2021 Walsall Director of Public Health Annual Report

Improving Mental Wellbeing in Walsall "Together We Can"
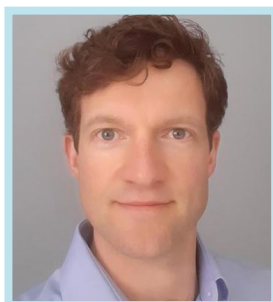
Walsall Council

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Foreword by Stephen Gunther – Walsall Council Director of Public Health

Hello and welcome to this year's Walsall Director of Public Health Annual Report.

This report is an important measure of health and wellbeing in the borough. It helps us, along with our partners including social housing, the police and NHS Trusts, to showcase our good work, address potential issues and make recommendations for improvements here in Walsall.

In my report last year, we focused on how partners in Walsall can help children reach their full potential, by reducing inequalities (**see progress to date in appendix 1 of this report).**

Inequalities affect lives. They are the avoidable differences in important outcomes like education or health - and these are inequalities that will impact upon children, their future potential and in the longer term will affect the local populations, too.

Mental wellbeing was highlighted in the 2020 annual report and its theme is further explored in this year's 2021 report. It is a key priority and area of interest of mine, that I am determined to get behind, so we can all develop longer-term strategies for Walsall.

In my role as a Public Health leader, I have seen the consequences that poor mental wellbeing can have upon family and friends and none of us are immune to it.

This last year has brought into sharp focus the importance of good mental wellbeing, and tapping in to our own networks and communities, so we can better support each other. I have experienced my own stressful times and I want to thank my family, friends, colleagues, fellow Directors of Public Health, and most importantly my team. Their support, kind words and many acts of kindness helped me continue to be at my best to support the residents of Walsall.

Stephen

Stephen Gunther
Director of Public Health

Introduction from Councillor Stephen Craddock – Portfolio Holder for Health and Wellbeing
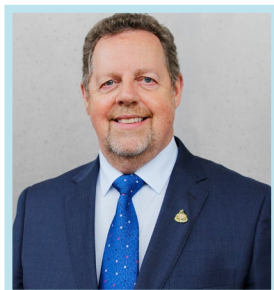
This report focuses on the importance of positive mental wellbeing. It evidences how increased 'mental well-being' can be anticipated, assessed and managed within our own communities. Residents, communities and organisations play an essential role in helping to deliver and support collective mental wellbeing.

Mental wellbeing was already a priority for Walsall, however, COVID-19 has accentuated its importance. The virus and consequent social restrictions have had a considerable impact on health and mental wellbeing.

Strong and resilient communities in Walsall have played (and continue to play) a vital role in reducing this impact. During the pandemic, our communities were selfless and made sure essential support got to those who needed it most. We saw hundreds of local people volunteering to support vulnerable residents and community organisations giving timely advice as and when required.

Wider factors also contribute to positive mental wellbeing in which we all play a part as individuals, as strong local communities, as focused organisations. Feeling secure and safe is integral to all of us and it means having decent homes, safe neighbourhoods and good jobs.

Never underestimate the power of connectivity, be this with nature and our health, through exercising outdoors in our quality parks and green spaces, or by connecting with those friends we know that we can rely on.

Research has helped us shape the report. Shared voices and comments from our residents and community leaders evidence how the issues that have been raised really affected them.

Importantly, recommendations in this year's report complement wider national and local strategies on mental wellbeing. For example, the Government's COVID-19 mental health and wellbeing recovery action plan. This sets out the national approach to improving the mental health and wellbeing impacts of the pandemic. Locally, the Mental Wellbeing Strategy takes a long-term view highlighting priorities and ambitions for the next 10 years in Walsall.

Stephen Gunther, Walsall Director of Public Health, and his Public Health team have worked tirelessly over the last 22 months to guide support and drive our response to the pandemic in Walsall and the wider region. We owe them a huge debt of gratitude for their dedication and professionalism during this unprecedented time.

We want you to find our annual report interesting and thought provoking, but most of all we hope it inspires you to take part in making positive changes to improve mental wellbeing in Walsall.
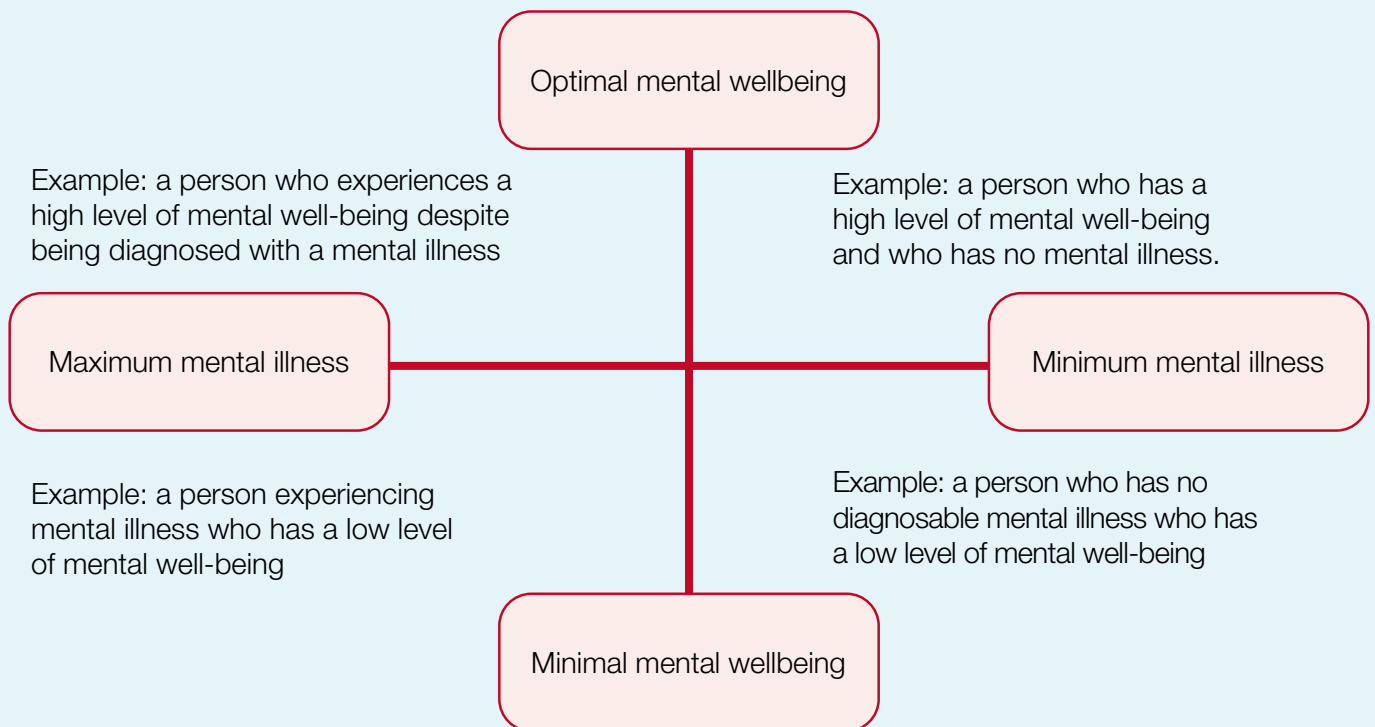
Stephen Craddock
Portfolio Holder for Health and Wellbeing

Chapter 1 – Understanding Mental Wellbeing

What's Mental Wellbeing?

- Mental Wellbeing and mental illness are not the same thing.
- Mental Wellbeing is about what people think and feel, achieving potential, coping with pressure of life, working in a productive way and giving back to the community.
- Mental ill health is associated with many of the leading causes of disease and disability. Anyone can suffer a period of mental ill health. It can develop suddenly, as a result of an event, or gradually, where it worsens over time. It includes conditions such as depression and anxiety.
- A person living with a mental illness can achieve mental wellbeing, similar to someone who has neither mental nor physical illnesses could have a poor state of mental wellbeing.

