

### 4.3 My Home - Healthy housing

Our strategic housing priorities linked with improving health are to:

- *Help prevent homelessness and provide support for rough sleepers*
- *Increase housing choice and employment opportunities.*
- *Tackle fuel poverty and improve the quality and energy-efficiency of existing and future homes (detailed in chapter 8).*
- *Address different needs and promote independent living, health and wellbeing.*

#### Homelessness

Homeless people experience some of the poorest health in our communities. Homeless Link's National Health Audit<sup>1</sup> found that eight-in-ten have one or more physical health needs, and seven-in-ten have at least one mental health problem. Being homeless means you are more likely to suffer from mental and physical ill-health and at the same time unable to access the health services you need. Research by Crisis<sup>2</sup> in 2011 estimated the average age of death of a homeless person to be 43-47 years of age. This is significantly lower than average for Walsall which is 80.2 years (looking at 5 year average between 2007 and 2011 for both genders).

The table below shows the principal causes of homelessness in Walsall for those households accepted as homeless. As highlighted the number of homeless acceptances has increased significantly (141%) from 2010/11 to 2012/13.

Cause of homelessness in Walsall	2012/13		2010/11	
	No.	%	No.	%
Termination of assured shorthold tenancy	52	19	10	9
Violent breakdown of relationship, involving partner	38	14	3	3
Parents no longer willing or able to accommodate	37	13	9	8
Other relatives or friends no longer willing or able to accommodate	32	11	6	5
Other causes	121	43	88	76
<b>Total</b>	<b>280</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>116</b>	<b>100</b>

*What we are doing:*

Improving the health of people who are homeless is central to reducing health inequalities. We are working in partnership with health to provide and sign-post our vulnerable customers to access to GPs, sign-post those with substance abuse issues to a dedicated

<sup>1</sup> [http://homeless.org.uk/sites/default/files/Health%20Audit%20Findings\\_National%20evidence\\_0.pdf](http://homeless.org.uk/sites/default/files/Health%20Audit%20Findings_National%20evidence_0.pdf)  
(Accessed: 17 Oct 2013)

<sup>2</sup> <http://www.crisis.org.uk/data/files/publications/Homelessness%20-%20a%20silent%20killer.pdf> (Accessed: 17 Oct 2013)

support worker at Addaction, and facilitate health drop-in clinics at our supported housing projects.

Walsall Council accepted an invitation from the Department of Communities & Local Government (DCLG) to be the Accountable Body for the West Midlands and Warwickshire local authorities to commission and develop programmes fund by a grant of £1.074m to help and support specifically for single homeless people, those with complex needs and rough sleepers, partly affected by the Welfare Reform who are finding it increasingly difficult to access and secure accommodation and appropriate support. Programmes include;

- New outreach team helping support entrenched and new rough sleepers
- Improving access to the private rented sector and social sector (shared tenancies)

The number of households supported where homelessness was prevented has increased significantly (by 70%), 1,599 instances in 2012/13 compared to 938 in 2010/11. Already in qtr1 and qtr2 2013/14 we have had 1,015 households supported to prevent homelessness which is 137% more than in 2010/11 and 63% more than in 2012/13.

Over the last two years significant investment has taken place in improving the condition of the supported housing projects by developing self-contained flats with upgraded heating, bathrooms and kitchens.

### **Rough Sleepers**

Rough Sleepers are a community who are more likely to have severe health issues including some form of substance abuse and mental health issues. As at October 2012 it is estimated there are 12 rough sleepers in Walsall. We are working in partnership with voluntary sector agencies such as Hi's N Lows and the Glebe Centre to help people move into stable accommodation. We also work closely with Midland Heat HA who provides a service specific for rough sleepers. Walsall Severe Weather Emergency Provision (SWEP) is a partnership which aims to reduce excess winter death. We provide a night shelter through the voluntary sector, and provide food and advice.

### **Planning for Housing**

Walsall Council's Planning Policy Team is currently working on two plans for the Borough that will allocate land to seek to provide additional provision of a wide range of new homes to meet needs up to and beyond the year 2026 (including affordable housing, extra care and open market homes). These new homes will be located in the most accessible locations with the necessary access to a range of community and health services, open space and sustainable transport choices to increase levels of wellbeing and encourage healthier lifestyles. Progress of these plans can be found at [www.walsall.gov.uk/planning\\_2026](http://www.walsall.gov.uk/planning_2026) .

The quality of new homes and a range of design standards (including energy efficiency) is also considered through the Planning Application process and monitored through the Authority's Monitoring Report available at [www.walsall.gov.uk/annual\\_monitoring\\_report](http://www.walsall.gov.uk/annual_monitoring_report).

Housing Quality and Hazards

We want our residents to live in safe and secure homes and this is a focus of the Council's adopted Housing Strategy ([http://cms.walsall.gov.uk/47472\\_housing\\_strategy\\_2012-2016\\_v4.pdf](http://cms.walsall.gov.uk/47472_housing_strategy_2012-2016_v4.pdf)) and adopted Home Energy Act Action Plan.

