Levelling up in practice >

Interim report from Walsall

RESEARCH NOTE

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Introduction

This is the third interim report from Onward's research into Levelling Up in Practice.

Our first interim report set out the purpose of this programme. In summary, we are working to develop a prototype methodology for levelling up, rooted in evidence and informed by the views of local communities. By taking the insights from the Levelling Up White Paper and applying them to specific places across the country, we want to generate an actionable toolkit for local leaders to improve their areas.

We believe this methodology for Levelling Up needs to be different from past attempts at regeneration. It needs to make places great to live in as well as making them wealthier, prioritise the social fabric alongside economic fundamentals, and bring opportunities to where people live already - rather than expecting them to move. And our methodology needs to marry consistency and flexibility: clear and replicable enough as a playbook that different communities can adopt it, but not so rigid that it ignores the nuances of local context.

Image: Walsall Arboretum, Walsall Town Centre

Our approach combines three steps:

- *Data Diagnostics* - understanding the economic and social characteristics of an area through a range of quantitative datasets and building a typology of places so that local leaders can identify relevant comparators;
- *Field Visits* - conducting qualitative research in a series of places across the UK, including focus groups with members of the public and discussions with businesses, community groups, local and regional government, schools, colleges, and universities;
- *Levelling Up Playbook* - identifying shared challenges to form the building blocks for a set of replicable and scalable interventions. These will primarily be low-cost, fast-acting, evidence-based interventions, within the gift of local leaders without recourse to central government.

In the spirit of sharing and learning, we will regularly publish interim research which summarises what we have learnt in each place and offer initial thoughts and recommendations. These will serve to prompt discussion and unearth common themes, and improve the robustness of the prototype once all the research has been concluded.

Our first two reports shared our learnings from Oldham[1] and South Tyneside[2], bringing together a range of data with views from members of the public and leaders from the public, private, and charitable sectors

Our Research in Walsall

The second place we have focused on is Walsall, which we visited in March 2022.

We are extremely grateful to the individuals and organisations who gave their time to speak to us, including Geoff Henderson at Urban Hax, Gary Bird at Manor Farm Community Association, Kevin Davis at the Vine Trust/Mercian Trust/Black Country LEP, Chris Woolridge and Jeremy Wooldridge at Wedge Galvanising, Jonathan Gray at the Black Country Chamber of Commerce, James Norris at Walsall College, Eddie Hughes MP, Simon Nielsen and Cllr Adrian Andrew at Walsall Council, and Andy Street, Laura Shoaf, & Ed Cox at the West Midlands Combined Authority. While these conversations were highly valuable, the authors hold full responsibility for the contents of this interim research note.

Walsall

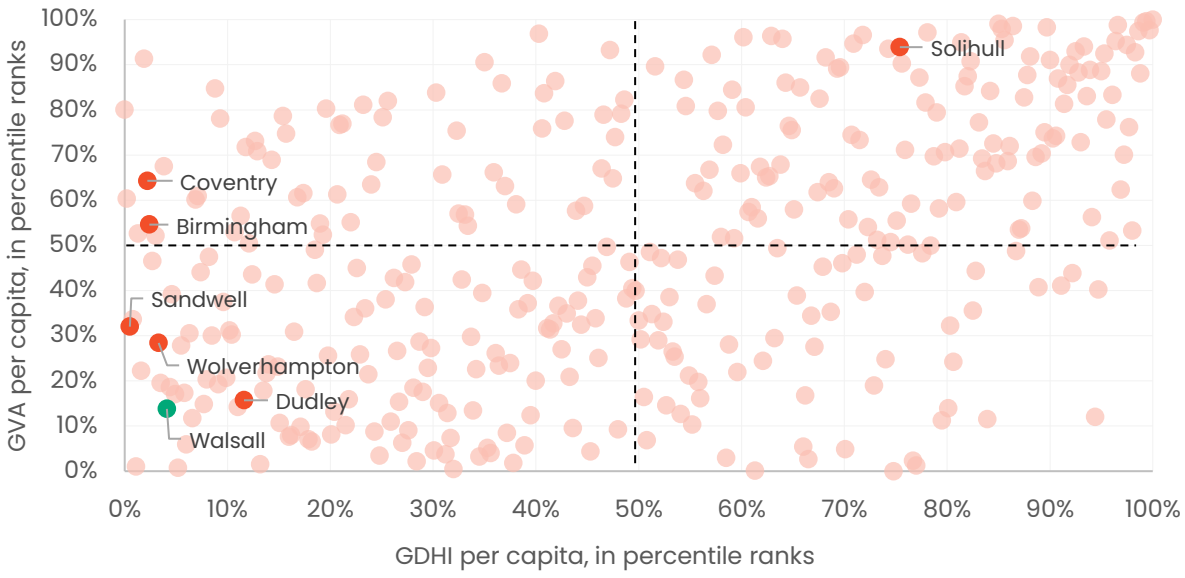
> "You've got the proper rich areas and then you go somewhere else where It's like a different planet."
> Ian, 20s, apprentice

Walsall is a borough of around a quarter of million people in the West Midlands, directly to the north west of Birmingham. Walsall is also a market town, which gives its name to the wider council area it shares with other towns including Aldridge, Bloxwich, Brownhills, Darlaston, and Willenhall. This distinction is key. The first thing many people tell you about Walsall as a borough is that there is no one Walsall: it is characterised by deep intra-local differences between towns and neighbourhoods.

It is also a borough that has been here before. In the early 2000s, Walsall was the beneficiary of an earlier attempt to "level up", when the Blair-era Labour Government funded a range of infrastructure projects in the borough. The New Art Gallery opened with funding from the National Lottery and the EU, Crown Wharf retail park launched with major brands like Next and TK Maxx, Walsall College opened the new Wisemore Campus, and connectivity was boosted with the completion of the new ring road.[3] Walsall was, for a time, "the envy of the West Midlands" as a result.

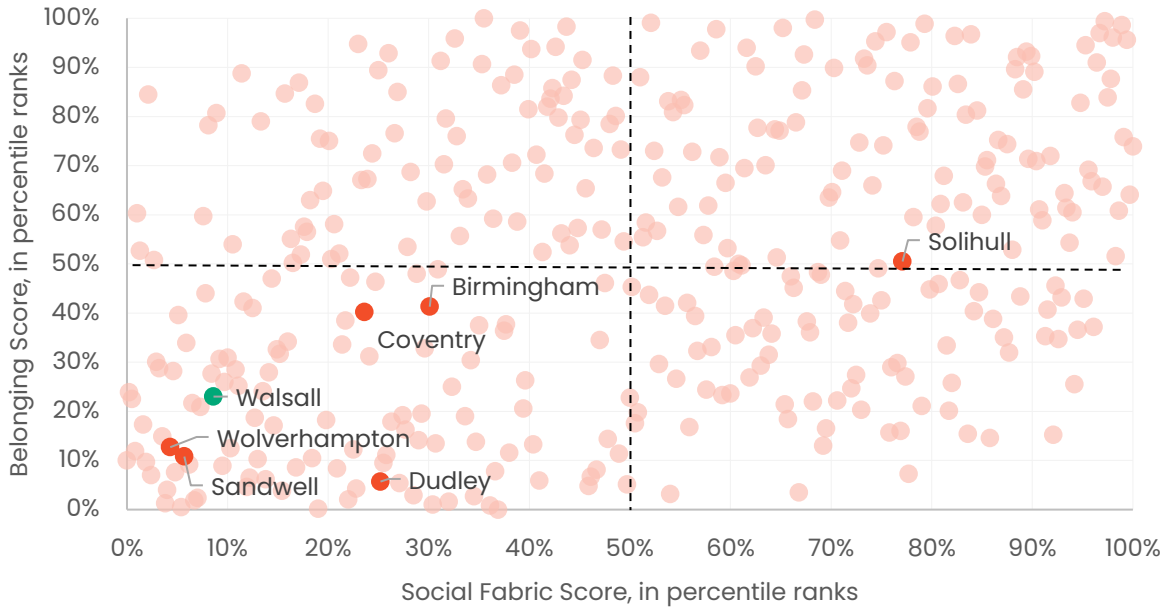
But the turnaround never materialised. On measures of economic output and welfare, Walsall remains one of the poorest performing local authorities in the UK. Productivity is the lowest in the West Midlands metropolitan area and over a quarter (28%) below the national average, with GVA per capita at £16,900 compared to a national figure of £23,328. Household incomes are even lower relative to national averages, with GDHI per capita at £15,694 compared to a UK average of £20,241 - placing the borough at the 4th percentile nationally.

Figure 1: GDHI per capita vs GVA per capita, in percentile ranks
Source: ONS Regional Accounts 2019, Onward analysis



These challenges are not limited to the economy. Walsall sits in the 9th percentile nationally on Onward's Social Fabric Index, which combines data on local issues such as volunteering, group membership, physical infrastructure like shops and green spaces, trust in civic institutions, crime rates and family formation to measure community strength. Data on the extent to which people feel they belong to their neighbourhood paints a slightly more positive picture, with Walsall sitting at the 22nd percentile - in the bottom quartile nationally, but significantly higher than other parts of the Black Country. This was reflected in our focus groups, with participants telling us that, despite the decline of the area's town centres, "the people" and "community spirit" were an underlying asset. One told us that "places of welcome" and "places of worship" were evidence of strong foundations of belonging.

Figure 2: Social Fabric and Belonging Scores, in percentile ranks
Source: Onward (2020), The State of our Social Fabric, Onward analysis of Understanding Society

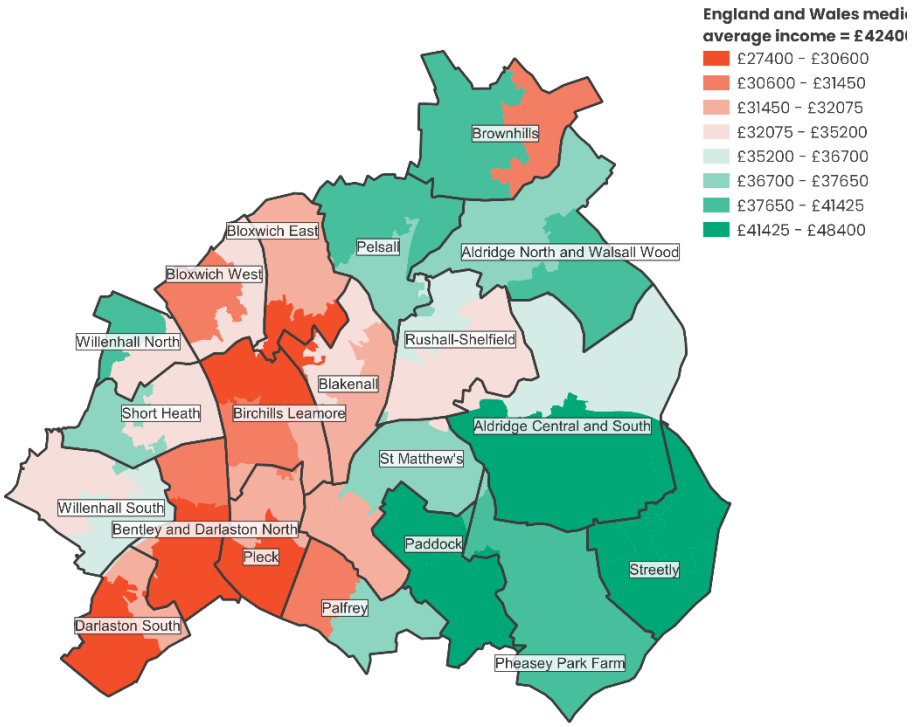


But digging deeper reveals a more nuanced story about Walsall's economy and community. On several indicators, averages across the borough disguise major differences between towns. As one local leader told us: "Walsall isn't one place". This intra-local story has a number of important dimensions.

