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Introduction - Director of Public Health



My ambition is for Walsall to have a sustainable, fair, prosperous food environment where good quality food is grown, available and promoted for our residents to have nutritious, affordable food choices. The culture of

food in Britain has changed beyond recognition in the past 20 years. The type of food we eat, where it is sourced, how we cook, buy and dispose of our food waste have altered dramatically. However, with these changes have come significant challenges. The intake of excess calories, high fat salt sugar (HFSS) foods with low fruit & veg consumption affects our health and wellbeing.

Food brought from hundreds of miles away, pesticide use, high density of hot food takeaway outlets with a limited food offer and food waste all need to be addressed. Recent economic challenges have led to record numbers of our residents relying on support to feed their families. It is a travesty that in one of the world's wealthiest countries, we have such need for food banks and food support.

The future food system should support health improvement, deliver high quality food and animal welfare standards, be resilient to global challenges, and should not damage nature or the planet.

It is time for us to work proactively on local and national policies which reduce the harm to health from the food system. Simple measures such as a tax on salt and sugar for food producers, or for individuals switching to some meat-free days can have a great benefit. Other local actions, such as growing food, sourcing from local suppliers, reducing the density of fast-food outlets and working with these businesses to improve the quality of the food on offer can make a huge difference to the food system and is within our gift. If we increase access to affordable fruit & vegetables and nourishing, filling food at home, school, community and workplaces it is possible to improve the health and wellbeing of our residents, whilst supporting the local economy and environment. There is a role for individuals, communities, businesses and organisations to make the improvements needed and I am certain that we can do this if we work together.

Stephen Gunther
Director of Public Health

Summary of Recommendations

I recommend Walsall residents to:

Take steps to improve the quality and sustainability of their diets, for example by:



- Increasing the amount of fruit, vegetables, fibre, and water they have each day
- Introducing meat-free days to their diet
- Use free tools from websites, retailers, and apps to make healthy changes

- Check the food hygiene rating of premises when buying and eating food outside the home



- Take up the local offer of Healthy Start Vouchers/breastfeeding/cooking/growing

I recommend that local communities and community association networks should:

- Support residents with cooking skills by working together and sharing resources



- Promote and support opportunities to grow food to increase self-sufficiency and community cohesion



Sign up to and/or promote:

- The Breastfeeding Friendly Scheme
- Healthy Start Vouchers
- Free School Meals and the Holiday Activities and Food Programme



I recommend that Walsall Council, local public sector organisations, housing, schools, and businesses work together to:

- Develop planning policies which limit the expansion of hot food takeaways



- Complete and implement an ambitious plan to reduce food waste, in line with national requirements



- Draw up and implement a borough-wide food plan to ensure local people have access to quality food and opportunities to grow food
- Ensure the availability of water-filling points at new public developments, such as the new railway stations across Walsall
- Get residents involved in food growing initiatives on allotments & other community growing spaces
- Promote diets with more wholegrains, fruit, vegetables, water & fibre for their staff/customers

- Join with national groups (e.g. LGA, ADsPH) to lobby for the implementation of the national food plan



- Restrict the advertising of high fat, sugar, salt foods in areas accessible to children. As part of this, specifically encourage Travel West Midlands to follow TfL's lead and restrict junk food advertising on transport
- Support nutritional training for their staff. For example, the "Understanding Cultural Diversity in Nutrition and Health" course
- Work with other West Midlands authorities to standardise enforcement work, for example on importing food, illegal food processing, adulteration of food and misrepresentation
- Promote a breastfeeding friendly workplace and to make their spaces breastfeeding friendly
- Set procurement standards for food on their own sites and for contracts they let.



Chapter 1

Food Glorious Food

Food is anything we eat or drink for our bodies to sustain life, growth, and vital functions and to provide energy. It consists of proteins, carbohydrates, fats, vitamins and minerals to keep us in balance.

Why do we eat food?

Food is not just related to our physical needs, it is also linked to our mood, emotions, and feelings. Aside from hunger, there are other reasons and motivations for eating.

Habit - most people have a routine of 'meal times' with snacks in between.



Social - eating together is a common way that people enjoy socialising. People may also use food to please and entertain others, by preparing meals for them and eating with them.

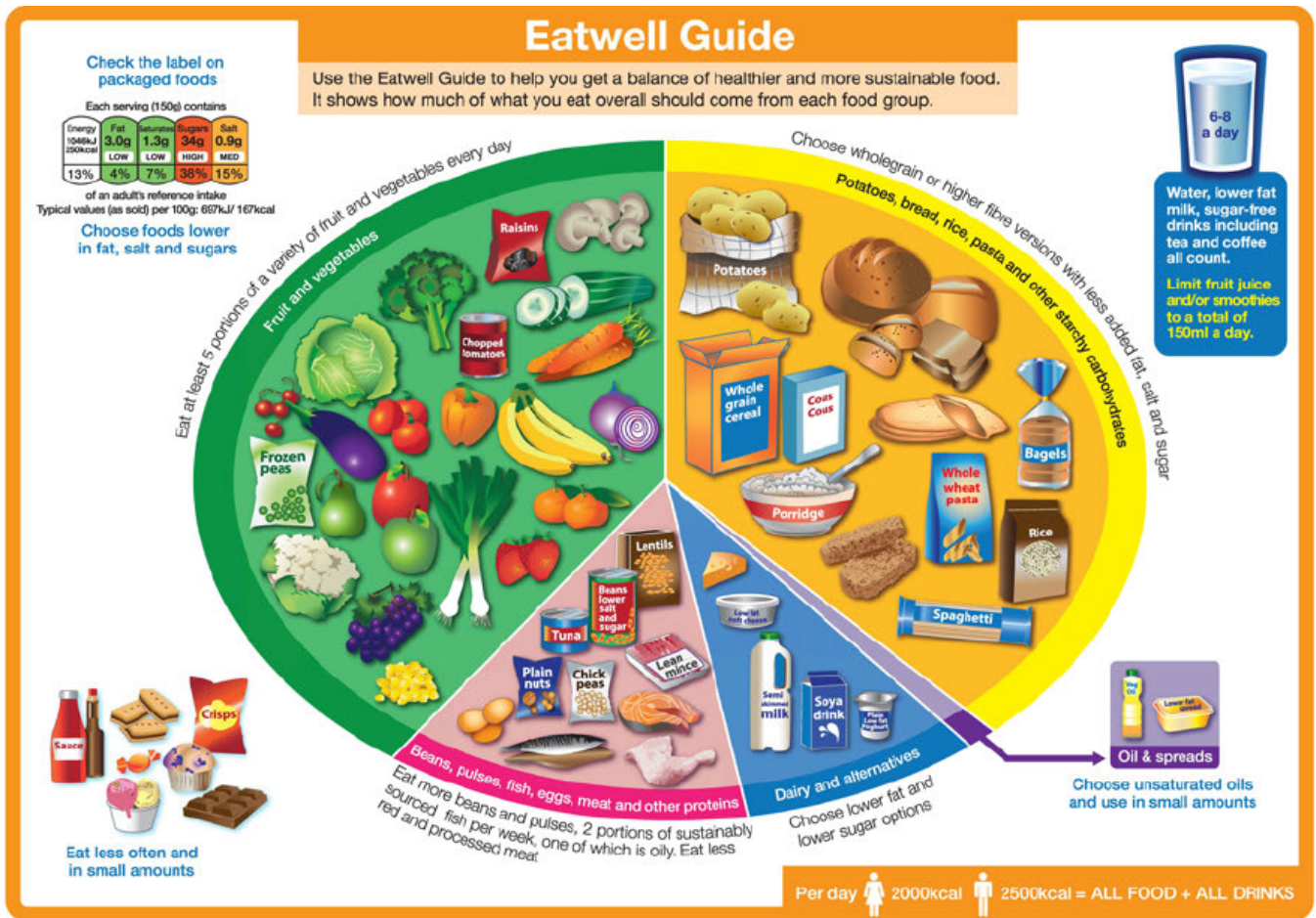


Sensory appeal - the stimulation of our senses gives a positive feeling. As we prepare food it can produce tempting smells and sounds. Food packaging, menus, and advertisements also show visually tempting dishes.



Psychological - eating is often a pleasurable activity, particularly of food that we like. Some people use food as a coping mechanism to deal with feelings such as stress, boredom, loneliness or anxiety, or even to prolong feelings of joy (often called 'comfort eating').





Source: Public Health England in association with the Welsh Government, Food Standards Scotland and the Food Standards Agency in Northern Ireland

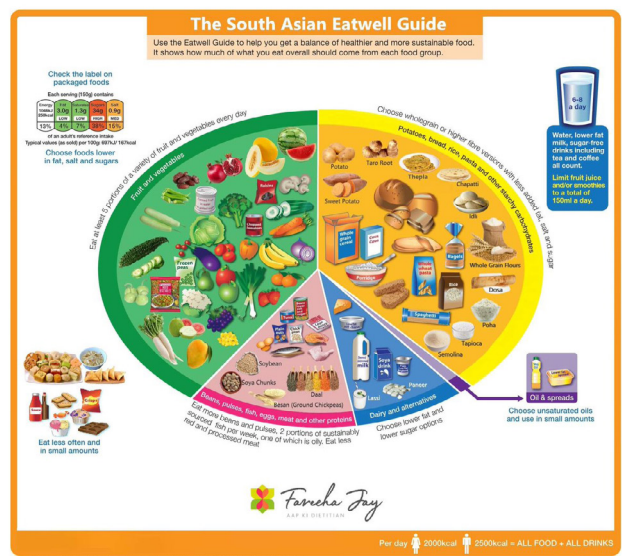
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The Eatwell Guide - What Should we Eat

To get the most and best out of food, it should come from a balanced diet, with the right mix of carbohydrates, proteins, fats, fibres, vitamins, minerals, anti-oxidants, probiotics, etc. The Eatwell guide shows us clearly the types and amounts of food we should be eating. This does not have to be for every meal, but it is recommended that we try and get this balance, over the day or over the week.