Mental Health Continuum

Optimal mental wellbeing

Example: a person who experiences a high level of mental well-being despite being diagnosed with a mental illness

Example: a person who has a high level of mental well-being and who has no mental illness.

Maximum mental illness

Minimum mental illness

Example: a person experiencing mental illness who has a low level of mental well-being

Example: a person who has no diagnosable mental illness who has a low level of mental well-being

Minimal mental wellbeing

SOURCE: Adapted from Keyes (2002)1

1   Gillam (2018) Enhancing public mental health and wellbeing through creative arts participation, Journal of Public Mental Health, VOL. 17 NO. 4 2018, pp. 148-156

The meaning of mental wellbeing can differ from person to person and organisation to organisation. These are just some of thoughts of local people on what mental wellbeing means to them;

"Being positive and confident are a significant part of [my] mental wellbeing. Seeing positivity as an overall state of character that plays a hugely important part in [my] life."

"Good mental wellbeing is being able to understand and manage your feelings so that you can cope with the everyday stresses and bring a sense of productivity to your life".

"Having a positive attitude about life and not letting setbacks or negative feelings stop you in achieving your goals are key to mental wellbeing."

"To be able to recognise how you are feeling and know it's ok to talk."

We can see that being positive is viewed by local people as a key part of mental wellbeing, being able to recognise how you are feeling and the ability to respond to challenges as they arise.

Since the World Health Organisation (WHO) first introduced the concept of mental wellbeing in 1948, many different definitions of mental wellbeing have been put forward. The concept is relevant to a wide range of disciplines, all of which have a slightly different take, in line with their underlying beliefs, attitudes and practices[2]. Here are some ways in which some organisations describe mental wellbeing;

"Mental wellbeing describes your mental state - how you are feeling and how well you can cope with day-to-day life. Our mental wellbeing is dynamic. It can change from moment to moment, day to day, month to month or year to year." (Mind, 2016)

"The state of being comfortable, healthy, or happy."

(Oxford Dictionary)

"Mental health is a state of well-being in which the individual realises his or her own abilities, can cope with the normal stresses of life, can work productively and fruitfully, and is able to make a contribution to his or her community." (WHO, 2001).

In the final description by WHO, positive mental health is seen as the foundations for mental wellbeing, providing residents and communities with what they need to work together effectively.

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2   Faculty of Public Health (2021) Concepts of Social and Mental Wellbeing, Concepts of Mental and Social Wellbeing (fph.org.uk)

What Shapes Our Mental Wellbeing

Our behaviours such as keeping active, having a balanced diet, smoking, alcohol consumption contribute to our mental wellbeing as well as wider factors known as the "fundamentals of mental wellbeing" play an important role. The "fundamentals of mental wellbeing" are described below;

Education and Skills

Our education shapes our knowledge, our confidence and ability to solve problems. Being able to read and write, carry out basic maths, communicate with others and use computers are important skills that will support us in everyday activities. A good education increases the possibility of securing a 'good' job which increases our chances of positive mental wellbeing.

"Having access to free ESOL [English to Speakers of Other Languages] provisions within walking distance of their homes/neighbourhood allowed them to improve their language skills, build their confidence in speaking English with other people and learning in an environment where they felt safe and secure."

Money

Limited finances can take a toll on our mental wellbeing. Having money enables more choice in terms of food, clothes, housing, transport and leisure (some of "the fundamentals of wellbeing"). Being able to pay for everyday items but also having enough to cover bills, emergencies or even take a break with the family all add to our quality of life and mental wellbeing.

"Being financially stable and being able to provide for family are key to mental wellbeing"

"I suffer with anxiety, and this is compounded by worries about money and a lack of food."

"It creates strain when you have to find money for school trips that aren't cheap, but you don't want your children to miss out."

Healthy behaviours and Leisure

A balanced diet including enough vitamins and minerals helps promote mental wellbeing. Regular physical activity play an important role too, even 10 minutes bursts can help improve mood. Leisure time (e.g. time on the allotment, reading a book, attending a group) is an opportunity to develop interests, meet other people and take a break.

"Community activities such as coffee mornings at the local senior school and a youth group at the church make the community feel connected and supportive of each other. COVID did impact on this but things are opening up again now."

"Positive mental wellbeing means being able to go for a swim or a walk, occasionally meeting up with friends, going to the cinema with her daughter or on her own."

Work and Volunteering

Work and volunteering gives us a purpose, opportunity to learn new skills, promotes independence and helps us to meet people. 'Good' employment and volunteering supports positive mental wellbeing. Poor working conditions, such as less control of workload, lack of job security, limited support and inadequate health and safety has a negative impact on mental wellbeing. Helping young people to find work can also reduce crime and anti-social behaviour.

"Having a job and not having to worry about bills are important"

"Over COVID I brought food to people and made sure everyone was coping and managing".

Environment

Living near and having access to good quality green spaces, such as a park, improves mental wellbeing. It provides an opportunity for relaxation, exercise and meeting families and friends. Clean streets and feeling safe are also important factors.

"I enjoy using green areas such as Walsall Arboretum and Sutton Park."

Housing

Housing which is overcrowded, noisy, cold and feels unsafe will have a negative impact on mental wellbeing. Having poor mental wellbeing can also make it difficult to deal with housing problems.

"Litter, people drinking in the street, but also internally in housing e.g. damp. These two environments can interact so that people can feel unhappy and anxious within their homes and when they leave their homes they can feel equally unsafe, threatened or unhappy. This can have a huge impact on wellbeing."
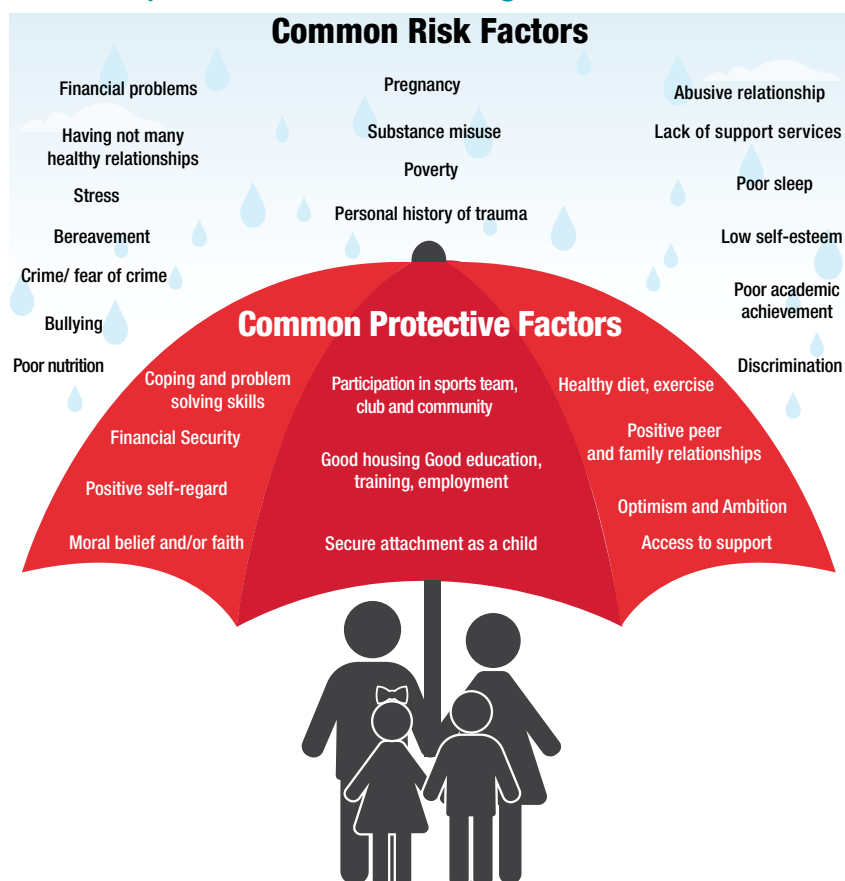
Being Connected

Knowing and caring for people including friends, families and communities makes most people happier. We often feel more secure knowing that support is available. Being connected can provide an increased quality of life.

