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# Editor's Opinion

**A New Year sees some new faces, with Sarah Smith, currently Executive Director of Health and Social Care at Knowsley Council, taking over as Chief Executive at cash-strapped Warrington Borough Council.**

Sarah has extensive experience of adult services and oversaw a CQC "Good" rating of Knowsley's adult social care services in August 2025. With our town finances so stretched, with the council having to find another £90m of savings over the next four years, she faces a tough task.

This is at the same time as Labour councillors voting to increase their own allowances over the next three years, to bring themselves into line with other local authorities, while at the same time seeking to raise our council taxes above the 5 per cent cap.

Financial pressures also continue



at our local hospital which is in the process of merging with the Bridgewater NHS Trust, the organisation responsible for community health care needs.

Hopefully with the two organisations becoming one, it will not only save money but also see more joined up thinking – although until Warrington Borough Council gets a grip on social care, it is going to be a tough task.

Meanwhile, it was recently announced that Lynn resident and former MP Andy Carter, will take on a new role as Chair of Warrington & Halton Hospitals NHS Trust next April. The merger with Bridgewater will see it become North Cheshire

& Merseyside NHS Trust.

I look forward to reengaging with Mr Carter soon to discuss some of the issues facing our hospital.



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# The 19 Steps – restored following local fundraising



**A NEW set of 19 steps providing improved access to the footpaths on Pestfurlong Hill, Birchwood, Warrington has been completed following local fundraising.**

The steps, leading from Silver Lane towards the paths, replace earlier steps which were in need of repair.

In the past, individual steps had been replaced frequently and it became clear a full renewal was needed.

The Friends of Gorse Covert Mounds provided funding of £650, raised by selling willow sculptures and running stalls at the annual Birchwood Carnival as well as at Risley Moss Green Safari Days and Birchwood WI Christmas Fairs.

A further £150 was donated by the Friends of Birchwood Forest Park Community Café and the project was managed by The Woodland Trust.

Nigel Balding, chair of the Friends of Gorse Covert Mounds said: "It's

wonderful to show visitors how their support has helped bring about such welcome improvements.

"By coincidence, there are 19 steps – echoing the title of an award-winning romantic novel. Perhaps this will become a fitting local name, complementing the much-loved willow tunnel near the top of the hill, a favourite spot for family photos and sometimes even surrounded by a fairy ring.

"I'd like to say a big thank you to our Woodland Trust site manager Neil Oxley for organising the new steps, and to all at the Birchwood Forest Park Community Café for their donation and continued support; this café is a wonderful resource for the community."

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# From troubled teen to boxing – the inspiring turnaround story of Sarah Grant

**When Warrington Youth Zone (WYZ) opened its doors in 2022, its mission was to offer young people in Warrington a safe, supportive space – “somewhere to go, something to do and someone to talk to.”**

For 20-year-old amateur boxer Sarah Grant, that mission proved to be life-changing.

As a teenager, Sarah found herself on a difficult path. “I used to be in the wrong crowd,” she reflects. At around 15, she struggled with intense anxiety and poor mental health – But beneath the surface, she says she had “a big heart,” always trying to support other young people struggling with their own mental health.

One night changed everything. As Sarah puts it, a youth worker – later identified as Jack Taylor – saw “behind the smile” and recognised someone who desperately needed help.

That moment led to her being referred to the boxing programme at WYZ. “They always said I had a fire in my belly,” she recalls.

Boxing proved to be more than just a sport for Sarah – it became a lifeline. Under Jack’s mentorship she discovered discipline, purpose and self-worth.

That structured support and consistent presence helped shift her life away from danger and despair.

For the past five years, boxing has been central to Sarah’s identity. What started as a way to channel anxiety evolved into ambition.

Today, she trains regularly and

recently stepped into the ring for her first proper fight – a milestone she views as proof of how far she has come.

Although it ended in defeat it will not deter her ambition with her coach believing she has every chance of becoming a professional boxer in the future.

But the biggest transformation has been in her role within the Youth Zone. Once shy and overwhelmed, Sarah has blossomed into a confident young coach and mentor.

“I went from being this shy, withdrawn girl to being the one who’s putting back – being part of people’s lives,” she says. In doing so, she has become a living embodiment of WYZ’s mission.

Warrington Youth Zone offers a wide range of activities – from music, cooking and arts, to fully equipped gyms, climbing walls, dance and drama studios. Boxing and martial arts are among the core offerings aimed at building discipline, confidence, and resilience. The centre also runs targeted programmes – such as the 2023 “Train Like a Pro programme” – combining sport, personal development and mentoring for young people at risk of disengaging from school or community.

Support for WYZ remains strong and growing.

For Sarah, WYZ has been nothing short of a second chance. Once stuck in a cycle of anxiety and unhealthy influences, she now wakes up every day driven by purpose – training, mentoring others.

“I can’t describe how much it’s given me,” she says.

Her story stands as a testament to the power of community support, sport and consistent mentorship.

For Sarah, and for many others, Warrington Youth Zone isn’t just a facility – it’s a place that offers hope, healing and a future.



## Hotel used to house asylum seekers undergoing “dramatic” multi-million pound refurbishment

THE Daresbury Park Hotel and Spa near Warrington, which closed to the public to house asylum seekers, is currently undergoing a “dramatic” multi-million pound refurbishment.

The Daresbury Park Hotel housed asylum seekers for over five years under a contract with the Home Office until the government ended its contract with the hotel last Spring, as part of a wider effort to reduce the use of hotels for asylum accommodation. Residents were moved to other parts of the asylum estate.

The 4-star Elite Venue Selection hotel will include a new health club, coffee lounge and landscaped gardens.

Construction work is seeing all 228 bedrooms and bathrooms fully remodelled and significantly upgraded with stylish new fixtures and furnishings. The hotel’s bar and restaurant and its seven-suite conference facilities are also being stripped and renovated alongside the reception area and all communal spaces.

In addition, a new coffee lounge is being created as part of the work and the venue will benefit from a brand new health club comprising an indoor heated pool, steam room and spa pool plus a gym, squash court and fitness suite.

Daresbury Park Hotel is set to open in March 2026 and will form part of the Elite Venue

Selection portfolio – a collection of 15 luxurious hotel experiences in premium locations. The portfolio has been meticulously curated following a series of acquisitions to provide distinctive destinations for weddings, corporate gatherings, spa breaks and golf retreats.