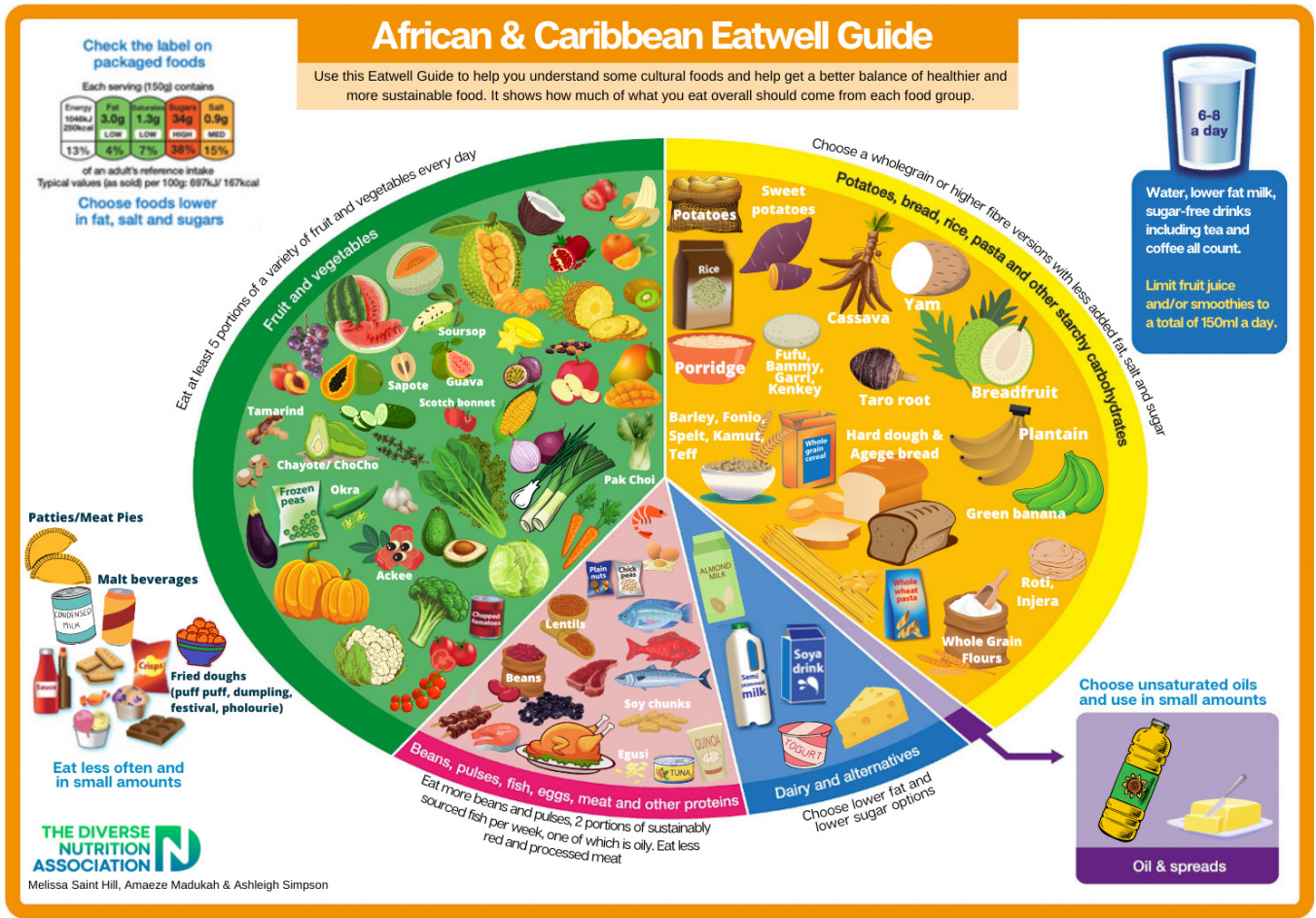
Genetics and ethnicity can increase a person's risk of certain diseases and conditions. For example, compared to other ethnic groups, people of South Asian descent are more likely to develop heart disease and Type 2 diabetes¹, and members of the Black African and African-Caribbean community are more likely to suffer from hypertension (high blood pressure), heart disease, diabetes and stroke².

Culturally diverse adaptations of the Eatwell Guides have been developed, to include popular foods that are associated with traditional African, Caribbean, and South Asian diets. These guides may be more relatable and so may encourage and facilitate healthier informed choices across the increasingly diverse population of Walsall and the UK, and subsequently reduce the risk of ill health in these populations.



Source: Public Health England in association with the Welsh Government, Food Standards Scotland and the Food Standards Agency in Northern Ireland

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The NHS recommends that we eat at least 5 portions of fruit and vegetables a day³. These 5 portions should include a variety of fruit and vegetables, because different fruits and vegetables have different combinations of fibre, vitamins, minerals, and other nutrients.

Almost all fruit and vegetables count towards your 5 A Day. They can be fresh, frozen, canned, dried or juiced.

Here are some examples of what you can eat to count as 1 of your 5 a day:

- 80g of fresh, canned or frozen fruit and vegetables
- 30g of dried fruit
- 150ml of fruit juice, vegetable juice or smoothie
- 80g of beans and pulses

WHAT IS A 5 A DAY PORTION?

Eating a wide variety of vegetables and fruit is a great first step to eating well and protecting yourself against cancer. Aim for at least five portions every day. Here are some examples of what counts as a 5 A DAY portion for an adult. **One portion weighs 80g, roughly equivalent to:**

<p>Cruciferous vegetables</p> <p>8 florets or pieces eg. broccoli, Brussels sprouts, cauliflower</p>	<p>Root vegetables</p> <p>1 whole eg. carrot, parsnip, sweet potato</p>	<p>Salad leaves</p> <p>1 cereal bowl eg. lettuce, uncooked spinach</p>
<p>Medium to large vegetables</p> <p>½–1 whole vegetable eg. courgette, leek, pepper</p>	<p>Small or sliced vegetables</p> <p>3–4 heaped tablespoons* eg. peas, sweetcorn, or sliced cabbage, mushrooms, runner beans</p>	<p>Large fruit</p> <p>1–2 slices eg. mango, melon, pineapple</p>
<p>Medium fruit</p> <p>1 whole eg. apple, banana, orange, peach, pear</p>	<p>Small fruit</p> <p>2 whole eg. kiwi fruits, plums, satsumas</p>	<p>Berries</p> <p>1–2 handfuls eg. blueberries, raspberries</p>
<p>Unsweetened fruit or vegetable juice</p> <p>1 glass (150ml) (only counts once per day) eg. orange juice, apple juice</p>	<p>Cooked pulses (beans & lentils)</p> <p>3 tablespoons* (only counts once per day) eg. canned chickpeas, lentils</p>	<p>Dried fruit</p> <p>1 heaped tablespoon* (30g) (only counts once per day) eg. raisins, dried cranberries</p>

The benefits of a good quality diet

Eating a good quality diet can have positive effects on our physical and mental health. It can reduce the risk of Type 2 diabetes, keep hearts healthy by maintaining blood pressure and cholesterol levels, keep bones and teeth strong and, help to keep a healthy weight⁴. A good diet can also help improve our mood, give us more energy and help us think more clearly⁵.

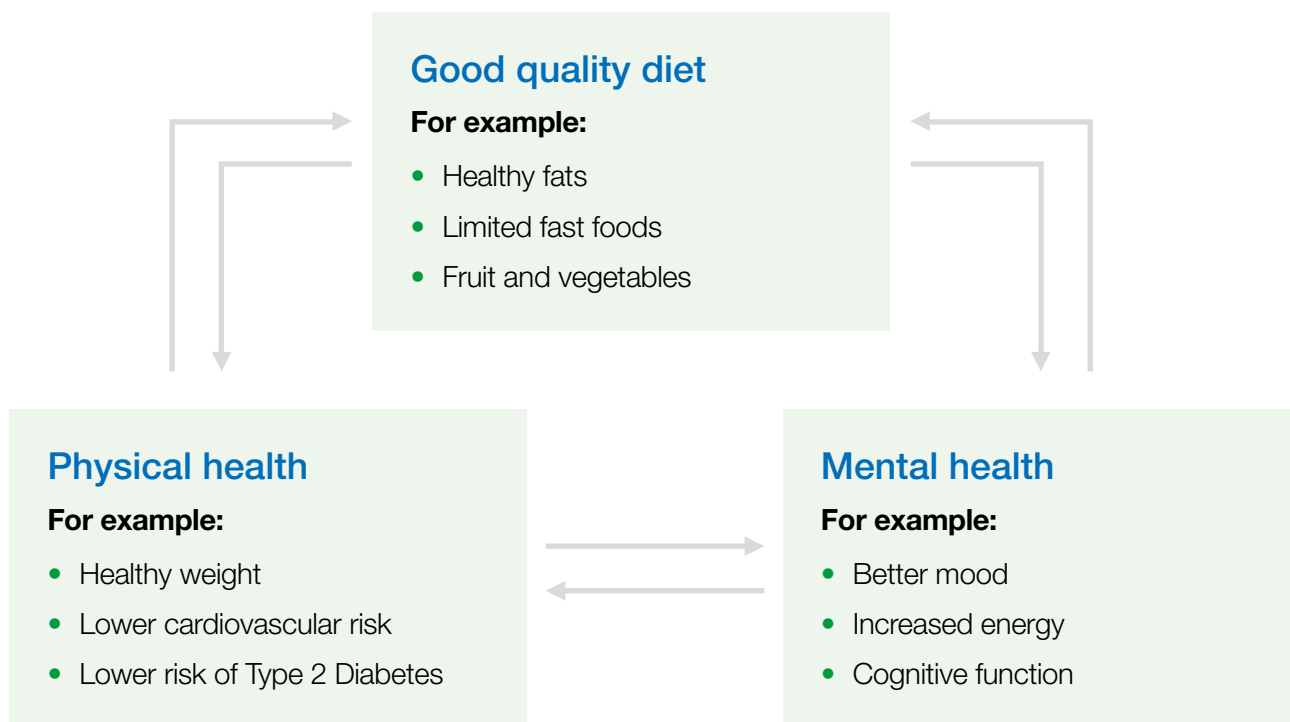


Image adapted from: <https://www.bmj.com/content/369/bmj.m2382>

Improving what you eat may help to improve your mood, give you more energy, help you think more clearly and improve your overall health. Some of the ways this can be achieved is by:

- Eating regularly at intervals
- Staying hydrated through the day

- Getting your 5 a day to cover a range of nutrients



- Looking after your gut with fibre, fluid, and exercise
- Getting enough protein

- Managing the caffeine intake



- Eating the right fats the body needs

Similarly, poor nutrition is not just about “bad foods”. Both undereating and overeating (even of the “right foods”) can have adverse affects on health such as:

- Overweight & obesity

- Problems with teeth & gums



- Heart disease & stroke
- Type 2 diabetes and hypertension

- Vitamin deficiency



- Depression & eating disorders
- Cancers

What are we eating?



In Walsall, only **51.3%** of adults meet the recommended '5 a day' on 'a usual day'⁶.

The **average number** of portions of fruit consumed a day is **2.5** and the average number of portions of vegetables consumed a day is **2.4**⁶.



In children aged **5-15** years old, we know that in England the average number of fruit and vegetables eaten is only **3**, with only **18%** of children getting their 5-a-day⁷.



The National Diet and Nutrition Survey collects data on the UK's food consumption, nutrient intake and nutritional status of the general population and shows that we are:⁸

Eating too little

- Fruit and Vegetables
- Oily Fish
- Fibre

Meeting recommendations

- Red and processed meat

Eating too much

- Saturated fats
- Sugar



Too much saturated fat can raise "bad" LDL cholesterol in the blood, which can increase the risk of heart disease and stroke⁹. Too much sugar can lead to obesity and raise your risk of heart disease and diabetes¹⁰.

Oily fish is high in long-chain omega 3-fatty acids which help keep hearts healthy¹¹. Examples of oily fish include salmon, sardines, trout and mackerel.

