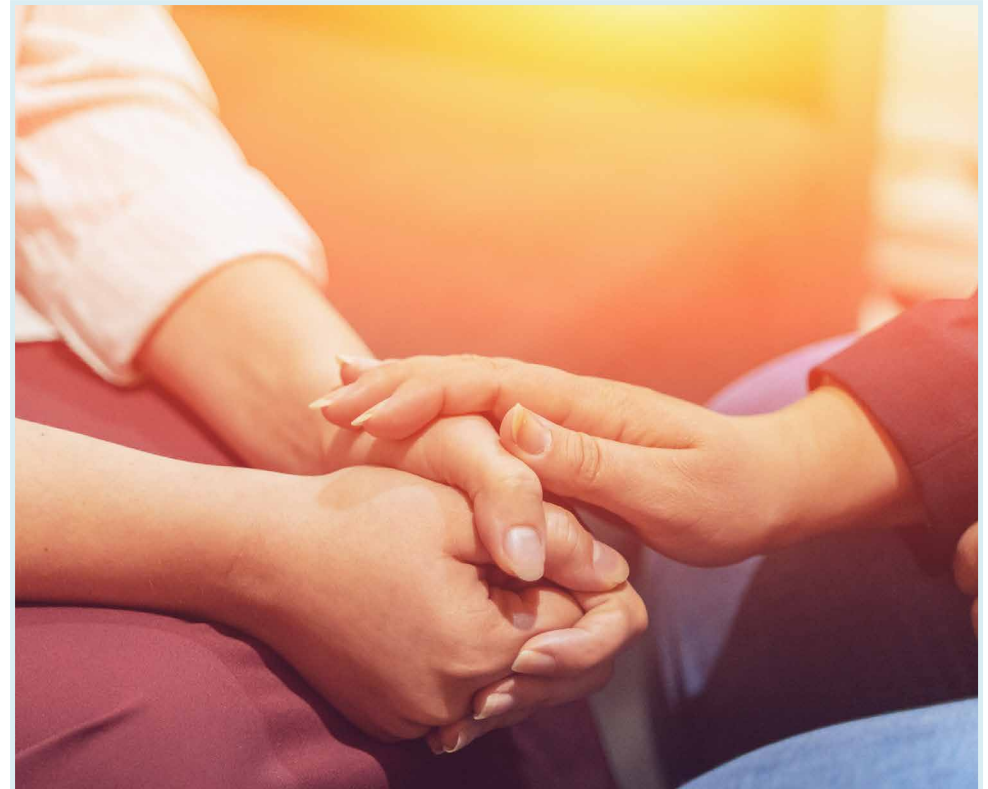
**2500+ hours**

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

**100%**

Users surveyed have said they would recommend Walsall Connected to their family and friends.