Located in the Cheshire borough of Halton, Daresbury Park Hotel is just three minutes from the M56 motorway and a short drive from Warrington Bank Quay and Runcorn East train stations and Manchester Airport. The venue benefits from a 400-space car park and is pet-friendly.

Jane Heath, Head of Sales at Elite Venue Selection, commented: “We’re pleased to be bringing a completely refreshed and reinvigorated Daresbury Park Hotel to Halton and the North West. Our investment goes far beyond cosmetic transformation – we’re creating new spaces for guests to relax, recharge and connect, whether that’s in our health club, upgraded restaurant or the new coffee lounge. The scale of this project reflects our ambition at Elite to create a portfolio of modernised, high-quality hotel experiences for conferences, weddings and leisure breaks. We can’t wait to open our doors at Daresbury in March next year and showcase the completely new-look hotel to guests and the local community.”



# Mayor brings communities together



**AN Interfaith Peace Conference hosted at Warrington Town Hall brought together community leaders, faith representatives and members of the public for an evening focused on peace, unity and understanding.**

The event was organised and led by the Mayor of Warrington, Cllr Mo Hussain, who has previously run similar interfaith gatherings. The idea was first suggested by Cllr Kuldeep Dhillon and Cllr Balvir Dhillon, and developed by the Mayor to create a space for meaningful conversation across Warrington's diverse communities.

Faith representatives speaking at the conference included Archdeacon Simon (Church of England), Father Raymond (Catholic community), Harjinder Kaur (Sikh community), Ibrahim Syed (Muslim community), Michelle Hayward and October Wright (Jewish community), Dr. Priya (Hindu community) and Judy Ding (Mulan Culture Warrington).

Attendees also included Police & Crime Commissioner Dan Price, Deputy Lord Lieutenant Alan Davies,

crime writer Simon Michael, local school leaders, councillors, the Public Protection Team and many residents.

The evening featured thoughtful questions and open dialogue, with a shared message of rejecting division and strengthening community bonds.

Mayor Hussain said: "This event showed the strength, diversity and togetherness of our Warrington community. It was a powerful reminder that peace and unity must always be at the heart of who we are."

"Interfaith work is about using our differences for a shared purpose—peace and understanding—and it felt as though we achieved that."

The Mayor said he hopes the conference will lay the foundations for continued interfaith collaboration and future community-focused initiatives in Warrington.

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# STEM specialist announces major investment with new HQ

**Leading STEM education provider, Creative Hut, has announced plans for a new state-of-the-art office, as its international expansion continues.**

The Warrington-based company – which provides STEM education programmes to schools, community groups, and private organisations all over the world – has signed an agreement to lease two floors at The Hive in the town centre.

Work is already underway to refurbish the 4,500sq ft site, which will provide Creative Hut with space for more than a dozen staff, as well as a purpose-built STEM learning area and custom-made content facilities.

Gareth Boldsworth, CEO of Creative Hut, said, "This work marks a major milestone in Creative Hut's history as we look to expand and develop state-of-the-art educational facilities that will take our business to the next level.

"Not only will the new space provide world-class facilities to host STEM classes, but it will allow us to demonstrate our lesson plans to clients in a real-world environment. We're expanding internationally with demand for our in-school resources and CSR programmes all over the globe and we're incredibly

excited about this next chapter."

Founded in 2017, Creative Hut provides hands-on STEM resources, teacher training, and community-led education projects across the world. The company's mission is to make learning meaningful, build creativity and resilience, and leave a lasting legacy for future generations – and works with well known brands, including LEGO and Amazon.

Gareth added: "The move isn't just about more space – it's about creating a place where innovation, education, and collaboration come together.

"It will allow us to bring schools, teachers, and businesses together to inspire the next generation of problem-solvers."

Work to upgrade the building is expected to last until March 2026, with core members of staff starting to work out of the building from January.



## Local estate agency builds for growth



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WARRINGTON-based independent property specialist Belvoir Sales & Lettings is laying the groundwork for further growth following a change in ownership, after securing a six-figure funding package from HSBC UK.

Belvoir Warrington, now led by director Lauren Hughes, plans to expand its sales operations and strengthen its presence in the North West. The business is focused on expanding its sales team, including bringing in an in-house sales negotiator and lister, while outsourcing specific tasks to improve productivity and service delivery.

Since the HSBC UK funding was secured, the town's Sankey Street branch has already recorded a strong performance, with a eight per cent uplift in lettings year-on-year and 72 per cent of its portfolio now covered by a rent guarantee policy. Looking ahead, Belvoir aims to grow turnover by 10 per cent, representing a significant year-on-year increase.

This renewed growth strategy follows on from a recent acquisition of the estate agency branch from founders Gary and Amanda Pemberton.

As part of the acquisition, all seven members of Belvoir Warrington team were retained, safeguarding local jobs and

providing the foundation for future growth.

Lauren Hughes, Director at Belvoir, said: "This is an incredibly exciting new chapter for myself and Belvoir Warrington. With the support from HSBC UK, we've been able to position the business for sustainable growth, whilst also ensuring we continue to invest in our people. My focus is on expanding our sales offering, driving efficiency, and continuing to deliver the high-quality service our clients expect. We've already seen encouraging results, and I'm confident that the business will go from strength to strength."

Arti Patel, Client Manager at HSBC UK, added: "We're proud to support Lauren and the entire Belvoir Warrington team as they drive towards the next stage of growth. The branch's plans to expand and enhance operations reflect the strong potential of the local property market, and we look forward to seeing the business continue to flourish under Lauren's leadership."

Belvoir Group, one of the UK's largest independent property franchises, currently operates more than 170 franchise offices nationwide, and specialises residential lettings, property management, residential sales, and property-related financial services.



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## Spotlight on Local Business

# New Partnership and giving back at Barrow Electrical

By Laurence Barrow

**When I launched Barrow Electrical nearly 20 years ago, it was built on one simple principle: reliable electrical work with integrity and a personal touch.**

Over the years we've grown — not just into a trusted name for installations and facilities maintenance, but into a business with a growing vision for what modern building services can and should be. That's why I'm excited to announce that from this edition forward, our monthly page will spotlight an important new chapter in our journey.