Transport can help us feel connected, it allows us to visit places, experience cultures, take part in activities, widen employment options and access support. Active forms of travel, such as walking and cycling is even better because it's also good for physical health and the environment.

> "Connecting with people, building nice relationships with people, even if it is just walking by someone in the street and saying hello, or paying people compliments are all important"

> "Feeling loved, being allowed to have friends, feeling wanted, being able to have a partner - this can all provide validation and feelings of security"

Some other factors that impact on mental wellbeing

Common Risk Factors

Financial problems

Having not many healthy relationships

Stress

Bereavement

Crime/ fear of crime

Bullying

Poor nutrition

Pregnancy

Substance misuse

Poverty

Personal history of trauma

Abusive relationship

Lack of support services

Poor sleep

Low self-esteem

Poor academic achievement

Discrimination

Common Protective Factors

Coping and problem solving skills

Financial Security

Positive self-regard

Moral belief and/or faith

Participation in sports team, club and community

Good housing Good education, training, employment

Secure attachment as a child

Healthy diet, exercise

Positive peer and family relationships

Optimism and Ambition

Access to support

Why Mental Wellbeing?

PEOPLE WITH GOOD
MENTAL HEALTH WELLBEING ARE:

SATISFIED

OPTIMISTIC

HAVE HIGH SELF-ESTEEM

RESILIENT

FEEL IN CONTROL

HAVE A SENSE OF BELONGING

Walsall Council

STRONG AND RESILIENT
COMMUNITIES THAT SUPPORT
GOOD MENTAL WELLBEING HAVE:

REDUCED INEQUALITIES

**INCREASED LEVELS OF EDUCATION
AND EMPLOYMENT OPPORTUNITIES**

INCREASE PRODUCTIVITY AT WORK

**REDUCED POVERTY, HOMELESSNESS,
DRUG AND ALCOHOL MISUSE**

**REDUCED NUMBER OF YOUNG PEOPLE
ENTERING THE CRIMINAL JUSTICE SYSTEM**

MORE CONNECTED COMMUNITIES

Walsall Council

Chapter 2: What is Walsall's Ambition and Where are We Now?

Walsall's Mental Wellbeing Ambition

Our ambition is to achieve optimal wellbeing for all Walsall residents and reduce mental wellbeing inequality.

To achieve the ambition we have committed to a shared understanding of population mental wellbeing, working together to increase opportunities for better mental wellbeing and enhancing the population's opportunity to self-care. The strategy is not focused on mental ill health, it prioritises:
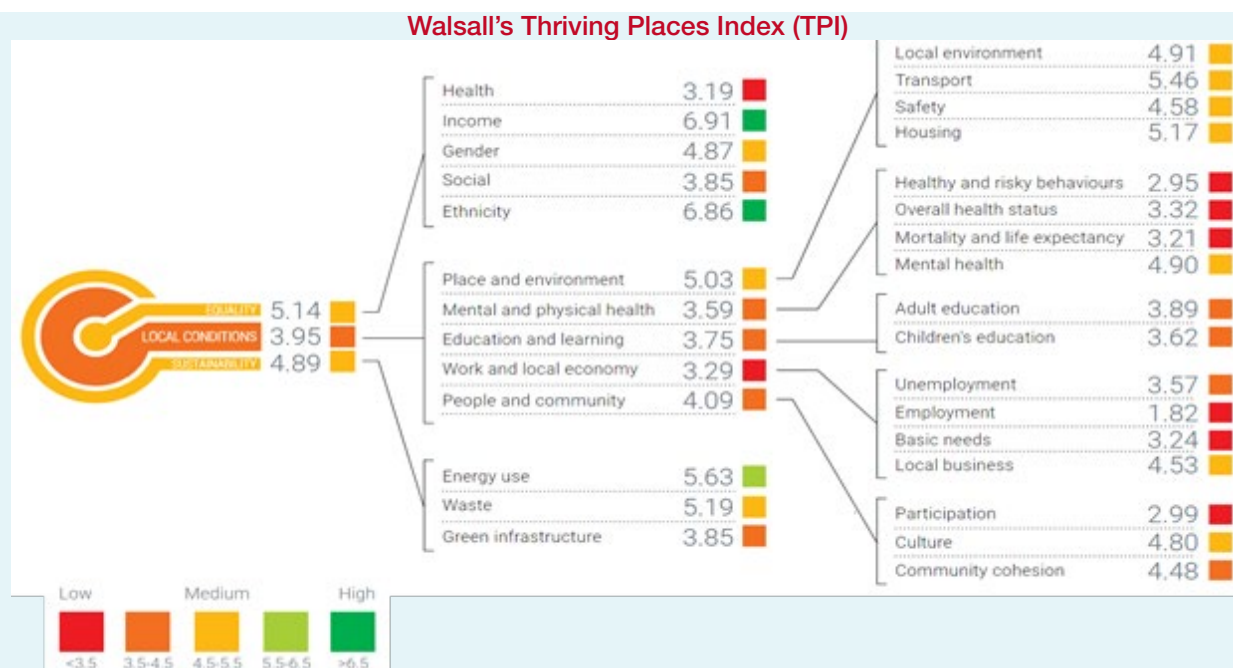
All of Walsall's Mental Wellbeing

Walsall is committed to a universal and a targeted approach to improve our residents' mental wellbeing and reduce mental wellbeing inequalities. The priorities are:

- Improving the populations understanding of mental wellbeing and reducing mental health stigma and increasing knowledge of how to access support.
- Working together to improve some of the economic and housing challenges impacting on our residents' mental wellbeing.
- Working in partnership to reduce unemployment and working with employers to support their employees.
- Enhancing community connections, peer support and networks to improve mental wellbeing.
- Making bereavement and counselling support more accessible by locating delivery within communities that need them most and making more culturally appropriate.
- Utilising prevention and early intervention, to enhance residents' wellbeing. For example, by increasing access to physical activity opportunities and supporting communities to improve their nutrition.

What Do We Know About Mental Wellbeing in Walsall?