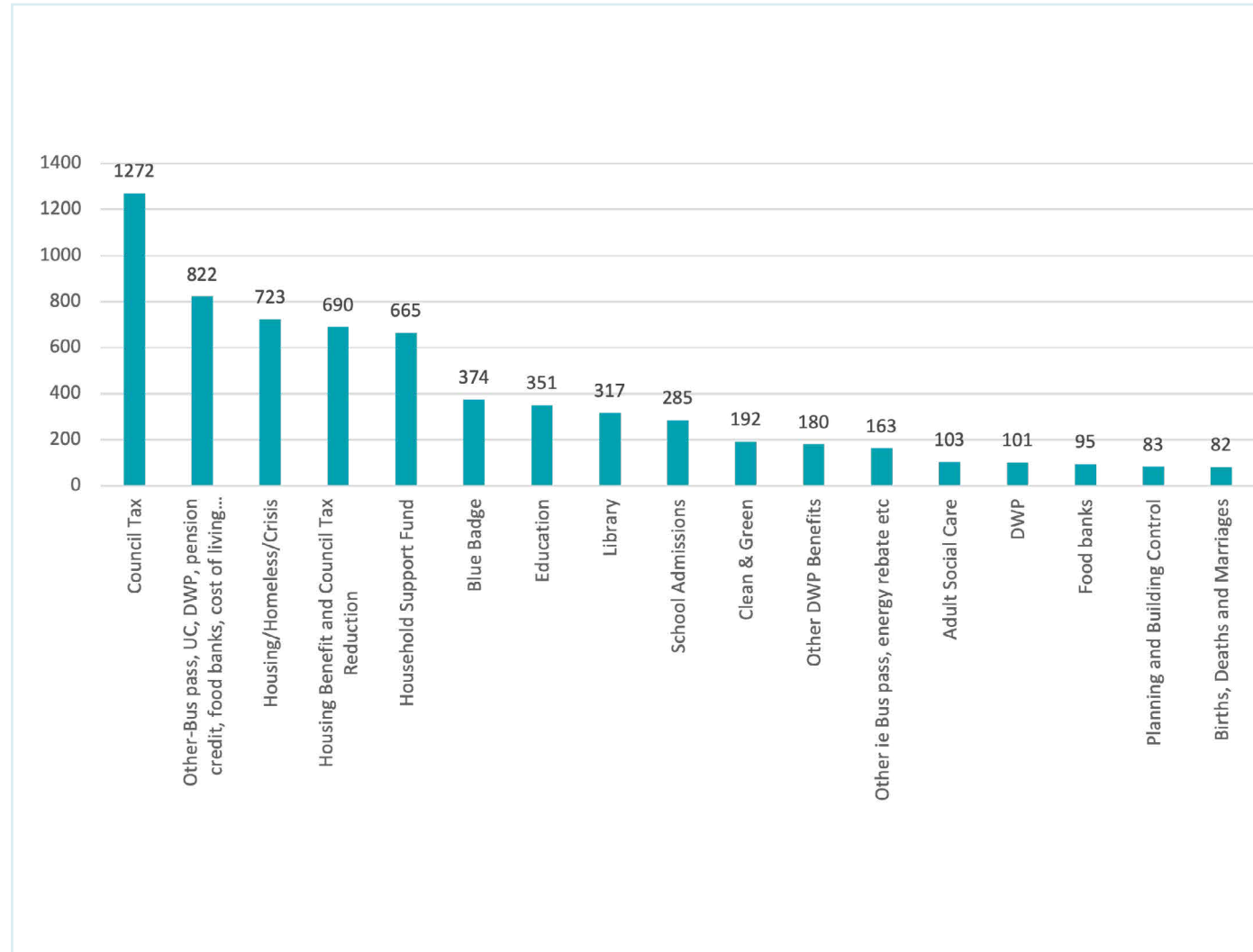
Our overarching goal is to offer digital upskilling and general signposting to all residents in Walsall who need support and to empower residents to be able to self-serve at their own convenience 24/7. However, for those residents for whom going online will not be an option moving forward, we continue to offer in-person support to access first-line Council services easily to ensure the customer receives a GREAT customer experience. Walsall Connected will continue to develop and adapt to incorporate more support and access to services as required so no resident gets left behind in the increasing transition to online in all areas of everyday life.





# Walsall Connected – Top 20 demand by service area & Process

Top 20 demand by service area



Data by Process	Customers
OTHER	1134
Household Support Fund	652
Housing/Homeless query	414
Blue Badge	369
Council Tax	344
Housing Benefit and Council Tax Reduction - Make a New claim	312
School Admissions	296
Other -Printing photocopying	222
Council Tax general query	205
Education - Walsall Late primary Application form	164
WHG	161
Non-Council service	145
Universal Credit	144
Housing Benefit and/or Council tax Reduction query	137
Council tax rebate payment	125
Bus pass	116
Food banks	103
Housing Benefit and Council Tax Reduction - Upload evidence online	103
Housing/Homeless	102

