

Housing Strategy

2020 - 2025



Walsall Council

PROUD OF OUR PAST OUR PRESENT AND FOR OUR FUTURE

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Foreword

It is my ambition that Walsall residents should be able to live in a decent home that meets their needs and aspirations. A good home is fundamental to feeling safe, secure and well. A good home provides a settled base to maximise learning and employment opportunities for all generations. Since our last Housing Strategy, we have ensured the delivery of a significant number of homes, continued to prevent homelessness, and helped to improve the energy efficiency of Walsall's homes.

To continue this good progress, we will take advantage of the new opportunities arising from our work with the Black Country Local Enterprise Partnership and West Midlands Combined Authority (WMCA), taking the lead role on the Land and Housing agenda. We will continue to work with all our partners to:

- develop good quality new homes and environments where people aspire to live, and bring long term empty homes back into use
- improve house conditions, especially taking tough action against rogue landlords
- build resilient and integrated aspirational communities to improve health and wellbeing
- make our homes energy efficient and cheaper to run so that residents are warm in winter
- minimise homelessness and fuel poverty.

This Housing Strategy will help deliver the Walsall Plan priorities, and will support our other strategies such as our [Walsall for All](#), [Corporate Parenting Pledge](#), and [Strategic Economic Plans](#).

Working together, we can make real progress towards delivering a decent home for all . We need more affordable housing options and increase new aspirational housing to give all our residents a choice. We need to engage fully in understanding new building technologies to deliver housing and I passionately believe we can make a difference to people's lives, and that all starts with getting our housing offer right.



Councillor Adrian Andrew

Deputy Leader and Portfolio Holder,
Regeneration

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'Adrian Andrew'. The signature is stylized and written in a cursive-like font.

Context

This strategy aims to outline how the Council will use its powers under planning and housing legislation to provide the new homes that our residents need and to improve the existing housing stock. As the Council does not own any housing, we will make best use of our partnerships with the social housing sector as well as with private landlords, landowners and developers.

Walsall

Walsall is a metropolitan borough consisting of a mix of urban, suburban and semi-rural communities, and has an overall estimated population of 283,400 (ONS, mid-2018). The borough covers 40 square miles, is located to the north-west of Birmingham and is one of the four local authorities that make up the Black Country sub-region (with Dudley, Sandwell and Wolverhampton). Walsall is part of the West Midlands Combined Authority (WMCA), along with the rest of the Black Country, plus Birmingham, Coventry and Solihull.

Walsall town centre lies at the heart of the borough surrounded by Aldridge, Bloxwich, Brownhills, Darlaston and Willenhall district centres. There are two distinct housing markets in Walsall (east and west). The west of the borough borders traditional Black Country manufacturing areas with the M6 a prominent feature, and contains above average levels of affordable housing. The east of the borough borders open countryside with affluent settled areas where there are extensive green spaces between neighbourhoods, much less industry, and more owner occupied properties. The west of the borough has greater levels of deprivation and up to 10 years lower life expectancy when compared with the east (Walsall JSNA 2019).

In 2003, Walsall Council transferred its housing stock to two new organisations; walsall housing group (whg) and Walsall Association of Tenant Management Organisations (WATMOS). This followed on from a small scale stock transfer to Beechdale Housing Association (now part of Longhurst Group) in 1996. Together these housing associations (HAs) own 80% of the affordable housing in Walsall as per approximate numbers below:

- whg - 20,000
- Watmos - 1,700
- Longhurst Group (Beechdale) - 1,300

The other main provider of affordable homes in Walsall is the Accord Housing Association, with approximately 4,200 homes. A smaller number of affordable homes are also provided by Bromford, Clarion, Midland Heart, PA Housing and Stonewater, with additional older person housing provided by Housing 21, Hanover and Nehemiah. The majority of these HAs come together with the Council to form Walsall Housing Partnership (WHP).

The Walsall Private Sector Stock Condition Survey 2019 has shown there has been a significant increase in the size of the private rented sector since Census 2011 from 11.7% to 16%, and subsequent decrease in owner occupation from 63% to 59%, and social housing has remained at around 25%. Average House prices in the borough between December 2018 and December 2019 are £166,532 (Land Registry data) and the mean annual gross pay for October 2019 is £24,014 (ONS income data). This means the ratio of income to house prices is unaffordable for many, with average house prices being just under seven times of annual gross pay.

Policy and legislation

National housing policy and strategy has seen substantial changes in recent years. A programme of welfare reform changes beginning in 2013 resulted in the introduction of:

- Spare bedroom subsidy (Bedroom Tax).
- £20,000 benefit cap for couples, families, and £13,400 for single adults.
- Local housing allowance increases were reduced, and subsequently frozen in 2016, whilst private rents continue to rise.

The most recent legislation has been introduced through the Housing and Planning Act 2016 and Homelessness Reduction Act 2017.

Whilst the Housing and Planning Act gained royal assent in 2016, a number of the Act's key provisions are yet to be implemented and others have been dropped. Some of the measures are in force such as strengthening action against rogue landlords, changes to neighbourhood and local planning, and bolstered compulsory purchase powers.

The Homelessness Reduction Act 2017, implemented in April 2018, provides a greater focus on homelessness prevention, and new duties to help anyone regardless of priority need. It also extends the homelessness duty period to 56 days and includes a public body duty to refer which means some public authorities have to notify councils of service users they think may be homeless or threatened with becoming homeless.

The Government's Rough Sleeping Strategy was launched in August 2018. The Government is committed to halving rough sleeping by 2022 and announced in December 2019 a commitment to ending rough sleeping by 2024.

A social housing green paper was published in 2018 with a focus on decent homes, improving tenant complaints resolution, tackling stigma, strengthening regulation, and supporting community and home ownership. The Council will monitor whether any of these proposed measures are implemented and will respond Accord Housing Association.