There are many factors that contribute to good health and wellbeing, both physical and mental. The Thriving Places Index (TPI) identifies the local conditions required for good mental wellbeing and measures whether those conditions are being delivered fairly and sustainably. Walsall's scores in the TPI are shown in the figure below:
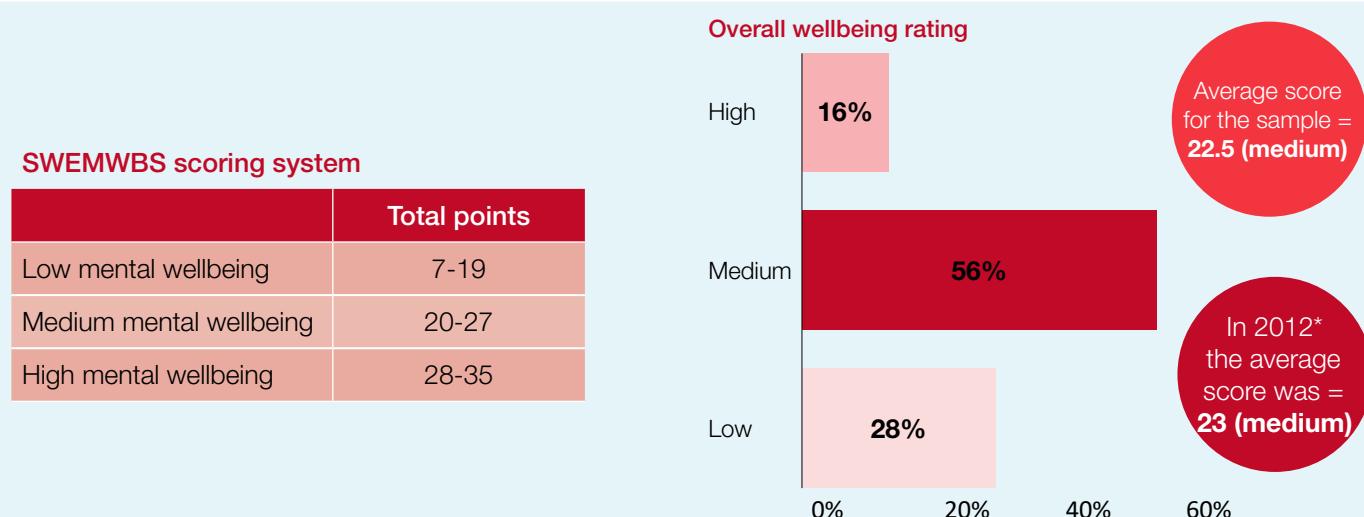
Walsall's Thriving Places Index (TPI)

The TPI suggests that in Walsall, there are a number of factors that support good mental wellbeing that could be improved. These include diet, exercise, obesity and risky sexual behaviours.

The TPI suggests that improving the local environment and transport networks (part of "Being Connected") and employment (part of "Work and Volunteering") would increase mental wellbeing in our residents.

Walsall Residents' Life satisfaction

- In 2019/20, on average, people in Walsall reported "high" levels of happiness and life satisfaction, feeling that life is worthwhile with low levels of anxiety. However, anxiety has increased in the population overall over the course of the COVID-19 pandemic.
- In the UK, throughout the course of the COVID-19 pandemic, people of "other than white" ethnicity have experienced lower life satisfaction than the white population, whilst having higher loneliness scores.
- The survey of Walsall residents conducted in late 2020 revealed that the majority of our residents experienced a "medium" level of overall mental wellbeing, which is similar to the findings of the 2012 survey.

Mental Wellbeing of Walsall Residents (2020)

SWEMWBS scoring system

	Total points
Low mental wellbeing	7-19
Medium mental wellbeing	20-27
High mental wellbeing	28-35

Overall wellbeing rating

High 16%

Medium 56%

Low 28%

0% 20% 40% 60%

Average score for the sample = **22.5 (medium)**

In 2012* the average score was = **23 (medium)**

Note that the short version of the Warwick–Edinburgh Mental Wellbeing Scale (SWEMBS) is a questionnaire designed to measure mental wellbeing.

Local research (see next section for more detail – "what we don't know") has identified a number of specific factors that impact on mental wellbeing of Walsall residents. This includes work and money, housing and being connected. Local data for each of these is presented below;

Work and Money

- The proportion of people in Walsall who are involuntarily excluded (not from choice) from the labour market, due to unemployment, sickness or disability and caring responsibilities, is in the worst 40% of all local authorities in England.
- Unemployment levels remain above (worse than) pre-pandemic levels. Younger people are affected the most by unemployment and furloughing.

Percentage of 16-64 year olds claiming Unemployment Benefits in Walsall Compared to England, West Midlands and Black Country

Proportion of 16-64 year olds claiming unemployment benefits

● Walsall ● West Midlands ● Great Britain
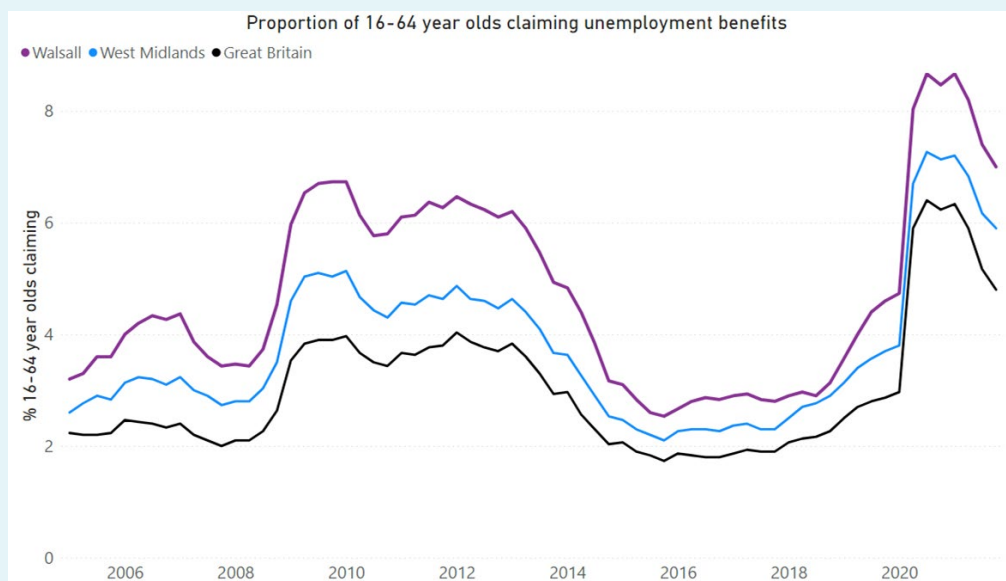
The chart above shows the local impact of the pandemic on residents claiming out of work benefits. There has been a sharp increase in claims at the start of the pandemic, despite support for employers, such as the furlough scheme. The number of claimants (just under 15,000) has remained steady since then.

Mental wellbeing and money are strongly connected, and debt can trigger or worsen stress, anxiety and depression. Unemployment and redundancy are the most common reasons for people falling into debt[3]. Nationally, over the course of the pandemic, it is estimated that:

7.3 million people are estimated to have fallen behind on household bills

1 in 3 household have lost income

36% of people who have lost their income have run down their savings

45% of people with children have lost household income

Housing

- The proportion of overcrowded households in Walsall is significantly higher than nationally, with about 5.2% of households in the borough affected.

- Decent quality housing is fundamental to health and wellbeing. In Walsall, 12-14% of homes are estimated to have some type of hazard e.g. fall hazards, excess cold, disrepair or overcrowding[4]. This is true in the private owned, private rented and socially rented sectors
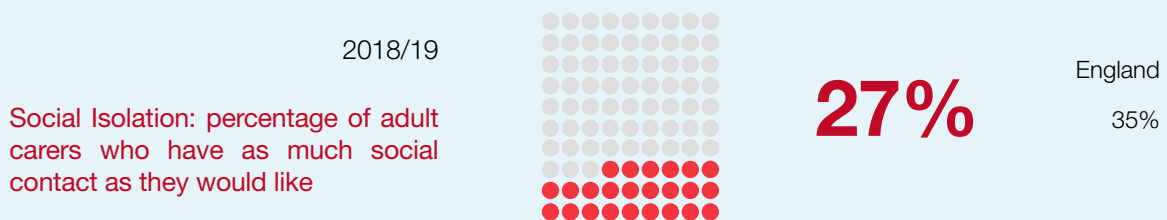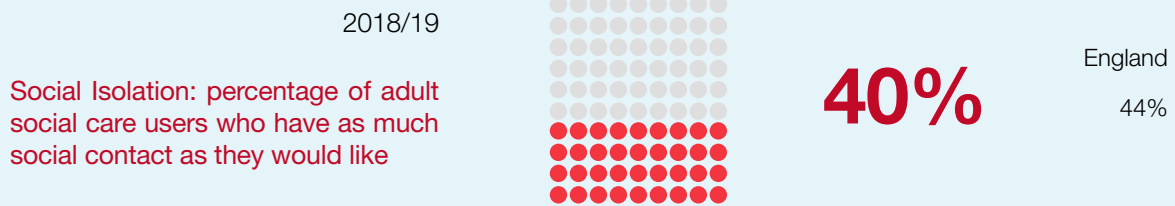
- Fuel poverty, strongly linked to cold homes, contributes to poor mental wellbeing. Around 13.7% of households in Walsall experienced fuel poverty in 2017. This is likely to be made worse due to the recent rise in fuel and energy costs.