This month's focus is our new partnership with Tyrrell Systems — a leading smart-building and controls specialist based in Leigh, Greater Manchester. Their founder, Ged Tyrrell, is someone I've become really good friends with over the past year, having worked together on many projects. Ged has more than two decades in business and nearly four decades of experience in the BMS and building-controls arena, and his leadership and expertise are genuinely exceptional. With deep knowledge spanning Building Management Systems (BMS), IoT, analytics and master-systems

integration, Tyrrell Systems brings a level of technical understanding that elevates everything we do.

By teaming up, Barrow Electrical and Tyrrell Systems unite hands-on electrical expertise with cutting-edge BMS and IoT infrastructure. In practical terms: for our facilities management and retail-site clients, that means fully integrated monitoring and control systems — from HVAC and lighting to security, energy management, and real-time analytics — all accessible through a streamlined platform. It's about bringing buildings into the 21st century: smarter, more efficient, easier to manage.

But beyond the technology, I want this partnership to reflect something deeper: our commitment to building long-term value and resilient relationships. Even as we expand services and embrace modern systems, we remain personally invested in delivering reliability, transparency and trust — the same values that founded Barrow Electrical.

That brings me to the other major focus of this month: community, empathy and giving back. In June this year, my wife was diagnosed with a stage-2 glioma — a form of brain cancer. She underwent major surgery in August and has faced some very challenging times since then. It's been a difficult few months for our family. But through it all, her courage — and the support of our medical team at the Walton Centre in the Northwest — has inspired me deeply.

As we head into the new year, I'm determined to channel that inspiration into action. That's why I'm organising an exclusive, invite-only corporate golf day in aid of Northwest Cancer Research. The event will take place at the stunning Mere Golf Course & Country Club — now undergoing a major £400 million renovation — and promises to be an unforgettable day on the greens, raising vital funds for cancer research and supporting families like ours who've faced similar journeys.

We already have nine large, well-known North West businesses confirmed for the day, so there are not many places left. If you're a North West business and would like a meaningful way to contribute

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Thank you for reading. I look forward to sharing more updates next month — about our projects, our people, and how we're building not just smarter buildings, but stronger communities.



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# Iconic Walton Hall stars in Netflix TV series



**WARRINGTON'S iconic Walton Hall and Gardens has taken centre stage in the highly anticipated Netflix and AMC series *Talamasca: The Secret Order*.**

Set within the acclaimed Anne Rice Universe, which also features other hit shows such as *The Mayfair Witches* and *Interview with the Vampire*, the series recently landed on Netflix.

The story focuses on talented law student Guy Anatole (Nicholas Denton) whose life is upended when the secret society contacts him.

Discovering an extraordinary gift, Guy joins the ancient organisation to unravel a supernatural mystery and confront his family's dark past.

The show features a star-studded cast with *Downton Abbey*'s Elizabeth McGovern playing Helen and *Prison Break*'s William Fichtner as enigmatic vampire Jasper.

Filming took place at Walton Hall in October last year, with the venue transformed into the 'New York Motherhouse' for episode one of the

series.

Scenes were shot in the concert room, bar area, and along the Hall's iconic staircase, bringing a touch of Cheshire charm to the heart of New York.

This remarkable transformation underscores Walton Hall's growing reputation as a premier filming destination, having previously hosted productions such as CBBC's *Something Special*.

Cllr Tony Higgins, cabinet member for climate change, sustainability and the environment at Warrington Borough Council, said: "We're thrilled to see Walton Hall showcased on an international platform.

"The collaboration with AMC was an incredible opportunity to highlight the beauty and history of our venue, and we hope to welcome the team back for a second series!"

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# College thrilled to receive prestigious Employer of the Year award



**WARRINGTON & Vale Royal college has been awarded Employer of the Year: Platinum at the prestigious Investors in People awards, an accolade that reflects the college's unwavering commitment to its staff and its recent achievement of Platinum status.**

The achievement showcases the dedication and hard work of the college's staff who have driven this success, positioning Warrington & Vale Royal College as one of only four Further Education colleges in the country to hold Platinum status, and the only college in the country to receive the Employer of the Year Award.

At the annual Investors in People awards ceremony, CEO Paul Decoy shared a powerful reminder: "When you invest in people, everything gets better." Warrington & Vale Royal College's success is testament to that philosophy.

Feedback from the recent Investors in People Platinum assessment praised the college as a "vibrant, high-performing organisation where people are deeply aligned to purpose, motivated by values, and committed to continuous improvement." Assessors noted that the college has "created something exceptional – a culture where people are empowered, performance is owned at every level, and innovation thrives." This insight came after a rigorous accreditation process, including a college-wide survey and many staff interviews.

These combined achievements celebrate years of strategic investment in professional development. Flagship initiatives such as the Aspiring Leaders and Career Progression programmes have driven internal promotions, strengthened operational efficiency, and kept staff turnover significantly below the sector average.

The impact extends beyond staff development. Student success has soared, with satisfaction rates reaching 95% and achievement rates climbing to nearly 92%. These results demonstrate the strong alignment between the college's

people strategy and organisational goals, and the tangible benefits of workforce investment.

For Warrington & Vale Royal College, this award is more than worthy recognition. It is reaffirmation of its commitment to excellence, collaboration, and growth. As a proud part of the Investors in People community, the college firmly upholds the highest standards of leadership and development, because when people thrive, so does the organisation.

Tracy Callaghan, Director of Human Resources, commented: "We are immensely proud to have achieved Platinum status for the first time and, on top of that, to have been awarded Employer of the Year. This success is a direct result of our commitment to ensuring our people thrive in their working life, which is what our involvement with Investors in People has always been about."

Echoing this is college Principal and CEO, Nichola Newton. She says: "We are incredibly proud of these remarkable achievements. They are a testament to the hard work and dedication of our entire college community, reflecting our commitment to creating an environment where both staff and students can thrive. We couldn't be more delighted to see these college-wide efforts recognised on a national stage."

"Winning Employer of the Year: Platinum is more than an award. It reflects the college's vision and the dedication of its people. Notably, it comes just twelve months after the college's best ever Ofsted rating of 'Good with Outstanding Features' – underscoring that Warrington & Vale Royal is not only an exceptional place to work, but also an exceptional place to study."