Incomes are vastly different across the area. The east of the local authority, including Aldridge and Streetly, have similar total annual income levels to those in the wealthier West Midlands borough of Solihull. For example, South Aldridge sits in the 66th percentile nationally, alongside Chalford in Stroud or Bishop Stortford in Hertfordshire. This compares to Walsall town and Darlaston in the South West, and Bloxwich and Willenhall in the North West, which have considerably lower material welfare. Bentley and Darlaston North, for example, sits at the 5th percentile nationally for household incomes.

Figure 3: Total annual household income by Middle-Layer Super Output Area, 2018

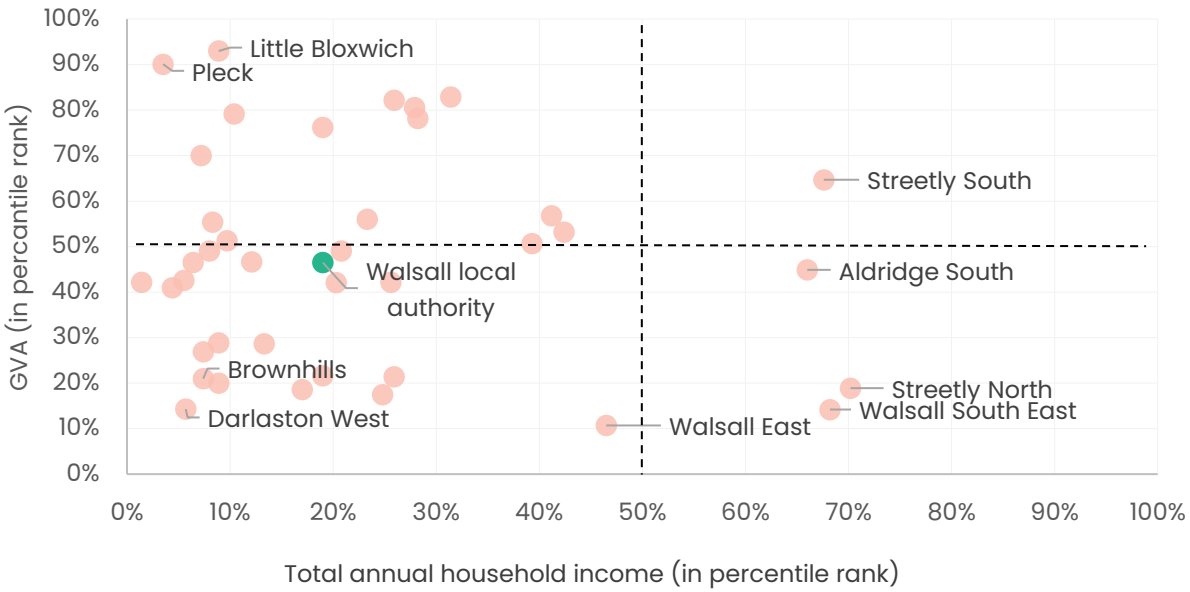
Source: Onward analysis of Income estimates for small areas, England and Wales, ONS



And if we repeat our initial data diagnostic on economic welfare but focus on neighbourhoods instead of the whole Local Authority area, this economic heterogeneity becomes even clearer. In Figure 4 below we use gross GVA (instead of per capita) and total household income (instead of GDHI per capita) given data availability at lower spatial levels, but the overall picture remains the same. The contrast in terms of economic output is stark, with some areas in Bloxwich East sitting in the top 10% of neighbourhoods for economic output nationally while a neighbourhood in Paddock sits just above the bottom 10%.

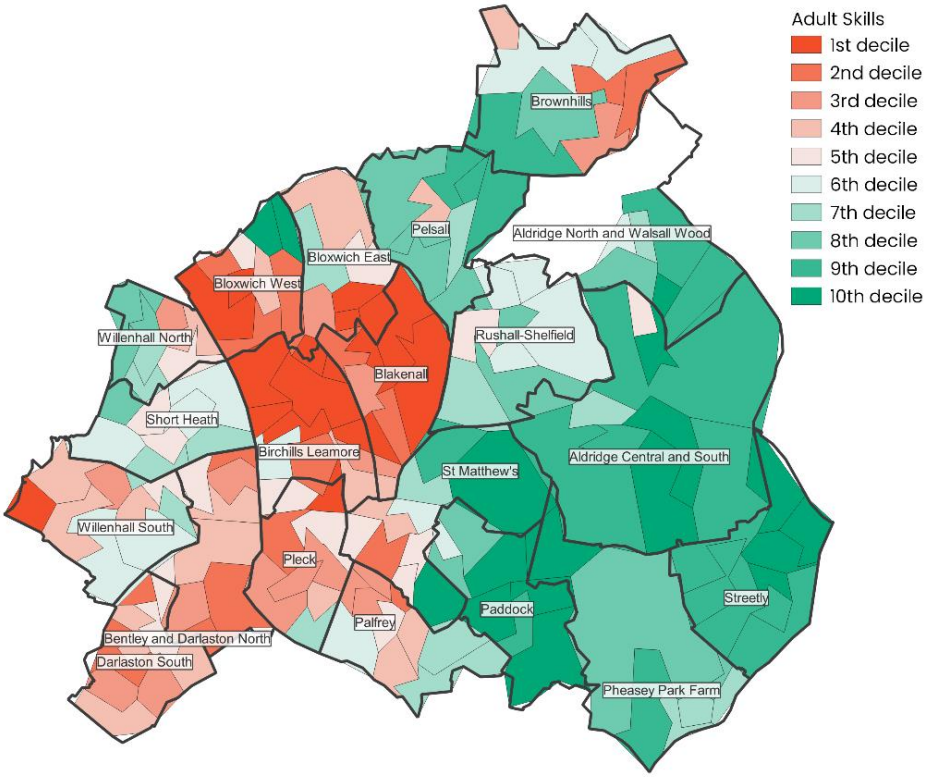
Figure 4: GVA vs Total Household Annual Income, MSOA level

Source: Income estimates for small areas, England and Wales, Experimental Annual Subnational Gross Value Added (GVA) reference tables, ONS



The divide between east and west is also clear in terms of human capital, as shown in Figure 5 below. Almost the entirety of Birchills Leamore and Blakenall sit in the bottom national decile for Adult Skills, with much of Walsall town also having low skill levels compared to the national population. Meanwhile, large parts of the east of the borough sit in the top two deciles for adult skills nationally. This reinforces the point, made in the Levelling Up White Paper, that as well as wide regional imbalances, the UK suffers from extremely significant intra-regional and neighbourhood-level differences.

Figure 5: Adult Skills in Walsall, national deciles
Source: English Indices of Multiple Deprivation, 2019

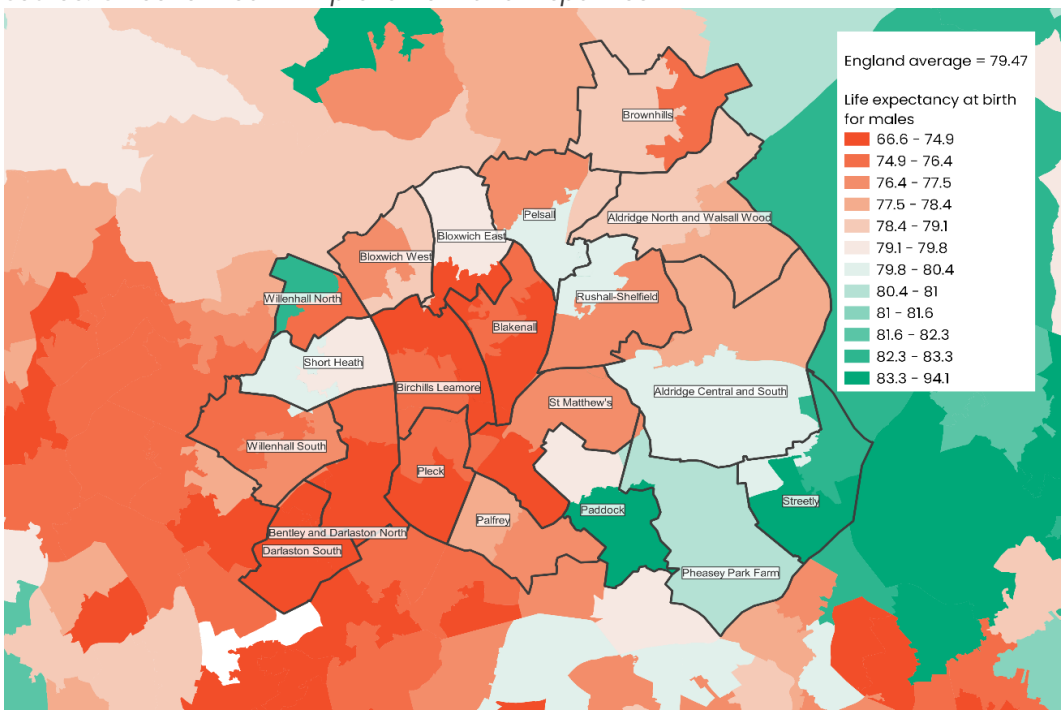


We can also observe a similar pattern with health inequalities, which vary considerably across the borough and are likely to be driven by, and contribute to, wider social and economic variation between neighbourhoods. For example, life expectancies for men between some parts of the east and west differ by almost thirty years, with almost all of Darlaston, Bloxwich, and Birchills below the UK average.

This diagnosis points to the importance of hyper-local understanding and the need to vary interventions across the borough: what works in Aldridge will not work in Bloxwich, and vice versa. The Levelling Up White Paper contained new commitments to gathering and publishing hyper-local data, and incorporating this evidence in how Whitehall designs and delivers policy. But there is only so much that can be done for neighbourhoods from the centre. Even Local Authorities covering multiple towns can struggle to act at the granular level required. Community groups, parish councils, local businesses and institutions like schools and colleges need to step forward and be empowered.

Figure 6: Life expectancy for males at birth

Source: Office for Health Improvement and Disparities



So how do these hyper-local challenges manifest in Walsall? What might a set of local interventions look like to tackle them? And what implications does this have for the design of the Levelling Up in Practice playbook? In the remainder of this case study, we explore Walsall further against the four headings of the Levelling Up White Paper.

1) Boost productivity, pay, jobs, and living standards by growing the private sector

> " I don't think you can run a multinational success story from Walsall "
>
> Calum, 20s, Sports Coach

Walsall was once known as the town of a hundred trades due to the wealth of industries it was home to. Up until the 19th century there was a strong mining and metalworking community, and clothesmaking became a comparative advantage. It was the leather-making industry which Walsall became well known for internationally - during the First World War, one saddlery in the area supplied 100,000 saddles for the British Army in one year alone.[4] This heritage is felt keenly by local residents, with many pointing to the Walsall Leather Museum as a point of pride that gives the town a recognisable identity.

