



# Walsall Community Cohesion Strategy 2025 - 2035

Building a

**WALSALL FOR ALL**

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# **Walsall Community Cohesion Strategy 2025-2035**

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## Message from the Walsall For All Chair

Since its inception in 2019, The Walsall for All Programme has been instrumental in erasing the invisible boundaries that existed in our Borough for as long as I can remember, which resulted in communities rarely venturing beyond their immediate locality. The first phase of the programme demonstrated the importance of creating safe spaces where residents from diverse backgrounds and abilities have the opportunity to come together in local community venues and benefit from supportive and cohesive networks that improve community relations and facilitate social engagement that leads to reducing isolation and loneliness. The kindness of strangers was never more noted than during the Covid 19 pandemic, which led to colour blindness as we saw the strong taking care of the vulnerable throughout our communities through the Making Connections Walsall initiative.

Local residents and local community organisations from around the Borough have been instrumental in shaping the Walsall Community Cohesion Strategy 2025-2035. They have highlighted the challenges and obstacles faced, which are not always obvious but negatively impact individuals, especially young people. Agencies in the Borough (i.e. Local Authority, Housing Department, Voluntary Community Sector etc) have a collective responsibility to respond to concerns raised by residents that leave them feeling invisible, excluded, bullied and subject to hate crimes. It is hoped that the strategy will be implemented at operational and strategic levels to ensure all residents feel supported and valued to actively participate and benefit from life-enhancing opportunities. These will uplift and engage residents of all backgrounds so that as a Borough, we are moving forward collectively and benefiting from the wealth of talent and aspirations.

As a resident of the Borough and tasked with delivering services for the most vulnerable via Aaina Community Hub, I am inspired every day by the army of volunteers who are committed to investing their time to make Walsall a better place for all. Despite the local and national challenges that lead to polarised communities, we all want to see Walsall as a thriving Borough that celebrates its rich diversity and celebrates a cohesive and vibrant community. Walsall Community Cohesion Strategy 2025-2035 is crucial in paving the way for a collective vision for Walsall that leads to increased awareness and commitment to develop and imbed service delivery that minimises community tensions and conflict from the outset.

Through my work at Aaina and as Chair of Walsall For All, I have the privilege of working with inspiring colleagues from all sectors and backgrounds who are committed to developing and delivering services for Walsall residents that alleviate difficulties and improve lives.

As a result, the Walsall Community Cohesion Strategy will be guided to focus on developing services that reduce the opportunity for community tensions due to lack of understanding, awareness or appreciation of diverse cultural needs.

A'isha Khan  
Chair of Walsall For All



## Message from the Portfolio Holder

Walsall is home to remarkable individuals who dedicate their time and energy to the betterment of our borough, often without recognition and regardless of the diverse communities they serve. They act with a simple, yet profound, belief in kindness and mutual support for all. For many, including myself, the drive to transform prejudice into a positive force comes from personal experience. I have witnessed firsthand how areas that were once insular and resistant to change have embraced diversity, opening their doors to families and individuals of all ages, breaking down boundaries between generations, cultures and lifestyles. These stories of transformation may be hard to believe, but they are happening here in Walsall.

I recognise that many of our residents may not venture far from their own neighbourhoods, whether due to circumstance, confidence, or a sense of security in familiar surroundings. Some may even view their own communities as superior to others or feel anxious about the fast-changing world around them. However, I firmly believe that when we engage people from all walks of life in shared causes and initiatives, perceptions shift, and a deeper understanding emerges.

As residents of Walsall, we all share a responsibility to shape the kind of borough we want for ourselves and future generations. Walsall Community Cohesion Strategy 2025-2035 embodies this vision. Building on the success of previous work, we aim to break down barriers, making our neighbourhoods, schools, and businesses places where everyone feels welcome. This strategy is about fostering connections, encouraging people to come together, and ensuring that everyone, especially our young people, have the opportunity to contribute to our local economy and shape the future of their communities.

This strategy will drive forward innovative projects and deepen our commitment to reducing inequalities and unlocking the full potential of our residents. Walsall's strength lies in its diversity, and by working together, we can build a more integrated, resilient, and prosperous community.