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# Mascot chosen for popular Stockton Heath Festival

**LOCAL** primary school children were invited to imagine a character which could be developed into a mascot for Stockton Heath Festival 2026 and beyond.

The pupils were asked to create a friendly personality which represented both the Festival and the local area – and given the annual Festival aims to provide 'Something for Everyone' the mascot was also to be universal and inclusive.

Schools submitted their ideas anonymously, which were appraised based on the idea alone and not the level of drawing skill.

Festival volunteer organisers had the difficult task of shortlisting

the ideas, and ultimately choosing the one which they felt was full of impact. Peter, the Festival Volunteer Coordinator says: "It was tricky to choose given the amazing creativity and thought that had gone into these mascot sketches. The talent of the children shone through, each sharing their vision of what the mascot could be. The characters were so varied including bears, dogs, squirrels and foxes, and those which stood out really told the local story and included

activities the Festival is known for. The winner was full of originality and personality, and jumped off the page straight away, making us smile."

Peter adds: "Having visited Stockton Heath and St Monica's primary schools to congratulate the children who created the Winner and Highly Commended sketches, I was delighted to hear they enjoyed creating their mascots and I would like to thank them all and the schools for making such a fantastic effort."

The winning idea has been developed into the final mascot to represent the popular Stockton Heath Festival from 2026 and beyond. Can you spot 'Heathy' (which reflects the area and also means vitality) hiding in a few shops in the heart of the village from Thursday 4th December to Sunday 11th January 2026?

To recognise the talent and variety of ideas the children put forward, the school submissions have now been invited to take part in the 2026 Stockton Heath Festival in July. This will be a dedicated exhibition showcasing each mascot sketch and stories put forward by the primary school children.

General enquiries contact: [Hello@StocktonHeathFestival.co.uk](mailto:Hello@StocktonHeathFestival.co.uk)

For the latest updates please follow Stockton Heath Festival on social media.



Lila Hazeldine (Highly Commended, Teddy), Eleanor Simmers (Winner and Highly Commended for Arty) from Stockton Heath Primary



Highly Commended – Grace Freeman, Queralt Oliveras-Santandreu, Emily Ebbrell from St Monica's Catholic Primary School



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# Call to Save Woolston Neighbourhood Hub passed unanimously by council

**A motion to Save Woolston Neighbourhood Hub was passed unanimously at the Full meeting of Warrington Borough Council.**

A large number of protesters braved the rain to make their feelings known outside the Parr Hall before the meeting.

After much debate, the council unanimously agreed a Motion proposed by Councillor Tynan and seconded by Cllr. Stuart Mann

Thanking campaigners who turned out in force, Local Cllr. Rob Tynan said: "Last night's Full Council sent a clear message: Woolston Hub must be saved. My motion to save our hub was passed unanimously, now it's time for this Labour-run Council to get on with setting out steps to reopening and making sure the consultation is open and transparent.

"Residents have waited long enough. The Hub is vital to our community, our health, and our local services. That's why I will keep holding the Council to account until we see a real plan, proper engagement, and firm action to reopen the facility using any means necessary.

"I'll continue to fight for Woolston and make sure local voices are heard loud and clear. And while this motion is a big step forward, the fight isn't over. I urge everyone to keep signing the petition as it strengthens our case and shows just how much local people care about

this vital community asset."

Cllr Mann added: "To have this motion passed is a really, really positive first step BUT as Rob said last night this is not the end, it is only the start.

"Much more needs to be done to secure the future of the 'Hub We Love' and moreover ALL leisure services across Warrington.

"Whilst the conversation of how we got to this point is a very valid one I think at least for today we should celebrate what was achieved last night.

"Now the hard work begins!"

The motion: Woolston Neighbourhood Hub has long been a central part of local life, providing access to a swimming pool, library, gym, squash courts and community spaces. Situated alongside the local GP practice, it plays an important role in supporting health, wellbeing, learning and social connection. Since its closure in September 2025 due to water-safety and structural concerns, residents have been left without access to many valued services. The ongoing uncertainty has understandably caused frustration and concern about the future of the site. It is widely recognised that the challenges facing community facilities are complex and that

difficult decisions may be required. However, any decisions about Woolston's future must be shaped openly and with meaningful involvement from local people. Woolston is a growing community with evolving needs, and long-term planning should reflect that. This Council resolves to:

1. Acknowledge the full community value of the Woolston Hub, including its contribution to health, leisure, learning and social wellbeing.
2. Commit to a clear and transparent consultation on the future of the site, ensuring that Woolston residents can participate fully.

3. Explore and publish all realistic options for repairing, reusing or replacing the facility, supported by clear and accessible costings.

4. Ensure continued access to local library services, fitness facilities and community meeting space, either within the existing site or nearby.

5. Work collaboratively with local GP services to understand how any future proposals may affect patient access and primary care provision.

6. Provide a detailed update to Full Council within three months, setting out progress, findings and proposed next steps.

For details of the campaign via [savewoolstonhub.uk](http://savewoolstonhub.uk)



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Tony shares the excitement, "It's fantastic to work with Craig again. Love Carpets offers better prices, quicker turnaround—fitting within two days—and exceptional service. I'm amazed at what an independent business can offer."

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# Chambers Fletcher Solicitors

## Divorce Column

By Peter Wilkinson

Divorce Lawyer at Chambers Fletcher Solicitors

### Divorce – Matters of Power, Control and Abuse

Family solicitors are increasingly dealing with separations in circumstances involving patterns of controlling, manipulative or emotionally abusive behaviour. These cases cut across all backgrounds and are far more common than many people realise.

Unlike physical abuse, emotional abuse and coercive control often leave no visible marks. They may involve persistent belittling, gaslighting, isolation from friends or family, financial restriction, monitoring of movements or the gradual erosion of a person's confidence and self-belief. Victims may begin to doubt their own perceptions, minimise what is happening, or feel incapable of making decisions without fear of repercussions.

The law now recognises coercive and controlling behaviour as a serious and harmful form of abuse. It is not about occasional arguments; it is characterised not by conflict but by dominance. Further, such abuse does not always end when the relationship does. In some relationships the control continues and might even escalate after separation – played out through children, finances, relentless communication or the manipulation of the legal processes – perhaps by causing delay or refusal to engage constructively.