The area still has a strong manufacturing presence, with 13,000 of the area's 100,000 workers employed in the sector. Nationally, roles in manufacturing tend to have higher levels of productivity, and therefore wages, than other sectors. Yet data collected for Onward's report *Making a Comeback* reveals that manufacturing in Walsall has a negative wage premium of 5.5% (around £29.60 a week).[5] This is also true of the broader Black Country, with the UK's largest negative wage premium in Wolverhampton the highest at 14.1% (£81.20 a week). This suggests that underlying factors are holding back the sector's potential.

Outside of manufacturing, most of the workforce is employed in lower productivity sectors. Almost 1 in 3 workers (28%) are in either transport & storage or wholesale & retail trade compared to 1 in 5 nationally (20%). There is also a significantly lower number of workers in higher value "knowledge economy" sectors like professional, scientific, and technical services when compared to the UK average. This drives the area's low productivity performance, which has the lowest GVA per hour worked of the West Midlands metropolitan area at just £27.60 per hour.

Figure 7: Over/under-representation of industry by employment
Source: Business Register and Employment Survey, 2020

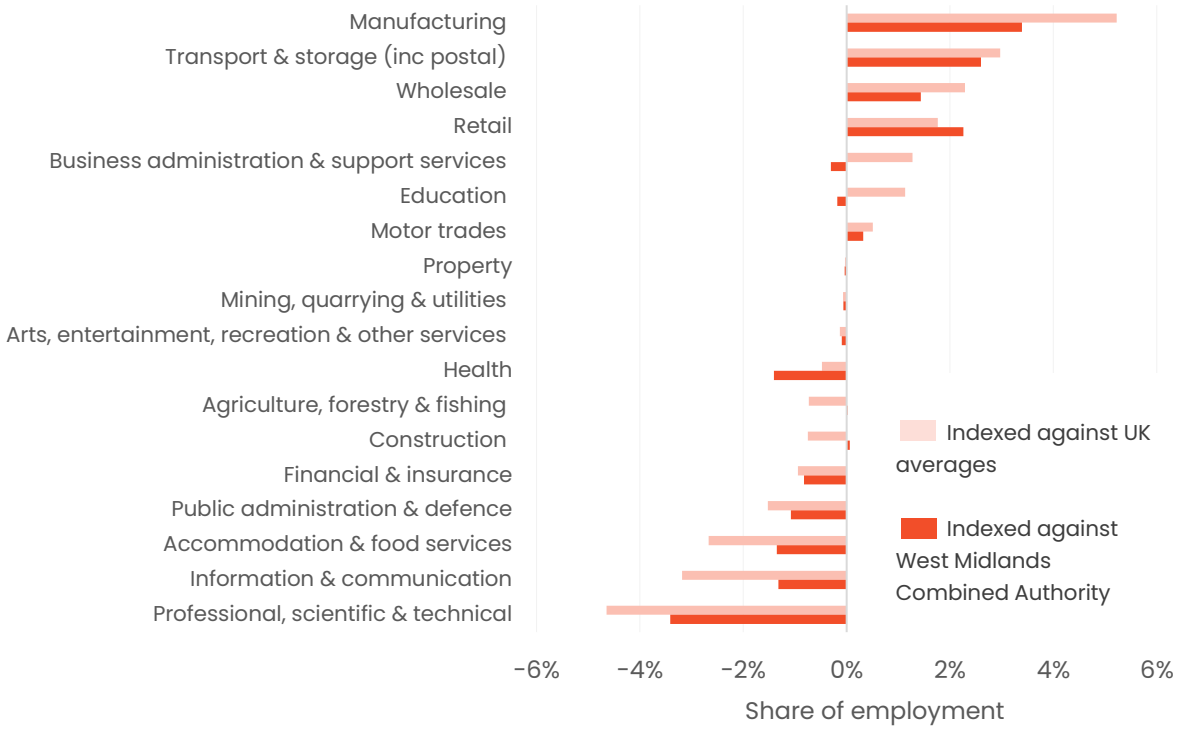
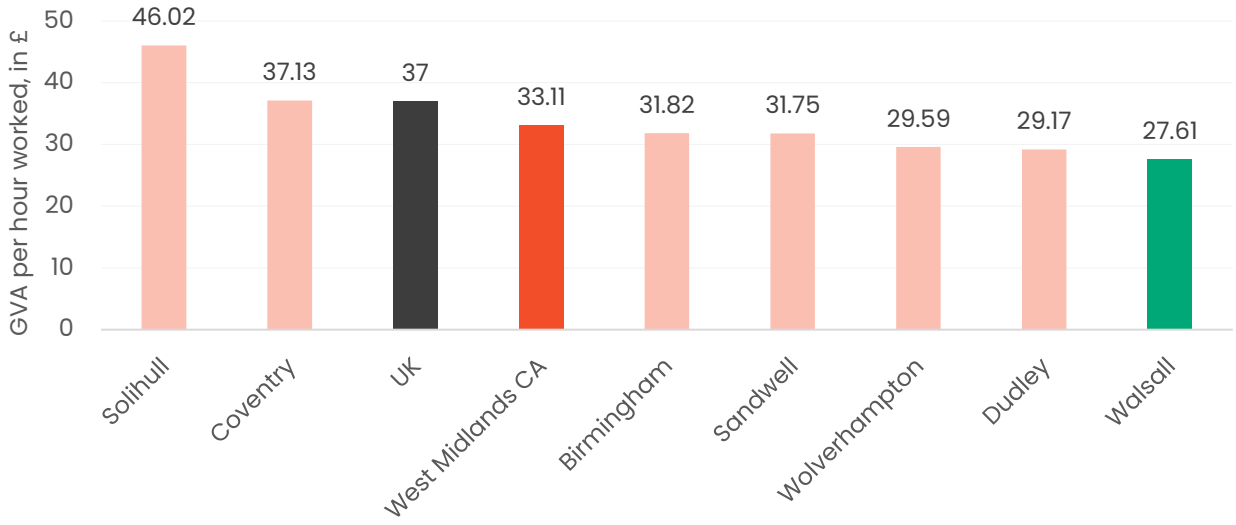


Figure 8: GVA per hour worked, 2019
Source: Regional Gross Value Added, ONS



So the local economy faces two distinct but related challenges. What should be high growth sectors are not reaching their productivity potential, and too many people are employed in low growth, low productivity sectors. What is driving these problems?

One factor holding back productivity seems to be a lack of human capital, which we explore in more detail below. Another factor is almost certainly low levels of fixed capital investment by businesses, which is a challenge throughout the UK economy, although it is difficult to find data on this at a local level.

But our conversations with local political and business leaders pointed to a third possible contributor to low productivity: the way that businesses interact within the borough. Research by the Bank of England has pointed to the importance of relationships between firms across supply chains and within places to increasing productivity through exposure to new technologies and innovative management practices.[6] These agglomeration effects create spillovers that drive up productivity.

Yet local leaders consistently told us that the most productive firms in Walsall had limited interactions with local businesses or colleges, regularly citing as an example a large FTSE250 employer headquartered in the area. This was contrasted with companies that used to serve as "Mother Hens", with some pointing to GKN aerospace which operated in the borough for fifty years before closing its doors in the early 2000s.

A 2019 report by the Black Country LEP found that in 2019 there were 513 "strategic companies" in the borough with over £1m turnover.[7] To borrow language from Andy Haldane, the former Chief Economist of the Bank of England, Walsall seems to have some productive "hubs" but few "spokes" to poorer and less productive areas. And as the quote from one of our focus group participants indicates at the start of this section, there is also limited public awareness of Walsall's success stories amongst the wider community.

Another factor constraining productivity appears to be lack of physical connectivity. Figure 9 below uses Onward's data on the ratio of jobs locally to the jobs that can be reached within an hour on public transport.[8] The evidence points again to east/west divides. The east of the borough is well connected, with residents regularly able to access 50% more jobs by public transport as they can locally. However in areas like Bloxwich, Brownhills, Darlaston, and Walsall town there are limited additional opportunities that can be reached by bus, tram, or train. Nonetheless, a fairly extensive and reliable bus network and close proximity to Birmingham means Walsall as a borough sits in the 81st percentile nationally by this connectivity measure. This was broadly reflected in our focus groups, although there were concerns about congestion on the roads for drivers, with one participant saying "it's horrendous getting through the town, probably one of the top 10 worst places to drive in the country".

Figure 9: Jobs reachable within 60 mins for each job within 5 miles
Source: Network Effects, Onward