In December 2019, the Queens Speech outlined a new focus on Renters Rights, Planning Reform, Home Ownership and Decarbonisation. The Government made a commitment to one million new homes over the Parliament term and will also offer key workers and local people discounts on new homes through a First Homes scheme. The introduction of a Renters Reform Bill will look to deliver a fairer, more effective, and professional rental market through greater affordability and security of tenure for tenants, and accountability for landlords and lettings agents. The Government will also look to widen access to, and expand the scope of, the database of rogue landlords and property agents and introduce a Lifetime Deposit scheme.

Vision and Objectives

Vision

To ensure a consistent message for our residents, we have adopted the following priority from the [Council's Corporate Plan 2018 to 2021](#) as our Vision:

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

This Strategy can only be delivered with the help of our partners, and as such our Vision will also support:

- The Walsall Plan: Our Health and Wellbeing Strategy 2019 to 2021
- The 'Health Equity in England: The Marmot Review 10 Years On' report due to be published in 2020.











Objectives

The Vision will be underpinned by the objectives developed by WHP:

- Increase housing supply and choice for our residents
- Improve the energy efficiency of homes
- Improve housing conditions and tackle rogue landlords
- Create and maintain resilient and integrated communities
- Promote independent living, and health and wellbeing
- Prevent and reduce homelessness



Achievements

-  1300 affordable homes built in the last five years
-  Successful multi tenure regeneration:
 - 412 homes developed at Waterskeep, and another 407 homes commenced on site at Primrose Lodge
 - 235 homes provided in Brownhills district centre
 - 233 homes completed at The Woodlands, Moxley
 - 170 homes completed at the former Servis site, Darlaston
 - 207 homes under construction at Heathfield Lane West.
 - Three new wellbeing schemes at Cardan pointe, Keelson Pointe and Ellum Pointe
 - Major former industrial derelict sites brought forward for development
 - 252 homes to be developed at former Caparo, and 260 homes to be developed at former Goscote Copperworks
-  538 homeless preventions since the introduction of HRA (2017) in April 2018
-  First area in the WMCA to deliver the Housing First service for rough sleepers, with 50 housed through the programme
-  More than 2500 adaptations have been completed in the last five years
-  125 Statutory housing notices served in the last five years
-  750 energy measures delivered since July 2018
-  Winners of the Institute of Revenues Rating and Valuation (IRRV) in 2019
-  Winners of the Technical Officer of the Year awards in 2019
-  29% reduction in long term empty homes in last five years



1. Increase housing supply and choice for our residents

Key to maximising the life chances of our residents is having enough good quality housing to meet need. The main way we will increase our housing numbers in Walsall is through facilitating the building of new homes, but we also need to increase the number of long term empty homes brought back into use.

Delivering Housing Supply and Regeneration

The current housing requirement in Walsall to 2026 is set out in the [Black Country Core Strategy \(BCCS\)](#). However, the Government has introduced a standard method for calculating housing need and this indicates that there is now a need for 908 net new homes in Walsall per year. This need will be addressed through the Black Country Plan (BCP), which is in preparation and will replace the Core Strategy and cover the period to 2038. Over the last 5 years, an average of 734 new homes have been developed in Walsall per year. We need to consider how we will increase this build rate, whilst also ensuring that the right homes are built in the right locations, and to a high quality. In addition, we need to ensure that the relevant education, health and transport infrastructure is put in place to support these new developments and existing communities. We need to future proof our developments, with guidance already in place to encourage more sustainable car usage, with requirements for an element of electric car charging points on all new major developments.

Locations for new homes are shown in [Walsall's Site Allocation Document \(SAD\)](#), which was adopted in January 2019. It also allocates land to meet the need for 66 Gypsy and Traveller pitches, and 90 plots for Travelling Showpeople. The SAD confirms the Council's 'brownfield first' approach to allocating land for housing. Our housing requirement ambitions are supported by the principles of Walsall's Strategic Economic Plan (SEP) around job creation through significant investment in road, rail and public transport infrastructure. As well as total new home numbers, the BCCS contains requirements for affordable housing. Preparation of the BCP will need to consider the future needs for affordable housing and other specialist types of accommodation such as housing for the elderly.

Our town and district centres are important to the well-being of the area. [The Walsall Town Centre Area Action Plan \(AAP\)](#) was adopted in January 2019 and identifies opportunities to provide more homes in appropriate locations. The Town Centre Masterplan provides a vision and interventions to stimulate investment and bring about transformational change in the town centre over the next 20 years. The masterplan vision is to ensure that 'Walsall will have the healthiest town centre in the country where people are proud to live and work within a healthy environment and balanced economy'. The vision includes encouraging a diverse range of uses, particularly high quality town centre living. Previous regeneration interventions have already delivered additional housing within Brownhills District Centre, as well as at Goscote and Moxley. The Council is considering options for a delivery plan for Willenhall Garden City.

The Walsall to Wolverhampton Growth Corridor has been identified as a priority regeneration area for the WMCA and forms part of the Housing Deal secured with Government. Sites in the corridor will potentially benefit from a £60m Land Fund available to acquire, remediate and de-risk housing land in order to accelerate delivery and increase the quality and density of new homes. There is an aim to deliver approximately 8,500 homes across the corridor by 2031, many of which will be within the Walsall administrative boundary. The corridor stretches from Walsall Town Centre to Wolverhampton City Centre, which incorporates the Town Centre and the surrounding area up to M6 Junction 10, Birchills, Leamore, and Willenhall. One of the key principles of the programme is to secure transformational place-making and attract and retain strong and sustainable communities through good design, high-quality street scene and tenure mix. A key element of these principles is to ensure there is no difference in quality between alternative tenures. There is also a focus on increasing the use of Advanced Manufacturing in Construction (AMC) housing. Finally, it is the intention to ensure that a significant amount of the new housing in this corridor provides affordable housing options, including rented, and home ownership that meets the needs of first time buyers.