The council inspects and secures improvements in existing housing in line with the Housing Health and Rating Safety System (HHSRS). The HHSRS rates 29 hazards such as damp and mould, crowding and space and personal hygiene, sanitation and drainage. These hazards are rated to give a quantifiable hazard score. Depending on the score the hazard will fit into one of two bands – Category 1 hazards or Category 2 hazards. Category 1 hazards are the more severe hazards which warrant a more rapid response.

The Council has an adopted Housing Standards and Improvement Enforcement Policy which contains the possible responses/ enforcement options available to improve housing conditions.

[http://cms.walsall.gov.uk/de/appendix\\_1\\_-\\_housing\\_enforcement\\_policy\\_version\\_final\\_dl\\_2\\_.pdf](http://cms.walsall.gov.uk/de/appendix_1_-_housing_enforcement_policy_version_final_dl_2_.pdf)

The latest private housing stock condition survey in Walsall (2007)

[http://cms.walsall.gov.uk/executive\\_summary\\_final.pdf](http://cms.walsall.gov.uk/executive_summary_final.pdf)

identified the following five Category 1 risks as the highest in prevalence;

*Crowding and space: 3833 homes (4.7%)*

*Excess Cold: 2602 homes (3.2%)*

*Risk of falls: 2282 homes (2.8%)*

*Structural Failure: 1882 homes (2.3%)*

*Dampness/ mould: 1228 homes (1.5%)*

Geographically, above average rates of Category 1 hazard failure are associated with three areas in particular:

*Palfrey and Pleck : 26.5%*

*St. Matthews and Birchills Leamore : 20.7%*

*Darlaston : 16.5%*

Residents who live in a house which provides a poor physical environment, for example homes that are inadequately heated, damp, overcrowded, or in a poor state of repair are more likely to experience poor physical health and impact on their emotional wellbeing. They are at higher risk of experiencing exacerbation of chronic illnesses such as respiratory and heart disease, higher rates of some infectious diseases and higher rates of accidents in the home than those who live in good-quality housing.

There is evidence of adverse impacts on the educational attainment of children who live in overcrowded conditions. Most falls among children occur in or around their home and are related to the design and maintenance of housing and recreational areas. Examples of factors that increase the risk of falls and injuries include poor lighting, lack of window guards and missing guardrails for stairs.

Living in cold and damp conditions is a particular risk to health: mould exacerbates conditions such as asthma, and cold indoor temperatures are linked to increased rates of premature death due to heart failure. Vulnerable groups include the elderly, the very young and those suffering from long-term ill-health. These groups also tend to have the greatest exposure due to the lengthy periods that they spend indoors. Improvements in general, respiratory, and mental health have been reported following warmth and energy efficiency improvements.

People who live in very poor housing conditions are more likely to suffer from poor mental health and physical health than those whose housing is of higher quality. As most of the social housing stock in Walsall has achieved the national 'Decent Homes Standard' the priority now is to improve the physical quality of private sector housing stock, particularly those in the private rental sector. Social housing and poor-quality private sector housing is generally located in Walsall's deprived neighbourhoods to the west of the borough. In these communities, health outcomes are poorest and the health inequalities gap widest.

Levels of deprivation are reflected in the social determinants of health: poverty, unemployment, occupation, education, ethnicity, low self-esteem and isolation are some examples. These wider factors also determine people's physical and mental wellbeing and their capacity to participate in the social and economic opportunities that are generally accepted by society as the norm.

In order to achieve this we are delivering a number of measures targeted at tackling fuel poverty (see Chapter 8) and improving the quality and energy-efficiency of existing and future homes.

Key achievements in Walsall in recent years include:

#### **A. Tackling Fuel Poverty and excess winter deaths**

##### **Walsall Health Through Warmth – Creating healthy homes**

This Council-funded programme has invested £789,000 to help 425 households. The fund also helped lever-in investment of £477,000 from a variety of sources including the Department of Health, Npower, Scottish Power and the Department of Energy and Climate Change (DECC). This service has also developed or supported the following;

##### **Raising awareness of impact of excess cold or heat in the home**

Production of low cost room thermometers :

- For new parents – shaped like teddy bears and
- For vulnerable households

##### **Reducing the cost of home energy**

Developing collective switching schemes and encourage 'switching' of suppliers to help residents secure lower home energy costs. The first scheme in summer 2013 provided average annual savings of £150 for Walsall residents.

##### **Home Energy Conservation Act (HECA) Action Plan.**

Walsall Council was one of the first in the UK to adopt a HECA Action Plan – ‘Improving Home Energy Efficiency Together’ – in line with the revised government guidance in 2012.