Fibre is an essential part of our diet. Eating foods with fibre can make us feel fuller, it helps digestion and to prevent constipation. Fibre also lowers your risk of heart disease, stroke, type 2 diabetes and bowel cancer¹². You can get fibre from:

- wholemeal bread
- brown rice
- fruit and veg
- beans
- oats

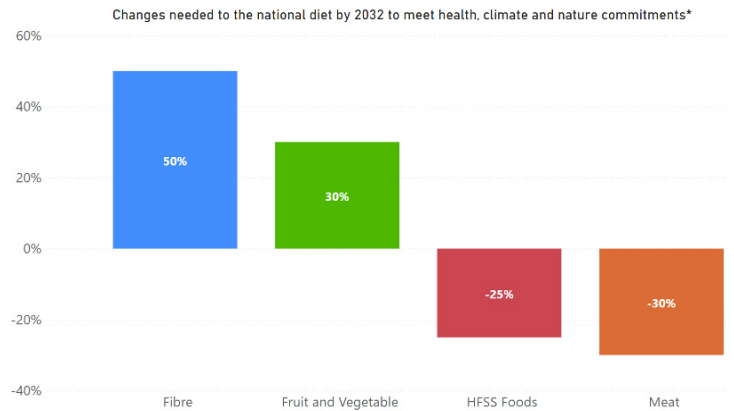
Aside from fibre, fruit and vegetables also supply us with important vitamins and minerals.

Salt is another important nutrient in our diet that we should monitor carefully. The average daily salt intake of adults in England is 8.4g, despite the World Health Organisations recommended target of 5g¹³. If every adult in the UK met World Health Organisation (WHO) salt consumption guidelines by 2030, by 2035 there could be¹³:

- Up to **1.4 million** fewer new cases of high blood pressure
- Up to **135,000** fewer new cases of coronary heart disease
- Up to **49,000** fewer new cases of stroke
- More than **450,000** more years living in perfect health

We need to change our diet, and the way we grow and produce our food, if we are going to meet national and international health and climate related ambitions¹⁴.

- An increase in the amount of fruit, vegetable and fibre, along with a decrease in foods high in fat, salt or sugar (HFSS) is needed to meet nutritional guidelines.
- Reducing meat consumption is necessary to meet UK carbon commitments and global agreements to conserve 30% of land to boost biodiversity.




The rising cost of living is a concern for everyone in Walsall at the moment. However, although it is commonly thought that it costs more to eat healthy foods¹⁵, there are low-cost changes we can make to our food choices to help save money while eating healthily.

Food swaps

Breakfast swaps (excluding milk)

- ❌ Coco pops – **19p per serving**
- ❌ Croissant – **26p each**
- ✅ Porridge – **6p per serving**
- ✅ Slice of wholemeal toast – **4p a slice**

Switching your white bread to wholemeal bread can give you 1.1g more fibre with every slice – that's nearly **80%** more fibre, for exactly the same price!



Lunchbox swaps


- ❌ Packet of crisps from a multipack – **29p**
- ❌ Chocolate bar from a multipack – **34p**
- ✅ Banana – **14p**
- ✅ A pack of raisins – **10p a pack**



Dinner time swaps

- ❌ Margherita pizza – **£1.75 per serving**
- ✅ Vegetable pasta – **95p per serving**

The recipe can be found here: Odds and ends arrabbiata al forno | Tesco Real Food



Exact prices will vary according to the supermarket but this shows some examples of simple swaps we can all make to help achieve a well-balanced diet, while either cutting costs or even making savings. We can also use websites and phone apps to help make healthier and more sustainable food choices.

To find out more about healthier food swaps check out:

- Healthier food swaps - Food facts - Healthier Families - NHS (www.nhs.uk)

For more budget recipes:

- Supermarkets tend to have their own budget recipe sections on their websites, such as '5 meals for £20'.

Sainsbury's: Feed your family for a fiver Sainsbury's Recipes (sainsburys.co.uk)

Aldi: Budget Recipes | ALDI

Tesco: Budget meals and recipes | Tesco Real Food

Morrisons: Recipes | Morrisons

ASDA: Budget Meals | ASDA Good Living

LIDL: 5 meals for £20 Collection September 2022 (lidl.co.uk)

Helpful Apps

Easy Meals

Find a wealth of delicious, easy and healthy recipes.



TooGoodToGo

Buy and collect food from businesses that hasn't been sold in time at a reduced price.



Change4Life Smart Recipes

Find a wealth of delicious, easy and healthy recipes.



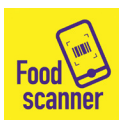
OLIO

A food sharing app where anyone can share food that they don't want or aren't going to eat.



Food Scanner

Scan food to find out what's inside your food and find healthier alternatives.



Refill

Find local water refill stations as well as zero-waste shopping options and hot drink refill stations.



Portion distortion

In addition to failing to meet national guidance on what we eat in terms of nutrients, the amount we eat has been worryingly increasing. A report by the British Heart Foundation¹⁶ found that many portion sizes have progressively grown between 1993-2013 across a range of products. Larger portions make it easy to eat more calories and nutrients than we need to. Over time, this habit can cause unwanted weight gain, contribute to obesity, and increase your risk of developing certain chronic illnesses.

On the other hand, if we don't finish the oversized portion this can lead to food waste. This is not only a waste of the food itself, but a waste of the energy and water required to grow, harvest, and transport food, and a waste of the food packaging. When food rots in landfills, it releases methane, which contributes to climate change¹⁷. Mindful eating is an approach to food that focuses on being fully present while you're eating. It helps regulate appetite, aid digestion and make eating an enjoyable and pleasurable experience¹⁸.

Recommendations:

I recommend Walsall residents to take steps to improve the quality and sustainability of their diets, for example by:

- Increasing the amount of fruit, vegetables, fibre, and water they have each day
- Introducing meat-free days to their diet
- Use free tools from websites, retailers and apps to make healthy changes



How have portion sizes changed?

The British Heart foundation's 2013 report found that portion sizes of pre-prepared meals had generally increased over the preceding 20 years.



Data source: British Heart Foundation. *Portion Distortion*. https://www.bhf.org.uk/-/media/files/publications/policy-documents/bhf_portion_distortion_oct2013.pdf [accessed 26 Nov 2015]



To learn more about Walsall residents' food habits and their views on the local food environment, we held a series of focus groups. Five main themes came up in these discussions.



"Going back to supermarkets, it's accessibility of sweets - isn't it? - and fast food. It's there. You know what I mean? So like sweets, it's always there at the checkout. Even though they said years ago they wouldn't do that anymore, it still is."

Theme 1:

The food environment as a barrier and facilitator to accessing food

Walsall residents felt it was easy to access fresh food in shops within their local area owing to the high number of shops available. However, not having a car was a barrier to food shopping and tended to lead to more frequent trips to the shops.

Residents felt that supermarkets dedicated more space in their shops to processed and high fat, salt, sugar foods, rather than to fresh produce. These foods tended to also be placed in areas in the supermarket to encourage temptation – such as by the counters. These less healthy options also tended to be priced lower, making the temptation to buy them greater.

Overall, residents felt the food on offer in cafes, takeaways and restaurants could be improved to have more healthy options.

Theme 2:

Whether food and healthy eating is a priority

A balanced diet was largely of importance to residents we spoke to. However, there are many other priorities which it competes with, and this was felt to be more the case with younger individuals. There was a feeling of shifting needs across generations and younger people having to balance more needs and wants, leading to healthy eating falling down on their list of priorities.

A lack of time due to working long hours and busy lifestyles was another factor, and this tended to lead to buying convenience foods. Convenience seemed to be perceived as an important priority to some individuals.



"My son works full time, and he now has taken another job which is almost full time, and he doesn't cook at all. He just doesn't cook. He'll grab a sandwich in Asda when he's packing the shelves with the spices. And then he'll probably pick up a takeaway from Asda on his way home. And it's I think because there's no time for him to cook"



'You talked about healthy options and access to healthy options as far as distance. I think a lot of barriers to having the healthy option is finance for a lot of people and a lot of families.'

Theme 3:

The importance of cost

The rising cost of food was a major concern for residents, as well as the cost of energy for cooking. These added to other worries about the increase in other living expenses, adding to financial pressures.

These financial challenges were leading to some residents changing food behaviours and facing decisions on what to prioritise. Some people reported switching to cheaper alternative food items, such as supermarket own brands. Other changes included bulk cooking to save money. However, there was also significant concern of the impact of rising costs on households with lower incomes. Money was identified as a critical barrier for these households to access food and to be able to afford to prioritise healthy eating.

Sources of free, or reduced priced food, was discussed by some residents. The importance of these sources of support was acknowledged, but challenges which face them include stigma which can discourage people from taking up these options. The current cost of living is also leading to increasing demand with decreasing supplies.

Theme 4:

Gaps in cooking skills and nutritional knowledge

The focus group participants were mostly confident in their abilities to cook and in their knowledge surrounding nutrition. Many cooked from fresh ingredients, and fewer tended to use pre-prepared or ready meals. However, many of the residents we spoke to felt that this was because they had been taught these vital skills at school or at home when they were younger. It was felt that this is an important gap now, where younger generations weren't, and are not, being taught these vital skills.

'I think if we're all admitting we're all a certain age, we've all had classes at school. We've had domestic science...and you learn how to cook. I think that's a bit of a gap now.'



'There's enormous amount of people who've no idea how to cook anything...'

Theme 5:

The impact food has on the environment as a consideration when making food choices

Walsall residents were aware of multiple aspects of food which impact on the environment. Conversations covered minimising the use of plastic, food miles and local produce, organic food and growing your own food, and lastly, minimising food waste and expiry dates. The amount residents prioritised this varied, but for the majority this fell below other factors - such as cost.



'We go to farm shops, and we access our milk from Oakleys Farm. It's one of the milk dispensers. So you reuse the bottles each time.'

Cooking skills

There is no standard offer from local agencies to provide cooking skills for residents. Since the publication of the School Food Plan in 2014, schools have had a legal requirement to teach cookery and nutrition to all children up to the age of 14¹⁹. The plan states that by 14 years old, all pupils should be able to “understand the source, seasonality and characteristics of a broad range of ingredients” and “cook a repertoire of predominantly savoury dishes”. However, in many schools, this is still not happening.

Residents in our focus groups told us that they would welcome support such as learning essential cooking skills and gaining nutritional knowledge.

There are voluntary and community organisations providing teaching on essential cooking skills across Walsall. Organisations such as Positive Outcomes Project who provide essential health and wellbeing support for 16-25 year olds in Walsall. As part of their fantastic work they run cooking classes for the young adults who attend their services.



MindKind also provide a free healthy eating peer support group at their wellbeing centre.

However, it is challenging to identify all courses, as some agencies, run cooking skills alongside other activities, and many are not tailored for specific needs such as people with disabilities.

Another example of cooking support is the Holidays Activities and Food programme (HAF) which provides food parcels to children on the scheme during school holidays. These parcels include ingredients for 2 meals, with instructions and a video on how to cook the meals. Children are encouraged to cook with their whole family.



Feedback from the summer 2021 programme, showed the following benefits²⁰:

- New meal ideas **65%**
- Saved money **47%**
- Tried/introduced new food **49%**
- Learned new cooking skills **41%**
- **36%** reported to cook fresh meals more often since
- **40%** reported to involve children in cooking more often

Knowing these benefits are possible, agencies across Walsall should be doing much more to equip Walsall residents with essential cooking skills. Local organisations appear willing to provide this but are challenged by very limited funding.