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3   Debt and mental health, The Mental Health Foundation. https://www.mentalhealth.org.uk/a-to-z/d/debt-and-mental-health.
4   Integrated Dwelling Level Housing Stock Modelling and Database for Walsall Metropolitan Borough Council

Being Connected

Relationships are one of the most important aspects of our lives. People who are more socially connected to family, friends, or their community are happier, physically healthier and live longer, with fewer mental health problems than people who are less well connected[5].

2018/19

Social Isolation: percentage of adult social care users who have as much social contact as they would like

40%

England
44%

2018/19

Social Isolation: percentage of adult carers who have as much social contact as they would like

27%

England
35%

- Of adults who have social care needs in Walsall, only around **4 in 10** had as much social contact as they would like – which is lower than the national average for England of 44%.

- Of all adult carers in Walsall only **27%** had as much social contact as they would like – again significantly lower than the national average of **35%**.

- These groups are likely to experience social isolation, loneliness, lower mental wellbeing and have been highly affected by the pandemic.

- Nearly **22%** of adults in Walsall feel lonely often, always or some of the time. This is slightly below (better) than West Midlands **(23.67%)** and England **(22.26%)**.

5 The Mental Health Foundation - Mental health statistics: relationships and community.

What don't we know?

Unfortunately, there is much we don't know about mental wellbeing. We need to increase local knowledge of what is having the greatest impact (both good and bad) on our residents. Later on in the report we talk about more voice and control for residents. We have also committed to a programme of research which will help to reduce this gap in our knowledge. This includes the following;

- "Growing up in Walsall" – Research used to inform last year's annual report and the 'Walsall Best Start 4Life' (BS4L) strategy. It helped to understand what it is like to be a young person living and growing up in Walsall which included looking at factors that impact on mental wellbeing.

- Health Needs of Young Adults – First stage was research focused on mental wellbeing, substance abuse and sexual health and how this impacts on young adults' (in Walsall) overall health. The second stage is working alongside young adults to jointly design the support that is available in the future.

- Health Watch Walsall: Young People's Mental Health Survey - This is a Black Country wide look at Children and Adolescent Mental Health Services, particularly focussing on service access, delivery and the transition to adult mental health services.

- Understanding Mental Wellbeing of Adults – Research that looked at how the fundamentals of mental wellbeing (see Chapter 1) impact on mental wellbeing of adults. This was focused on Walsall residents who are unemployed and those with caring responsibilities because we know they have poorer mental wellbeing than Walsall's average. The research also explored what is helping or hindering communities to be stronger and promote positive mental wellbeing.

  The research above will help to shape local policy and support to ensure it is based on the needs of Walsall residents.

Chapter 3: Important Role of Individuals, Communities and Organisations

My/Your Mental Wellbeing - Looking after our own mental wellbeing

- It is more important than ever to emphasise the need to look after your mental wellbeing.

- Improving knowledge and understanding of mental wellbeing will enable better self-care and help identify when more support might be needed. Walsall residents will be better equipped to make effective decisions about their mental wellbeing.

- Self-care is an important part of living a healthy and happy lifestyle. Looking after ourselves both mentally and physically is crucial to taking control of your health.

- The Self-Care Forum (a national charity that promote awareness of self-care) describe self-care as;

> "The actions that individuals take for themselves, on behalf of and with others in order to develop, protect, maintain and improve their health, wellbeing or wellness"

Why's It Important to look after our own mental wellbeing?

- We lead really busy lives and it can be easy to forget to put yourself first, especially if you have lots to do and other people to care for. Looking after yourself will make you feel better and help you to improve some of the fundamentals of mental wellbeing (e.g. work, money, and housing) discussed in Chapter 1. The thought of self-care sometimes might make you feel like you are being selfish, especially if you care for others (e.g. children, parents, vulnerable adults). However, unless you are equipped both mentally and physically, fulfilling all caring responsibilities will be very difficult. For those who have been on an aeroplane, you will have heard the pre-flight aeroplane analogy - **"please put on your own oxygen mask before you help other people"**[6]**.** This is the same for mental wellbeing.

> "As a carer the person being cared for always has to come first so there is never a time when you are completely relaxed."

- Our mental wellbeing affects all areas of life, and looking after it can really improve the way that we feel every day. Looking after our mental wellbeing when we are feeling on good form is also key because it helps us to cope better when future challenges arise.

6   Barth F.D (2019) Self-Care Is Important: Why Is It So Hard to Practice? Self-Care Is Important: Why Is It So Hard to Practice? | Psychology Today United Kingdom

Find the time to look after our own mental wellbeing

- Self-care doesn't have to take too much time and it doesn't have to cost the earth. It could be taking a bath, relaxing with a good book, taking a walk outside or eating your favourite food. It's about making a commitment to putting yourself first, even just for a while.

Importance of routine in looking after our own mental wellbeing

- Routines are an almost automatic set of regular actions[7]. Once a problem has been solved or improved by doing something, it makes sense to repeat that process again as and when required. Positive routines help to save energy and increase our own mental capacity for dealing with more pressing parts of our daily lives[8].

- **"An apple a day keeps the doctor away".** Many of us have heard of this saying which is suggesting (correctly) that apples are good for our health. It suggests the importance of eating apples regularly and for some people it means eat more apples. However, perhaps a more valuable action in response to the saying would be to routinely eat more healthy foods. The term lifestyle change means that routines and habits are formed and changes are made that last a lifetime[9]. This also applies to our mental wellbeing. So it is really important that we identify lifestyle changes that help our mental wellbeing and make sure they are maintained (so we need to be realistic about what is achievable) as part of our routine.

> "Being busy and keeping to routine are the main thing that supports maintaining positive mental wellbeing"

> "Having time to read and spend time in the garden are important"

Some residents are more at risk of low mental wellbeing

- Research shows us that some residents are more at risk of low mental wellbeing. This includes people that are unemployed, carers, men and certain ethnic minorities. It is important for everyone, but particularly these groups, to know when they might need additional support with their mental wellbeing.

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7   Avni-Babad, D. (2011). Routine and feelings of safety, confidence, and well-being, cited in Heintzelman S and King L, Routines and Meaning in Life, Personality and Social Psychology Bulletin, Routines and Meaning in Life - Samantha J. Heintzelman, Laura A. King, 2019 (sagepub.com)

8   Dunn, W. W. (2000). Habit: What's the brain got to do with it? Cited in Heintzelman S and King L, Routines and Meaning in Life, Personality and Social Psychology Bulletin, Routines and Meaning in Life - Samantha J. Heintzelman, Laura A. King, 2019 (sagepub.com)

9   Arlinghaus K and Johnston C (2019) The Importance of Creating Habits and Routine, American Journal of Lifestyle Medicine, Mar-Apr; 13(2): 142–144, The Importance of Creating Habits and Routine (nih.gov)

Case Study

Elizabeth is 54 years old and lives in Walsall.

Elizabeth was feeling low in mood due to recent weight gain and felt like she might need some support.

She received support through One You Walsall Lifestyle Services who talked her through the Eat Well plate to ensure Elizabeth was eating a healthy balanced diet. Elizabeth was also provided with details of a community based exercise session which she now attends twice a week.