New housing developments need to 'design out' crime where possible. Secured by Design principles should be incorporated in new developments as well as design guides for housing, schools, commercial and health premises. The West Midlands Design Out Crime Team will respond to planning applications for housing on behalf of the Chief Constable of West Midlands Police and the Office of Police & Crime Commissioner. This will be done in full consultation with Neighbourhood Police Teams and wider police departments.

A further benefit with maximising housing development is the employment and training opportunities that it can generate, as well as opportunities for the local supply chain. It is estimated every £1 spent on house building generates £2.84 in total economic activity, and £1 million of building investment supports 12 year-long jobs. The Walsall Works Team work closely with housing developers through the planning process to encourage and support the employment of construction apprentices, and use of local products and services. **Target - over the next five years we will help create 50 construction apprenticeships, and 100 pre-employment traineeships.**

We will:

- Engage with Walsall College to ensure appropriate courses and opportunities are available to Walsall residents wishing to progress a career in construction. This will include consideration of skills required for AMC
- Work with private developers and HAs through the pre application process to try and secure apprentice opportunities, and use of local businesses for labour and or supply of building materials
- Strive to provide a fully resourced, comprehensive, fast and responsive planning service
- Work with private sector housing developers to encourage investment and development into key priority sites for residential development
- Encourage the provision of homes in and around our town and district centres that will meet the needs of all sections of our communities, including an element of aspirational homes,
- Encourage an increase in the number of new homes in Council Tax Band D, helping maximise our Council Tax receipts which will support local services
- Work with partners to consider where regeneration of existing estates is appropriate, through selective demolition, remodelling and re-provision
- Identify and implement the most appropriate mechanism for bringing forward regeneration in Willenhall, working with private and public partners
- Encourage appropriate densities on new development to maximise the number of homes provided
- Carry out an options appraisal of different housing delivery models
- Actively pursue the use of compulsory purchase order (CPO) powers to bring long term vacant / strategically significant land back into use for housing
- Make best use of the Council's existing land assets, including strategic packaging of sites where appropriate
- Work closely with the WMCA to make use of all available powers and funding to unlock housing development sites
- Encourage the use of AMC homes where appropriate
- Consider the use of garden city design principles on appropriate sites across the borough.
- Promote the [WMCA regional design charter](#),
- Consider the use of
 - [National design guidance](#)
 - [Building beautiful report](#)
 - explore the need for additional local design guidance
- Consider the impact of major development proposals on health and wellbeing of new and existing communities through a health impact assessment
- Ensure that health and safety of residents is paramount following the Grenfell fire tragedy.

Meeting Housing Need and providing Affordable Housing

Evidence published in 2017 to support the preparation of the BCP indicated that we require 179 affordable homes per year to 2036, with a mix of rented and home ownership options. There is a fairly even split of requirements by property size, but with a particular shortfall of four bed plus affordable rented homes.

Approximately 1,300 new affordable homes have been developed in Walsall over the last 5 years (2014 to 2019). New affordable homes in Walsall are predominantly affordable rent, as this is the tenure funded by government grants. Affordable rents are set at a maximum of 80% of a market rent, inclusive of service charge. However the Council does encourage the provision of social rent (which tend to be more affordable than affordable rents) through planning gain contributions, as well as the choice of shared ownership and other affordable home ownership options where appropriate.

Affordable housing will continue to be delivered by our HA partners, either grant funded by external agencies such as Homes England, or through private housing developer contributions secured through legal agreements, known as S106 agreements, as part of the planning process. The type and tenure of our affordable housing contributions from developers is guided by Walsall's Affordable Housing Supplementary Planning Document (SPD). We typically require developers to provide affordable housing on site, but in certain circumstances we can instead receive a financial contribution to provide affordable housing units elsewhere – this is known as a commuted sum.

We will:

- Continue to maximise housing developers' affordable housing contributions through the planning permission process, subject to financial viability of the development. **Target** - 25% affordable housing on all applicable sites
- Develop a commuted sum spend programme to work with partners to increase the affordable housing supply through the purchase of existing empty homes or the development of new homes
- Review and revise Walsall's Affordable Housing SPD during 2020/21 to update the type and tenure requirements, and address recent and emerging changes in national policy and legislation
- Continue to work closely with our major HA partners to ensure that a sufficient number of affordable housing, that meets housing need, is provided
- Encourage the provision of some four (and above) bed homes to help meet the needs of our larger families
- Consider the new regional affordable housing definition, which has been approved by the WMCA's Housing and Land Board, and is based on local people paying no more than 35% of their salary on mortgages or rent.
- Work with the government's proposed new First Homes programme which is aimed at helping local first time buyers, young people, veterans and key workers, and offering a minimum 30% discount on a new home with the discount on the property being retained in perpetuity to help other first time buyers

Empty Homes

Empty homes can attract anti-social behaviour, and the Council is committed to protecting neighbouring residents. The Council is working to bring long term (empty for six months or more) empty homes back into use, to not only reduce the potential for anti-social behaviour but also address housing need and support the borough's residential property market.

The Council offers advice and assistance to empty property homeowners to help bring them back into use to meet housing need. We will arrange for rubbish to be cleared where it is creating an eyesore or a health hazard where the owner fails to do so, and the owner will be recharged for this service. Where properties have been empty for significant periods of time and/or are in a bad state of repair, the Council will make repeated attempts to contact the owner and advise them how to bring the property back into use. If this approach fails, then the Council will consider the use of its CPO powers, and we have successfully completed two CPOs on much needed three bedroom homes.

The Council also uses council tax premium powers as a deterrent to keeping properties empty. In January 2019, the Council approved a motion to increase council tax premiums for long term empty homes. From April 2019, properties unoccupied and unfurnished for more than two years incur a 100% premium – double the normal council tax rate. From April 2020, council tax rates for properties unoccupied and unfurnished for more than five years will triple to 200%, and from April 2021 properties that are unoccupied and unfurnished for more than 10 years will be charged a 300% premium.