There has also been a marked increase in cases involving extreme levels of self-focus, lack of accountability, narrative shifting and refusal to compromise – behaviours often associated with narcissistic traits. While 'narcissism' is not a legal expression the associated conduct frequently presents very real challenges in resolving financial or child-related arrangements. These behaviours can make achieving negotiated outcomes extremely difficult and turn otherwise straightforward divorces into prolonged disputes.

Not every difficult breakup is abusive, of course. However, where fear, imbalance of power or psychological harm are present, approaches that assume equality between the parties are likely to be inappropriate and ineffective. In these circumstances a firmer and more robust approach is likely to be required to address and manage the imbalance of power and dominance at play.

Early legal advice can be critical in these cases. Identifying controlling behaviour at an early stage helps ensure that the right approach is adopted from the outset.

If you feel you may need family law advice, we can help.

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# MP talks Democracy and Parliament with Cubs and Scouts



**WARRINGTON** North MP Charlotte Nichols joined 1st/14th Warrington West Cubs and 1st Croft Rangers to take part in their UK Parliament Week events.

UK Parliament Week (UKPW) is an annual event, spreading the word about what Parliament is, what it does and how you can get involved. It's a great way to find out new things about UK Parliament or be reminded of things you might've forgotten!

Last year over 2.4 million people took part in over 17,000 activities in every nation and region of the UK, and countries all over the world. UKPW runs from the 24th till the 30th of November each year and includes a wide range of activities for young people to take part in.

- discussing issues and holding votes
- lively debates and quizzes
- creating petitions
- themed assemblies and school council elections
- baking, crafting, and colouring
- meeting their MP, a member of the Lords, local councillors, mayors, MLAs, MSS or MSPs – either in person or virtually

Ms Nichols MP said, "As part of UK Parliament Week, it's been brilliant to join 1st/14th Warrington West Cubs and 1st Croft Rangers to engage with scouts and guides around how Parliament work, and to hear from them about what young people want to see in our community and in the country."

"I am always impressed with how switched-on our young people are, and we covered a huge range of topics in their questions on everything from bus services, leisure facilities, online safety, health and wellbeing, and the environment. I was also very amused to be asked

by one of the cubs about the Prime Minister getting told-off by a head teacher on a recent school visit for doing the "six seven" meme – showing they are clearly following the news!"

"Thank you for inviting me along and a huge thank you to all the volunteers who give their time every week to help run these groups which make such a massive difference to young people's lives."

Charlotte Bond of the 1st Croft Rangers said: "It was truly empowering for our members to sit down with a woman leading in Parliament and talk openly about community, equality, and why it matters that girls feel confident to speak out. For many of our members this was the first time meeting an MP in person, and it showed just how important it is for young women to see themselves represented in local politics."

"This term we've been working through the "Take Action" theme on our programme which encourages girls to get involved in social action on topics that matter to them. UK Parliament Week and Charlotte's visit inspired them to realise that politics is not some distant world, it's about real decisions that affect our communities, our future and our voices."

Warrington's Cubs and Scout groups are always looking for more support and if you think this is something you would like to help with please visit the links below.

[www.girlguiding.org.uk/get-involved/become-a-volunteer/register-to-volunteer](http://www.girlguiding.org.uk/get-involved/become-a-volunteer/register-to-volunteer) or [www.volunteeringopportunities.scouts.org.uk](http://www.volunteeringopportunities.scouts.org.uk)

Hi there!

Happy New Year! One month into 2026 and we're already busy down at Ameritz. Starting the year as we mean to go on!

## New Releases for 2026



**GONDOLAS** celebrated the release of their first studio single with us last month. *Last Laugh* has been eagerly awaited after the success of their summer single, *Sharpshtooter* reached over 100K streams on Spotify. The band played their single at a launch party at Tunnel

(formally EBGBs) in Liverpool on 13th December with support bands Idyllic, Tender Claws and Salvant. Their next single is due to release early 2026 and you can catch them live again at Manchester's Night & Day Cafe on Sunday 1st February.



The long-awaited debut album from The Lower Angel Band is finally here! *'All In'* is released on Friday 16th January, to be followed by the album release show at Warrington Irish Club on Saturday 17th. We can't wait to see you all there, and if you still haven't got your ticket,

grab one quick! You don't want to miss it! If you can't make it, no need to fret! The Lower Angel Band are taking the live music scene by storm this year - so keep your eyes peeled for the announcement of their 2026 tour dates.

Another 2026 project in the mix, is the debut album from Liverpool singer, George Gallagher. You may recognise George from the 2025 BBC series *'This City is Ours'* where he sang *'The House of Bamboo'*. (If you haven't seen the Live at Ameritz version with Mike Smith and his band across our socials, go and check it out!) The team have been over to Liverpool to film something super exciting with George...and let's just say, we've been using our new drone (Ameritz' favourite new toy)! We can't wait to show you what we've been working on - George really is one to watch in 2026.

## Luna Drift in the studio.

The post-punk indie-rock Luna Drift are a band we worked with on Live at Ameritz earlier in 2025. They released two live singles with us, *Callback* and *Lost in the Echoes*. The four-piece Manchester band are in the studio this month recording their long awaited first album. We're all excited to hear the album completed and can't wait to share it with everyone. Look out for their releases and upcoming live shows.



Warrington's own The Ambersons are also another band with an album coming in 2026! After releasing a Live at Ameritz version of *99*, the band signed an album contract with us and have been working hard in the studio throughout the last few months of 2025. There is no release date yet but if you want to see The Ambersons live you can catch them at Friar Court's new venue, Brickhaus on Saturday 7th February. They are supported by local bands Belmont & The Stocks and Containers.

Lastly, if you've been into the Warrington music scene for a while, you'll probably know singer and guitarist, Peter Price. You'll be glad to know that Peter's albums are now live on digital platforms, including Spotify, Amazon and Apple. Stream and enjoy!

2026 is an exciting year for Ameritz and we can't wait to share everything with you. Keep an eye on our socials for announcements, release dates and ticket links.