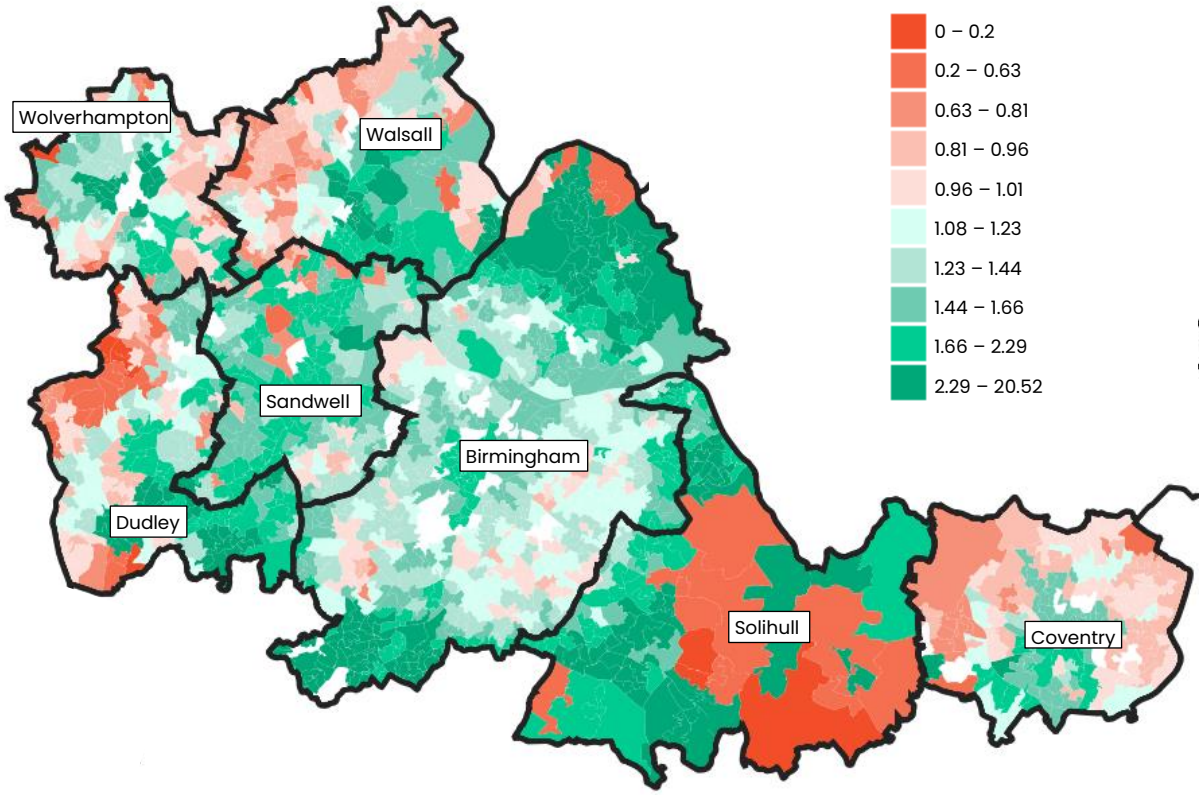
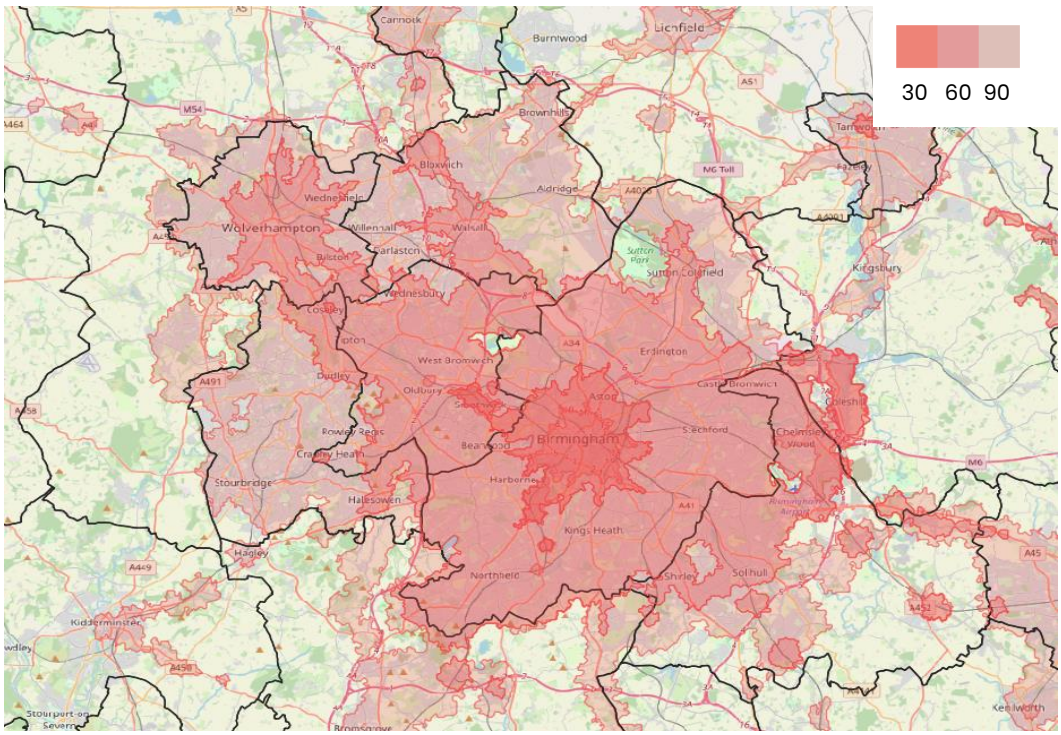


Figure 10: How far you can travel from Birmingham using public transport, 30, 60 and 90 minutes
Source: Analysis of Travel Time data



The final aspect of the economic challenge is the lack of movement towards higher productivity sectors and opportunities. Local leaders told us that for some time Walsall has lacked a clear economic strategy. At times local interests had been lost in wider geographies - either the West Midlands Combined Authority focusing on the region, or the Black Country Local Enterprise Partnership focusing on the sub-region.

This had left the area without agreement on which growth opportunities to target, plans to overcome key barriers, and joint action to mobilise shared resources. We heard similar frustrations in Oldham given their position in Greater Manchester, which prompted them to launch the Oldham Economic Review.[9] Without such a growth strategy in Walsall, well-intentioned institutions appear to have struggled to get the west of the borough out of a low growth, low productivity trap**.**

What might this mean for the local playbook?

The Council and Combined Authority are currently taking steps to address many of these challenges, particularly through "Walsall 2040" which is looking to develop a long-term economic strategy for the area. The Town Deal proposals for Walsall town centre have also focused on developing an economic hub, centred around digital businesses, to grow and attract more productive and innovative firms. The Combined Authority are also delivering a range of major capital schemes alongside the Council, including both transport projects like through the City Region Sustainable Transport Scheme and regeneration schemes like the new housing development at the former Caparo engineering works.

One area of focus in future needs to be building connections between firms at the productivity frontier and other businesses in the area. Local leaders have a key role to play here. Walsall Council has already adopted a Key Account Management approach, focussing on approximately 100 of the 513 "strategic companies". Further engagement could focus on the barriers key firms face to growth, which may include new premises, recruitment, or access to capital.

Through this engagement, local leaders could identify opportunities to connect with local sites, workers, suppliers, or investors. Attempts at this approach have been made before, as outlined in the area's 2019 Local Industrial Strategy, but lacked serious resources.[10] The current Trailblazer Devolution Deal, and the reforms to Local Enterprise Partnerships, represent opportunities to unlock investment for these activities so large businesses take it seriously.

This focus on frontier firms needs to be accompanied with interventions to improve the productivity of existing businesses in the area. Anchor firms cannot be expected to engage with local businesses out of charity: there needs to be a clear commercial advantage to doing so.

One promising approach to incubating and supporting businesses in Walsall is the 'makerspace' model. Urban Hax, based near Walsall town centre, is a community interest company that hosts and connects small manufacturers and businesses.[11]

As well as offering lower costs for premises and access to tools like 3D printers, the makerspace model allows creators to collaborate and supports the sort of serendipitous interactions that underpin innovation.[12] Locally, there are concrete steps that leaders can take to support them.

The council and local authority could identify and release publicly owned premises for similar models, offer discounted business rates, invest revenue funding to support their establishment, and co-locate public services on the sites. In Leicester, the council has even created its own makerspace - "LCB depot" - which now operates over three sites and supports 111 creative businesses.

The council could also develop a clearly articulated hyper-local industrial strategy possibly through the Walsall2040 process. This would need to relate clearly to the recently published West Midlands "Plan for Growth", which identifies eight clusters that are intended to drive the region's growth post-pandemic.[13] Private sector leaders in Walsall could come together to articulate the Walsall contribution to regional growth, identifying which clusters they could feasibly host within Walsall, or how their supply chains could connect to clusters elsewhere in the region. Without this sort of private-sector led plan for the local area, they risk being left behind as more productive parts of the region grow.

2) Spread opportunities and improve public services

> "We've got the infrastructure, it's what we do now for the 16-year-olds and the graduates."
>
> Local leader

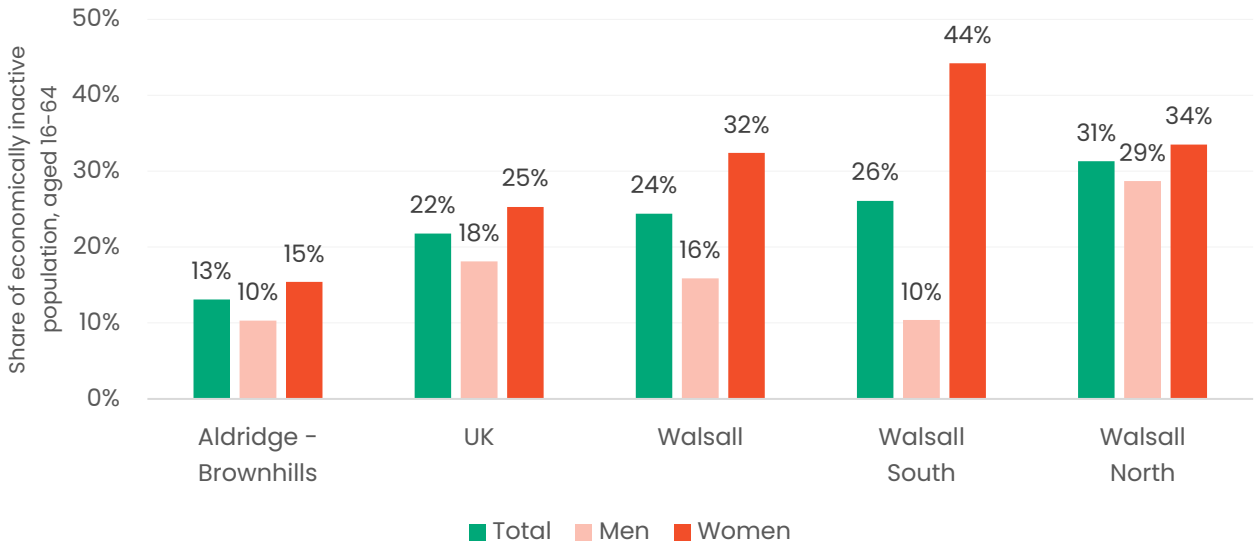
Our conversations in Walsall often came back to one central barrier to levelling up: skills and human capital. Local leaders and focus group participants pointed to the high levels of economic inactivity and worklessness, the lack of qualifications amongst the adult population, and the relatively poor quality of education for young people. In gathering evidence on these issues, the contrasts between different parts of the borough are again apparent.

The proportion of adults who are economically inactive in Walsall as a whole is only slightly above the UK average at 24.4%, compared to 21.6% nationally. But breaking the borough into its three parliamentary constituencies - Walsall South in the south east, Walsall North in the north east, and Aldridge and Brownhills in the west - reveals bigger challenges.

In Walsall North, a remarkable 1 in 3 of the adult population are economically inactive (31.3%). In Walsall South the overall number for economic inactivity is lower (26.1%) but the discrepancy by gender is extremely high, with 44.2% of the female population economically inactive compared to a national average of 25.2%. Local leaders said to us in interviews that this gender discrepancy was partly rooted in the cultural approaches to work and family amongst the significant ethnic minority population in the west of the borough. This has some evidence to support it: across Walsall as a whole, the proportion of economically inactive individuals that are looking after family is higher than the UK average (25.2% vs 19.2%) while the proportion that are long-term sick is significantly lower (14% vs 24.6%).

Figure 11: Economic Inactivity by gender

Source: Annual Population Survey



This economic inactivity has a major impact in terms of welfare dependency. Walsall South and Walsall North sit in the 5th and 6th percentiles respectively nationally in terms of the proportion of the local population claiming universal credit or jobseekers allowance.

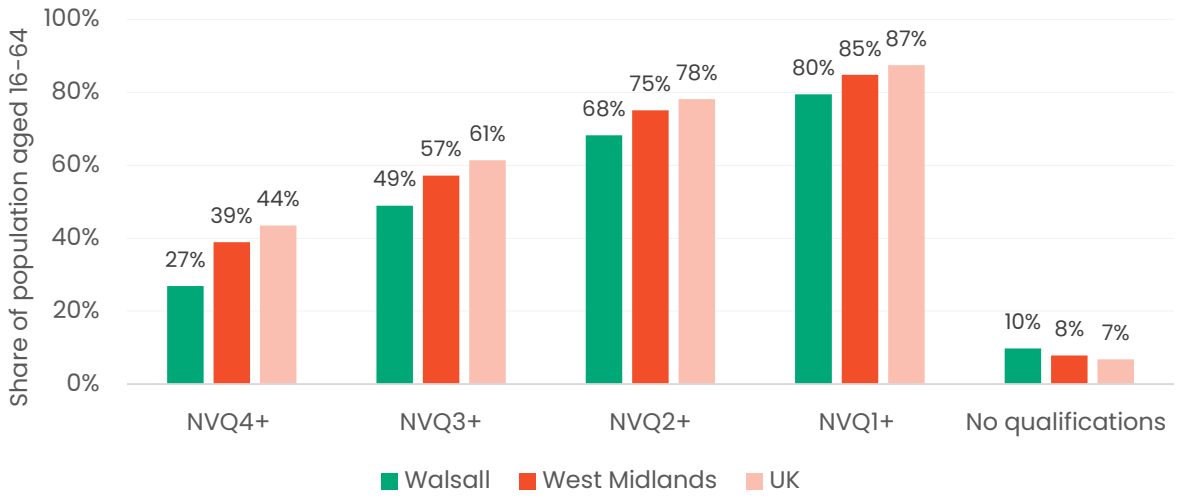
It also makes it harder for local businesses to grow, and employers told us that they found it difficult to recruit locally. Promising interventions were highlighted, including the Walsall Works jobs fair which hosted 70 employers, advertised 500 vacancies and was the largest of its kind in the Black Country. We heard from some that community organisations who were focused on supporting the economically inactive population into work had found it difficult to secure funding in recent years as the focus of the welfare and skills system moved towards colleges and formal qualifications.