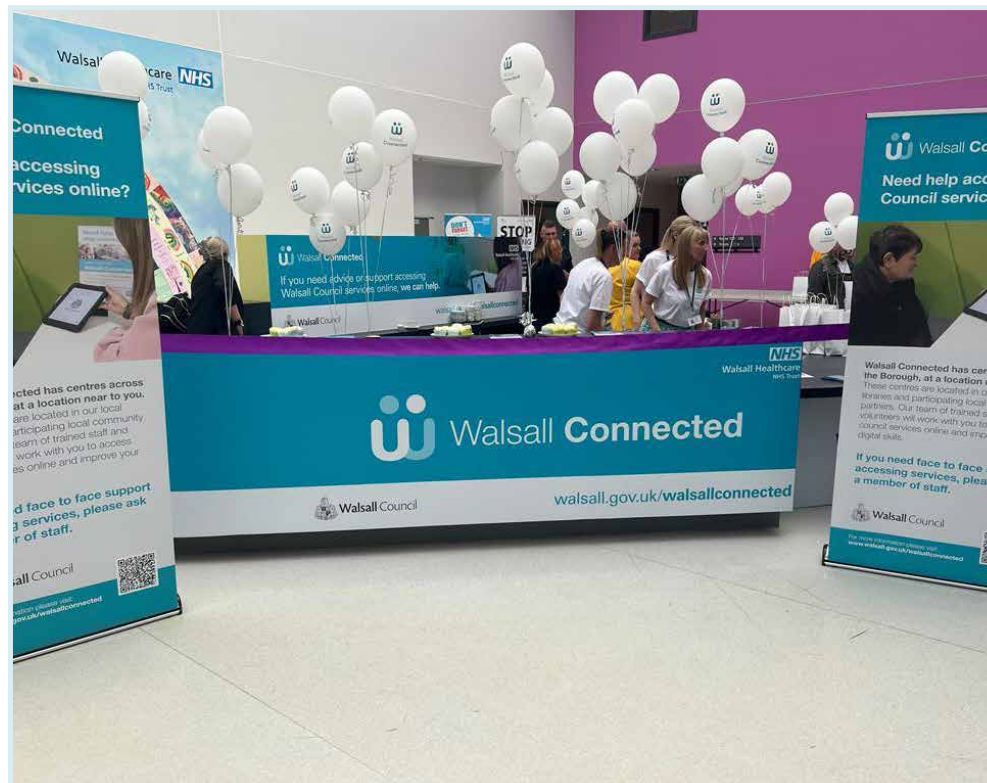
## Walsall Connected – From launch to present day

2023 saw the launch of Walsall Manor Hospital as a Walsall Connected centre.

This will enable Walsall Connected to support some of the Borough's most in need residents with digital upskilling and signposting at a convenient destination, allowing patients, carers and staff to get support while also attending appointments and visiting the hospital.

Footfall at the Manor Hospital is anticipated to be high, and we are looking forward to taking learnings around customer needs and wants from this new centre and incorporating them into developing the service.

Although the Walsall Connected centre at the Manor Hospital was only launched in July 2023, the data captured since suggests there are opportunities to help improve the journey for residents who enter hospital and then find they need adaptations or assistive technology to be able to return home. This valuable insight will be used to help inform our work plan for 2023/24.