I have every confidence that the Walsall Community Cohesion Strategy 2025-2035 will continue to inspire the selflessness and kindness we see in so many of our residents. Through strong leadership and collective action, we will ensure that Walsall remains a borough that serves the interests of all its people, all the time.

**Councillor Garry Perry**  
Leader of Walsall Council



# **Walsall Community Cohesion Strategy 2025 - 2035**

## **Building a Walsall For All**

### **Walsall For All 2018 – 2024**

Walsall for All is a partnership of different organisations from voluntary, community and statutory sectors that was formed in 2018 to work on enhancing and strengthening social cohesion and integration.

Walsall was one of 5 Integrated Areas that helped the government implement the Integrated Area Programme as part of the government Integrated Communities Strategy. More than 15,000 residents from Walsall participated and benefited from the programme and positive outcomes from the activity have been evaluated and compared with key national research studies in the field of social cohesion. For instance, we know that Walsall's work on social cohesion before the pandemic helped us build trust and deal with the impacts of Covid-19 on different communities better, than other areas. The research has also shown that there's a positive connection between promoting diverse volunteering and creating a more cohesive society.

For more details, please view the evaluation report and celebration video <https://www.walsallforall.co.uk/evaluation>.





## Walsall Demographics

Walsall is a metropolitan borough consisting of a mix of urban, suburban and semi-rural communities. Covering 40 square miles, it is one of the four local authorities that make up the Black Country sub-region (with Dudley, Sandwell and Wolverhampton). Walsall town centre lies at the heart of the borough surrounded by Aldridge, Bloxwich, Brownhills, Darlaston and Willenhall district centres.

Walsall's total population of 286,700 (ONS 2020) is projected to grow by 7% over the next decade, from 266,800 in 2010 to an estimated 304,400 by 2030. Like many places, the projected increase in Walsall's older population (>65) is higher at 10.2%. There has been an 8.8% rise in births in Walsall between 2004 and 2014, and the number of pupils starting school in Walsall has gone up 11.34% between 2012 and 2017. So, planning to address the needs of a larger younger population and a larger number of older people is part of the Local Authorities' main strategic goals.

Walsall has a moderate level of diversity compared to UK standards, with a population that is not White British (non-WB) slightly higher than the averages for England & Wales. However, our population changes quickly and the borough is among the top 20 local authorities in the UK with the fastest changes. Walsall's non-WB population is not distributed evenly, and the wards of St Matthew's, Paddock, Pleck and Palfrey are much more diverse than others. Non-WB groups mostly live near or in Walsall town centre. Therefore, Walsall has a 'halo effect' – more diverse urban areas surrounded by whiter areas. Our diversity includes many different cultures with 146 languages spoken in our schools.

The biggest ethnic group in the borough is White British, making up around 67.4% of the population. The next largest groups are people from Indian, Pakistani and Bangladeshi backgrounds. The minority ethnic groups have grown significantly, and now represent 32.6% (a third) of Walsall's population, compared to 23.1% (a quarter) ten years ago in 2011. Some new emerging communities from Central and Eastern Europe, Middle East, Central and West Africa have also settled in Walsall.

Source: Walsall Joint Strategic Needs Assessment (JSNA) 2018/19.





Our neighbourhoods are experiencing fast and diverse changes in their makeup. This includes but not limited to age, disability, ethnicity and LGBTQ+.

For example, there is a wide variety of differences between the wards, from Pelsall with 95% White British people to Pleck with only 10% White British people.

You can see more information in the ward profiles  
[www.walsallintelligence.org.uk/home/profiles/ward-profiles/](http://www.walsallintelligence.org.uk/home/profiles/ward-profiles/)

The wards of Streetly, Pheasey Park Farm, Brownhills, Aldridge North & Walsall Wood, Aldridge Central and South, Bloxwich West, Bloxwich East, Willenhall North and Rushall Shelfield have pockets of increasing diversity. There are some risks involved with this 'faster rate of change' as it may create potential for anxiety and tensions and potentially increased risks of bullying in educational institutions and schools.



The map above illustrates how our communities have changed over time, and how some areas that used to be mainly White British are now becoming more diverse.