Recommendation:

I recommend that local communities and community association networks should:

- Work together and share resources to develop an offer to support residents with cooking skills.



Nutritional Knowledge in Health and Care professionals

Health and care professionals can be an important source of dietary knowledge and support. When we spoke to local dietitians and trainee GPs however, there seems to be important gaps in nutritional knowledge and skills in some professionals. Aside from dietitians, health and care professionals receive too little training in nutrition during their careers and, as a result, are not always confident in giving advice to patients.



Dietitians: *'[I am] confident in diabetes nurse knowledge and that they will refer appropriate patients. However [I am] less confident with other health care professionals as knowledge seems to vary a lot'*



Doctors: *'I would be interested in training and resources'*

Recommendations:

For Walsall Council, local public sector organisations, housing, schools and businesses I recommend that they:

- Work together to support nutrition training for their staff. This could include The Diverse Nutrition Association "Understanding Cultural Diversity in Nutrition and Health" for healthcare professionals working with diverse communities.



Giving every child the best nutritional start in life

It is important to ensure we are getting nutrition right, across the whole life course, starting from conception. Our diet in the early years is key to equip us with all the nutrients we need to grow and develop, but also to form those healthy dietary habits and food preferences which we will carry through our lives.

Pre-conception

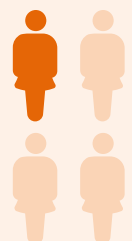
Providing every child with the best nutritional start in life begins even before conception. Folic acid and vitamin D are essential vitamins for a baby's development²¹.

- **All women** should take **Folic acid** supplements daily from pre-conception up to week 12 of pregnancy
- **All women** should take **Vitamin D** supplements daily during pregnancy



Maternal weight is also very important in pregnancy. A raised Body Mass Index (BMI) increases risks to mother as well as baby. It increases the risk of having a miscarriage, giving birth early, having a big baby, or having a stillbirth²².

Over **1 in 4** pregnant women in Walsall are obese at their booking appointment, which is higher than the regional and national average²³.



Breastfeeding

Healthy eating starts at birth. Breastmilk has many benefits over formula milk for both infant and mother, such as²⁴:

- **breast milk protects your baby** from infections, diarrhoea and vomiting and sudden infant death syndrome (SIDS)
- breast milk reduces you baby's risk of being overweight/obese in childhood
- breastfeeding provides health benefits for the mother, including a reduced risk of breast cancer
- breast feeding has also been shown to have positive effects right into your baby's adult life, with a reduced risk of cardiovascular disease
- breast milk is available for the baby whenever the baby needs it
- breastfeeding can build a strong emotional bond between you and your baby through release of the hormone oxytocin

Breastfeeding initiation:
59% of babies born in Walsall had a first feed of breastmilk²⁵.



The breastfeeding rate in Walsall is significantly lower than other parts of England and the West Midlands²⁵.

Walsall has lower rates of initiating breastfeeding at birth and exclusive breastfeeding at 6-8 weeks compared to other parts of England and the West Midlands. Our rates are not improving, or indeed being maintained, as is happening in other parts of the country. Many women are reluctant to breastfeed in public owing to stigma relating to breastfeeding and fear of confrontation from strangers. When women do breastfeed in public they often feel uncomfortable doing so²⁶.

Everyone has a role to create a more welcoming environment for mothers to breastfeed whenever and wherever they wish. It is important that shops, businesses, workplaces and the wider community recognise the role that they play in making this happen.

A good start would be to review their policies and signing up to the Breastfeeding Network's "Breastfeeding Friendly Scheme" to be a safe place for mothers in Walsall to feed their children.

I recommend Walsall residents to:



Breastfeeding Friendly

- Take up the local offer of Healthy Start Vouchers/ breastfeeding/cooking/growing.

I recommend that local communities and community association networks should:

- Sign up to and promote: the Breastfeeding Friendly Scheme.

Infant Feeding

Solid foods are recommended to be introduced to infants from 6 months of age. Unfortunately, there is limited data on what children are being fed aside from breast milk at this age.

We do know, however, that there needs to be important changes made to the baby food industry. This is a crucial period for forming dietary habits and food preferences and it is therefore disheartening to see that the baby food industry is failing in several areas to align their products to national infant feeding advice. Currently there are no restrictions on permitted amounts of salt and sugar in baby food.

According to the British Dental Association, many baby food pouches intended for infants under 12 months old may **have more sugar by volume than Coca-Cola**²⁷.



Excess sugar is one of the leading causes of tooth decay, which is the most common oral disease in children, affecting nearly a **quarter of five year olds**. It is the most common reason for hospital admission for 5-9 year olds²⁸.



A recent independent review also found clear inconsistencies between national infant feeding advice and how some commercial baby food and drink products are presented²⁹.

It found that:

- some foods marketed as healthy snacks are amongst those with the highest sugar content
- sweet snacking is being encouraged
- misleading product labelling and marketing encourages the introduction of solid food before official advice recommends
- some product names don't reflect the balance of ingredients
- products do not always provide clear feeding instructions

Clearly, this makes it difficult for parents and carers to make informed choices about healthy nutrition for their young children.

There is a responsibility for us all (individuals, communities and organisations) in Walsall to join together to lobby for mandatory limits on the sugar and salt content of baby food.

We should all be encouraging families to “make their own” baby food, highlighting the reduced cost and the reassurance of knowing the content of their children’s food. This would give benefits in terms of better infant nutrition, longer term health, exposure to a wider variety of foods, less packaging, and lower cost to families.





Walsall Healthcare 

NHS Trust

Infant Feeding Support Service

We are here to support you, please contact us anytime during your feeding journey.



01922 605 248

Available Monday - Friday: 09.00am - 17.00pm (except Bank Holidays)



We offer support via:

- **Telephone contact**
- **Virtual video consultations**
- **Face to face** (by appointment only)





You can also find us on Facebook

@Walsall Welcomes Breastfeeding



Local Support for Infant Feeding

Walsall's Infant Feeding Team

Our Infant feeding team do a range of activities to support mothers and carers with feeding, including:

- Support to initiate and maintain breastfeeding after birth.
- Postnatal face to face visits
- Regular breastfeeding and infant feeding support groups

Recommendation:



I recommend Walsall Council should:

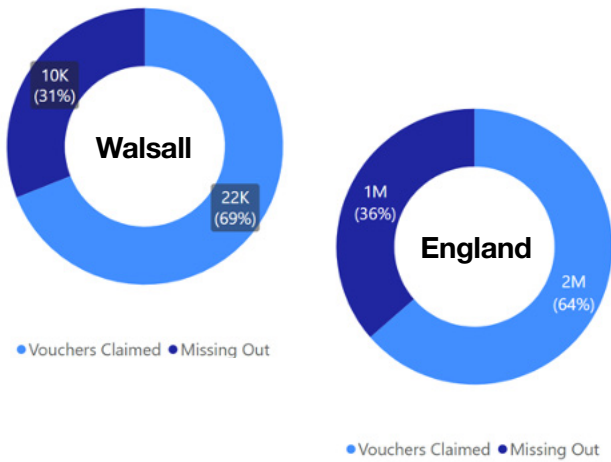
- Promote a breastfeeding friendly workplace and encourage local businesses and organisations to make their public spaces breastfeeding friendly.

Caring for Walsall together



Healthy Start Scheme

Healthy Start is an NHS scheme which provides milk, fruit, vegetables and vitamins for pregnant women and families on low incomes or who receive specific benefits, and with at least one child under 4 years old.



Source: www.healthystart.nhs.uk/healthcare-professionals/

In spite of national and local promotion, knowledge and uptake of Healthy Start could be improved. There are still around **3** in every **10 eligible families** missing out, especially with vitamins.

Up to **1400 Walsall households** are missing out every month; that's **at least £23,800** worth of Healthy Start vouchers not being claimed each month, which could benefit the health of Walsall's mothers and young children. The economic crisis affecting families in Walsall, makes the task to improve this situation even more pressing.

Are you pregnant or have children under the age of 4?

You could get help to buy:

- Plain cow's milk
- Fresh, frozen or tinned fruit and vegetables
- Fresh, dried, and tinned pulses
- Infant formula milk

You can also get free Healthy Start vitamins.

www.healthystart.nhs.uk
 @NHSHealthyStart

Walsall Public health worked with Aston University on research with local families to explore the reasons why people are not taking up the healthy start scheme. These were:

- Complicated eligibility and application processes
- Lack of awareness of scheme
- Lack of understanding of what is included in Healthy Start Scheme
- Some vulnerable groups ineligible
- Lack of outlets accepting vouchers
- Stigma and social unacceptability of taking up free vouchers

A series of actions are needed to optimise local access and uptake to this scheme. All organisations in Walsall should prioritise actions to improve the processes for access, distribution and uptake of Healthy Start Vouchers.

Recommendation:

I recommend that local communities and community association networks should:

- Sign up to and promote Healthy Start Vouchers

Food in early years settings

Early years settings are key providers of food to young children across Walsall. It is therefore important that their food offer provides the right amount of energy and nutrients, and that it promotes healthy eating habits. Across Walsall there are a range of caterers who provide this food. Some providers have their own in house cook to prepare snacks and meals on site. Others have external caterers. However, there is limited monitoring of the quality of the food offer in the early years, and this is something that would be useful to be collected nationally. 30 of the settings take part in the Food for Life (FFL) healthy eating programme in Walsall. One example is described below.

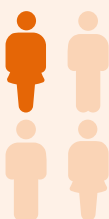
Blossoms on the Common are a Pelsall based nursery working with Food for Life. They have achieved their Food for Life Early Years Award. This means that their menus have been shown to be compliant with the national guidelines on food and nutrition. They also grow, cook and enjoy fresh, healthy food and have links with farms or local food businesses.

Feedback from the early years settings is of positive responses from parents on the food served to the children, and they must all abide to national statutory framework regarding food. However, there is limited monitoring on the quality of the food offered in the early years, and this is something that would be useful to be collected.

Food for School age children

In school aged children only 18% of children are getting their 5-a-day³⁰.

Almost **1 in 4** pupils in reception are overweight or obese, and by Year 6 this has increased to almost half of all pupils³¹.



2 in 100 children in reception, and in Year 6, are underweight³¹. Therefore, the need to help children to develop healthy eating habits and a balanced diet is important for parents, education, care, and leisure providers.

Food in Schools

Children spend 190 days of the year in school and during term time they consume as much as 50% of their food at school. For some students, the

At a glance: Lunch

Each lunch should include a main course and a dessert. Try to include foods from the four different food groups.

Drinks

- Provide only fresh tap water and plain milk for children to drink.

Fruit and vegetables

- Provide at least one portion of vegetables and/or fruits as part of lunch each day. These can be fresh, frozen, dried or canned.
- Check product labels to choose canned vegetables and pulses without added salt and sugar, fruit canned in juice not syrup, and reduced salt and sugar baked beans.

Dairy and alternatives

- It is good practice to provide three portions of milk and dairy foods each day (including those provided at home), one of these can be provided as part of lunch.

Beans, pulses, fish, eggs, meat and other proteins

- As well as providing protein, foods from this group also contain a useful source of iron and zinc and can be provided as part of breakfast.