It was clear from our discussions that one of the challenges was fragmented leadership, with a lack of clarity on who was responsible for supporting people into work. Employers in particular were seen as lacking a focus on the long-term interests of the population, just wanting "bums on seats" and relying too heavily on agencies to bring in workers. As we heard in South Tyneside, it was felt that DWP operated on too large a scale to really understand the local challenges in particular towns across Walsall.

The high degree of worklessness is driven by low levels of adult skills. Across the borough, just over a quarter of adults have a degree-level qualification compared to nearer half across the UK as a whole. In Walsall North and Walsall South these figures are lower still, at 23.4% and 25.5% respectively. At the other end of the skills spectrum, there are a significant number of people with no qualifications, with almost 10% compared to under 7% nationally. In Walsall North, this number is extraordinarily high at 18.5%.

Figure 12: Skill levels in 2021

Source: Annual Population Survey

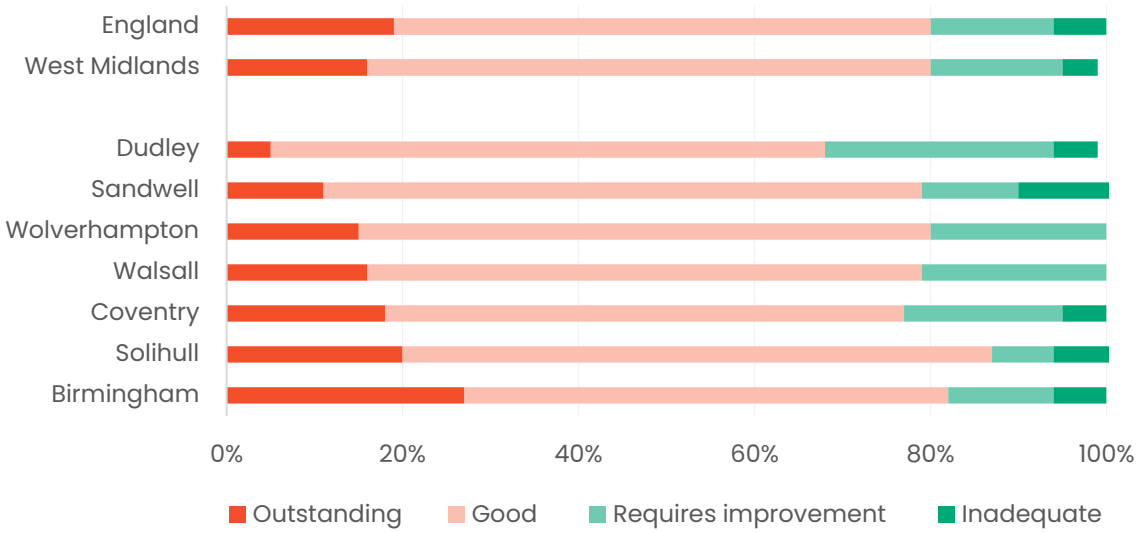


So what is at the root of these skills inequalities? The data indicates that challenges begin at early years, where the borough of Walsall has the 14th worst figure for school readiness at five years old out of 150 English Local Authorities.[14] This is a common challenge in the Black Country: Sandwell and Dudley also appear in the bottom 10% in England for this measure.

The standard of schools in Walsall is also below average. Of the 121 state-funded schools in Walsall, 103 of these were rated good or outstanding as of March 2021 by Ofsted. While primary schools are of a reasonable standard, secondary schools appear less effective. Of the 19 secondary schools, three are outstanding, twelve are good and four are requiring improvement. This means that Walsall's share of good and outstanding secondary schools is lower than the West Midlands Combined Authority and English average, it positions similarly to Sandwell and is lower than only Dudley and Coventry - although it also has no inadequate schools. Of the three outstanding schools In Walsall, two are selective grammar schools and one is an academy.

Figure 13: Ofsted inspections of secondary schools in England and WMCA

Source: Ofsted Inspection data, August 2022



Academically, Walsall is ranked in the 14th percentile nationally (pre-Covid) by the share of students achieving grades 9 to 4 in English and Maths, sitting at 58% against the national average of 65%, and in the 15th percentile for Attainment 8. The two Grammar schools in the town centre notably outperform the rest and pull up the local area average, obscuring poorer performance in the west of the borough. This low attainment has resulted in increased demand for level 2 and 3 training as well as pre-employment programmes after leaving school because young people are underprepared for the labour market.

Walsall College in the town centre is, however, well regarded. It is currently rated Good by Ofsted having been downgraded from Outstanding in 2020. It is seen as a focal point in the area for post-16 education, taking in 4,000 16-18 year old students, over 1,300 apprentices and around 7,000 adults and has relatively successfully aligned its provision to the skills needs in the area. Our focus groups unanimously saw it as a source of pride and a number of respondents' own children had attended. They remarked they were "very impressed" and thought their children were doing "brilliantly". The College is not without its challenges. They and employers have struggled to navigate Further Education reforms, particularly the competing demands and complexity of the funding landscape. Education leaders felt frustrated by recent apprenticeship reforms which have seen a decline in the number of apprenticeship starts particularly among young people.

There was also some frustration that although there is a clear need for level 3 and above attainment, this needed to be complemented by a clear progression ladder from lower levels in line with the current job market. Local leaders also reiterated that they didn't feel employers were doing enough to engage and plan for the future workforce requirements, highlighting a number of large employers that have long-term vacancies and yet are hesitant to invest in pre-employment training, seeing it as too time consuming.

There were some concerns that there is a lack of aspiration among school leavers in Walsall. We were told that Walsall has the lowest rate of university attendance in the country. This doesn't appear to be accurate: Walsall sits in the 43rd percentile for the proportion of young people going onto higher education, below average but by no means the lowest. It is true that Walsall is poorly served by its most local universities, for example the University of Wolverhampton has some of the poorest outcomes nationally for continuation and progression.[15] But there are world class universities nearby, like the University of Birmingham. Where people do attend university, they regularly move out of Walsall to do so and stay there after receiving their degree. One local leader told us that "a lot of people want to get out of Walsall the second they realise where they come from".

What might this mean for the local playbook?

Given the scale of the skills challenge in Walsall, tackling it is a clear priority for local organisations. The Combined Authority and Council work together closely along with national bodies like the DWP on targeted adult skills provision, bootcamps, jobs fairs, and Sector Work Academy Programmes (SWAPs). Walsall College has taken a leadership role in the region as a whole, chairing the Colleges West Midlands Group and introducing innovative new programmes on digital inclusion. Some local entrepreneurs are also taking action. The Walsall Towns Deal includes the creation of a new Digital Skills Hub in the St Matthew's Quarter, by local charity The

Vine Trust and its joint venture, the Mercian Multi-Academy Trust. This aims to provide both a visible and accessible training site for young people, while also attracting larger tech and digital employers to the town centre.[16]

More could be done to tackle some of the challenges outside of the formal skills system that hold Walsall back. One clear challenge is high levels of economic inactivity, which prevent people from applying to college-based or public-sector funded provision in the first place. There could be a clear role here for community provision, rooted in the neighbourhoods, faith organisations, and civil society groups that are better able to support people far from the labour market. It is unlikely that the public sector will be best placed to commission or manage contracts for this sort of work, either at a regional or local authority scale. Instead, efforts could be taken to identify anchor organisations in the third sector who could take on responsibility for coordinating elements of community provision, focused not on formal qualifications but on building confidence and foundational skills to support access. This sort of approach has been modelled by the Good Things Foundation, a national digital inclusion charity who operate through a network of hyper-local "online centres" who are trusted to take their own approaches given their knowledge of barriers in the community.[17]

Efforts clearly need to be taken to improve the standard of schools in the borough. Relative to the UK and West Midlands average, Walsall has a higher share of pupils in outstanding schools. The problem is that the success of these high performing schools, predominantly in the east of the borough, are not spilling over into the poorer performing schools in the west. Local authority leaders should be pushing to get more requiring improvement schools into the good category. This could include creating school to school partnerships between outstanding schools and requiring improvement schools to identify how they could raise standards. This should model the approach used in the London Challenge where school to school partnerships were used to share best practice and drive up attainment.[18] Steps have already been taken in the area to bring successful grammar schools together with nearby non-selective schools to form Multi-Academy Trusts in order to improve performance, as permitted in the drafted Schools Bill. The local authority could also make use of the National Tutoring Programme to target support at the pupils with the highest levels of need.

Local leaders could also consider how to best support residents in accessing the new Institutes of Technology (IoT) which have been set up in Dudley and Solihull. While in their early stages, these Institutes are designed to provide high quality learning in collaboration with leading businesses, providing prestigious technical education. In practice, this might mean providing free or subsidised transport links from the west of the borough to the Dudley site or launching outreach programmes in schools that build links to the IoTs and raise aspirations.

Lastly local leaders could address the sometimes scattergun approach to public services and attempt to create a clearer framework for the public to interact with. For example, Walsall is one of the local authorities that is eligible for funding to create a Family Hub. These hubs offer the opportunity to consolidate services to parents and direct them to the support they need. The local authority should use this transformation funding to bring together services like Children Centres. They could also align registry offices and birth registrations with such hubs to drive footfall and inform parents and soon to be parents of the support they are eligible for.