We will:

- Continue to monitor the number and location of long term empty dwellings. **Target** – 10% reduction in the number of long term (over six months) empty homes by 2025.
- Use CPO powers where advice and encouragement have not been successful in bringing an empty property back into use
- Use the full range of available options, including CPO powers, to bring homes empty for the longest period of time back into use, with a particular focus on the 125 dwellings which have been empty for more than 5 years, of which 59 have been empty for more than 10 years.



2. Improve the energy efficiency of homes

It is important to ensure that everyone has the option to live in an energy efficient home which is well insulated and affordable to heat, cool and use. The Council has a published Home Energy Conservation Act (HECA) Action Plan that identifies our key actions. A number of Walsall's wards have above average levels of income deprivation, and so this increases the priority to ensure homes are affordable to live in. It is essential that we seek to improve energy efficiency in a number of ways, including both new and existing homes, to reduce the environmental impact of our homes on climate change.

New Homes

The national Future Homes Standard will require new build homes to be future-proofed with low carbon heating and world-leading levels of energy efficiency, and it will be introduced by 2025. It is expected that this will provide primary energy and householder affordability measurements for new build housing.

The Council will work with housing providers to improve the energy efficiency of new homes, both in the construction phase, and for the end users. In 2011, Walsall Council worked in partnership with Accord Housing Association HA to help them deliver the country's first HA led AMC factory in Beechdale. This factory has produced around 200 closed panel timber frame homes per year since then, and has been so successful that Accord Housing Association subsequently moved their operation to greatly expanded premises in Aldridge in 2017, capable of delivering 1000 new homes per year. The Beechdale factory is currently being retained by Accord Housing Association for storage and potential future component manufacturing. Another success of the project has been Accord Housing Association working with the Council to help local unemployed people find sustainable employment within these factories.

In 2019, whg were successful in attracting £1m grant funding from Innovate UK to fund research and development in offsite housing construction. Whg intend to use AMC to contribute to their home building targets over the next five years, including bringing derelict garage sites back into use.

We will:

- Continue to work with these and other partners as we strive to consolidate Walsall's position as a regional excellence hub for AMC
- Encourage partners to use reduced plastic technology in construction
- Explore through the preparation of the BCP the possible need for additional planning guidance on energy efficiency standard requirements

Existing Homes

The Council has an Ecoflex statement which will bring more resource into the borough through Eco3, up to March 2022, for energy efficiency works such as cavity and loft insulation and the installation of new and more efficient heating systems. The Council has been successful in a bid to the Warm Homes Fund for 200 fuel switches across the borough from inefficient electric heating to gas central heating (120 private and 80 Accord Housing Association). The bids were submitted in partnership with Accord Housing Association and E-ON. A further successful bid is enabling 112 free fuel switches (from oil and bottled gas) for park homes in the borough. These programmes will be delivered in 2020. The Council will continue to seek such funds to help residents. Whg have been successful in securing £3.2m from the Warm Homes Fund to switch 1,000 customers from less efficient electric storage and room heaters or solid fuel to gas central heating. There has also been £88.3m of investment by whg, since the stock transfer, to improve the energy efficiency of their existing homes. whg have also been successful in levering in external funding to reduce fuel poverty amongst their customers.

Many national energy suppliers are now rolling out smart meter schemes to help residents keep an eye on their energy costs. The Council is a Smart Energy GB in Communities partner with National Energy Action (NEA) charity and has trained champions to deliver information to residents on smart meters, particularly those in the over 65 age group.

We will continue with partners to lead in tackling fuel poverty through:

- **Action to reduce the percentage** – of dwellings with newly registered Energy Performance Certificates (EPCs) that are in the lowest bandings of F and G (most energy inefficient). **Target - to keep below 2.53% each year.** We will encourage and where necessary enforce compliance with the Minimum Energy Efficiency Standard (EPC must be E or above for private rented sector properties).

Helping residents lower their fuel bills through:

- Fuel switching
- Advising on more efficient heating and more effective insulation
- Education in use of heating and timers / thermostatic controls
- Promoting renewable micro-energy production
- Helping residents improve their home insulation and heating through seeking grants / loans to help reduce the cost
- Helping residents reduce the cost of appliance use through education and advice on efficient appliance types
- Working with the Local Energy Advice Partnership (LEAP) in offering free advice to help residents irrespective of tenure to save money and keep their homes warm
- Accessing Affordable Warmth funding through N-Power Foundations for Independent Living (FILT) to help fund boiler replacement for owner occupiers. The Council has also secured further FILT Gas Safe Charity Funding to fund interventions including repairs / servicing/ testing/ replacing gas appliances and infrastructure.

3. Improve housing conditions and tackle rogue landlords

Everyone should be able to live in a home that is safe and hazard free. The majority of the Council's activity is focussed on ensuring that homes in the private rented sector (PRS) are safe to live in, and where possible we will do this through partnership working with good landlords, but we will also not hesitate to tackle rogue landlords. We will also work with our HA partners to ensure HA tenants have a decent home.

The PRS stock in Walsall comprises some good quality homes and responsible landlords, and some poor quality properties and landlords who do not maintain or manage their properties correctly and/or obtain the relevant licences.

The Council's Stock Condition Survey (2019) identified that the PRS had risen to 16% of all homes in the borough. St Matthews has the highest proportion of PRS (30%). Palfrey and Pleck have significant levels of PRS but also have the highest levels of disrepair and Houses in Multiple Occupation (HMOs). Palfrey also has the highest level of category 1 hazards (under the Housing Health and Safety Rating System, HHSRS), along with Paddock.

The Council will continue to work with landlords through our successful Landlord Forum and associated Steering Group and promote the benefits of landlords working collectively to improve the PRS offer in Walsall. As well as supporting good landlords, the Council is committed to tackling rogue landlords.