Elizabeth has also identified some self-care resources which are really helping too. These include tips from the Every Mind Matters NHS website www.nhs.uk/every-mind-matters/ and routinely using the 5 Ways to Wellbeing. These are 5 simple steps to improve mental wellbeing. In a later section (see "Supporting the Fundamentals of Mental Wellbeing") of this annual report the 8 Steps to Wellbeing are introduced which builds on the 5 Ways to Wellbeing.

Elizabeth feels so much better in herself and really enjoys the class as it is an opportunity to socialise with other people. She has also lost over 1 stone and her WHO-5 Mental Wellbeing score has improved from 40 to 72.

Walsall Director of Public Health Recommendations - What more could be done to look after our own mental wellbeing?

Based on what we have learnt above I recommend that every resident;

1. **Make a commitment to putting yourself first, even just for a while.**
2. **Find out where you get support if you need it.**
3. **Make a (realistic) positive routine.**

Our Mental Wellbeing - Stronger and more resilient communities will support better mental wellbeing

"Community" is a group of people with different characteristics who are linked socially, share common issues (sometimes goals, beliefs) and may take part in joint action within a location (e.g. a street or ward in Walsall) or setting (e.g. a community centre, school or mosque).

> "Where communities are passionate they can have an impact - for example community litter pickers, can give a sense of pride - which lifts aspirations - which lift wellbeing."

Our communities play a really important role in our mental wellbeing. These are some of the key elements that strong communities offer;

- **Belonging -** If you or your family feel that you don't fit in, it can be a lonely experience. Community provides a sense of belonging and a group you identify with. If you feel you or family members have to change to fit in, then that is not belonging. Belonging allows you to feel you are a part of the community and you are embraced and appreciated for being unique[10].

> "I love people and when I go to the supermarket they all know me down there, I love people and socialising."

> "A lack of community cohesion, high rental areas that are transient, it has a massive impact on the community because there is no stability in the neighbourhood."

- **Support -** Having people or local organisations you can turn to when you need to talk or require help. Some issues may seem impossible to solve by yourself. Having others in your community who can provide support can help you feel cared for, safe and feeling a lot more positive about the future.

> "'Having that group of people has been great and if there are concerns you can have 121 phone calls afterwards but if that had stopped I don't know what I would have done." in reference to Autism West Midlands

> "It's having the right wellbeing services available to you, not just programmes but the right access to the right services, for example things like yoga, Tai Chi that improve wellbeing."

> "Community activities such as coffee mornings at the local senior school and a youth group at the church make the community feel connected and supportive of each other. COVID did impact on this but things are opening up again now."

> "People struggling to access services, particularly in the COVID context - things being on-line or telephone only, there was a real sense of frustration. Particularly impacting older people, people with caring responsibilities and disabled people."

- **Purpose –** People contribute to communities in different ways. Some people might help to move a heavy item, cook someone a meal, provide a listening ear or coach the local football team. As well as being thoughtful, these roles provide a sense of purpose through improving other people's lives. Having purpose and supporting others helps give meaning to life and promotes positive mental wellbeing[11].

> "Makes you feel like a nobody" (in reference to being unemployed)

> "I feel like a lost cause, and I know I'm not but it isn't easy."

- The assets within communities are building blocks for good mental wellbeing. These building blocks are things like skills and knowledge of community members, friendships and neighbours looking out for each other, local groups (e.g. knitting group), voluntary/ charitable organisations (e.g. community centre, housing association), parks and green spaces, transport routes (e.g. road, a canal) and other assets provided by public (e.g. GP practice, employment support through Walsall Council) and private sector (e.g. local pub, gym).

> "All the gardens are kept nice, even where there is a bit of grass that doesn't really belong to anyone, that will get cut, just to keep the neighbourhood nice. It is a very neighbourly neighbourhood if you see what I mean."

> 'If you were going to do this [interview] at my house, I would have told you not to come because the house next door has so much rubbish outside it is awful. It gets me down,'

> "The Carers Association has been of great support, the centre that directs me to all the things I need".

> "It has happened that I have been taken to hospital at night and they have come in and stayed while my son is asleep, so he isn't on his own."

10   Gilbert S (2019) The Importance of Community Mental Health The Importance of Community and Mental Health | NAMI: National Alliance on Mental Illness
11   Gilbert S (2019) The Importance of Community Mental Health The Importance of Community and Mental Health | NAMI: National Alliance on Mental Illness

Need for Greater Voice and Control

We will help release the potential of these to building blocks to provide the foundations for more positive mental wellbeing. This will require a shift to a more people and community centred approach both in terms of developing Walsall's policies (what and how things will be done) and delivering programmes (the support provided). There is a need for greater voice and control and community participation.

> "Get advocates and champions together to find out what matters to those accessing services"

> "Policy makers to walk in the shoes of service users and use this insight to inform service development"

The World Health Organisation have stated that greater community participation will help to provide environments that encourage more positive mental wellbeing and provide greater support that can be maintained now and into the future. Increased community participation will help:

- Promote belonging by listening and including those groups that are excluded and/or have the worst mental wellbeing.
- People and communities to gain more control over their lives.
- Realise the potential of community resources.
- Develop more effective support to address lots of issues at once, rather than one at a time.
- Ensure greater community ownership.

> "We need to see more investment in local community groups and empower them to support their own communities rather than bringing in outside agencies to provide such support which disappears when the funding ends."

- The Chief Medical Officer for England has said that we need a new wave of public health based on 'the active participation of the population as a whole' and a renewed focus on working together.
- Residents having a greater say in their lives will help to achieve a reduction in avoidable differences in important outcomes (e.g. having access to 'good' jobs) and improve how connected residents are with each other.
- Forming positive relationships is also a key part of mental wellbeing and individuals should connect with those around them as one of the 'five ways to wellbeing'[12]. Research tells us communities with strong social relationships are likely to live longer than similar individuals with poor social relations[13].

> "Having strong family ties that allow an individual to feel strong, knowing they are there if needed"

> 'If I woke up one morning feeling a bit down, I'd just phone my mom. Not that I feel like that, but I know she is there if I needed her"

> "Supportive and positive relationships with family and friends are important"

- Connected communities help create environments where residents are supported to have positive mental wellbeing whilst actions that have a negative impact (such as crime and substance misuse) are discouraged.

> "We have meetings and have a cuppa and we welcome everyone. The pastoral work I do through that is great. Over COVID I brought food to people and made sure everyone was coping and managing"

> "My area isn't that safe, there's drug dealing, stolen cars being dumped in the car park. That is stressful and has an impact on my mental health then its putting prices of car insurance up and that's putting stress due to limited money – it's a horrible circle."

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12   New Economics Foundation (2008) Five Ways to Wellbeing, Microsoft Word - Five_ways_to_well-being the evidence.doc (neweconomics.org)

13   Holt-Lunstad et al (2010) Social relationships and mortality risk: a meta-analytic review. **PLoS Med**. 2010;7(7):e1000316. Published 2010 Jul 27. doi:10.1371/journal.pmed.1000316 Social Relationships and Mortality Risk: A Meta-analytic Review (nih.gov)

Making Connections Walsall Case Study – A community centred approach

The Making Connections Walsall (MCW) programme began in October 2017 to tackle loneliness and social isolation, improve health and wellbeing and reduce preventable use of health services and social care among people aged 50+ in Walsall.

The service was co-produced by service users and community based organisations having input into the design, delivery and evaluation of the initiative. A set of workshops throughout the life of the project allowed it to be shaped based on local need. Community based organisations (such as Manor Farm Community Association) were also used to co-ordinate referral hubs based across Walsall who were responsible for supporting residents to access social activities. Social activities (such as gardening) were also provided by community based organisations (such as Goscote Green Acres).