Potatoes, bread, rice, pasta and other starchy carbohydrates

- Provide a portion of starchy food as part of each lunch.
- Limit starchy foods which have been fried to once a week at lunch.
- Limit canned pasta in sauce.
- Avoid flavoured dried rice, pasta and noodle products eg packets and pots of instant flavoured noodles, pasta and rice.

HM Government

Example menus for early years settings in England can be found www.gov.uk

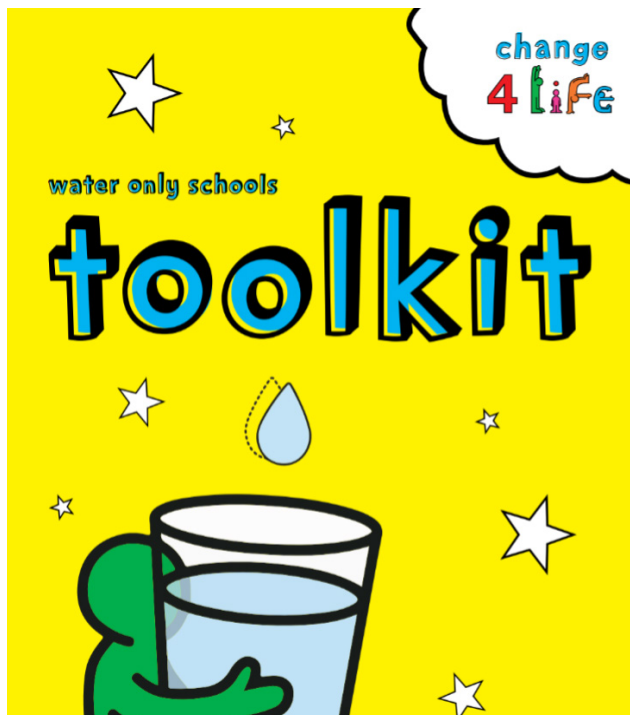
school lunch is their only substantial meal of the day. It is important that schools offer a wide range of food that appeals to pupils while also being well-balanced, fresh, locally sourced, and sustainable. The environment where children eat is also critical in influencing children's relationship with food and mealtimes.

Food served in all maintained schools and academies in England must meet the Governments School Food Standards³². These mandated standards are there to ensure children have healthy and balanced diets so they have enough energy for the school day. It also ensures that children have a pleasant environment for eating. Ofsted's role is to ensure schools are meeting requirements for safeguarding, welfare, and learning and development, however, this does not seem to cover food quality and healthy eating practices. There has now been a commitment to put a greater focus on how schools create a culture of healthy eating³³.

'It's Time to #Spill the Beans' is a report by Bite Back 2030, a youth-led movement campaigning to transform the food system, and provides first-hand insight into the food provided in schools from the pupils who are actually eating it³⁴.

The report suggested that the school food standards are routinely not being upheld.

This is a UK wide report covering a range of schools, so it is possible that the findings would be similar in Walsall. It stresses the importance of ensuring that we are meeting the school food standards and ensuring fair access to food for all pupils.



The Spill the Beans report also found that water is still not available and accessible in all schools. Keeping regularly hydrated is essential and school-aged children should aim to drink 6-8 glasses of fluid a day. Water is the best form of fluid for children for hydration and so we should be encouraging all Walsall schools to ensure water is easily available to all students. 'Water only schools'³⁵ is a toolkit produced by Change 4 Life to encourage all primary schools across London become water only and could be used locally here in Walsall.

Free School Meals

Free School Meals (FSM) are an important support for children and families who are on low-incomes or receiving benefits. However, not all families who are eligible for free school meals in Walsall are taking up the offer.

Recommendation:

I recommend that local communities and community association networks should:

- Sign up to and promote Free School Meals and the Holiday Activities and Food Programme



"The change I want to see at my school is for students to have equal access to a good amount of food that is affordable; both students who do and don't receive free school meals"

It's Time to #Spill the Beans' report

"I'll choose the unhealthy option because it will fill me up more, or because it's cheaper to buy so I can buy more of it. Recently the school started selling Skittles and Smarties and people are hoarding them because you can buy lots."

It's Time to #Spill the Beans' report



"There's hardly anything vegan or vegetarian. Once, when I had to get a school meal, all I could have was chips and some apple juice."

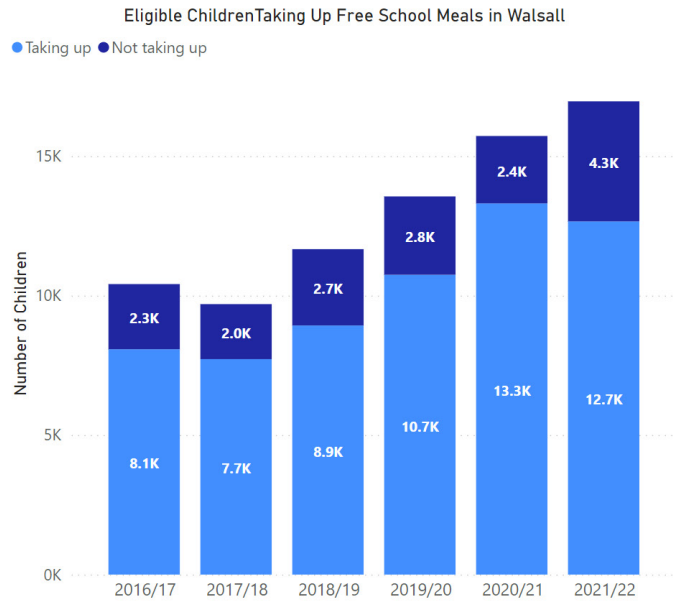
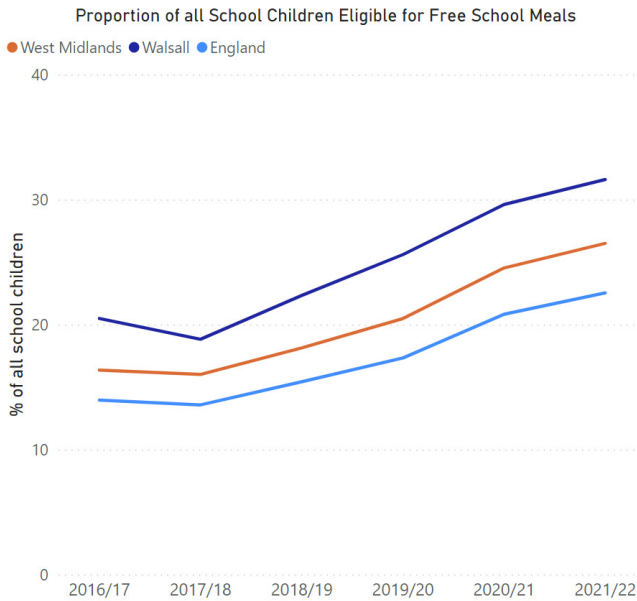
It's Time to #Spill the Beans' report



A report by Food Active highlighted 5 barriers for students and families³⁶:

1. Stigma
2. Knowledge
3. Poor choice/Variability
4. Taste socialisation
5. School Food Environment

The eligibility criteria are also excluding a significant number of families in need, with the Feed the Future Campaign reporting that 800,000 children in England living in poverty are not currently eligible for Free School Meals³⁷. There is a real challenge to reduce the barriers to families accessing FSMs but also lobby with others to widen the range of people who are eligible. All organisations in Walsall can join the Feed the Future campaign to expand FSM to all children in households on Universal Credit.



Local Action

Food for Life



The Food for Life (FFL) programme run by the Soil Association, is about making healthy, tasty, and sustainable meals the norm for all to enjoy, connecting people with where their food comes from, teaching them how it's grown and cooked, and promoting the importance of well-sourced ingredients.

The service was commissioned by public health in order to embed a healthy approach to eating. This includes influencing caterers and the food served in the school or early years setting, teaching children about healthy eating and offering them the opportunity to grow and taste different foods.

FFL has been running in Walsall since 2017. 86 settings take part in the programme, reaching 16,000 school children and 2238 in nurseries.

"I cannot praise enough the support that the team from Food for Life have given us at school! From the very beginning, when we decided to 'go for Gold', we have been supported and encouraged every step of the way. Nothing is ever too much trouble and the advice and support we have received to completely change our menu and enable us to deliver high-quality food for our children is having a remarkable impact on lunches and children's eating habits and choices."

(Food for Life Walsall school – Radleys Primary School)

"The joint workshop for parents have been great and it is wonderful to see the knowledge learned filtering through into meals being prepared at home. We look forward to more in the near future."


(Food for Life Walsall school – Radleys Primary School)




Active Black Country

Active Black Country run a healthy schools rating scheme which encourages schools' contributions to pupils' health and wellbeing. Two key parts are assessed for these awards – the school's food education and their compliance with the national school food standards. The diagram below gives examples of criteria for the scheme's various awards:


Bronze Award:

- Healthy Eating is a curriculum priority 
- The school must comply with the school food standards across the school day (This is a statutory requirement for schools)
- School food standards are specific in school catering contracts, annual assurance is provided by catering services or the local authority
- Have a nominated school governor with responsibility for school food standards

Silver Award:

- Professional development for teachers on food 
- School ensures training for catering staff on school food standards

Gold Award:

- Gold Award:** 
- Pupils assist catering staff in preparing food
 - School grows food on site for school meals
 - School provides extra curricular cooking clubs
 - Unhealthy items are banned from packed lunches
 - The school is part of a school food award or accreditation scheme



The Holiday Activities and Food programme

The Holiday Activities and Food programme (HAF) works with 62 providers in Walsall, to provide food for children eligible for FSM, during the school holidays.

Local evaluation of this programme found that **3** out of **4** parents said that their children had eaten healthy food while they attended activities.



For Walsall Council, local public sector organisations, housing, schools and businesses I recommend that they:



- Draw up and implement a borough-wide food plan to ensure local people have access to quality food and opportunities to grow food.