Green - established provincial (low level, low change)



Orange - newly diversifying (low level, high change)



Blue - growing and changing (high level, high change)



# **Walsall Community Cohesion Strategy 2025 – 2035**

## **The Consultation Methodology**

The Walsall for All Legacy conference held in 2023 showed a continued desire from communities and partners to maintain the momentum of the Integrated Area Programme and review the social changes that our neighbourhoods experienced after the pandemic. Various methods of co-creating were used during the consultation process, building on the suggestions from the conference. Firstly, groups facing the most exclusion were identified, then these groups and under-represented communities were asked to design their own way of collecting feedback that was suitable and accessible for their cohort.

They presented their proposals to the partnership and a small grant to conduct the consultation was awarded. The idea was to ask the people of Walsall, who are the best experts of their own lives, about what was important to them. By doing this, feedback and recommendations were gathered on what the partnership should focus on over the ten year period and to create an effective action plan.

The different types of engagement included organisations completing one to one interviews, Facebook, locality based survey questions, Google survey questionnaires, group interviews, interviews with service providers and research analysis with over 750 people directly involved. An agreed list of actions can be found on pages 13-16. These actions will be owned by various partners; some of these include Walsall For All, Walsall Council's Community Building and Cohesion team and other strategic partners.



## What people said...

“We were really happy when we got asked to take part in the consultation. It was an opportunity for us to explore aspects around integration and community cohesion with our own group.

We learned so much about how people felt, their experiences and challenges”.

*Walsall resident*

“It was nice to take part in the integration consultation, as it allowed us to ask questions to understand our own communities and how integrated we really are”.

*Walsall resident.*

“It’s nice to see different communities come together. We need to see more of this, especially when times are difficult”.

*GoodNews Christian Centre.*

“Thank you for the opportunity. I got to share my experiences. I hope it helps shape your strategy and helps other people in my situation”.

*Walsall resident*



## Strategic themes emerging from the consultation

Some shared themes emerged among many of the groups and individuals who participated. These included:

### Cost of Living

Many respondents spoke about the rising cost of living and how this was impacting their life choices, thus reducing opportunities and access to foodbanks, education and health. Increasing levels of poverty meant that inequalities were increasing and reducing opportunities to mix and participate in projects. Some reported feelings of despair and hopelessness.

Several groups of residents experienced lack of disposable income which has pushed them further into poverty. These included single parents, people with disabilities, carers (paid and unpaid) newly arrived communities, parents of children with special educational needs, unemployed, those on benefits, those living in private rented accommodation and families with parents in low paid long hour employment.



### Isolation and Loneliness

Since the peak of the Covid pandemic of 2021, loneliness and stress related to socialising had grown. This affected many groups such as older people, people with disabilities, carers, new arrivals and young people.

After Brexit, newcomers to Walsall, especially those who spoke English as a second language, felt isolated and only interacted with people from the same country or religion as them. They reported feeling unwelcome and low sense of belonging which motivated them to stick to people like themselves.



### Mental Health

Mental health and the shortage of specialist services to talk about integration, hate crime, stress and anxiety problems in different languages or formats were common topics among many groups. The different mental health challenges that arise from families and individuals being apart because of conflict, relocation, cultural norms or hate crime need specific interventions and more diverse and focused services would be beneficial in the future.

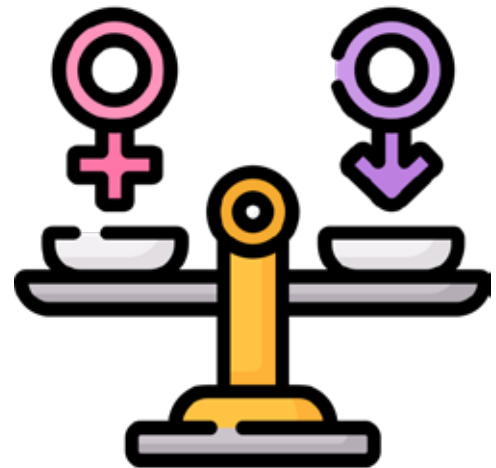


## Gender Inequality

Fear of crime was more prevalent with females across many of the groups spoken to. These issues ranged from increased instances of hate crime against women to choosing not to attend projects or events due to the need to walk in public spaces after dark.