Tackling rogue landlords

We undertake proactive work including the full use of all available legislation. The Council has for example made use of:

- Statutory Improvement Notices;
- Prohibition orders – for the worst cases of poor housing condition;
- Civil Penalty fines against landlords for failing to comply with legal notices. These can be as high as £30,000 for each breach;
- Registration of a landlord on the National Database of Rogue Landlords and Letting Agents.

The Council has been supported in 2019 by funding from the Government to tackle rogue landlords and will continue to seek funding to expand this work. This funding targets specific areas of need including for example:

- To ensure that all PRS properties have an Energy Performance Certificate (EPC) that meet the minimum energy efficiency standards (bands A – E).
- To enable the inspection of unregulated properties used by Children's Services.
- To enable the inspection of PRS properties with serious disrepair in the town centre and Caldmore areas, with particularly attention to properties that are occupied by Eastern European households who are disproportionately affected by poor housing conditions in these areas.

We will also:

- Continue to carry out our inspection and advice function to eradicate Category 1 hazards (e.g. trip and fall hazards, excess cold) under the HHSRS.
- **Target** - Help up to 250 households live in safer private rented accommodation by 2025, through serving statutory notices where applicable.
- Strive to identify all licensable HMOs and ensure they are licensed.
- Work with energy companies to improve the energy efficiency across all tenures of properties with a specific focus on tackling fuel poverty.
- Encourage and where necessary enforce compliance with the Minimum Energy Efficiency Standards.

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- Work with HA partners to minimise any instances of disrepair
 - Tackle reported instances of Anti-Social Behaviour (ASB) in the PRS, and all other tenures, using relevant legislative powers
 - Continue our successful approach to bidding for external funding to enable intensive targeted action within particular areas and communities which experience high levels of poor quality PRS or management practices.
 - Seek to develop accreditation schemes to recognise the high quality PRS properties provided by the majority of our landlords.



4. Create and maintain Resilient and Integrated Communities

The Council are committed to promoting resilient communities, integration, community cohesion, social inclusion, and value cultural diversity. We recognise that different communities have experienced different patterns of settlement and have varied lifestyles and economic circumstances, all of which have an impact on their need for housing and services.

Walsall is a culturally diverse borough with a 23.1% Black and minority ethnic (BAME) population, where people of Indian, Pakistani and Bangladeshi backgrounds form the largest groups. The number of non-UK born residents in Walsall increased by 3.7% (or 9,900 people) between the 2001 and 2011 censuses and Walsall now has a small Eastern European population who make up about 1% of residents (2,700 people in total). Census 2011 showed 288 people (0.1% of Walsall's population) identified themselves as gypsy or traveller. In terms of children and young people aged 0-17, the proportion of pupils from minority ethnic groups has increased to 37.4% of all pupils living in the area from 36.7% in 2016, and 24% of Primary pupils have English as an additional language. (School Census, January 2017).

Resilient Communities

The Council has adopted a Resilient Communities model that focuses on the assets of the population. It is a citizen led way of improving quality of life and reducing harm in our communities, allowing them to thrive. The agenda focusses on empowering communities to help them to be safe and reduce crime, but also to remain healthy, well and active in their neighbourhood. We will support and promote the four components of the Model across all Walsall's housing estates, which will:

- Enable and support people to have personal responsibility;
- Deliver community led solutions;
- Integrate services for the delivery of support to communities;
- Integrate enforcement.

Good place making, with safe and warm homes, can help resilient communities thrive, empowering communities to reduce ASB and stay safe, well and active. A good standard of accommodation will help reduce inequalities, maximise the potential of people, and help provide equitable life chances.

Walsall For All

In March 2018, the Ministry for Housing Communities and Local Government (MHCLG) announced Walsall as one of five national pilot areas to work with government to trial a new localised approach to integration. Government, local authorities and a wide range of other partners are working together to co-design and implement local integration strategies to take tailored actions to address the integration challenges specific to their place. These strategies build on existing good practice, local knowledge and expertise, and the strength of community assets. In January 2019, the Council and partners launched their Strategy 'Walsall for All', which has the following four priority areas:

1. Connecting across communities
2. Young people learning and growing together
3. Working and contributing together
4. Living together

Whilst the housing agenda contributes to all these priorities, there is a particular housing focus on the 'Living together' priority. This specifically considers how the Council is tackling rogue landlords, as new migrant communities may be disproportionately disadvantaged in poor rented properties. It also considers how the Council can involve communities in planning and being involved in new housing developments. On both new and traditional estates, community centres and meeting spaces are an important part of any housing estate, helping communities integrate together.

Living together is about the creation and sustainment of residential areas, where people from different backgrounds can live together in harmony and across both new and existing estates. The Council

want to encourage major new developments to integrate with existing communities, regardless of tenure. We will work with partners to encourage community involvement in the planning design of new developments, using such techniques as 'Planning For Real', which is a system owned by Accord Housing Association and is a nationally recognised community involvement planning process based on 3-D modelling. We aim to maximise community involvement, and use this type of modelling if possible, on the forthcoming development of the former Goscote Copperworks site, which will deliver approximately 250 mixed tenure homes. This site is close to recent new developments by whg and Keepmoat, with hundreds of new homes built in and around the Blakenall area following substantial demolition of pre existing estates. Despite wide scale demolition, there are still significant number of traditional established estates in the near vicinity. There is a Neighbourhood Co-ordinator on Waterskeep that is funded through the Black Country Local Enterprise Partnership (LEP) and focuses on promoting community cohesion between the new and existing residents

Tackling child and food poverty

National data suggests that 34% of children live in poverty in the UK (Social Metrics Commission, 2019). It is estimated that 41% of children in Walsall live in poverty once housing costs are taken into account, equating to around 30,551 children (End Child Poverty, 2019). There is significant variation between wards, with an estimated 18% of children in Streetly living in poverty compared to 62% in Palfrey (End Child Poverty, 2019). Access to decent, affordable and stable homes can help improve the life chances of children, young people and families and reducing child poverty.