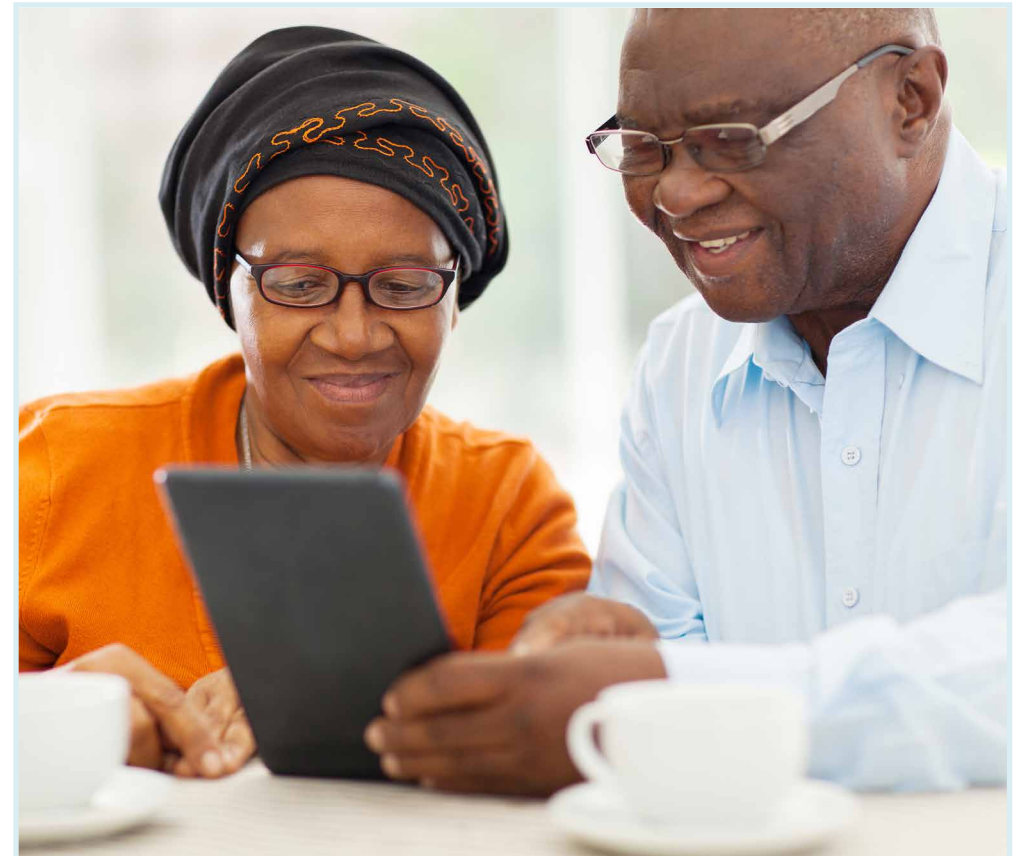


## Walsall Connected – Access to devices and data for Walsall residents

Digital exclusion is not having the skills and confidence to use digital devices and it can also be not having access to devices and data, or a combination of both.

Deprivation can make it harder for people to be digitally included by not having the funds to own devices, or to be able to afford ongoing connectivity.

Walsall Connected has two options to bridge this gap. We refer residents into a digital device loaning scheme through the NHS Black Country Connected Programme and between June and December 2023 also have access to devices and data due to securing significant West Midlands Combined Authority (WMCA) funding to provide eligible residents with suitable equipment and data.



# Walsall Connected – Key Achievements Year One

Year one has been remarkable for the organisation and partnership working. Some of our key accomplishments include:



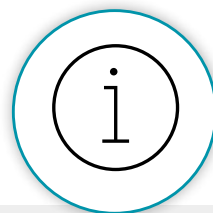
We have supported 4105 residents to build their confidence to enable them to be able to carry out the same process themselves independently in the future.



Partnered with 28 centres across the Borough. This moves away from the previous model of one front door into the Civic Centre and provides access to support in a convenient local location for a resident. This offers a great opportunity for residents to also receive signposting to other beneficial services through our partners.



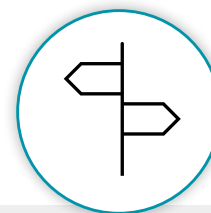
163 staff and volunteers have received training to ensure they provide consistent support at a high level via Walsall Connected. This allows our partners to provide face-to-face digital support, whether this be with Walsall Council services online, Barclays Digital Wings or even basic digital skills.



5590 residents have been supported without the need to contact a Council service directly via traditional methods such as phone, by embracing self-service and gaining essential skills. This frees up valuable time for specialist officers to focus on technical back office duties.



Walsall Connected infrastructure has enabled us to secure and deliver external funding such as the WMCA Connected Services Programme. This allows over 1500 digital devices to be distributed across the Borough for eligible residents through the Walsall Connected network.



The added value of Walsall Connected centres being in different locations means that a resident attending for digital support will also be introduced to other services available to them. This includes: befriending groups, various courses, other support networks and much more.



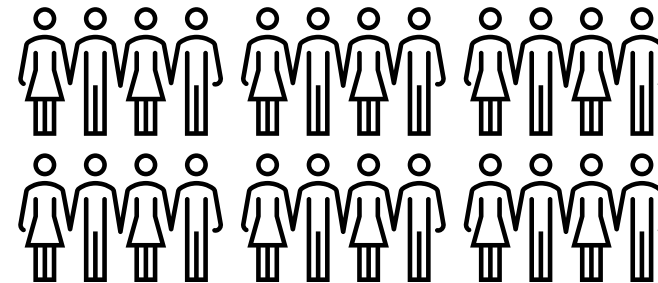
Walsall Connected has been shortlisted as a finalist for Best Efficiency and Transformation Initiative for the 2023 APSE Service Awards which will take place in September 2023.

# Walsall Connected – Performance Overview

## Walsall Connected Performance

**7017**

Residents have been supported through Walsall Connected receiving face-to-face support by trained staff



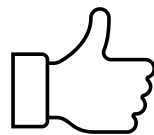
**2.5%**

Interactions resulted in a referral direct to Council service area for specialist support



**87%**

Residents fully supported at first point of contact. Walsall Connected provided a great customer service with their interaction dealt with first time.