Increased risk of domestic abuse and general violence against the person perpetrated by men raised concerns for women. A culture of “sexting” and uninvited sent pornographic images was not an unusual experience for women.

Many of the recently arrived communities have cultural norms and strict standards for women that are at odds with British values but are not questioned or addressed by professionals. This can result in harmful prejudice against some communities over time if there is no education or challenge.



## Cultural Understanding of New Communities and Existing Communities

As the borough becomes more and more diverse, it is important to help both new and old communities cope with the change that diversity creates. Often, the emphasis is on educating established communities and professionals who work with new communities, but it is also clear that new arrivals need to learn more about British Values, their rights and duties, as well as the local culture of the place they settled in. Ethnic minority communities also expressed their concerns and experiences of racism.





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# Building a **WALSALL FOR ALL**

Walsall for All believes that our borough is prepared for a bold vision that will foster a feeling of inclusion and more fairness for everyone in our Walsall communities regardless of their protected characteristics.

Walsall for All aims to build a borough where:

- △ In every locality residents feel safe, included and empowered to make a difference to where they live.
- △ Residents can travel to any locality and feel safe, and not face prejudice.
- △ Skin colour and accent does not impact experience, and people will be accepted.
- △ A borough that is friendly and welcoming, where inequality is recognised, and action taken to reduce inequalities.
- △ Residents feel that service providers make increased efforts to listen to their lived experiences and pro-actively and reactively try to improve people's lives.
- △ A borough where support can be found easily and meets the communication needs of the service user.
- △ Where hatred is unacceptable, and residents feel confident to report incidents of hatred and are confident that they will be listened to and receive support.
- △ If you have a disability, it will not stop you living a full and productive life.
- △ A borough where the risk of social isolation is recognised, and actions taken to minimise it.
- △ Where using the pavements and crossing the road is not impeded by vehicles or design of the road network.
- △ A borough where your gender does not influence your opportunities to engage in all aspects of life.
- △ Where children and young people feel confident that they will not suffer prejudice and will be given opportunities and support to succeed.
- △ A listening borough of friendship and neighbourly care for all our residents.
- △ Where everyone from volunteers, carers, residents and neighbours gets involved with keeping their areas clean and public realm is celebrated.
- △ Organisational and civic leadership at a borough wide level, and at the community level, are proud and committed to making Walsall a wonderful place to live, learn and work.
- △ Our diverse residents are proud of living in Walsall, from those who were born here to those who have chosen to live in Walsall.
- △ Individuals and groups are resilient and who, despite living and working in challenging times, remain committed to try and make better lives for themselves and their communities.

# Walsall Community Cohesion Strategy 2025-2035

## Action Plan

We recommend that this strategy is viewed as a roadmap for individuals, organisations, and the partners to work together in building a future where Walsall is not just a place to live, but a place to belong and thrive. Through targeted initiatives, collaborative partnerships, and a commitment to continuous improvement, we can strive towards a Walsall where:

- △ All members of our community feel engaged and empowered - both those who are part of majority communities, and who may have lived in Walsall all their lives, and members of minority communities including people who have recently moved to our Borough.
- △ Newcomers feel welcome and supported in integrating into the Borough.
- △ Different cultures and traditions are celebrated and cherished.
- △ Shared spaces and opportunities foster interaction and understanding among diverse groups.
- △ Individuals have access to services, resources, and opportunities to reach their full potential.
- △ A drive to bring people together through empathy and understanding of the individual's life journey.
- △ Inequality is recognised, considered and reduced.

Building a truly inclusive community is not a simple task. It requires dedication, commitment, and a willingness to challenge existing norms and structures. A thriving, inclusive Walsall will benefit not only its residents but also its economy, its cultural landscape, and its overall well-being.

This Action Plan can be found on the Walsall For All website where updates will be provided. The actions will be managed by a variety of partners and monitored by Walsall Council and Walsall For All.

### Children and Young People

Value the voices of children and young people.

To create opportunities to engage, listen to and co-produce solutions and decision making.

More awareness in education settings on the impact of racism, bullying and hate crime.

Engage children and young people through awareness campaigns including knife crime, drugs and gang culture.

