

Chapter 4: My Money, My Home and My Job

The causal link between poor health and the development of a vibrant economy is well understood in Walsall. If we are to truly increase the numbers of wealth creators, provide the labour force our employers need and reduce the numbers of our population who are economically inactive, we must ensure that our current and potential workforce is healthy. These principals are also true for helping those in lower paid employment gain greater income.

In developing the workforce of tomorrow, we also recognise the need to ensure our residents hold the skills that employers are demanding, together with adequate and affordable housing to retain and attract people within the Borough. If linked to financial independence and job security, this actively encourages people to join and remain in the workforce as wealth creators, assisted as required by appropriate support.

This Needs Assessment recognises the importance of all agencies working together to achieve the desired end results, and for us to test out new ways of working. Walsall council has established the 'Help Me With My Money, My Home, My Job' work strand, which brings together the traditional service areas of Housing Benefit / Council Tax Reduction, Housing Support, Council Tax, Welfare Rights, Customer Services, to support better co-ordinated joint working with other teams and agencies., including: the Employment & Skills team within Strategic Regeneration, local Colleges and Training Providers, Jobcentre Plus etc.

When customers come to Walsall Council for help they are often passed around the system (organisation) if they need support with more than one problem. This causes waste and duplication leading to higher costs, low staff morale and customers not being helped in the way they need it. Using a systems thinking approach, we worked with customers and collected data which told us that customers with housing benefit queries also needed help with council tax, employment support, budgeting and housing needs.

When a customer contacts the council, a member of staff will take ownership of the customer and work 'end to end' journey with them, removing any barriers that might be stopping the customer from getting the help they need. Where a member of staff is unable to help the customer with a problem, they will 'pull' in help from a colleague with the relevant skills and gain learning thus building up their capability. Our customers like the new way of working as they have one point of contact throughout their customer journey and staff enjoy being able to help customers in the way they need to be helped.

The health sector and its ways of working are also subject to change at both national and local levels, and are being requested to move away from 'diagnose and treat' way of working towards a 'predict and prevent' culture. To achieve this it requires re-modelling of both its ways of doing business (systems and procedures) and its workforce. This brings a mix of challenges and opportunities, together with the potential for significant down-stream benefits for service users and those providing the funding, who are looking to achieve more for less etc.

This re-tooling process will require new systems and procedures together with a workforce with appropriate / new skills and abilities capable of meeting the needs of customers, together with technology that assists the workforce and empowers patients. Examples include new roles like: Personal Assistants, who assist with placing patients at the centre of managing their care, this will generate new employment opportunities and ways of working, improved service delivery and hopefully reduced down-stream costs.

We will work to capture this evolving agenda within complementary strategies and their delivery plans, including: the Health & Well Being Strategy / Action Plan, to harness and co-ordinate the work partners and stakeholders. This will include exploring new ways of service delivery and the use of new technology and social media, the Digital Health agenda.

The council and partners are very aware of the impact on residents in Walsall of both changes to the welfare system and the recession and are undertaking ongoing analysis of how this is affecting people in a bid to understand how services need to respond. Various data sets are being considered that build a picture of which services are being used by residents affected by the recession and changes to welfare system to identify ways of improving access to services and ensuring services that are most needed are provided.