Evidence suggests that the need to use food banks is linked to financial insecurity or sudden loss of income, such as due to the loss of a job or issues with claiming benefits (The Trussell Trust, 2019). Walsall has a network of nine foodbanks operating in Walsall. Six are partnerships with the Black Country Foodbank and the other three are with the Trussell Trust.



We will:

- Continue to work positively with voluntary and community sector partners delivering foodbank services, by promoting and signposting to the services being offered
- Where possible, use the Goscote Copperworks site as a pilot area to consider how these traditional and new estates, containing a variety of tenures and diverse communities, can form an integrated community
- Work with our housing providers to run learning workshops from large developments, with actual residents who are now living there to inspire future changes in planning, design, cohesion, transport links, for all new developments.
- Work with our HA partners to ensure community cohesion and integration is considered when they allocate housing and when supporting their existing tenants
- Work with our HA partners to continue to maximise residents' income, and ensure that homes are affordable
- Continue to support the integration of our 20 Syrian refugees that were rehoused in Walsall in 2017/18, through the Council's contracted provider the Refugee and Migrant Centre (RMC)
- Work with MHCLG to support the government's new 2020 resettlement programme
- Build on the work of some of our major HAs who have already ended fixed term tenancies, to encourage all HAs in Walsall to end fixed term tenancies, contributing to sustainable communities
- Increase community resilience through encouraging more active tenant involvement and management, building on the great work of WATMOS and some of the co-operatives and tenant management organisations supported by Accord Housing Association and other HAs
- Encourage good practice to facilitate neighbourliness and also help HAs and tenants together to prevent ASB, neighbour issues and tenancy breaches through community tenancy sign-ups on new schemes for example
- Explore options to address the needs for transit sites for gypsies and travellers
- Work with partners to support our Modern Slavery and Human Trafficking (MSHT) prevention agenda by ensuring pathways to reporting are clear, the profile and seriousness of the issue is raised, and we actively work together within our communities and across our partnerships to help tackle this crime
- Research the housing needs and aspirations of our existing BAME and new communities who are settling in the borough
- **Target** - Increase the representation of BAME residents to 23% in our formal consultation processes
- Conduct a service user satisfaction survey to measure the service users experience of the Council's Money Home Job function to help identify gaps in provision and to inform improvements.

5. Promote independent living, and health and wellbeing

The Council want to enable Walsall residents to manage their own health and wellbeing, and live independently in their communities for as long as possible. A national driver called the Better Care Fund (BCF) has encouraged integration between health and social care systems across the country. The BCF has created the opportunity to pool health and social care budgets under an agreement to fund services in the community to help residents manage independence and remain at home for a longer period of time.

The Council and its partners have come together to support independent living and wellbeing and have developed the local Walsall Together programme. Walsall Together is our local Integrated Care Partnership and includes partners across the borough; Walsall Council, whg, Walsall Healthcare NHS Trust, Dudley & Walsall Mental Health NHS Trust, Walsall Clinical Commissioning Group (CCG) One Walsall (Council for Voluntary Services) and local doctors (GPs). The partnership operates across the health and care system to deliver place-based integrated services to improve outcomes and quality of care for citizens of Walsall. One of the main work streams included in the Walsall Together programme is resilient communities, which housing has a significant impact upon. The partnership approach will help build resilient communities with an offer of integrated prevention and early intervention for all Walsall residents. Our partners such as whg and Accord Housing Association invest heavily in communities, particularly around health and wellbeing and employment and skills. Whg also offer a Wellbeing Service for older residents that helps avoid the need for someone to move into a more expensive care setting.

Walsall Together will deliver transformation for the following priority clinical pathways which are aligned to the local population and aims of improving independence and wellbeing:

- Respiratory
- Cardiovascular Disease (CVD)
- Diabetes
- Mental Health
- End of Life Care (EOL)

Walsall has a growing elderly population. It also has growing numbers of residents with additional needs, and a number of these individuals will be diagnosed with more than one additional need. Walsall's elderly (65+) population currently stands at 50,600 and is forecast to grow by a further 3,000 by the end of this Strategy. Walsall currently also has an estimated:

- 2,075 people with autism
- 5,015 adults with a learning disability
- 26,263 with a mental health disorder
- 3,646 with dementia

A number of our residents need help and support with addiction issues. Public Health Walsall commissions a drug and alcohol day centre which offers advice and guidance, in addition to a meals and washing service. It includes a GP service and a mental health drop in service one day per week. Homeless referrals are made to the Council or to housing providers. Public Health also commission the integrated drug and alcohol treatment service, which has an outreach worker who facilitates homeless clients into treatment. This is supported by a health liaison worker who operates on an outreach basis to carry out assessments with homeless people where they are, and to refer into appropriate treatment.

To help meet these needs Walsall will:

- Provide Housing and support services which offer tenancy and budgeting support with an emphasis on those with mental health problems or learning disabilities
- Work with HA partners to promote health and wellbeing with their tenants, including stopping smoking
- Work with providers to develop accommodation based services for Dementia
- Encourage Nursing Elderly Mentally Infirm (EMI) developments
- Encourage Extra Care developments, particularly in areas with little or no Extra Care service such as the Darlaston/Bentley and Pheasey/Paddock areas
- Encourage the provision of Wellbeing schemes, which are age designated blocks with communal facilities and a wellbeing officer service
- Work with providers to develop schemes that are as flexible as possible to cater for a number of these different needs and usages at the same location. This will enable better community integration and enable people to live as independently as possible, and to remain in their home for as long as practical.
- Include an element of 'step down' accommodation in these developments where appropriate, to help people transition from hospital to their own home.
- Align schemes funded by the Better Care Fund to the Walsall Together Alliance model to continue support across a number of social care services and resources.