83% of clients reported connecting with people and making new friends. The social return on investment showed that for every £1 invested in MCW, it has created £3.35 social return.

As a result of MCW being trusted by residents as well as its reach into communities, the service has been used in response to the COVID-19 pandemic. It has provided support including delivery of food packages and medication to some of the most vulnerable residents in Walsall. The hubs being embedded within communities (and support from key partners such as WHG and Walsall Fire Service) has ensured enough volunteers have come forward to support this work.

During the height of the pandemic the hubs were supporting over 1500 residents.

"It's good to know that it is not just my family who care but strangers have brought me friendship and I feel safe." A quote from one of the service users.

Walsall Director of Public Health Recommendations - What else could be done?

I recommend 3 actions to help communities be stronger and promote positive mental wellbeing:

1. Connect to someone new in your community, even if it's just saying "hello".
2. Let your friends know that it's ok not to be ok and you are available to speak to if and when they need you.
3. Actively participate in your local community. This might be volunteering, attending a local group, helping a neighbour or sharing your views through a consultation on a local development.

Supporting the Fundamentals of Mental Wellbeing – Local Organisations Working Together to Support Better Mental Wellbeing for our Residents

- Providing accessible, and good quality support when needed as well as helping shape the environment in which people live to support mental wellbeing should be a key focus.

What's Already Happening in Walsall?

Walsall has already taken some significant steps in developing mental wellbeing support available to its resident. This includes:

- A range of community and voluntary sector facilities supporting mental wellbeing including befriending services and support networks.
- A range of social prescribers (through WHG, Primary Care Networks and Making Connections Walsall) who help residents to access support based on their physical and mental wellbeing needs.
- Public Health working with partners to design a new community wellbeing service.
- A Community Mental Wellbeing Forum is in place to enable a more seamless transition through and between services for residents in greatest need.
- Developing mental wellbeing "No Wrong Door" where partners work together to enable residents to receive the right support at the right time.

> "Really important that staff are able to respond appropriately so that service users get the most appropriate support and the situation isn't made worse, or service user isn't discouraged from disclosing or seeking support in the future."

- A range of on-line and face to face training on mental wellbeing including suicide prevention and mental health first aid. This means there are more people in Walsall who understand mental health and wellbeing and are able to provide support when required.
- Counselling and Talking therapy services.
- Walsall Community Mental Health Enablement Information Hub, which provides online information to services available in Walsall.
- Sanctuary Hub Crisis Café and a 24-hour single point of access where people in distress can access direct support.
- Emotional wellbeing tool kit developed to signpost to support for children.
- Walsall partners are working together to improve access to money advice and support.

> "Hole of debt is getting deeper and deeper and the risk of returning to crime and doing something stupid just to make some money is always there. I fight it every day but sometimes it feels like there's no other way"

- A range of employment services available to help people get back into training and work.
- Plenty of community volunteers and businesses offering staff time for support with local issues.
- Black Country Community Development Workers who provide community support to residents at greatest risk of poor mental wellbeing.

What else could be done?

To successfully improve mental wellbeing (and fundamentals of mental wellbeing) across Walsall, strategic partners must build on the joint work already taking place.

Walsall Director of Public Health Recommendations - What else could be done?

Based on the evidence presented above I recommend Walsall Council and its partners to;

- Develop and implement a set of co-production principles to enable greater voice and control to residents and communities and having relevant plans e.g. Corporate Plan more community centred.

- Implement a Mental Wellbeing Impact Assessment tool for use when undertaking any major plan, project or proposal at strategic board level.

- Increase the number of organisations signing up to the Mental Wellbeing Prevention Concordat. The Mental Wellbeing Prevention Concordat is an agreed set of actions owned by local organisations to improve population mental wellbeing.

- Increase the number of organisations signing up to the No Wrong Door System and delivering wellbeing plans with service users.

- Develop targeted media campaigns to increase knowledge of our residents to maintain or improve mental wellbeing with specific focus on those more vulnerable to poor mental wellbeing.

- Provide easily accessible information on the support available and when and how to access it as well as self-supported wellbeing plans. These will help identify and plan opportunities for maintaining or improving mental wellbeing.

My Wellbeing Plan

Self-Supported Wellbeing Plans (based around 8 Steps to Wellbeing)

Be Active

Learn Something New

Take Notice

Hydration and Nutrition

Connect

Sleep for Wellbeing

Give Something to others

Hope for the Future

Chapter 4 – Conclusion

The key message to take away from this year's Director of Public Health Annual Report is that no individual or organisation by themselves can improve mental wellbeing across Walsall. However.....

"Together We Can"

Individuals, communities and organisations all play a role. We need to understand mental wellbeing including how we can help ourselves and each other. Communities need to be more empowered to make decisions and shape support based on their own needs. Organisations (both national and local) and staff need to be more willing to enable this to happen on a more consistent basis. This may require a change in the way some organisations operate and in the longer term a change in the culture so community centred and co-designed approaches become standard practice (as and when they are appropriate).

It is clear that there is some excellent work already happening to support mental wellbeing (such as the range of employment support services). Using some of the lessons we have learnt from the pandemic (such as knowing who is at greatest risk of poor mental wellbeing and the principles behind successful initiatives such as Making Connections) we can build on this and ensure we are offering support to those who need it the most.

Summary of Recommendations

I recommend that every resident;

1. Make a commitment to putting yourself first, even just for a while.
2. Make a (realistic) positive routine.
3. Find out where you get support if you need it.

I recommend 3 actions to help communities be stronger and promote positive mental wellbeing;

1. Connect to someone new in your community, even if it's just saying "hello".
2. Let your friends know that it's ok not to be ok and you are available to speak to if and when they need you.
3. Actively participate in your local community. This might be volunteering, attending a local group, helping a neighbour or sharing your views through a consultation on a local development.

I recommend 6 actions for Walsall Council and partners to develop positive mental wellbeing across Walsall;

1. Develop and implement a set of co-production principles to enable greater voice and control to residents and communities and having relevant plans e.g. Corporate Plan more community centred.
2. Implement a mental wellbeing impact assessment tool for use when undertaking any major plan, project or proposal at strategic board level.
3. Increase the number of organisations signing up to the Mental Wellbeing Prevention Concordat. The Mental Wellbeing Prevention Concordat is an agreed set of actions owned by local organisations to improve population mental wellbeing.
4. Increase the number of organisations signing up to the No Wrong Door System and delivering wellbeing plans with service users.
5. Develop targeted media campaigns to increase knowledge of our residents to maintain or improve mental wellbeing with specific focus on those more vulnerable to poor mental wellbeing.
6. Provide easily accessible information on the support available and when and how to access it as well as self-supported wellbeing plans. These will help identify and plan opportunities for maintaining or improving mental wellbeing.

Acknowledgements

I would like to thank the following for their contribution to this year's Director of Public Health Annual Report.

- Young people at the college who submitted entries to the image competition for use within this report. Particular congratulations to **Steven Goncalves** whose picture was chosen for the front cover of this year's report.
- Public Health Working Group - Joe Holding, Angela Aitken, Claire Heath and Hazel Malcolm.
- Colleagues, partners and residents across Walsall for supporting the research that has informed this report and other related strategies.