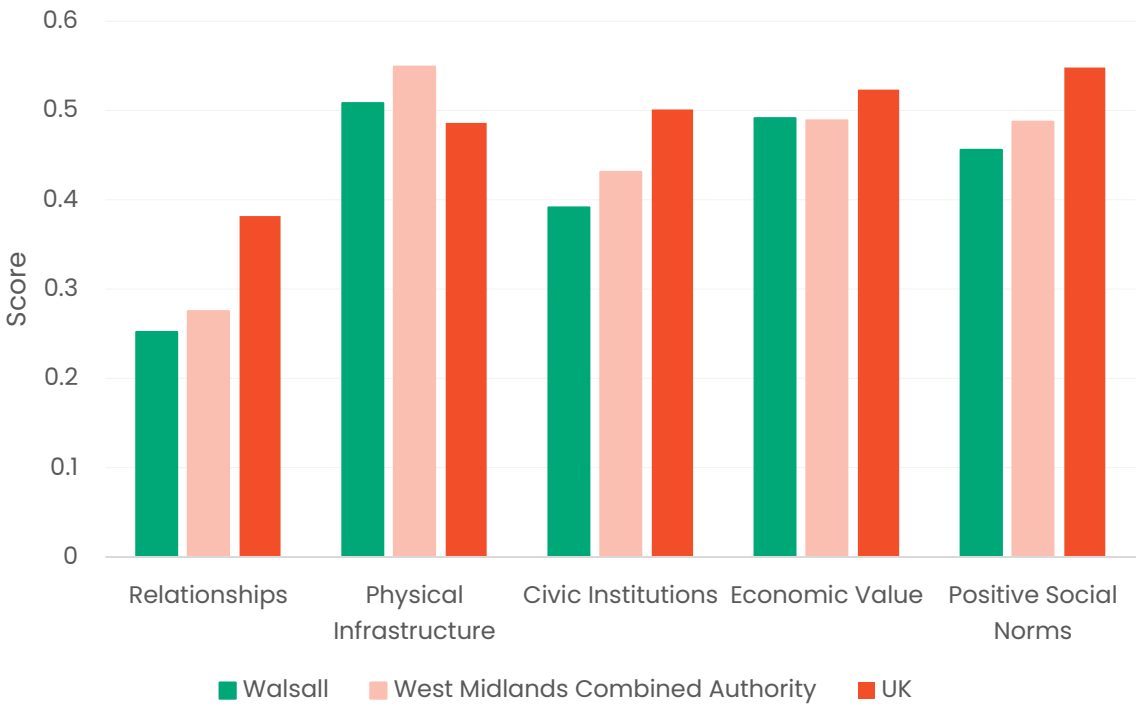
3) Restore a sense of community, pride, and local belonging

> "I don't feel safe down Walsall, I can't believe they've knocked the police station down."
> Nicola, 40s, Planner

When we asked participants in our focus groups how they would describe Walsall, we were initially met with negativity: “depressing”, “hellhole”, “run down” and “rough”. These descriptions were often quickly followed by references to the differences between towns within the borough. Tajina, a teacher, said “my father-in-law lives in Aldridge, he would never say he lives in Walsall”. But as our conversations continued, we heard some of the positives. Focus group participants emphasised to us that it is not “not all bad” and it is “home”. A significant number spoke of pride in the areas diversity, multiculturalism, and tolerance. The Arboretum in Walsall town centre was singled out by numerous participants as a real positive, described as “a nice place to walk” and “what makes Walsall stand out”. Tajinda said she is “transported to another place when I’m there”. We were also told about other cultural assets, including the Damien Hirst artwork at The New Art Gallery and the industrial history on display at the Leather Museum.

Breaking down Onward’s Social Fabric Index into its constituent threads gives some additional insight into the nuances we heard from our focus groups. Overall Walsall is below the UK and West Midlands metropolitan area averages for most areas of the index, but is particularly low for relationships and civic institutions. This aligns with two areas of frustration we heard most clearly from our focus groups when we asked about pride in place: the declining status of the town centre and rising levels of crime.

Figure 14: Score by Social Fabric Threads
Source: Onward Social Fabric data



The hollowing out of Walsall town centre is clear when walking through it. At the bottom of the high street is Crown Wharf retail park with national brands like JD Sports and River Islands, a cinema, and well-known restaurant chains around the wharf. But as you walk along the high street into the town centre you encounter closed storefronts, gambling and charity shops, and the run-down Saddlers Shopping Centre.

Our focus groups and conversations with local leaders confirmed suspicions raised by this initial impression, arguing that the Crown Wharf retail park is the fundamental reason for the declining town centre due to misdirected footfall. We heard “they built the wharf, but then there's all these empty shops”, “once you get three, four, five shops shut then the whole place starts to go downhill ” and that it used to be “bustling” but now everyone would rather go to Lichfield or Birmingham. This challenge was recognised in the Towns Fund Bid for Walsall Town Centre with plans to create an “inviting, engaging and quality public space which better links the high street to the New Art Gallery and edge of town retail”.

Looking up from the high street also reveals a high number of beautiful heritage buildings, often run-down and obscured by unattractive store fronts. We heard from local leaders that there hadn’t been a long term masterplan to restore the high street, and instead the council had lurched from project to project for decades. Our focus groups suggest that these aesthetics matter. Becky, a teaching assistant and mum of three, said of the centre of town: “when you walk down there it gives that vibe, it always looks messy and unclean”. Glenn, a cleaner, said: “I’ve worked in Walsall for twenty years… when I go out, I don’t go to Walsall, I go to Lichfield”. What members of the public wanted, in their words, was “a bit of hustle and bustle” and they specified “clean streets”, “free parking” and “benches and bins” as important to maintaining a vibrant public realm.

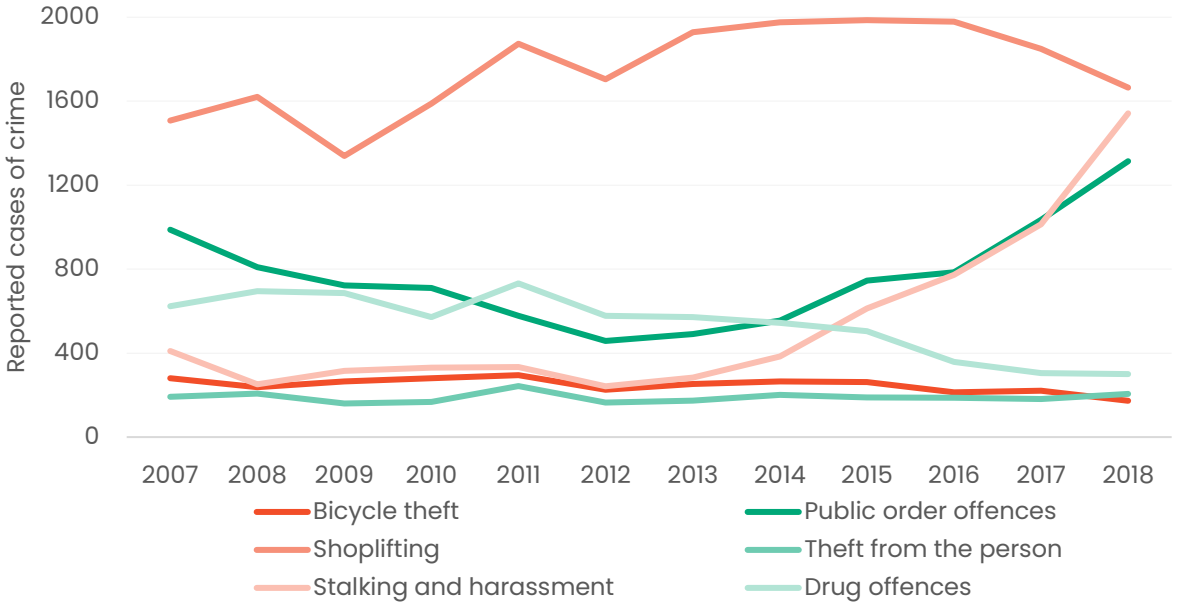
Figure 15: Walsall High Street Heritage Sites
Source: Google maps

High levels of anti-social behaviour and crime are also undermining the town centre's appeal. We were told by focus group participants that "crime is terrible" and "I don't feel safe going out [at night] anymore". In the centre this appeared to be largely antisocial behaviour - drug taking, fly tipping, spitting - and some cases of shoplifting and gang-related crime which goes unchecked. We heard "shoplifting is rife and they are brazen with it because there is no one there to stop it" and "staff don't need to risk their life for bits of meat and or an easter egg". We heard similar concerns in our work in Oldham and South Tyneside, where antisocial behaviour dominated conversations about what levelling up should focus on.

There is some evidence for these impressions in the data. Although shoplifting and theft from the person have remained relatively unchanged in the last decade, public order offences and harassment have sharply increased.

Figure 16.1: Recorded crime in Walsall, 2003 - 2018

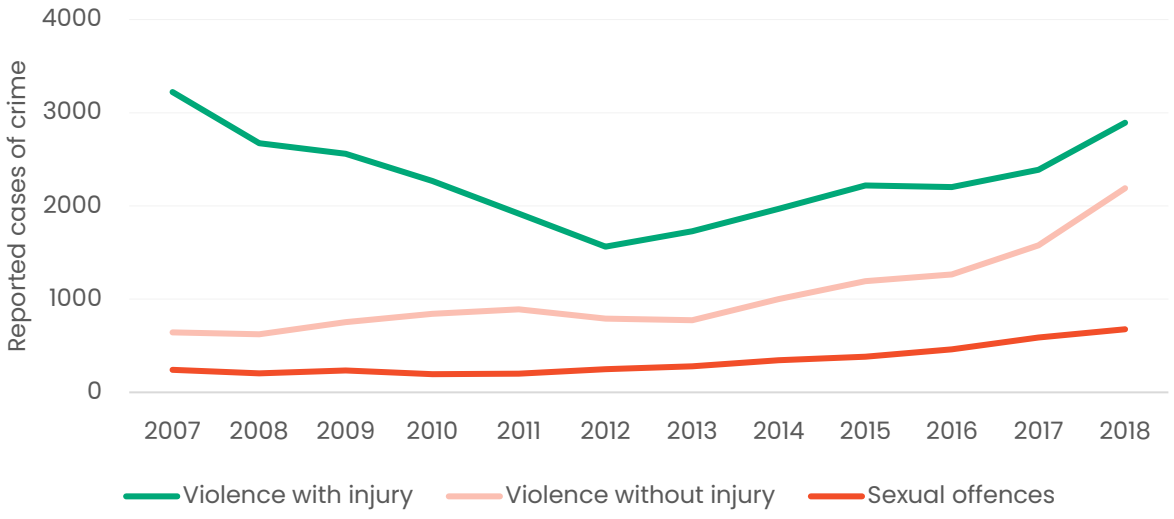
Source: Crime in England and Wales, ONS



We also heard direct references to "no go areas" in other parts of the borough and signs of more violent crime. Karen, a retired supermarket worker, told us that there was one neighbourhood where "you don't go unless you've got a baseball bat in the back of your car". Perceptions of growth in more serious crime are also supported in the data. Since 2013, recorded incidents of violence with injury have almost doubled in Walsall, along with increases in violence without injury and sexual offences.