# Plan for new all-through school approved despite opposition

**PLANS to create a new "all-through" school catering for pupils aged 2-16 at Padgate have been approved by Warrington planners, despite opposition from local residents.**

The decision by Warrington Borough Council Development Management Committee to approve plans for all-through school at the Bruche Primary Academy site in Seymour Drive, Padgate, has been welcomed by Warrington Primary Academy Trust (WPAT).

A protest petition signed by 79 residents and 14 individual letters of objection had been received and the local parish council had also objected. But planning officers recommended the scheme be approved.

The school – designed to help cope with a growing shortfall of secondary school places in the borough – involves an expansion of the existing Bruche Primary School.

It will mean the demolition of the existing southern block of buildings, which are no longer used, the erection of a new early years wing and an extension of the existing primary school.

Welcoming the decision, Bernard Clarke, Chief Operations Officer at Warrington Primary Academy Trust (WPAT) said: "We of course welcome the planning committee's decision to approve our plans for a new all-through school on the site of Bruche Primary Academy in Seymour Drive, Padgate.

"We are now looking forward to

making a start on clearance work on the site in early 2026 before construction starts.

"Our aim is to welcome our first pupils into the school in September 2026. This is an exciting additional offer to families in Warrington, with Bruche Primary Academy developing into Bruche Academy School, the first all-through school in the borough.

"Bruche Academy will provide the community with a much-needed boost to secondary school places over the next few years – meeting a demand identified by council plans.

"We understand that this development has caused some concern to nearby residents but through a process of public consultations we have listened and made alterations to our original plans so that we can ensure the new all-through school will be a good neighbour.

"We have taken care in our proposals to minimise impacts from the new building, siting it as far away from existing properties as possible and beyond the recommended distance.

"The plans include planting trees and shrubbery along our border to increase the privacy of residents and minimising windows

overlooking gardens.

"Car parking has also been significantly expanded, with increased pedestrian space, allowing cars on site so that we can reduce impact on street parking. The site will retain multiple entrances and staggered school start times.

"The new building will accommodate a maximum of just 60 Year 7 students on its scheduled

opening in September 2026 and will only reach its full complement of 300 students five years later. The site's new sports and cultural facilities will also be available for use by the community.

"Bruche Primary Academy has an exemplary reputation for academic performance and behaviour and these high standards will continue to apply to the new all-through school."



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# Obesity: A chronic disease we must start treating seriously

By Dr Stephen Coogan MBChB MRCGP, Founder and CEO, myGP Clinic

**January is the point in the year when many people take stock of their health after a season of over-eating, and obesity inevitably comes into sharper focus. Too often the discussion is wrapped in blame, willpower and personal failure. This view is outdated. Obesity is a chronic, biologically driven disease with well-understood mechanisms, and it carries serious long-term risks to health if left unmanaged.**

We now know that bodyweight regulation is governed by complex systems involving gut hormones, brain signalling, metabolism and genetics. These systems are designed to defend body fat, not shed it. This is why so many people experience weight-cycling or "yo-yoing" despite working extremely hard. They lose weight, then regain it because the underlying biology pushes back. This is not a lack of discipline; it is the natural behaviour of a chronic disease. Stigma is not only unfair but clinically harmful, as it discourages people from seeking proper help.

Obesity significantly increases the risk of cardiovascular disease, type 2 diabetes, fatty liver disease, sleep apnoea and several cancers. It is not about appearance or vanity; it is about reducing the diseases that shorten life expectancy and diminish quality of life.

Effective management requires a structured approach built on four pillars: nutrition, physical activity, behavioural support and,

when appropriate, medication. Sustainable dietary change matters far more than short-lived restrictive diets. Physical activity should be realistic, safe and progressive. Behavioural support helps consolidate habits over the long term rather than relying on bursts of motivation that inevitably fade.

Medication can be transformative for many people when used correctly, and the evidence for modern anti-obesity medicines is strong. After eight years of prescribing these treatments, we have observed consistent, safe and meaningful weight reduction when they are used under proper supervision. However, these medicines are powerful and must be treated with the same caution as any other prescription therapy.

A growing problem is the widespread availability of counterfeit or illegally sourced weight-loss drugs. These products often contain incorrect ingredients, unsafe doses, or no active medication at all, and they pose

serious risks. No-one should ever obtain obesity medication online or through unregulated vendors. Treatment must be supervised by a qualified GP who understands the patient's medical history, monitors progress and manages dosing safely.

At My GP Clinic, we take a non-judgemental, medically grounded

approach to obesity care. We aim to inform, support and guide people towards long-term health rather than temporary fixes. January is a sensible moment to take action, but tackling obesity is a year-round commitment. With expert oversight and a structured plan, meaningful and lasting change is entirely achievable.



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# Major investment to expand local SEND provision



**A major investment to expand SEND provision in Warrington, including a £675,000 investment at Birchwood High School, has been approved by Warrington Borough Council.**

The significant package of capital investment aims to expand and improve school facilities across the borough, supporting children with Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND). The investment also aims to tackle children being sent out of the borough for SEND placements at high costs.

At its meeting on Monday, 8 December, the cabinet agreed to increase investment to £675,000 for a new designated provision at Birchwood High School. This facility will create 24 specialist places for students with Social, Emotional, and Mental Health (SEMH) needs – the first secondary provision of its kind in Warrington.

This investment forms part of the council's wider strategy to meet rising demand for Education, Health and Care Plans (EHCPs). By enhancing local provision, the council aims to ensure children can access high-quality education within their own community, reducing the need for long journeys to out-of-area placements.

Cllr Matt Smith, Cabinet Member for Children's, Families and Education, said: "This is a vital investment in our children's futures. We are seeing a significant rise in demand for specialist support, and it is our absolute priority to ensure that Warrington children can access high-quality education in settings that meet their specific needs.

"I am particularly pleased that we are moving forward with the

new provision at Birchwood High School. Creating 24 new places for students with social, emotional, and mental health needs within a mainstream secondary setting will be transformative for those young people, allowing them to learn alongside their peers and stay connected to their local community."