Appendix 1 - Progress on Last Year's Director of Public Health (DPH) Annual report

Actions Achieved October 2021 against DPH annual Report recommendations

DPH Annual Report Recommendations	Actions Achieved October 2021 against DPH annual Report recommendations
Immediate	
Advocate for Walsall's Health and Wellbeing Board members to prioritise mental wellbeing in young people and wider community.	Mental health and wellbeing for the whole population is part of HWB strategy and agreed August 2021. CYP Mental Wellbeing will sit within proposed Young Adult Hub as well as within Children's Partnership developments
To work with young people, the Youth Justice service, Street Teams and the police to understand the real life impact of crime on our young people and identify actions which can reduce the impact	to be taken forward
Complete a self-assessment based on the National Youth Agency Hear by Right framework and work with partners including young people to develop an action plan to increase youth engagement.	Youth Engagement and Voice of the Child is key in all work with young people and a priority for all partners Engagement work prioritised in all WBC, Walsall Healthcare trust and Black Country Healthcare trust work with young people Engagement based on Hear by Right Framework to be taken forward as part of Children's Partnership work
Work with internal partners to develop an action plan based on Hear by Right self-assessment to further develop youth engagement that will support young people participation in the recommendations listed in this Annual Report	Youth Engagement and Voice of the Child is key in all work with young people and a priority for all partners Engagement based on Hear by Right Framework to be taken forward as part of Children's Partnership work
Children's Services to evaluate how effective the services targeted at families with specific needs are and whether the groups we most want to reach access these.	National evidence continues to support the provision of evidence based parenting programmes to families in need. A plan to fully understand this and to analyse further is in place.
The parenting team and those delivering parenting courses to understand the barriers to accessing parenting courses;	Impact and feedback from parents/carers attending courses has been positive showing similar patterns and results to national data of impact and evidence. During lockdown virtual courses were offered which increased retention Since May 2020 a total of 456 parents are recorded to have accessed and completed on line and/or virtual parenting programmes. Retention has significantly increased compared to the face to face delivery in previous years, virtual offers in the peak of 'lock down' showed on average 13 parents attending per virtual group with all completing the course. Work with parents has identified reasons for non-engagement and these are being addressed.

DPH Annual Report Recommendations	Actions Achieved October 2021 against DPH annual Report recommendations
Immediate	
Identify the wider teams who have an impact on community wellbeing; support them to understand their contribution and set the measures in place that will promote the wellbeing of children and young people ensuring that young people are part of the planning process.	Work is in place with PVI, statutory and voluntary agencies who are taking forward work promoting the health and wellbeing of children and young people and their families
Ensure the benefits of the Town Deal Fund are extended to other parts of the Borough in order to create vibrant, colourful gateways into district centres, working to improve play areas and create biodiversity programmes.	Developing business cases for and then deliver Green Bloxwich and Active Public Spaces programmes as part of Town Deal - complimented by WMBC Public Realm strategy and delivery plan
Design and implement a Walsall Food Plan and a Walsall Physical Activity Plan as part of Walsall's young person's strategy informed by young people's views	Support in primary schools and Early Years Settings for healthy eating, growing and increasing dining experience through Food for Life. 50 primary schools engaged with 14 achieving their bronze award and 9 of these working towards silver. 35 Early Years settings enrolled with 16 achieving their Early Years award. Voice of child embedded. Oral health included in programme developed specifically for Walsall. National Child Measurement Programme restarting October 2121 Physical Activity Framework has been drafted with an emerging governance structure and development of a food plan for the borough will be built into the PH work plan for 2022/23.
Ensure that all Walsall schools are signed up to the Walsall Healthy Schools programme and mental health is prioritised.	Walsall Healthy Schools Programme to be refreshed as COVID pressures decrease. Within Walsall PHSE is prioritised as part of the curriculum and schools and their school nurses supporting the promotion of health in the school. 50 primary schools and 35 Early Years settings are signed up to the Public Health commissioned Food for Life programme to support settings increase healthy eating and growing opportunities. Emotional Health and Wellbeing is also a major focus in 2021 in schools. Mental Health Support Team provision will be available in a total of 25 Walsall schools providing lower level support for mental health concerns. The Children and Young People Emotional Health and Wellbeing strategy is being taken forward by multiagency group led by the Black Country CCG. Walsall Education team is leading on a national programme supporting Borough wide mental health school support. School Nurses providing extensive child and parent wellbeing workshops and available for 1:1 or online support. PCN West 1 focus in 2021 is on mental health in years 5 and 6 in local schools

DPH Annual Report Recommendations	Actions Achieved October 2021 against DPH annual Report recommendations
Immediate	
Use the political process to lobby central government for additional resources to support children with special educational needs including those with Social Emotional and Mental Health (SEMH) Needs based on their needs.	Opportunities monitored and to be taken forward as the opportunity arises
Foster a culture of participation with young people, using their views to help shape the decisions made by organisations both within and outside of the Council whose actions affect their health and wellbeing	Voice of young person gathered through wider Council, Walsall Children's Service, Walsall Healthcare Trust and Black Country Healthcare Trust activity with young people Engagement taken forward through Holiday and Food activity. As the Children's Partnership develops, this will be facilitated strategically
Develop and implement a borough/ council-wide family poverty strategy, linking with the Walsall Strategic Economic Plan.	Strategy in process of being commissioned in line with Walsall Economic Strategy
Build in the promotion of good mental wellbeing into the work of all organisations that influence the lives of young people	Increased Mental Health Support Team provision available in 15 further Walsall Schools providing lower level support for mental health concerns. Children and Young People Emotional Health and Wellbeing strategy being taken forward by multiagency group led by Black Country CCG. Walsall Education team leading on a national strategic programme supporting Borough wide mental health school support. School Nurses providing extensive child and parent wellbeing workshops and available for 1:1 or online support. PCN West 1 focus on year 5s and 6 in local schools and as part of this, Active Black Country providing physical literacy support in primary schools with aim of increasing awareness of how to maintain mental wellbeing Part of the development mental wellbeing plan for the borough will includes a focus on children's mental wellbeing.
All those working with young children to actively promote access to early years education settings	Take up of free early years education continues to be promoted through the work of the health visiting service and child Social Care and Early Help services. School and private settings also promote early education to families that already have contact with children.
Education partners to continue to prioritise good educational outcomes for all Walsall's children; pledging to not leave behind those with the least access to resources and those adversely impacted by the Covid-19 lockdowns.	Working with Challenging Education to deliver the RADY programme to schools to raise the attainment of those disadvantaged young people who were disproportionately affected by the lockdown.
Support the children's services team to reduce all types of school absence, with particular attention to absences caused by poor mental health using understanding gained from young people who are missing school	EEF Learning Behaviours programme in place in schools. This is helping schools to understand the learning needs of the children and helping reduce any anxiety in the student cohort caused by the pandemic.

DPH Annual Report Recommendations	Actions Achieved October 2021 against DPH annual Report recommendations
Immediate	
Partners supporting children to continue to ensure that Educational Health and Care Plans are not unduly delayed	A recently agreed recruitment plan is in place to strengthen the capacity of the SEND team to meet current and future demands upon its capacity.
Maximise the uptake of the Department of Work & Pensions (DWP) Kick-start scheme which is developing a number of high quality 6-month work placements for young people aged 16 to 24 claiming Universal Credit benefit and at risk of long term unemployment	Registered Kick-start gateway bringing forward a minimum of 150 placements, with at least 12 of these being internal work placements. Focus recruitment on local young unemployed people.
To work with Education providers and young people to ensure that life lessons are offered in schools and that these meet the needs of young people	School Nurses and Teenage Pregnancy team supporting PHSE curriculum and teachers in its delivery. A school improvement offer in place that ensures the national curriculum is followed and this includes the topic of PSHE
To work with young people, employers and providers of further education to ensure that young people are given relevant and appropriate work experience with particular priority on children in and leaving care	In conjunction with Children's Services, work being taken forward through Care Leaver support and within IMPACT team. 2 Employment Advisors assigned to support care leavers who are identified as NEET, in order to move them in education and apprenticeships.
Ensure that the protective factors which impact on a healthy weight and mental wellbeing are set in place incorporating the contributions of the community, young people, the police, education and teams supporting parenting with choices maximised in the areas where there is greater need.	in review