### **Energy Company Obligations (ECO) £70M**

The council has nominated two contractors (Keepmoat and Walsall Housing group) to work with residents and help secure circa £70M of funds from energy companies to improve home insulation and heating especially for households in fuel poverty and those in LSOAs with high incidence of fuel poverty. This programme

### **Carbon Emissions Reduction Target Funding (CERT). £11.9M+**

Between 2008 and the end of 2012, a total of 24,353 homes in Walsall received an energy-saving measure (cavity wall insulation and/or loft insulation) with a total of 29,926 measures being installed. Based on an average cost of £400 per measure this equates to £11,970,000 invested in the borough.

### **Community Energy-Saving Programme (CESP) £21M**

This programme has led to improvements to the following:

- Blakenall - £3,000,000+ from whg, British Gas, the Regional Housing Pot
- Jones House - £1,752,000 from whg, British Gas,.
- Borough-wide whg properties £9,000,000+ whg, British Gas,
- Austin House planned for this year £3,250,000 whg, British Gas
- Accord properties borough- wide £2,000,000+ Npower
- Private sector homes borough-wide £2,000,000 Npower

## **B. Tackling other hazards in housing**

### **Tackling Slips Trips and Falls**

In addition to the increasing number of households assisted by statutory Disabled Facility Grants the Council has for many years provide a free handyman service for vulnerable people over the age of 55 with minor works around the home that they can't safely do that would prevent accidents and injuries.

### **Carbon Monoxide detectors**

Joint work with West Midlands Fire Service, Public Health and the Housing Service is underway to help reduce incidence of carbon monoxide poisoning (and fear of such) in particular vulnerable groups including those 65 years-of-age or older, the disabled, smokers, those living in large households or living alone using funding from the Department of Health and our existing heating contractors and Fire Service staff to deliver and install carbon monoxide detectors. Already 700 households have been assisted.

### **Ensuring standards in Houses in Multiple Occupation (HMO)**

There is a significantly higher risk of fire in HMOs and fire statistics show most types of HMOs have a greater risk of fire than houses occupied by a single family. There are a variety of reasons for this increased risk, but because it exists, local authorities have powers to require adequate means of escape in case of fire and other fire precautions. The Council inspects and secures improvements to both licensable and non-licensable HMOs.

## **Tackling electrical hazards**

### **Electric Blanket testing**

Working jointly with Trading Standards and using funding from the Department of Health, for the last two years we have been providing free electric blanket testing and replacement. The work is part of our broader help for vulnerable residents. In one session we tested over 150 blankets of which 41% failed, the oldest blanket being from 1957 but with some very recent ones (under 4 years' old) that failed/were worn out through constant use.

### **Support from the Electrical Safety Council (ESC)**

The Council and West Midlands Fire Service are promoting the work of the ESC and in particular to help tackle dangerous home electrical installations and appliances.

## **C. Other work**

### **Helping residents become and remain safe in their homes – Adaptations Service**

The Council has significantly improved the delivery for customers of its adaptations service including statutory disabled facility grants (DFGs) in recent years. This means that more households are able to be helped, helped faster and for lower costs:

- 2011 a total of 289 DFGs approved
- 2012 a total of 351 DFGs approved
- 2013 up to 5<sup>th</sup> November 424 DFGs approved (already 47% more approvals than in 2011)

	2008/09	2009/10	2010/11	2011/12	2012/13	2013/14*
Average DFG cost	£12,575	£12,297	£9,948	£8,170	£6,467	£4,998
Time in weeks from referral to approval	90	65	27	9	8	7

\*As at 5<sup>th</sup> November 2013.

### **Walsall Health and Housing Steering Group**

A group led by Walsall Housing Group and the Council is an active partnership between health, housing associations and other key statutory and third sector partners which works to address these issues through implementation of the Walsall Health & Housing Strategy.

#### **Indicators:**

Homeless household numbers, Children living in poverty, Category 1 hazards (including statutory housing overcrowding rates), fuel poverty.

Priorities for action:

- *Maximising income through better access to employment and benefits and reducing fuel poverty.*

- *Improving the condition, quality, energy-efficiency and choice of housing, particularly in the private sector.*
- *High-profile marketing of programmes such as the Energy Company Obligation (ECO) and collective switching, which will improve the energy efficiency of homes, is needed to ensure that residents in deprived areas take up measures which will also benefit their health.*
- *Through partnership working with social and private landlords, improving access to health services, encouraging tenants and residents to adopt healthy lifestyles and encouraging those with long-term conditions to take up self-care management programmes.*
- *Developing community capacity in deprived areas in relation to healthy lifestyles through health literacy, community champions and health trainers.*
- *Encourage through new development schemes, and through land allocations, the provision/improvement of good-quality green open space and play areas for the benefit of all those who live and work in the borough.*
- *Ensuring there is a wide range of housing-related support options for vulnerable people, to enable them to maintain independent living.*
- *Identifying hot spot areas of pest infestations and target through proactive pest control visits, sewer baiting and awareness-raising on dealing with infestations effectively.*