Access to Affordable Food


The current economic crisis is having a devastating impact across the UK and in all communities in Walsall. The Food Standards Agency's UK survey showed that in December 2022³⁸:


- More than **8 in 10** people were concerned about food prices 

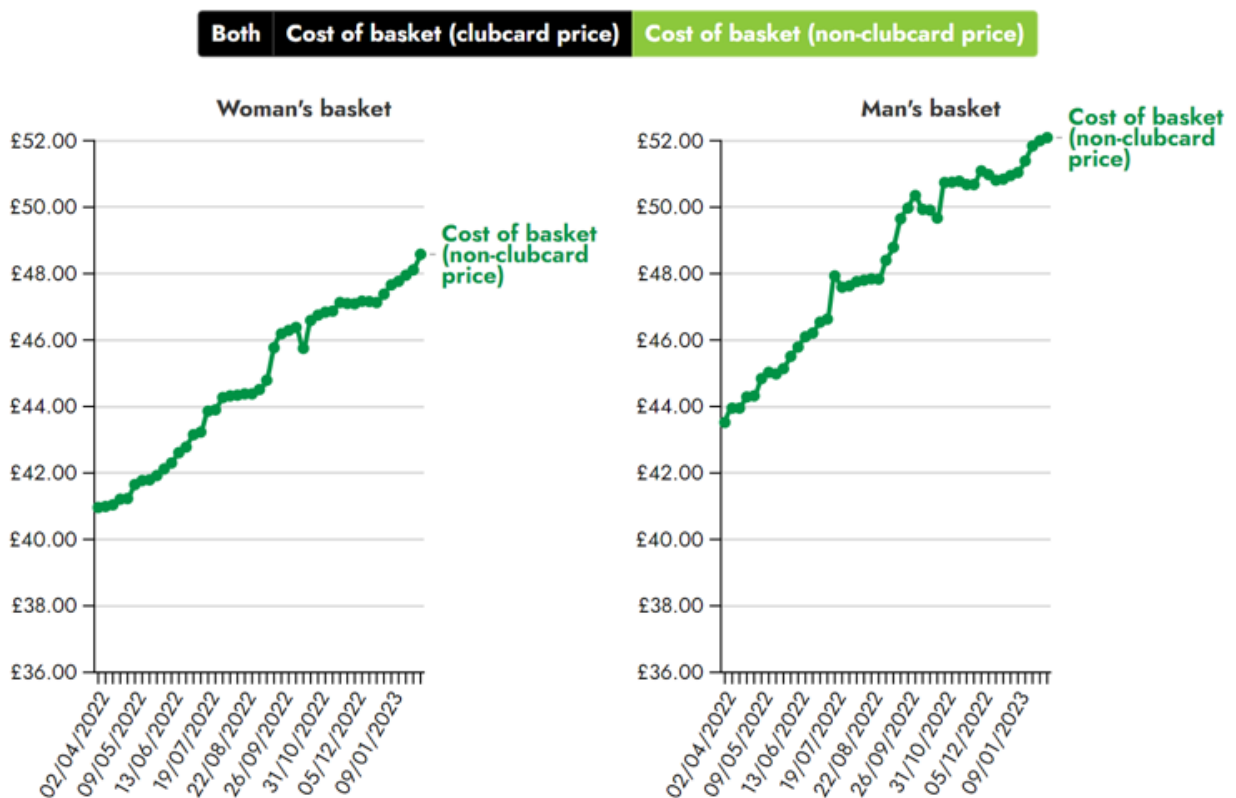
- More than **1 in 4** of respondents said they could not afford their essential food shopping at least once in the last month
- More than **1 in 5** had eaten food cold at least once in the last month, as they couldn't afford to cook hot food
- Nearly **1 in 3** reported at least one occasion in the past month when they could not afford to eat a healthy balanced diet.



A Joseph Rowntree report³⁹ has shown that **7.2 million households** in the UK are either:

- going hungry or cutting down the size of meals or skipping meals 

- or going without basics like showers or adequate clothing. 



Graph taken from: <https://foodfoundation.org.uk/initiatives/food-prices-tracking#trackers>

The Food Foundation has been monitoring the weekly prices of a basket of food bought from Tesco for an adult male and adult female as part of a reasonably costed, adequately nutritious diet. This shows the incredibly steep increases in food prices that we have all been facing alongside all other rising costs⁴⁰. Rising prices were a significant concern to residents at our focus groups who reported that cost is a critical barrier for households to access food, particularly those on lower incomes.



"I mean, the prices aren't just going up in 5 pence. I mean, we saw something the other day that was a pound that two days later it was 1 pound 50..."

"You still have to make those choices each week when you go shopping between the cost of fresh food and what you can and can't do."

"I cook a roast on a Sunday and I cook it for four people. But I'm conscious now of my electricity bill and my usage."

Affordable food in Walsall

Local markets provide lower cost foods and are located across the borough in the town centre, Willenhall and Bloxwich. In addition, value supermarkets such as Aldi and Iceland, have opened more outlets in Walsall in recent years.

Social supermarkets and pantries e.g. those in Pelsall and Pleck, also offer access to discounted food for a small weekly subscription fee.



Free cooked meals are provided by organisations such as Walsall Outreach, SEWA Kitchen and FoodCycle.



Several food banks are also operating across Walsall. Food banks provide free food supplies to those who need it. These are a lifeline for an increasing number of households. Walsall has a good network of food banks with seven Black Country foodbanks, two Trussell Trust, and a growing number of independent foodbanks including Blessed 2 Bless, Residents R Us and Hands 2 Help U.

FareShare is a food redistribution charity which provides surplus food to charities across the UK, which then use this to feed people at risk of hunger. They currently support 21 Walsall organisations.



At a time of increasing demand however, there has been a reduction in donations to foodbanks and other organisations providing free and reduced cost food. Supermarkets have also been extending their best before dates allowing older food to be sold rather than given away to the community and voluntary sector. Local residents identified stigma associated with using a foodbank as a key barrier.

Compared to this time five years ago, Trussell Trust has reported an **86% increase** in need for their food banks in the West Midlands⁴¹.



The charities that FareShare support help understand in finer details the reasons in this rising demand⁴²:

- 65% of the charities state the increases in the cost of food

- **52%** state rising energy bills



- 63% state changes in universal credit

- **56%** state mental health issues



- 36% state physical health issues

- **54%** state low pay



- 60% state unemployment

New foodbanks are being created, such as two new ones in Beechdale and Willenhall. Existing foodbanks are also extending their offers with Blessed to Bless supporting a foodbank at the Manor Hospital. Organisations who wish to start a foodbank can receive help and support through the Black Country Foodbank, Walsall Council or One Walsall.

General help is provided to residents through the Government funded Household Support fund, which is managed by Walsall Council with local partner agencies.



But we need to do more. It is an outrage that we are facing a climate with such high rates of food insecurity and where the need for food banks is so great. The reasons lie in wider policies on welfare and living wage employment and childcare. These challenging times call for coordinated, focused, action to reduce food insecurity.

There are a range of actions that can be done by local agencies including:

- Work with food providers to increase the local supply of affordable food
- Use opportunities from new investments e.g. town centre regeneration to increase living wage employment
- Ensure people get the support they need when in crisis by reviewing the offer in Walsall of foodbanks and explore the potential for collaboration



Chapter 2

Enhancing the Local Food Environment

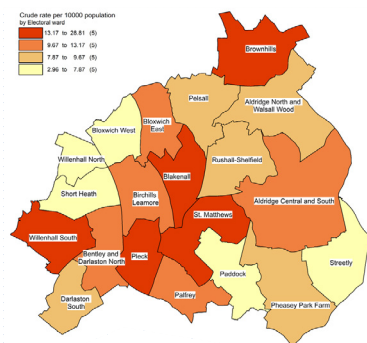
Nationally, the proportion of meals eaten outside of the home is increasing, with more than **1 in 4 of adults** and **1 in 5 children** now eating from out-of-home food outlets at least once a week.



Meals eaten out of the home tend to have larger portions, and higher fat, sugar and salt content, and lower nutrients than meals eaten at home. Fast-food and takeaway outlets, are associated with poorer nutrition.

In addition, national and local data show that fast-food outlets are more densely concentrated in areas of greater deprivation compared to more affluent areas, which contributes to health inequalities.

The map illustrates the density of fast food outlets for each ward in Walsall. There is a tendency for fast-food outlets to cluster around schools, increasing children's access to and opportunities for purchasing energy-dense less nutritious food⁴³.



There is a significant rise in the amount of food that is ordered online, as increasingly people purchase their food from online platforms such as Just eat, Deliveroo and Uber eats. These “hosting” sites take a percentage of the sales and this places extra pressure on local food business profit margins, which could lead to local businesses compromising the quality of their offer.

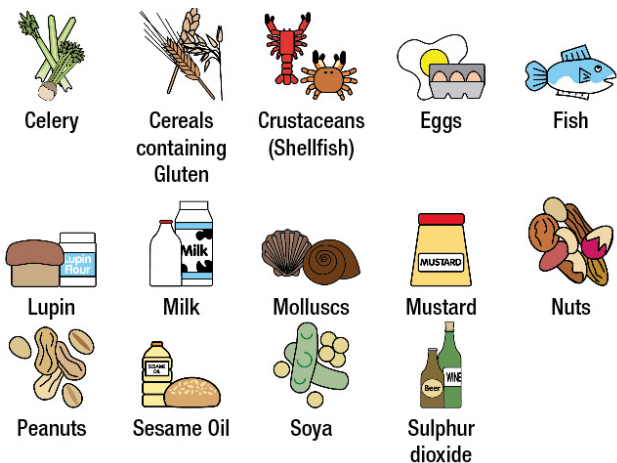
The Food standards Agency (FSA) has recently required these platforms to ensure that any businesses advertising on their sites have a food hygiene registration.

However, we have seen a rise in the number of unregulated “home caterers” selling food through social media e.g. Sunday carvery type meals, cakes, sweets, and speciality cultural dishes. A simple search of social media will show a range of food offers from domestic premises and these premises are difficult to regulate.

A recent survey by the Office of National Statistics found that to cope with the cost of living challenges, one in five people were eating food beyond its use by date⁴⁴.

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There are now two million people in the UK suffering from food allergies (1–2% of adults, and up to 5–8% of children)⁴⁵ but reasons for the increase are unclear. A new law came into force in October 2021 which requires businesses to label all packaged food with full ingredients and all food producers need to be aware of the significant health risks associated with poor allergen control and their duty to control the risks to ensure consumer safety.

Regulation of food businesses

A food business is defined of anyone preparing, cooking, storing, handling, distributing, supplying or selling food.

Contrary to popular belief, most businesses do not require a licence to sell food. New food businesses have to register with a local authority (for free) but the registration cannot be refused.

The Food Standards Agency requires environmental health departments to visit all high-risk premises (or those with poor food hygiene ratings – see diagram). The requirement to register includes food businesses trading from physical customer-facing premises, from home, a mobile unit or temporary premises such as a stall of van, or through online or distance selling. Examples include:

- restaurants, cafes and takeaways
- making food and selling from your home
- catering businesses run from home, B&Bs, mobile catering and temporary businesses marquees, food stalls, food pop-ups and food vans
- nurseries, schools and care homes

distance selling, mail order and food delivery, including food supplied online or through social media channels or marketplace

The process is:



Key elements of the ‘food hygiene intervention rating scheme’ are covered during a food hygiene inspection and determine the level of risk posed by the food operation and subsequent inspection frequency. They are assessed on:

1. The level of compliance with food hygiene and safety procedures, (including food handling practices and procedures, allergen control and temperature control).
2. The level of compliance with structural requirements (including cleanliness, layout, condition of structure, lighting, ventilation, facilities etc.).
3. Confidence in management/control procedures.

The FSA requires businesses to do an allergen matrix (see figure below).

DISHES AND THEIR ALLERGEN CONTENT - [INSERT THE NAME OF YOUR FOOD BUSINESS HERE]

DISHES	Celery	Cereals containing gluten	Crustaceans	Eggs	Fish	Lupin	Milk	Molluscs	Mustard	Nuts	Peanuts	Sesame seeds	Soya	Sulphur dioxide
Tuna Salad (example)	✓			✓	✓		✓		✓					



Review date:

Reviewed by:



Depending on the assessment at the visit, the environmental health team will decide the frequency of follow up visits. Manufacturers of products of animal origin, such as dairies, meat product manufacturers or fish processors, are subject to specific regulations that require a tighter inspection schedule.