The cabinet report highlighted ten active schemes designed to increase capacity and improve accessibility in schools. In addition to Birchwood High, investments include:

- Green Lane Special School – Reconfiguring the main building to create additional classrooms, break-out spaces, and installing a new lift to increase capacity.
- Gorse Covert Primary School – Creating a new designated provision classroom with a sensory space and outdoor learning area.
- Meadowside Primary School – Refurbishing classrooms to include regulation spaces.
- Padgate High School – Improving accessibility with new toilet and shower facilities and creating an additional classroom.
- Statham and Saint Vincent's Primary Schools – Adaptations to create new designated provision classes.

The new provision at Birchwood High School is expected to open in 2026, with construction works scheduled to commence in the spring term.



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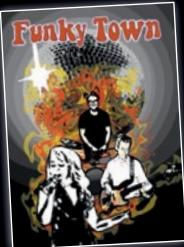
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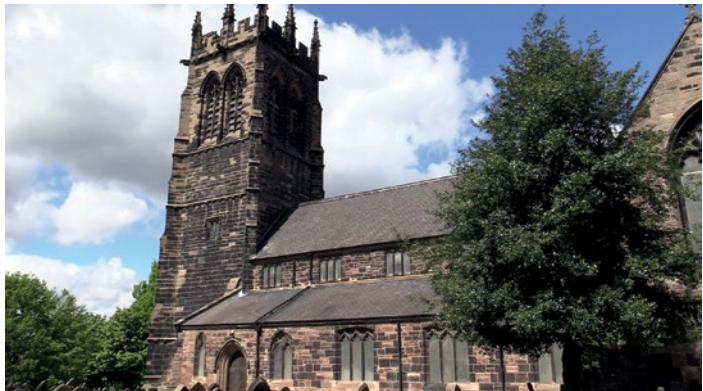


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**Spotlight on Local History with James Balme**

## A wander around Lymm Dam and historic St. Mary's Church



**The village of Lymm stands at the eastern end of the borough of Warrington and is renowned for its beautiful picturesque village centre with shops, restaurants and the quaint lower dam that runs through it.**

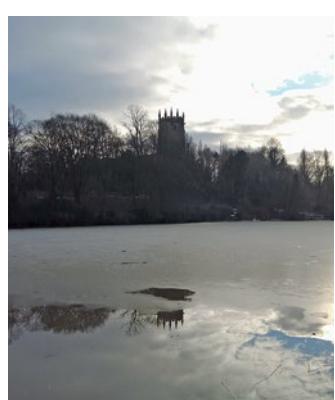
But if you take a walk along the 'Dingle' that runs alongside the lower dam you will eventually come to Lymm Dam and the ancient church of St. Mary's standing high on a sandstone outcrop. First built in the 11th century the church has been a place of worship for around a thousand years and today we see the current church having been rebuilt between 1850 to 1852 based on a design by John Dobson of Newcastle, however during the construction of the new church gun powder was used to destroy the original 15th century nave and aisle, something that today would be considered a criminal act. The site that the church stands upon today is considered to be one of the oldest religious sites in the north of Cheshire.

Directly below the church can be found Lymm Dam much used in Victorian times and today as an area of natural beauty and a very popular area for walking and relaxing. Originally it was Bradley Brook and it ran through the sandstone gorge close to the church. But in 1824 Lymm Dam was created as part of the construction of a new turnpike road. This allowed for the sandstone gorge to be flooded creating the lake we see today and being filled from the brook and natural springs. The area around the dam was part of the Lymm Hall estate. Water from the main dam ran down into the lower dam in the village centre with this being the mill pond that fed the nearby cornmill. Below the cornmill the flowing stream gained the name of Slitten Brook reflecting the nearby slitting mill in the village. There is no doubt that the construction of the dam in 1824 was a pivotal moment in the industrial landscape of Lymm providing much needed extra waterpower for the mills in the area. This in turn led to the creation of wealth for the mill owners who had built these structures. In 1848 a wealthy Manchester cotton merchant named George Dewhurst built a large mansion on land in

Lymm high above the Dam. The industrial past of Lymm can still be clearly seen in the landscape today including the remains of the slitting mill that was used for slitting and rolling iron bars providing many local jobs in the area. By 1800 this had been transformed into a textile mill before closing for the last time in 1825.

A visit to Lymm Dam to enjoy the beautiful landscape and explore the ancient church of St. Mary is a must and why not take a walk down the Dingle following the course of the stream as it winds slowly through the trees towards the lower dam in the village centre.

My film 'A History Walk around St. Mary's Church' can be viewed for free along with more great features and over 700 history videos covering Warrington and surrounds. Simply visit my youtube history channel today. [Youtube.com/@tvpresenter4history](https://www.youtube.com/@tvpresenter4history)



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## Autumn Budget 2025: Tax Rises, Threshold Freezes and a Shift in Incentives

After months of speculation, the Chancellor has unveiled the government's Autumn 2025 Budget, setting out a package of tax and spending measures aimed at supporting economic growth while addressing ongoing cost-of-living pressures.

In her statement, the Chancellor described the measures as "fair and necessary choices to deliver on our promise of change." In practice, the Budget relies heavily on continued fiscal drag, targeted tax rises, and a rebalancing of incentives for investment and business growth. Below is a summary of the key announcements affecting individuals and businesses.

### Income tax and national insurance

The freeze on income tax thresholds has been extended yet again. The personal allowance (£12,570), higher-rate threshold (£50,270) and additional-rate threshold (£125,140), together with equivalent National Insurance Contribution (NIC) thresholds, will now remain frozen until 5 April 2031. Scottish income tax rates and bands will continue to differ.

The NICs secondary threshold of £5,000 will also be frozen until 2031. In addition, salary-sacrificed pension contributions above £2,000 per annum will become subject to employer and employee NICs from 6 April 2029, reducing the attractiveness of higher pension sacrifice arrangements.

Tax relief for non-reimbursed homeworking expenses will be removed from 6 April 2026, ending a long-standing claim for many

employees.

Dividend taxation will increase from 6 April 2026, with rates rising from 8.75% to 10.75% for basic-rate taxpayers and from 33.75% to 35.75% for higher-rate taxpayers. From 6 April 2027, savings income UK-wide and property income in England, Wales and Northern Ireland will also see a two-percentage-point rise, taking rates to 22%, 42% and 47%.