**59%**

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



**2560**

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



## Customer Feedback



**93%**

Rated it as being excellent when asked about the friendliness and helpfulness of the staff



**89%**

Satisfied with the way they were dealt with while being supported by Walsall Connected

Staff were very helpful going out of their way to help

I was very happy with my visit today, so I don't see any need for improvements

Very useful and helpful visit

Feel fully supported and confident in centre staff

Data based on 159 surveyed residents

**100%**



Residents would recommend Walsall Connected to their family and friends

**84%**

Felt they had gained some online knowledge, skills or understanding as a result of their visit



**91%**



Rated service as very good

# Walsall Connected – Case Study

“I was feeling very lonely and isolated and coming into the centre has given me a purpose each day and changed my life. I have made lots of friends and enjoy lots of new activities”

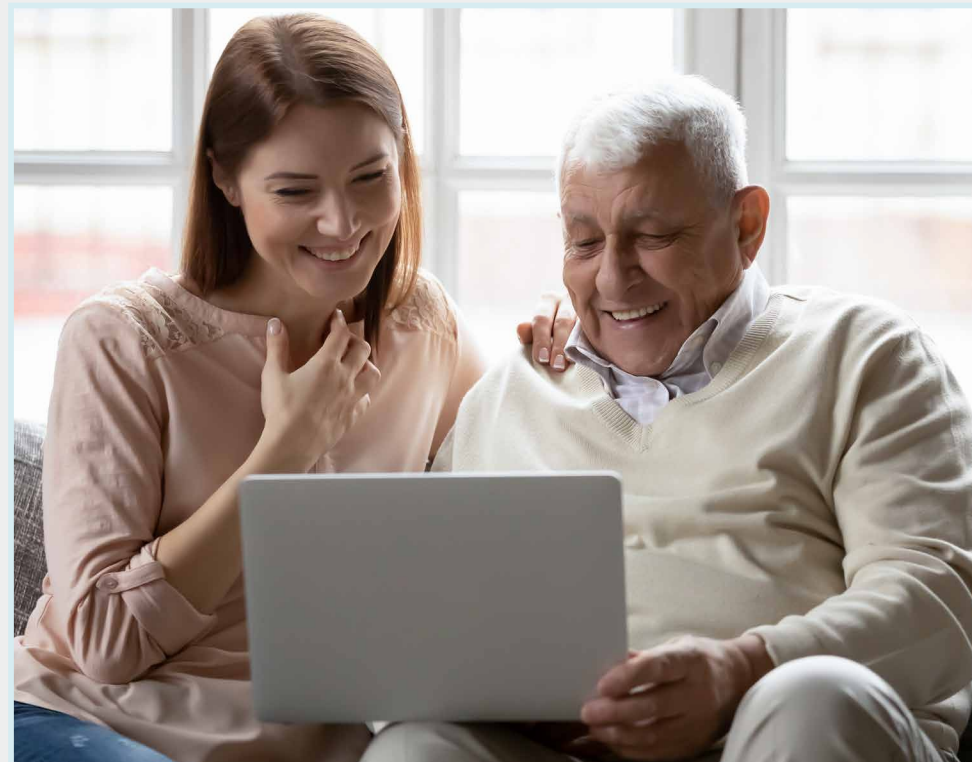
## A Residents Story

I visited the Stan Ball Centre to apply for a blue badge. The centre supported me with my application and during the visit I mentioned I felt very left behind with technology but was keen to learn.

The staff there signed me up for their basic IT course which I completed over 6-weeks and after finishing the course I signed up for a free digital device. Having received support from Walsall Connected, and having access to the device, this has increased my confidence in the digital world, and I no longer feel so intimidated when using technology.

Since visiting Walsall Connected at the centre, I've begun to regularly attend coffee mornings and have made lots of friends. I've also joined the seated dance exercise class activities at the centre to help improve my mobility following an illness.

Coming to the Stan Ball Centre has changed my life, it has given me a purpose each day and I've made some great friendships.