Accessible routes of communication to share key information and services led by children and young people.

Improve cultural competencies of corporate parents for separated migrant young people.

### Social Isolation and Mental Wellbeing

Raise awareness of existing services that encourage activities, which bring communities together.

Promote Walsall's Wellbeing Directory.

Provide access to Mental Health First Aiders training.

Raise awareness of the stigma around mental health.

Promote mental health and wellbeing projects.



## Addiction

- Provide multilingual and culturally sensitive information for everyone.
- Promote training opportunities for parents, schools, and community groups around addiction.
- Refresh the referral process to ensure clear pathways.
- Encourage schools to have vapes added to safeguarding risk.
- Develop a 6 monthly drug update for new or in-trend drugs and associated risks.
- Ensuring leaflets and posters are produced in multi-languages around drugs and alcohol.

## Gypsy Traveller and Roma (GTR)

- Promote the development of a longer-term vision / policies for the management of the GTR (review the temporary Transit Site and Willenhall Site).
- Develop and deliver awareness sessions on GTR communities.
- Increase health, mental health, and education support to GTR residents living in bricks and mortar and caravans.
- Ensure GTR communities are involved in wider inclusion work.
- Increase focus on Central and Eastern European Roma communities.

## Hate Crime

- Explore how we can strengthen the assistance for residents who suffer from hate crime in Walsall, considering the many obstacles they may encounter when dealing with these challenging situations.
- Increase knowledge of how to report hate crime.
- Use community events as an opportunity to highlight and educate residents on issues around hate crime.
- Raise awareness across disability groups and carers around reporting of hate crime.

## Faith

- Improve awareness of different faiths in Walsall, including important festivals and celebrations.
- Create more opportunities to engage, listen to, and co-produce solutions and decision-making with faith communities through the Walsall Faith Forum.
- Support faith groups to offer sessions and opportunities to exchange stories / experiences that reduce community tensions and promote cohesion and integration in a positive way.
- Support faith groups to act and deliver on supporting new and existing communities on emerging strategic themes.

## Cost of Living

- Develop a Social Justice Strategy.
- Identify and support sustainable food projects / social supermarkets.
- Improve understanding of the impact of how immigration affects the risk of homelessness.
- Campaign the continuation of the Housing Support Fund.

### LGBTQ+

Encourage more Walsall Council services and other statutory partners to attend Walsall Pride event.

Encourage schools to have more visible support for LGBTQ+ communities within the pastoral and welfare support.

Promote inclusive and respectful environments that engage LGBTQ+ communities.

Promote the diversity of LGBTQ+ communities through social media platforms.

### Disability

Encourage opportunities for people with disabilities to participate in sport and physical exercise to ensure inclusivity.

Campaign public transport to promote visual and audio stops on the bus.

Ensure Walsall Council website has a page dedicated to complaints around accessibility.

Use various methods of communication such as audio / word of mouth / large print to groups and organisations.

Increase awareness and offer training around neurodiversity.

### Gender

Improve access to employment to those women who are furthest from the job market.

Improve safety and reduce violence through partnership working.

Deliver initiatives and events around International Women's Day.

Raise awareness of the stigma around men's mental health.



## Newly Arrived Individuals / Communities.

Raise awareness of employment advice and guidance within the community.

Champion the delivery of ESOL provisions within community settings.

Increase volunteering opportunities within local organisations.

Provide cultural awareness training to improve cultural competencies.

Develop community cohesion profiles at locality level.

Update the 'Welcome Pack to Walsall' and make accessible online in key languages.

## Race

The most important source of tension and bias based on skin colour is still racism and prejudice.

Revitalise the Community Dialogue events through Walsall for All, where communities can share their issues and give their feedback.

Improve representation of diverse communities within VCS (Voluntary Community Sector) and community organisations.

Use community events as an opportunity to highlight and educate residents on issues around racism.

Explore how we can strengthen the assistance for those who are victims of racism in Walsall, considering the many obstacles they may encounter when dealing with these challenging situations.





*“We are grateful to local community groups, organisations and individuals from all backgrounds who took part in the consultation process and contributed to the development of the Walsall Community Cohesion Strategy 2025-2035.”*



**Walsall Council**

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