Young people

Good health and wellbeing, and support for independent living is important to give our families and young people better life chances. Appropriate housing in good condition can help with children's attainment levels at school. Having good quality housing in the right place strengthens the quality of family relationships, which is critical to ensuring children remain in the family home and not in the statutory care system. All our young people, including our care leavers, need good quality accommodation options when they are ready to have a place of their own.

We will:

- Encourage housing providers to offer a range of suitable housing options for families with children
- Encourage housing providers to offer options for young people needing their own accommodation, including consideration of Accord Housing Association's new pilot design of affordable flats that could be aimed at young people
- Use information about Young People 14+ years old to shape housing provision for the future that enables them to be fully integrated into the community and to develop their independence
- Encourage the exterior design of new developments to include places to play and travel actively, reduce need to use cars and allow children and young people to play and feel safe on roads ie 'Living streets'. Inside homes should have large enough kitchens to store and cook healthy food and space for families to eat together
- Review our corporate parenting pledges
- Review relevant protocols to ensure appropriate pathways into accommodation for 16 and 17 year olds, and care leavers
- Help our care leavers find and keep a stable place to live, including providing support where needed
- Continue to prioritise care leavers through our Allocations Scheme.

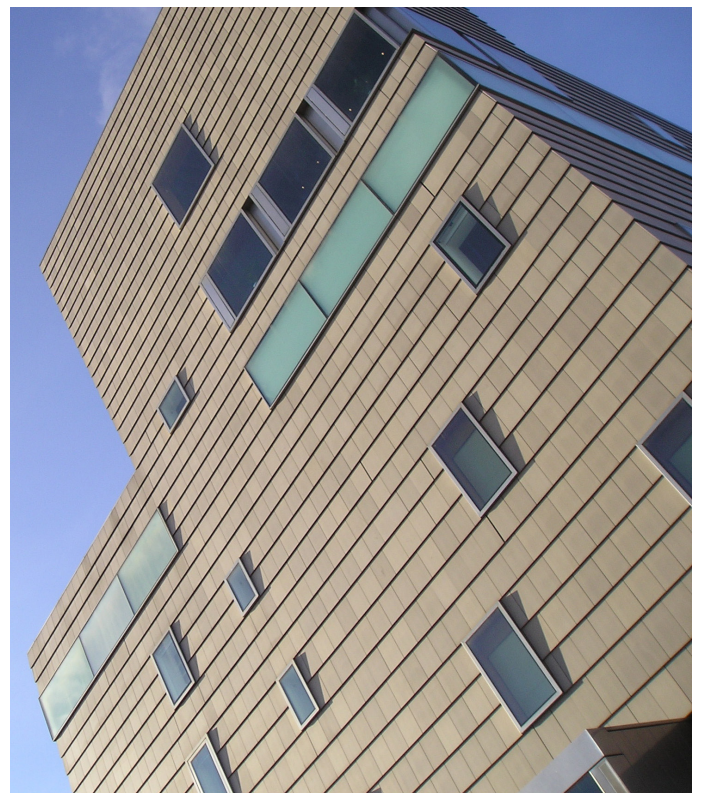
Disability friendly homes

The Council will ensure homes are disability friendly, and developed/adapted as ‘homes for life’ wherever possible through a variety of options. We will continue to work in partnership to invest in a number of priorities highlighted across the Alliance such as assistive technology, telehealth care and sensory equipment, to help people live safely in their own home for as long as they can. This assistive technology can be used to benefit all kinds of vulnerable households. The Council provides a ‘Shared Lives Service’ which provides a housing option for individuals to live with a carer.

We will ensure mobility and wheelchair adapted homes are available where possible through working with housing provider partners to offer wheelchair adapted homes as part of new developments, both a mix of family homes and ground floor flats and bungalows. Our partner whg provide a proportion of fully wheelchair adapted homes on larger developments where possible. We will encourage the provision of more bungalows on new developments to help meet the needs of our older population and households requiring ground floor only access. When providing new housing for people with disabilities and mobility issues there needs to be consideration of good public transport links, local amenities such as leisure, community centres, shops and GPs.

We will make best use of existing adapted homes, with whg keeping a list of those residents who have registered for adapted homes with them, and providing a home matching service where possible. We have an agreement with our HA partners that where they cannot match to one of their adapted properties, they will open this opportunity out to all the HAs in the borough to help one of their residents.

The Council will continue to offer a property adaptations programme through our Disabled Facilities Grant (DFG) service, which includes national award winning staff such as the 2019 Technical Officer of the Year. Last year we delivered 480 DFGs, which was significantly in excess of our target of 250, and we will continue to provide the best service possible. **Target – minimum 250 property adaptations per year.** This service provides adaptations for both children and adults who have adaptation requirements.



6. Preventing and reducing homelessness

In April 2018, the Homelessness Reduction Act (HRA) 2017 came into force, bringing in new duties to prevent and relieve homelessness, specifically:

- Prevent and relieve homelessness for all eligible applicants, regardless of priority need
- An extension of the 'threatened with homelessness' period from 28 to 56 days
- Duty to refer - public services will need to notify a local authority if they come into contact with someone they think may be homeless or at risk of becoming homeless

The Council prepared for this new duty by commissioning Neil Morland Consultants to update our Homelessness Strategy and Review. The Council has a legal duty to update our Homelessness Strategy every 5 years, and a significant range of HA, voluntary sector and other public service partners were involved in this process. We have continued this partnership momentum through:

- Working closely with partners to set up a duty to refer mechanism
- Setting up a quarterly multi agency Steering Group chaired by an independent voluntary sector partner. This built on our previous successful partnership which resulted in Walsall's innovative Housing First programme.
- Hosting a successful multi agency homelessness forum in 2019, which will now become an annual event
- Being a member of the WMCA Mayor's Homelessness Taskforce, including leading the 'families with children' work strand
- Providing training for all partners on the implications of the HRA Act and duty to refer, encompassing housing providers, probation, health, social care, voluntary sector

The Council also responded by reconfiguring our frontline homelessness services to enable us to have a greater focus on homelessness prevention. We were already in a positive position, having voluntarily operated a homelessness prevention service for some years.