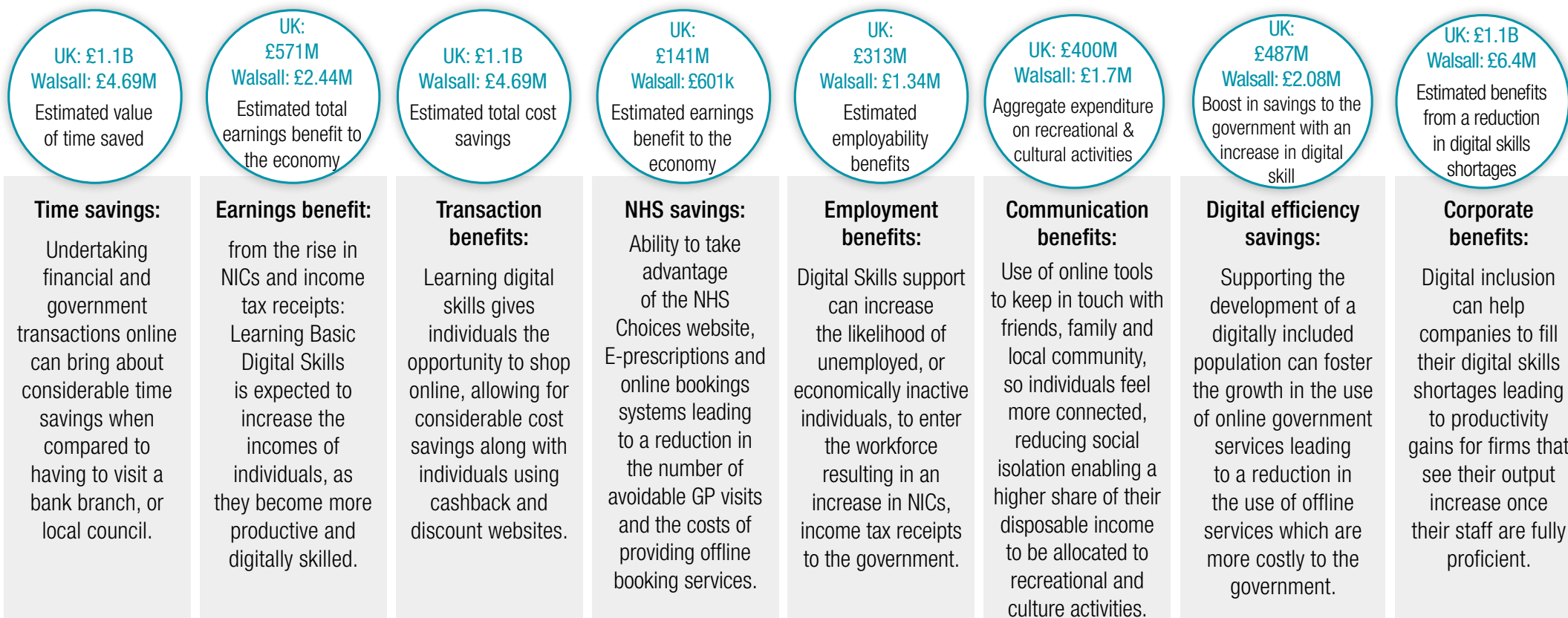


# Walsall Connected – Financial and economic importance of the initiative

## Estimated economic benefits and savings of digital upskilling for the economy by 2028

The Lloyds Bank UK Consumer Digital Index report in 2021 estimated that an estimated 11.3 million adults in the UK were digitally excluded. Adult UK population equated to £53.25 million. Hence 21.22% of adult population was deemed to be digitally excluded in accordance with the Lloyds Bank UK Consumer Digital Index report. Extrapolating this to Walsall – adult population in 2021 was 227,143 hence 22.22% = 48,201 estimated to be digitally excluded in Walsall.

Good Things Foundation data results suggest that 6.9 million people will remain digitally excluded by 2028. They carried out an analysis to calculate the cumulative benefits of supporting individuals without digital skills to learn Basic Digital Skills by 2028. Given the variety of benefits associated with having a digitally included population, they focused on eight channels:



# Walsall Connected – Annual Review – Key priorities July 2023 to June 2024



Encouraging customers to get online – Walsall Connected will endeavour to further support the Council's channel shift aspirations to ensure all residents have the tailored support they need in accessing Council services to self-serve online and continue to do so independently moving forward. The intention is to reduce dependence on the Walsall Connected network as more customers successfully migrate online by increasing familiarity and confidence in the digital world.

Building customer resilience – A primary aim of Walsall Connected will continue to be the digital upskilling of customers at their most appropriate community partner or library, whether this appropriateness be due to geographical location or centre specialism. This aim is resident led in that it strives to tailor support to individual needs and is based in their local area.

Continuing to align the way we work with customers, partners, and internal services – through regular review and appraisal, Walsall Connected will consistently review its offer to ensure it is optimised to meet the evolving needs of our customers and partners, whilst delivering a consistently great service and providing value for money across the Borough via the Walsall Connected network.

Developing more volunteering opportunities for residents of Walsall – through establishing a clear and beneficial volunteer offer for both individuals and voluntary organisations, Walsall Connected will create pathways for residents to get involved with the Council and their communities which will bring with it the benefits that accompany becoming a volunteer such as experience, education, self-development, and social inclusion.

For more information please visit:  
[www.walsall.gov.uk/walsallconnected](http://www.walsall.gov.uk/walsallconnected)