Figure 16.2: Recorded crime in Walsall, 2003 - 2018

Source: Crime in England and Wales, ONS



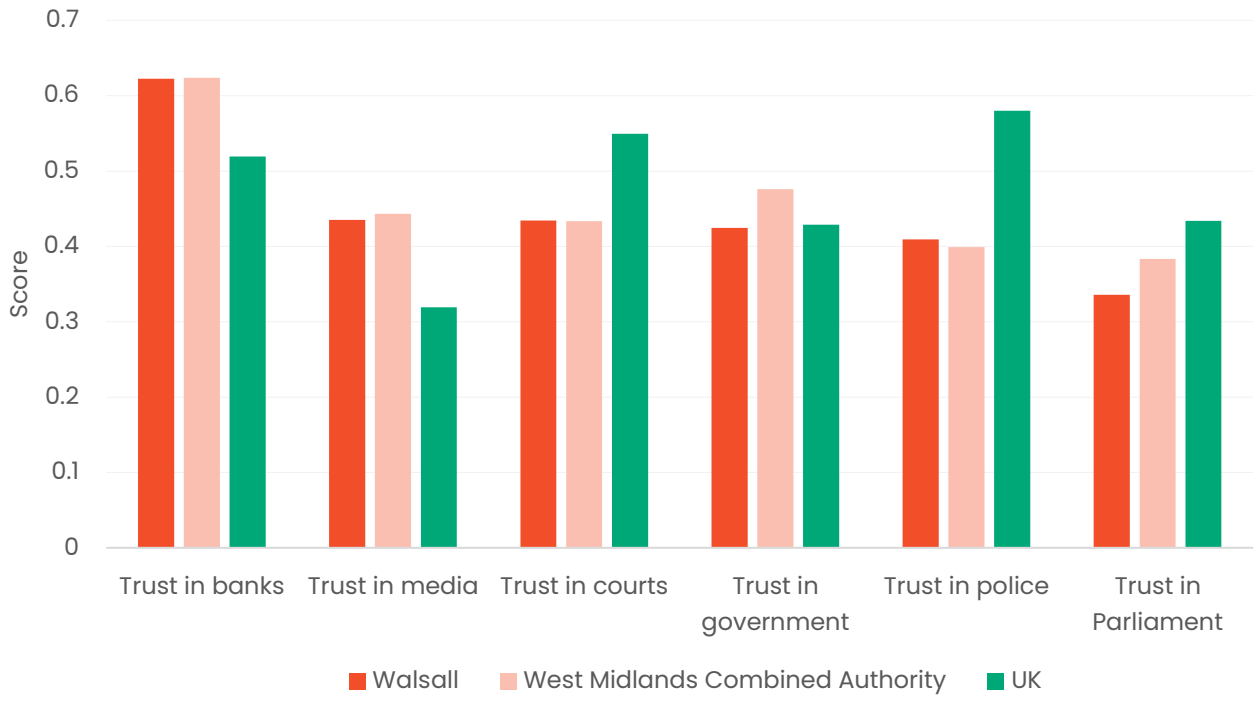
Local people believed that the increase in crime and their lack of personal safety was down to weak policing. The closure of the Walsall Police Station, which took place in 2019, was mentioned repeatedly in focus groups as a sign that not enough is being done to stop crime. We heard that people "would like to see more police officers. We don't even have a police station anymore" and "I cant believe they've knocked the police station down, crime is terrible".

Focus group participants mentioned CCTV and "chasing up things when they go wrong" as measures they would like to see more of to deter crime. This was in addition to desires to increase the offers for young people in the area, in order to stop them falling into crime. One said: "if we had youth clubs like I had when I was a kid then it would be less of a problem, they need something". Notably, there was no mention in focus groups or discussions with local leaders of the West Midlands Police and Crime Commissioner, suggesting that the role and its responsibilities are not well known in the area.

Digging deeper into Onward's Social Fabric Index provides wider evidence of this lack of faith in law and order. Survey data on institutions in Walsall points to a lack of trust in the criminal justice system, with Walsall sitting at the 13th percentile nationally for the share of people who trust the police and at the 36th percentile for trust in the courts.

Figure 17: Trust in institutions

Source: Onward, State of our Social Fabric. Note: The survey question asked, "I will name a list of institutions. For each, please indicate whether you tend to trust it or tend not to trust it."



What might this mean for the local playbook?

The clearest priority in restoring pride is rebuilding Walsall town centre. While each town in Walsall will want attention paid to its high street, our work suggests that having a bustling hub in the centre of the borough has particular importance. As noted, the Walsall Towns Fund bid is focused on addressing this challenge and repairing the physical fabric of the town centre. The Council also secured investment from the Future High Streets Fund, and launched a "Connected Gateway" project to improve the public realm around the train station and introduce amenities like public toilets.

On top of these efforts, the council could also take action to harness the untapped value of its heritage sites. In nearby Coventry, the Coventry Historic Trust have worked since 2011 to take ownership of heritage assets across the city and regenerate them using primarily philanthropic funds. Over time they aim to become self-sufficient, generating revenue from restored historic buildings and innovative development. More broadly, they act as a strategic partner to the council in restoring the public realm and were a key part of the successful Coventry City of Culture programme in 2021. Walsall Council could take steps to support the establishment of a heritage development trust, and seed fund it by transferring heritage sites to the trust for regeneration. The recently held Commonwealth Games in Birmingham saw cultural and sporting activity across the region, and this could be a helpful springboard for further work.

The Council is already working with the Combined Authority to use Compulsory Purchase Orders to take over and regenerate brownfield sites, particularly through the Willenhall Masterplan. They could go further still. In the Tees Valley, Ben Houchen has set out steps to create a Mayoral Development Corporation in Hartlepool town centre to accelerate development. The Council could create this new delivery vehicle via the mayor, Andy Street, to accelerate progress and secure new investment as part of the upcoming devolution deal with the Government. As we recommended in Oldham, the Council could also explore steps to tackle eye-sore derelict buildings through the better use of Repair Notices and Section 215 notices.

Tackling high levels of crime and antisocial behaviour must also be a priority, particularly for the West Midlands Police and Crime Commissioner (PCC). The number of Community Support Officers has fallen by 45% since 2010 across the country. Local leaders should push for recruitment and deployment of more community police officers, to crack down on antisocial behaviour and boost visible signs of law and order.

Given the frustrations at the lack of a visible police station, West Midlands Police could also consider opening pop-up stations on high streets across the borough in order to build community confidence. The council could actively work with WMP and the PCC to identify possible sites, possibly providing free premises if sites are owned by the Council.

The Council have taken steps to improve pride in place, and also raise aspiration, through a range of cultural activities. For example, the 'Hidden Hippo' trail is an augmented reality tour around key sites in Walsall which helps young people celebrate the area's craft heritage and discover local history.

4) Empower local leaders and communities

> "I am hopeful that Walsall can be a great place. But everyone needs to get involved…we can have the money and the strategies but actually its changing the mindset."
>
> Shahin, 30s, Charity worker

Participants in our focus groups and other residents we spoke to in Walsall were clear that they have felt let down by local leaders in the past. Criticisms were extended to a range of institutions, who were felt to have overlooked the area's interests and failed to come up with a convincing long-term plan for the area.

Many of these criticisms were targeted at the council. We heard from participants in our focus group that "our council is one of the worst 10 across the country" and "whatever Staffordshire council do for Lichfield is better than what Walsall Council did for Walsall". Some participants argued that councillors and council officials were disconnected from realities on the ground, with one arguing that "some of them [councillors] aren't even from Walsall, so they don't understand the grassroots issues. North Walsall has been forgotten."

This view did not seem to be politically motivated, and it was recognised that leadership of the council had changed from Labour to Conservative on several occasions in recent decades. Shahin, a charity worker, said "the council don't care, no matter what councillors are elected, whether it's Tory or Labour." When we asked focus group participants to come up with their top three ideas to level up Walsall, the number one response was better local leadership.

It is worth noting that these concerns are shared by local leaders themselves, with some pointing to the recent Town Board process as a missed opportunity to do things differently. They argued that an overreliance on external consultants and the participation of only a narrow cross-section of the business community meant that new ideas can too easily be missed. This was not a uniform view among the leaders we spoke to, with some arguing that the new projects could be genuinely transformative for both Walsall and Bloxwich. There was also a broader recognition that a decade of reduced funding for the Council had put them in a challenging position.

Frustration was also expressed at regional leadership. Focus group participants told us that Walsall could be ignored as part of the West Midlands, with one saying "we're not high on the priorities are we, we're 7 out of 7" and another arguing that "Walsall is left as the poor relation of the West Midlands…all the money is gobbled up by Wolverhampton and Birmingham". This reflected some of the concerns we heard in Oldham about disproportionate investment and focus on larger urban centres. One participant addressed this directly, saying "that's a city though isn't it; they are always going to spend more money on cities". Some local leaders supported these concerns, arguing that Walsall hadn't got its fair share out of the Combined Authority to date and needed to get more attention from the region's mayor.

There was a more positive sentiment expressed towards civil society organisations. It was felt that some of these groups had particularly shown their value during the pandemic. One community association, Manor Farm, were given responsibility for running lateral flow testing

for their town during the pandemic, recruiting 70 people within 48 hours to make this possible. They had previously been responsible for large-scale delivery of adult learning, providing foundational skills to 3,500 learners, but told us they had lost this role as adult skills commissioning had been taken up by the Combined Authority.

As discussed above, it was felt that business leadership was lacking in the area. With the decision to integrate Local Enterprise Partnerships into Combined Authorities, the previous forum for businesses to influence policy is also at risk. To date, the Black Country Chamber of Commerce has played an important role, but local leaders felt it could do more. One leader we spoke to claimed that no Chamber in the UK has membership of more than 4% of businesses, and argued we should move to compulsory membership like in Germany. But, again, many of these forums operated at either a regional or sub-regional footprint and very few operated at the level of the borough or individual towns.

What might this mean for the local playbook?

Regardless of the veracity of criticisms of the Council and Combined Authority, it is clear that there is work to do in order to build back trust. The council's 'Walsall Story' process provides an opportunity to repair relationships, developing a long term strategy while also building confidence amongst the public. The council could go further, introducing innovative forms of citizen engagement in order to restore trust such as citizens assemblies, citizens juries, and participatory budgeting.

Further devolution will also be an important step so local leaders at both the Local Authority and Combined Authority level have greater power and accountability. The ongoing Trailblazer Devolution Deal process could explore devolving powers to address some of the challenges outlined above, including greater control over adult skills, technical education, and the careers service to raise aspiration and skill levels.

But given the contrasts between different parts of Walsall, the clearest priority for local leaders should be to introduce new forms of hyper-local governance. Parts of the borough that have been left behind need opportunities to shape their future, instead of relying on plans that are focused on the borough as a whole, the Black Country, or the West Midlands.

As a first step, the council could take steps to introduce parish or town councils in priority wards and neighbourhoods. There are currently no parish councils in any Black Country local authority, yet nearby Birmingham, Solihull, and Coventry all have areas covered by parish councils. The Council could take steps to identify priority wards, support civil society organisations that could lead the petition process, and fast-track the approvals process to improve local representation. In the intervening period, the Council could pilot this approach by setting up a small community improvement fund and using participatory grantmaking to allocate money for local priorities, an approach trialled in London by Camden Giving.

The council could also take steps to improve hyper-local business leadership. There are currently no Business Improvement Districts in Walsall. In nearby Birmingham there are 12, covering areas from the Central Business District through to the largely suburban Sutton Coldfield. Steps have been taken by local leaders in Walsall to form a Business Improvement

District (BID) in the town centre, but they have struggled to organise due to limited resources and a disparate business base. The Council could support the process of forming BIDs, by offering to subsidise membership for an introductory period and making clear that the council were willing to actively partner with BID representatives.

Conclusion

> " We need to build Walsall for the people we have not who we are trying to bring in."
>
> Local leader

Walsall reinforced several of our insights from Oldham and South Tyneside - the importance of social and human capital alongside physical infrastructure, a feeling of resentment towards larger cities, and a frustration at local leaders who hadn't set a clear direction. It was clear that people in Walsall felt like the borough is a poor relation in both the region and the country as a whole.