Voluntary Class 2 NICs will be abolished for individuals living abroad, while the dividend tax credit for non-UK residents will be removed from April 2026. Image rights payments linked to employment will be treated as taxable employment income from 6 April 2027, subject to income tax and both employer and employee NICs.

Further changes include the removal of post-departure trade profits provisions in temporary non-residence rules from April 2026, and a reduction in income tax relief on Venture Capital Trust (VCT) investments to 20% from the same date.

### Capital gains tax

Several changes will affect business owners and succession planning. CGT relief on qualifying disposals to employee ownership trusts (EOTs) will reduce from 100% to 50% for disposals on or after 26 November 2025.

Incorporation relief will no longer be automatic and must be actively claimed from 6 April 2026. Anti-avoidance rules covering share exchanges and company reconstructions will also be tightened

from 26 November 2025.

### Inheritance tax

The inheritance tax nil-rate band (£325,000), residence nil-rate band (£175,000), and the new combined £1 million allowance for agricultural property relief (APR) and business property relief (BPR) will now remain frozen until 5 April 2031.

The combined £1 million APR and BPR allowance will be transferable between spouses and civil partners. In addition, inheritance tax charges on relevant property trusts settled by former non-domiciled individuals will be capped at £5 million from 6 April 2025.

### Other personal tax measures

A new High Value Council Tax Surcharge will apply to English residential properties valued at £2 million or more from 1 April 2028, ranging from £2,500 to £7,500 per year and uprated annually by CPI.

The cash ISA allowance for those under 65 will reduce from £20,000 to £12,000 from April 2027, although the overall ISA allowance will remain unchanged. New London Stock Exchange listings will be exempt from Stamp Duty Reserve Tax for three years, and a new settlement opportunity will be introduced for individuals with outstanding loan charge liabilities.

The scope of higher-rate Air Passenger Duty will extend to all private jets over 5.7 tonnes from 1 April 2027.



Thomas Coyne and Stuart Barr

### Business taxes

For businesses, the Chancellor announced a new 40% first-year capital allowance from 1 January 2026, alongside a reduction in the main writing-down allowance from 18% to 14%.

The 100% first-year allowances for zero-emission cars and EV charge-points will be extended to 2027, while historic Shadow ACT restrictions will be relaxed from April 2026.

Transfer pricing, permanent establishment and Diverted Profits Tax rules will be simplified from January 2026, with new international transaction reporting requirements introduced from 2027.

Other measures include VAT changes affecting private hire vehicles and disabled vehicle schemes, a new VAT relief for business donations to charity, expansion of the EMI scheme, and increased fundraising limits under EIS and VCT.

Overall, the Autumn 2025 Budget continues the trend of raising revenue through threshold freezes and targeted tax increases, while selectively encouraging investment and business growth. For individuals and business owners alike, forward planning will be critical in navigating the changes ahead.

### A Happy and Prosperous 2026, Everyone!

As we head into the New Year, we start with dealing with the 31st January self-assessment deadline and payments that are also due by 31st January 2026.

**WatkinsonBlack** have considerable experience in all areas of taxation and business services. This includes providing a very cost-effective **payroll bureau service**, as well as assisting to ensure compliance with the latest **Making Tax Digital** legislation. If you are **employed or self-employed** either as a sole trader, partnership or limited company and want to arrange a **no-obligation initial meeting on any taxation or accounting matter** then please contact us by telephone on **01925 413210** or by e-mail to **info@watkinsonblack.com**. Please note that these ideas are intended to inform rather than advise and you should always obtain professional advice before taking any action.

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# Rising teenage star signs five-year deal at Wolves



**RISING** teenage star half-back Ewan Irwin has signed a five-year contract at Warrington Wolves, committing his future to the club until the end of the 2030 season.

Irwin is regarded as one of the most exciting young playmakers in the country. He made three senior appearances in 2025, including his debut as 18th man against St Helens, becoming the club's third youngest debutant of the Super League era. He finished the year with a standout performance away to Hull KR, providing two try assists on his first full senior appearance.

Irwin captained the Wire's Academy during their unbeaten season, delivering a Man of the Match display in the 32-18 Grand Final victory over Leeds. Across the campaign, he scored 6 tries and 66 goals in 13 Academy matches, and added 3 tries and 38 goals in 9 Reserves appearances. His outstanding year saw him named both Academy Player of the Year and Players' Player of the Year.

He also impressed on the club's recent Academy tour of Australia, producing impressive performances against Penrith Panthers, Gold Coast Titans, and a New South Wales representative side – displays that caught the attention of several big NRL clubs.

The Club are proud to have secured Irwin's long-term commitment, retaining one of Super League's brightest young talents.

Ewan is proudly sponsored by WN7 Outreach.

Ewan Irwin said: "I'm glad to have committed my future to the Club and I'm really excited for the challenges ahead.

"It's a competitive environment, and that's exactly where you want

to be. The Academy and Reserves level is very strong, but this is a step up now into the first team, and I'm looking forward to what's next.

"I want to take it game by game, put my best foot forward, and see where it takes me."

Warrington Wolves Head Coach Sam Burgess said: "I'm really excited Ewan's committed his future to the club for the next five years. He's shown great potential and leadership with the U18s and Reserves last year. Hopefully, he continues with his progression next season and beyond. Above all else, he's an outstanding young man with a bright future ahead of him."

Meanwhile, the Wolves have also confirmed the signing of forward Kelepi Tanginoa on a two-year deal, with a club option of a further 12 months.

The forward joins the club from Hull KR after a successful two-year stint at Sewell Group Craven Park, where he scored 16 tries in 59 appearances.

Tanginoa joins Liam Byrne and Toafofoa Sipley as another powerful addition to Sam Burgess' forward pack for 2026.

Before his time with the Robins, the 31-year-old scored 22 tries in 88 games for Wakefield Trinity and enjoyed spells with Parramatta Eels, North Queensland Cowboys and Manly Sea Eagles in the NRL.

Kelepi will take squad number 34 and be proudly sponsored by Lewis Bros Ice Cream.



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**Monday 29th DECEMBER: CLOSED**

**Tuesday 30th DECEMBER: OPEN 09:30am-5:30pm**

**Wednesday 31st DECEMBER & Thursday 1st JANUARY: CLOSED**

**From Friday 2nd JANUARY: RE-OPEN usual hours (as per below)**

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