The restructured frontline services, combined our homelessness, debt and welfare and crisis support functions together to provide a single end to end journey for our customers. We operate a triage service to ensure everyone who comes in to see us gets the right help at the right time, and we will continually review these arrangements to ensure they are fit for purpose. All our frontline staff have received training on the implications of the new Act. We will continue to maximise the use of our Discretionary Housing Payments (DHPs) to prevent homelessness, and have recently updated our website with an online DHP form.

Since the introduction of the HRA in April 2018, we have prevented 538 people from becoming homeless, and where prevention has not been possible, we have relieved homelessness in 668 cases.

Target - at least 50% of successful prevention outcomes are through keeping people in the home by 2025, rather than needing to be moved to other accommodation. Walsall's work has been nationally recognised and we were selected to be part of the MHCLG's National HRA Implementation Review Group.

We have collaborated with our HA partners to streamline our Nominations process, (where HAs provide properties that we can match to our homeless households). We have worked with them to develop a revised Housing Allocations Policy and Nominations Agreement, to ensure rehousing priority is given to those most in need. We ensure that the Allocations Policy awards priority to serving and former members of the armed forces, in line with Walsall's Armed Forces Covenant.

We are working with our HA partners to reduce evictions where possible, although there will still be unresolvable financial or ASB issues where evictions will occur. In partnership with whg, we are trialling an Eviction Prevention Officer post during 2019/20, to complement whg's already extensive eviction prevention services, and will share the learning with our other HA partners. whg have now adopted an ambition where no one is evicted into homelessness i.e. if eviction is unavoidable, every effort will be made to ensure there is another housing option in place for that household before the eviction takes place.

We will continue to work with the Probation service to ensure there are housing pathways available for all offenders.

Homelessness takes many forms, and therefore we need to provide more tailored services where required. **We will** focus on:

- Temporary accommodation (TA) – our TA is currently provided in four flatted blocks. We are now piloting dispersed TA units for families, to enable a more modern and flexible service. Following conclusion of our options appraisal we intend to purchase or procure more dispersed TA units. **Target – maximum 0.9 households in Temporary Accommodation per (000s) households.**
- Domestic violence – we currently commission Accord Housing Association to provide a refuge service. We will extend the existing refuge provision in 20/21, whilst we consider the most appropriate service to commission post 2021 if funds are available. We also provide a Housing Independent Domestic Violence Advisor (IDVA) service, who works with victims and survivors of domestic abuse primarily dealing with their housing options and providing support. We will extend this post until at least 2021. We have also secured funding for a Children's Worker to be based at the refuge in 2020/21 who will deliver a range of interventions and activities to support children and their parents
- Young people - continuing the commissioning of a range of options for homeless young people, including care leavers who need help to secure housing and / or support to sustain their existing housing tenancies. Housing options for this group need to include access to affordable and good quality single person accommodation. The Council's Housing and Children's services are working closer together and have established a single housing pathway for young people, and have jointly commissioned a number of services. We have projects in place with YMCA Black Country Supported Lodgings and Night Stop, whg dispersed accommodation, and St Basils for complex young people. The Council's Young Persons Homeless team will continue to work with the Black Country Impact team to help get young people into education, training or employment
- Rough sleepers – the Council has built up a comprehensive street homeless prevention service. MHCLG has recognised Walsall's efforts and have awarded significant funding to the local authority to provide these services, which has been integral in Walsall being able to reduce its number of people sleeping rough from 26 in 2016 to 6 in 2019. **Target – ensure no one needs to sleep rough in Walsall by 2024.** The services include:
 - An Outreach Team who are out on the street trying to help our rough sleepers
 - Navigators who work with prisons, hospital and mental health schemes to prevent people leaving these establishments from sleeping rough
 - Winter night shelter and all year round day centre service
 - Specialist supported project for street sex workers and vulnerable women
 - Our flagship Housing First programme, which has been in operation since November 2017, and we commit to run until at least 2023. We have helped to rehouse and support 50 rough sleepers so far. **Target - 80 people to be rehoused and supported in Housing First by April 2021.** Housing First is a housing and support approach which provides the individual with a dispersed general needs tenancy (i.e. not a 'block scheme'), and the choice of open ended intensive support. The support is delivered by FryAccord Housing Association, and both whg and Accord Housing Association have provided a significant number of properties for this scheme, with a contribution aswell from Longhurst Group and Watmos.

Implementation, Monitoring and Review

This Strategy has been developed with a wide variety of partners, and included a four week public consultation period. It is essential that it is delivered and monitored as a partnership.

The Strategy will be monitored quarterly by the Council's Money Home Job service. It will also be scrutinised and reviewed on an annual basis by:

- Walsall Housing Partnership
- Walsall Homelessness Steering Group
- Walsall Private Landlord Steering Group

A summary of the Strategy's key performance indicators are below:

- 50 construction apprenticeships, and 100 pre-employment traineeships by 2025
- 25% affordable housing on all applicable sites
- Keep EPC Bands F and G below 2.53% each year
- 250 households live in safer private rented accommodation by 2025
- 10% reduction in the number of long term (over 6 months) empty homes by 2025
- Increase the representation of BAME residents to 23% in our formal consultation processes
- Minimum 250 property adaptations per year
- Minimum 50% of successful prevention outcomes are through keeping people in the home by 2025
- Maximum 0.9 households in Temporary Accommodation per 1000 households.
- Ensure no one needs to sleep rough in Walsall by 2024.
- 80 people rehoused and supported in Housing First by April 2021





Housing Strategy & Partnerships

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