But the clearest insight from our time in Walsall was the differences *within* the borough. Aldridge in the east of the borough has more in common with prosperous parts of Solihull than it did with the deprivation on its doorstep in the west of the borough. Some of these variations exist in many local authority areas in the country, but rarely are they so stark.

This points to the need to tackle specific problems at a local level. It's not enough to say there is a "skills challenge" in Walsall. It's more fitting to say there's a problem in Bloxwich and Willenhall with adults with no qualifications, and a problem in Walsall town and Darlaston with female labour market participation. It doesn't feel right to say there's a "productivity problem" across the borough: it contains international conglomerates and neighbourhoods that rank in the top 10% nationally for economic output, alongside clusters of manufacturing firms with almost uniquely low productivity.

This is why any effort to level up from the top down will face great difficulty. Problems differ from community to community, and in places that have been left behind these challenges will have become deeply entrenched. Tackling them doesn't just mean investing in local areas, it means equipping individuals and groups on the ground with the capacity and capability to solve problems. Without these hyper-local foot soldiers on the front line, interventions from Councils, Combined Authorities, or Whitehall simply won't work. Walsall, like other communities, will have to level up from the bottom up.

Acknowledgements

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Appendix - Focus Groups

This is a short overview of two focus groups that Onward moderated in Walsall on the evening of 24 March 2022. Participants were BC1 in the first group and C2D in the second, with an even mix of Leave/Remain and Con/Lab 2019 voters. All of them lived within Walsall borough itself.

1. How do people define levelling up?

- Participants generally knew what "levelling up" meant, although awareness was lower in the C2D group. People spoke of levelling up as being about "rich areas, poor areas, trying to get the balance of it better" and "the North-South divide". Shanin, a charity worker, said it was about "levelling up education, housing [and helping] those who are marginalised in our communities". Those who did not know what levelling up referred to in the second group said that they thought the phrase related to "gaming" or "being honest" and upfront.
- There was strong agreement that levelling up was the right thing to do but deep scepticism about both the rationale behind it and the ability of politicians to deliver. Becky, a teaching assistant and mum of three, said: "I think it's a good thing, but practicality wise, I don't know if it will ever happen." Glyn, a cleaner, said that levelling up "is meant to bring the country more together, but it doesn't". For some this cynicism was political. Khurrum said: "the ideology behind it is a good thing but the people in place aren't fit to do it" and labelled it "a political catchphrase". Another said that it "seemed to be a way of them [politicians] justifying Brexit".
- However much of the cynicism appeared to be a result of current or past disappointment. As Wayne, a meter reader, put it, it "always seems the Southern part of the country gets more than the Northern part, everything happens in the South. When anyone comes to do anything, they always go South to do it." Sayyid, a teacher, blamed the backgrounds of ministers, saying "there's no point having someone who's never been in a deprived area doing it". Several people said that the Government was "levelling down", because "wages aren't rising in line with inflation" and "the cost of living is more, but the wages are not."

2. What does a place look like that Is levelled up?

All of the groups had a long list of characteristics including jobs and businesses, but the discussion invariably focused on four things:

- **Places to socialise and interact.** Both groups put a premium on shared spaces that brought people together, including the high street, green spaces and bars and restaurants. People longingly spoke of Sutton Coldfield, where "my mother-in-law can walk down and have a curry or have a drink", and Lichfield, where "the city centre has everything there - bars, clubs, theatres." They wanted, in their words, "a bit of hustle and bustle" and specified "clean streets", "free parking" and "benches and bins" as important to maintaining a vibrant public realm.

- **Safe streets and visible policing.** There was complete unanimity that crime undermined good places. When asked what defines a good place, one said: "feeling safe to go out at night. I don't go out at night anymore." Participants repeatedly spoke of the need for CCTV, "good lighting" and proactive policing, as well as more "youth clubs" to prevent young people being drawn into crime.
- **Strong communities.** There was a strong sense that good places had a stronger social fabric. People spoke of good places having "decent people" and "good neighbours". This importance of people living in a place was central to both groups. One participant said the reason Lichfield had a strong community was because "they've got money there and it keeps the riff raff out" while another praised Stafford with "it's just the people there."
- **Good education.** Education was seen as the foundation of a good place. Ian, an apprentice, summed up the conversation when he said: "A good education would eradicate all these problems, it would shape the future". People wanted "outstanding schools".

3. How do people feel about their place – Walsall?

- When asked to describe Walsall, people described a town that had been run down. The words they used were: "shithole", "deterioration", "rough", "forgotten", "bad reputation", "hellhole", "depressing". Walsall was described as "the poor relation" of the West Midlands. This criticism was particularly aimed at the town centre which people feel has fallen into a state of disrepair. Becky said of the centre of town: "when you walk down there it gives that vibe, it always looks messy and unclean". Glenn, a cleaner, said: "I've worked in Walsall for twenty years… when I go out, I don't go to Walsall, I go to Lichfield". Others mostly agreed that they would rather visit other towns outside the borough, including Lichfield or Tamworth to go shopping or go out.
- This was strongly associated with crime. Crime was the number one issue in both groups, as it has been in other places we have visited. Nicola, a diary planner, said "I don't feel safe in Walsall…crime is terrible", adding "I'm even worried about my son going to college down there next year". Paul, a cleaner, said that he would only "go there [Walsall town centre] in the day" - saying any time after 4pm was not safe. Karen, a retired textile worker, agreed: "I don't go out at night anymore". Another said: "It is quite intimidating when you see all the gangs and the kids hanging around. There's lots of beggars who aren't even beggars, they just want money for drugs".
- Linked to crime was the sharp economic and demographic disparities between different parts of the borough, with some places described as "no go areas". Calum, a sports coach, said Walsall had "some really nice areas [but] big discrepancies within the local area". Ian agreed: "You've got the proper rich areas and then you go somewhere else where its like a different planet." An example cited was Birchills Leamore to the West of the town centre. Birchills used to be a relatively well off part of town but had recently declined: "I thought the area would go up and get better", said Karen, a retired textile worker who lived there, "but it's all gone down now". The reasons for this were twofold: demographic change and crime. "Birchills is like a different planet", said Yvonne, a retired cleaner, before warning others: "don't go through Birchills unless you've got a baseball bat in the back of your car." Karen lived in a three bedroom house with a garden in Birchills but said: "If they came to me and offered me a one-bedroom terraced house in another area, I'd accept it."

- While public transport was generally seen to be good, road transport was also mentioned as a weakness for the town. One participant said: “it’s horrendous getting through the town”. Another remarked that “Jeremy Clarkson has named Walsall as one of the worst places he’s ever driven through in his life.” In a separate group, Phil, a quality controller, said “I reckon it is one of the top ten worst places to drive in the country. It is gridlocked.”

4. Underlying strengths

This is not to say that people had given up on Walsall. Participants recognised a number of underlying strengths that they felt could be built upon to support levelling up in the area:

- **Green spaces.** Both groups immediately focused on the beneficial role of green spaces and parks in Walsall, with one saying “I think the arboretum is what makes Walsall stand out” and another praising King George’s Fields in Bloxwich. Tajinda, a teacher, said that when she visited Walsall Arboretum “I am transported to another place” while others said it was a nice place to walk. These were universally seen as assets that could be built upon and whose use could be expanded.
- **Culture.** There was a deep sense of pride in Walsall’s cultural history as an industrial centre, the “town of a thousand trades” and the “heart of the industrial revolution” as two different participants put it. The Leather Museum was widely seen as an institution that Walsall was known for, as was the newer art gallery. However, this pride was seen as fading, replaced by a stigma about Walsall. Sayeed, a teacher, said, “I am Walsall’s biggest cheerleader but there is a bit of a stigma around Walsall”.
- **People.** When they were asked to define Walsall, both groups talked about “the people”. People said that Walsall retained a strong “community spirit”. When asked to list Walsall’s strengths as a place, one group spoke of “places of welcome” and “places of worship” as evidence of a strong social fabric that sustained the community. Another, a charity worker called Shaz, said: “I am hopeful that Walsall can be a great place. But everyone needs to get involved … we can have the money and the strategies but actually, it’s changing the mindset in order to keep those areas.”

5. Who is responsible for Walsall’s fortunes?

- Participants overwhelmingly held Walsall Council responsible for Walsall’s problems rather than the West Midlands Mayor or central government. Sayeed, a teacher, said, “The council is one of the worst councils in the country” describing the recent history of decision-making as “absolutely poor management.” This was not a partisan point and aimed as much at officers as politicians: The “council don’t care - no matter what councillors are elected, whether it’s Tory or Labour, you call them or send them an email and they won’t help you”, said one participant.
- In addition to poor responsiveness, participants criticised a number of recent decisions including the decision to build a retail park near the Wharf and to buy the Saddlers Shopping Centre in Walsall Town centre. “Walsall market was out of this world… but Walsall Council moved them to the bridge, so that got finished”, said Karen. Becky said “It looks a run down place now now the wharf is shutting down”. They “paid a fortune for that Saddler Centre”, said another. Ian, an apprentice, explicitly compared this to other

towns: Lichfield and Walsall are "centres the same size, but they can't be more polar opposite places… whatever Staffordshire council do for Lichfield is better than what Walsall Council do for Walsall". When asked what to do to transform Walsall's fortunes, one group's top request was: "new management… get rid of the old council." Another said, "The council needs to do more to improve the image of Walsall to people outside to encourage businesses to invest there."

- A lack of investment was attributed to both central government and other places taking money that could be better spent in Walsall. Shaz, the charity worker, said: "austerity has taken everything away. I used to go to playgroups and Sure Starts … when I had my daughter 8 years later there was nothing there for me." This chimed with criticism about the lack of resources to tackle crime, with several people mentioned the closure of the police station and one claiming that Walsall only got five police officers. However people also blamed other parts of the West Midlands: "all the money is gobbled up by Wolverhampton and Birmingham", said one participant, to which another said: "That's a city though isn't it; they are always going to spend more money on cities." This echoed our findings in Oldham.

6. What would people do to level up Walsall?

We asked participants to break into groups and explore what they would do to level up Walsall, before discussing in the wider groups. The priorities of all the discussion groups were almost identical. The three priorities were as follows:

- **The ability to "feel safe to go out at night".** People wanted a relentless focus on cutting crime, which they saw as the biggest barrier to Walsall levelling itself up. They said they would invest in more police officers on patrol, reopen closed police stations and increase visibility of law enforcement, especially in the town centre. They also focused on preventative measures, with both groups referencing CCTV and one group arguing for more neighbourhood watch schemes.
- **Cleaning up the town centre.** The second priority was the revival of the town centre as a place to shop, visit and socialise. Ways to achieve this included a strong emphasis on cleaner streets, lower rents for shops to attract retailers, and investment in social areas, such as youth clubs and community clubs, which could bring people of all ages back to the town centre.
- **Education for the whole community.** People argued for a strong emphasis on education because, as Ian put it, "a good education would eradicate all these problems, it would shape the future". People were partly focused on building on the strength of the existing College and Grammar Schools, which people universally praised, but this priority extended more broadly too. Participants wanted "education in the whole community", "not just the school system… so it isn't just [ages] 5 to 18 but all stages of life".

Endnotes

[1] Hawksbee, A., Blagden, J & Tanner, W (2022), 'Levelling Up in Practice: Oldham Interim Report' Onward report

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