There are **2318** registered food businesses in Walsall with a yearly increase e.g. there have been **322** new registrations in 2022.



In addition, Walsall has a very diverse food offer, with an expansion in small international shops, restaurants, and takeaways offering speciality foodstuffs from around the globe. Although this is a positive step in relation to accessibility of a wider range of foodstuffs for our communities, it also brings challenges in relation to differences in the way foods across the world are imported, processed and labelled.

Walsall Council's Environmental Health and Trading Standards services activities in 2021/22 include:

- **119 programmed inspections** of established food businesses undertaken.

- **314 food complaints** relating to hygiene.



- **173 initial inspections** of unrated (new) food businesses.
- Investigation of **113 notifications of cases** of infectious diseases (including salmonella, campylobacter and E. Coli infections) and a number of allegations of cases of food poisoning, which had not been formally diagnosed.

It is important for regulations to be in place as, within Walsall, trading standards officers are still finding instances of breaches of standards which can pose a risk to public health. Such breaches have included:

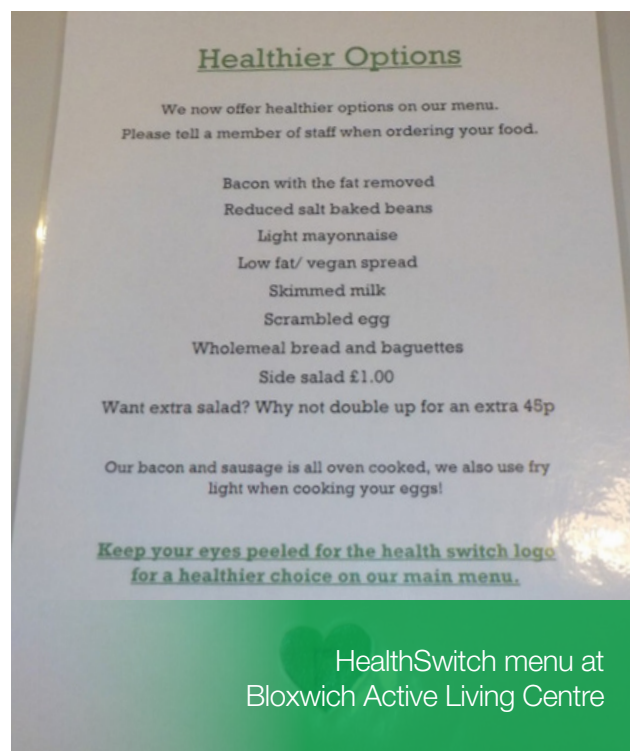
- Counterfeit products
- Incorrectly/Unlabelled food, which is particularly important to residents with allergies
- Out of date food items
- Contaminated and incorrectly labelled food

Support for food businesses

Until 2022, Walsall Council's environmental health and public health teams ran a HealthSwitch scheme for hot food takeaways, leisure outlets, playgyms and cafes. This provided knowledge and skills to give healthier options for their menus. These were well received by customers, and business incomes were not affected. However, the impact of the scheme on longer term customer behaviour and wellbeing was difficult to capture. Many of the actions taken on by businesses such as cooking with less saturated fat, adding vegetables, fruit and water, have been continued. Since the pandemic, the attitude of business owners to including healthier options in their menus is not clear.



Options provided at a local sandwich shop



HealthSwitch menu at Bloxwich Active Living Centre



All new food businesses will receive information and advice on allergen control as part of the initial visit. Alongside this, colleagues from Trading Standards will carry out proactive sampling for undeclared and /or mislabelled allergens in food stuffs, react to complaints and advise food businesses about labelling.

Recommendations:

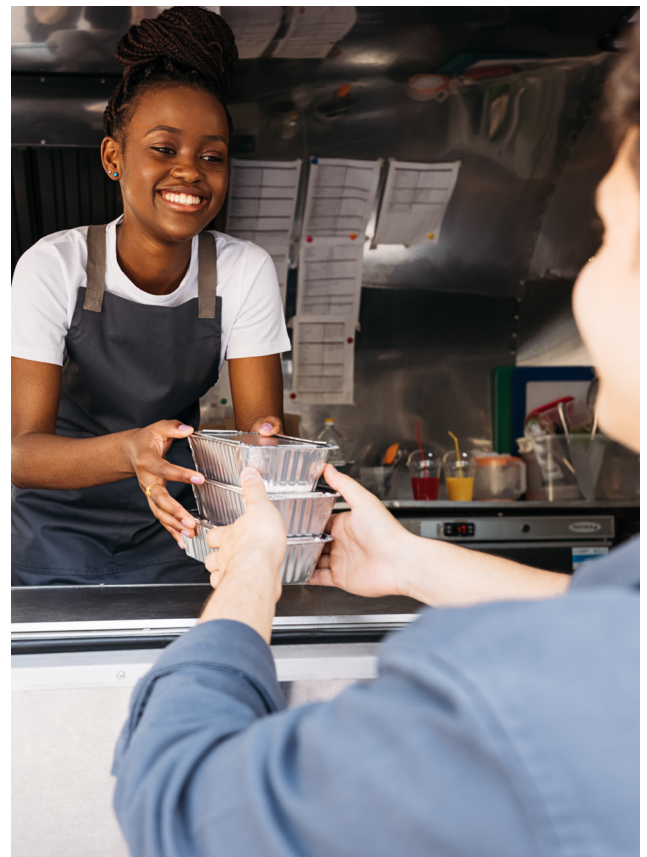
I recommend Walsall residents to

- Check the food hygiene rating of premises when buying and eating food outside the home (FSA website)



I recommend that Environmental health and trading standards teams should work with other West Midlands authorities to standardise enforcement work.

- For example on importing food, illegal food processing, adulteration of food and misrepresentation.





Growing food in Walsall

Space for growing food

There are **33 active allotment sites** owned by the Council across the borough covering 38 hectares of space (1 hectare = 10,000 m²).

There are also a number of derelict sites and sites in private ownership, bringing the total area of sites to 42 hectares. This equates to 2% of the greenspace in Walsall and 0.4% of space in the Borough in total. The space in active sites is divided into 1372 allotment plots, which are almost all managed by community run Allotment Associations (a small number being managed by the Council).



The National Allotments Society, which promotes allotment gardening, suggests a target of 9 plots per 1000 population, although the national average is **6.3 plots/1000** population.

Plots per 100 population in Black Country Local Authorities:



- **Walsall** has **5.5**
- **Wolverhampton** has **4.6**
- **Sandwell** has **5.5**
- **Dudley** has **3.5**

Walsall Council owns **6** farms, which are leased to local businesses for a range of uses.



Local Projects



Goscote Green acres

work with local people to inspire vegetable growing and eating in the Goscote area.



www.facebook.com/GoscoteGreenacresCommunityGarden

Caldmore Community gardens

Caldmore Community gardens is an arts-based organisation who provide community growing and performance space.



www.caldmorecommunitygarden.wordpress.com

Butts Community Garden,

which are developing a small area of open space into a space for bio-diversity, food growing and recreation.



www.facebook.com/TheButtsCommunityGarden

These organisations are community led growing projects which encourage residents to get involved in their local growing spaces and learn to grow vegetables, fruit and other species. There are also other local growing projects which are starting to become established in Walsall such as Rushall Playing Fields and a project proposal as part of Greening Bloxwich on Bloxwich Park.

National and regional projects

Birmingham City is host to a food waste project called Incredible surplus/The real Junk food project.



The organisation uses waste food and redistributes it to those that need it, it is also currently running a composting project, encouraging people to compost more and make their own soil improver.

www.facebook.com/IncredibleSurplus
www.incrediblesurplus.org/compost-culture

Ideal for All is a charity in Sandwell borough which works with people with disabilities, the elderly, vulnerable and their carers.



As part of their Growing Opportunities project they provide therapeutic gardening, food growing and healthy cookery programmes

www.idealforall.co.uk/Health-and-wellbeing

Recommendation:

Walsall Council to encourage local people to get involved in food growing initiatives on allotments and other community growing spaces.



Climate Change Action

Many people are concerned about the impacts of climate change on our lives. The Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change has found that approximately one third of greenhouse gases are attributable to the food system⁴⁶.

Walsall Climate Change action plan is a 5 year programme (2020-2025). It has limited action on food and food production as a producer of greenhouse gases. The main focus is on cutting energy and fuel use and improving measures to adapt to climate change.

Two clear recommendations from the independent Climate Change Committee are to⁴⁸:

- reduce meat and dairy consumption by **20%** by 2030, eating plant-based alternatives



- release **9%** of agricultural land for woodland creation and bio-diversity by 2035.



Changing dietary patterns would make our food intake more sustainable, reduce the impact of agriculture on the environment, and improve our health. Animal products generally need more land, energy, and water in their production and also generate more waste than planted crops. 15% of global emissions are from livestock (the same as vehicle emissions)⁴⁷. In industrialised countries, the average person eats twice as much meat as is judged healthy and global consumption is rising. Overconsumption of food is contributing to the steep rise in obesity and diseases such as cancer, type-2 diabetes, and heart disease.

Diets to support good health are low in red meat and high in fruit, vegetables and fibre. We should be promoting a high proportion of our diet to be from foods with the lowest environmental impact.

Actions which can be taken locally by us all are to eat local seasonal produce which is farmed organically or with reduced fertilisers and pesticides. Food waste and the transport to landfill and decomposition produces methane, another important greenhouse gas. Incredible Surplus, which is a Birmingham project helps to tackle these issues. There is an opportunity for Walsall to work with this organisation to develop a similar project in our borough.

“**Incredible Edible**” is a national movement which has projects all over the country. The project promotes vegetable growing on land which is underused by landowners, and encourages people to experiment and learn to grow. www.incredibleedible.org.uk/



Through our focus groups we found that local residents had an awareness of the impacts food has on the environment. It varied how much people factored this into their individual food choices, for some there were other more pressing priorities, such as cost. Some residents felt that more could be done higher than at the individual level, to minimise the negative impact on the environment such as:

- Reducing packaging
- More accurate expiry dates to minimise food waste
- Minimising the use of pesticides on food
- More local produce

Some authorities in our region are considering signing up to the



International Plant Based Treaty. The treaty is designed to put food systems at the forefront of combating the climate crisis. Other councils are encouraging their residents to think about their health, and the health of the planet, by focusing on plant-based food and other products, rather than a reliance on animals. Walsall could adopt this approach. Find out more about the Plant Based Treaty here: www.plantbasedtreaty.org

Recommendation:

I recommend that local communities and community association networks should:



- Promote and support opportunities to grow food in order to increase self-sufficiency and community cohesion.

Chapter 3

Influencing food policy

Potential to use procurement rules to improve food quality

The national food plan (The Dimbleby report) noted a poor monitoring and enforcement system for the national buying standards for food (GBSF) for public sector organisations⁴⁹.

Hospital food for patients, prisons and the armed forces are bound by the standards, but local authorities, schools, visitor and staff food in hospitals and care homes, do not have to follow the buying standards.

The standards do not require institutions to meet national nutrition guidelines (the Eatwell Guide) and do not consider the environmental impact of the food that is served. They do not reflect the public’s preferences on issues such as animal welfare (for example, eggs from caged hens may be used). They prioritise cost over quality, such that suppliers can provide imported food that is produced in ways that would not be legal for UK producers.



In addition, in many public institutions, there is no clear vision, leadership or training around healthy and sustainable food.

Walsall Council does not currently have policies on the local food offer or food supply on Council owned premises. Nor are there duties for contractors with the Council.

The National Food Plan recommended that Government procurement rules should be strengthened to require all public sector organisations to apply these standards so that taxpayer money is spent on healthy and sustainable food.

Bath and NE Somerset Council has introduced a dynamic procurement system which allows SMEs and local businesses to sell smaller quantities of fresh food and drink to public bodies⁵⁰. This has been successful in improving the local food offer. School Food Contract (bathnes.gov.uk)

Recommendations:



For Walsall Council, local public sector organisations, housing, schools and businesses I recommend that they:

- Set procurement standards for food on their own sites and for contracts they let
- Join with national groups (e.g. LGA, ADsPH) to lobby for the implementation of the national food plan and national obesity strategy.

Council Influence on advertising of high fat, salt, sugar food

It is known that children's chances of accessing healthy and nutritious depends strongly on where they grow up. In London work has been done to visualise a schoolchild's bus journey from home to school and track the number of unhealthy food outlets they are exposed to along the way. Link: Bus stops, junk food, and children's health - Impact on Urban Health

The work found that those living in areas with the highest rates of both deprivation and obesity in London also had the most exposure to junk food. Anecdotal evidence in Walsall suggests that the issue is similar within the borough.



Recommendations:

For Walsall Council, local public sector organisations, housing, schools and businesses I recommend that they:

- Restrict the advertising of high fat, sugar, salt foods in areas accessible to children. As part of this, specifically encourage Travel West Midlands to follow TfL's lead and restrict junk food advertising on transport.



An evaluation of the restriction on junk food advertising across the Transport for London (TfL) network in 2019.



It showed a result of:

- **94867** few cases of obesity
- **2857** less diabetes
- **1915** few CVD
- Save NHS **218M**⁵¹

Walsall Council has previously agreed a policy to restrict advertising of high fat, salt and sugar foods on council-owned land in areas accessible to children. However, there have been flagrant breaches of this.

Using planning processes to improve the local food environment

This report has shown the high number of fast-food outlets in Walsall. Local residents have spoken about the challenges for them in an environment such as this.

“And the problem is, we’re surrounded by a lot of the cheaper shops, which sell a lot of the more high fat- like Poundland places, you can go and buy four Yorkies- I don’t know, however many you get for a pound. Where, if you wanted to go and buy a packet of pears, it’ll cost you £2.40 if you go to Tesco or whatever”

“But within a few yards, you’ve got KFC. Just the other side of the chemists and the doctors, you’ve got Co-op. And they’ve got the pizza, haven’t they? There’s a pizza place. Then you’ve got the fish and chippy. Very, very close to one another”



It is however, within our hands to manage the expansion of fast-food outlets in Walsall. NICE recommends that Environmental Health Officers, Local Government Planning departments and Trading Standard Officers can take action by using planning policies to regulate the opening times of fast-food takeaways, particularly those close to schools. In addition, they suggest limiting the number of takeaways in any given area, and to help owners of takeaway foods improve the nutrition of the food offered⁵².

Local policy conditions can be used to restrict the operation of mobile food outlets within the vicinity of schools. For example, by prohibiting trading within 400 metres of school grounds from an hour before the start until an hour after the end of the school day.



A census of local planning authorities in England in 2017/18 showed that half of all local planning authorities had a policy to promote health by targeting takeaway food outlets. The most common planning policy was to have takeaway food outlet exclusion zones around locations attended by children and families (e.g. schools, parks and leisure centres).

The zones were mostly **400** metres, which has been considered a reasonable **5-minute** walk, or 800 metres which is a **10-minute** walk⁵³.



Recent changes in planning legislation in relation to the use class order and hot food takeaways provide opportunities for local authorities to make a difference to the borough’s food environment.

Some local authorities have utilised planning policy to limit the density of new fast-food takeaways. For example, Gateshead Council adopted a blanket ban approach. In 2015 to new applications for fast food takeaways, to improve health and tackle childhood obesity. Using the available planning policy, the Council managed a fall in fast food outlets as a percentage of all food providers compared to other boroughs in north east England.

The approach was:

- Restricting new fast-food outlets near schools
- Restricting new fast-food outlets if the density of existing outlets surpassed a set threshold of all retail outlets (no more than 20% of all outlets can be fast-food)
- Restricting new fast-food outlets if childhood obesity rates were above a threshold of 20% based upon data from National Childhood Measurement Programme for children aged 4-5 and 10-11.

Local planning officers have confirmed that these actions are possible in Walsall, with appropriate evidence.

Recommendation:

I recommend that Walsall Council develops planning policies which limit the expansion of hot food takeaways.



Introduction of food growing to planning policies

There are no powers to influence growing on land as planning is not required. As the Black Country Core Plan is now defunct (partners have withdrawn) a new local plan for Walsall will be drafted – scope will be completed for after the May 2023 elections. Significant investment has been made to Walsall from the Towns Fund and the Levelling up fund. The Regeneration team is leading plans for developing key areas in the borough. Ideas under consideration could include clarifying guidance for developers on making space for growing food in individual plots or communal areas.

New legal requirements are being proposed for biodiversity net gain. This could provide the opportunity to include food growing in new developments.

Recommendation:

Ensuring the availability of **water-filling** points at new public developments, such as the new railway stations across Walsall, is an important and visible commitment to supporting healthier food and drink for residents.





Food waste recycling & composting

As well as encouraging residents to eat healthier diets, and locally grown food, much more can be done to reduce food waste. This will help families and businesses but also support a sustainable environment.

Across Walsall we collect around **18,000 tonnes** of garden waste every year via the 'brown bins' and from the Council's Household Waste Recycling Centres. This waste is sent to a local contractor for composting at a facility in Staffordshire.



This waste is sent to a local contractor for composting at a facility in Staffordshire. The facility also takes in garden waste from other local authorities and larger producers of organic waste and has the capacity to process **90,000 tonnes** per annum.



The composted products are certified and sold commercially under a national supply contract. The finer compost has PAS100 approval and is sold for use in the production of 'growing media', which means it is in the bag of compost you can buy from the garden centre. The medium grade material is used in the agricultural, landscaping and horticultural industries, while any remaining oversize material is used to produce woodchip biomass which can be sold for fuel.

If Walsall was to produce more local compost, the ideal way would be for more people to home compost but it is likely to only ever be the keenest gardeners and allotment holders who do this. As garden waste is very seasonal, the Council only collects it for 36 weeks of the year. There is no real benefit (but an increased cost) to extending collection for the whole year.

No surveys of residents' views on composting have been undertaken in recent years.



Environment Bill Targets

National government has issued a 25 Year Environment Plan with goals to use resources from nature more sustainably and minimise waste.

There is a national target to achieve a **65% municipal recycling** rate by 2035, which includes material sent for composting. The Environment Bill 2021 mandates free garden waste collections by 2023/24. Walsall already meets this requirement.



There is also a requirement for the introduction of separate weekly food waste collections. Proposals are under discussion in Walsall and the Council is commencing a waste composition analysis project to define how much avoidable food waste is ending up in our general grey bins.

An important aspect of the Environment Bill is the power to set long-term, legally-binding environmental targets, with at least one within the area of Resource Efficiency and Waste Reduction.

Walsall Council is exploring how targets can help:

- increase resource productivity
- reduce the amount of 'residual' waste we generate

Recommendation:

- I recommend that Walsall Council completes and implements an ambitious plan to reduce food waste, in line with national requirements.



Influencing National policy

Recently (summer 2022), it has been announced that the government is delaying the introduction of the 9pm advertising ban for junk food due to 'cost of living considerations'.

A national policy on sugar in foods, the 'sugar tax' had been introduced in a limited way with some results. e.g. manufacturers reformulating food products with less sugar, but much more could be done. Walsall alone cannot influence this but, if working with other agencies to challenge national policy, change is possible.

Recommendation:

- I recommend that Walsall Council joins with national groups (e.g. LGA, ADsPH) to lobby for the implementation of the national food plan and national obesity strategy.



Update on Last Year's Recommendations

Looking after our own mental wellbeing



Stronger and more resilient communities



Local Organisations Working Together to Support Better Mental Wellbeing



	Recommendation Description	Actions
Looking after our own mental wellbeing		
1	Make a commitment to putting yourself first, even just for a while.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Promotion of the 8 Steps to Wellbeing Plans. Communication around Director of Public Health annual report, including a launch event and media release.
2	Find out where you get support if you need it.	<p>Implementation of:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> The “Thrive” wellbeing mobile unit No Wrong Door network Emotional help line Information hub available and being updated Mapping of existing wellbeing provision through a wellbeing outcomes framework project which will be accessible through an online portal. <p>The information hub is to link to the wellbeing outcomes framework.</p>
3	Make a (realistic) positive routine.	Promotion of 8 Steps to Wellbeing plans.
Stronger and more resilient communities		
1	Make a commitment to putting yourself first, even just for a while	Promotion of “Give them a call “ campaign to encourage people to call others.
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.	Communication and promotion activities on mental health awareness days and week.
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	Rewarding volunteering opportunities provided across Walsall including public sector (e.g., conservation volunteers through Walsall Council) and the community and voluntary sector.

Local Organisations Working Together to Support Better Mental Wellbeing

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	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Coproduction training made available through Walsall Together. • A range of coproduced projects/ intervention have been developed to improve mental health through the better mental health funded programme.
2	Implement a mental wellbeing impact assessment tool for use when undertaking any major plan, project or proposal at strategic board level	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The mental wellbeing impact tool has not been developed independently but is planned to be incorporated into the HEAT tool. • Alongside this, there is a wellbeing outcomes framework being developed through Walsall Together that will provide a consistent set of wellbeing outcome measures for Walsall.
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.	Full range of people and partners signed up to the Wellbeing Concordat, which is to be finalised and submitted.
4	Increase the number of organisations signing up to the No Wrong Door System and delivering wellbeing plans with service users	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The No Wrong Door partnership has 33 partners since it launched. • Engagement with 8 Steps to Wellbeing Plans have been incorporated in to tenders across the system e.g., Walsall Wellbeing Service, Public Health mental health services, Young People's health and wellbeing services.
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	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • See above communication and marketing of mental wellbeing which has taken place in line with events and national campaigns. • Mental wellbeing events taking place across Walsall to support partners to support others. • A number of targeted events to promote positive mental wellbeing directly to residents. This included a number of Tri-It physical activity events in the lead up to and following the Commonwealth Games.
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	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A range of partners have committed to delivering 8 Steps to Wellbeing plans including a young people's health and well-being service, POP, Wellbeing services (see below). Also, an information hub has been developed. • A wellbeing service is being tendered providing support across the fundamentals of wellbeing (e.g., employment, housing) and health behaviours (e.g., smoking, weight management).

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