

Agenda

Corporate and Communities Overview and Scrutiny Panel

Friday, 29 September 2023, 1.30pm
County Hall, Worcester

All County Councillors are invited to attend and participate

This document can be provided in alternative formats such as Large Print, an audio recording or Braille; it can also be emailed as a Microsoft Word attachment. Please contact Scrutiny on telephone number 01905 844965 or by emailing scrutiny@worcestershire.gov.uk

DISCLOSING INTERESTS

There are now 2 types of interests:
'Disclosable pecuniary interests' and **'other disclosable interests'**

WHAT IS A 'DISCLOSABLE PECUNIARY INTEREST' (DPI)?

- Any **employment**, office, trade or vocation carried on for profit or gain
- **Sponsorship** by a 3rd party of your member or election expenses
- Any **contract** for goods, services or works between the Council and you, a firm where you are a partner/director, or company in which you hold shares
- Interests in **land** in Worcestershire (including licence to occupy for a month or longer)
- **Shares** etc (with either a total nominal value above £25,000 or 1% of the total issued share capital) in companies with a place of business or land in Worcestershire.

NB Your DPIs include the interests of your spouse/partner as well as you

WHAT MUST I DO WITH A DPI?

- **Register** it within 28 days and
- **Declare** it where you have a DPI in a matter at a particular meeting
 - you must **not participate** and you **must withdraw**.

NB It is a criminal offence to participate in matters in which you have a DPI

WHAT ABOUT 'OTHER DISCLOSABLE INTERESTS'?

- No need to register them but
- You must **declare** them at a particular meeting where:
You/your family/person or body with whom you are associated have a **pecuniary interest** in or **close connection** with the matter under discussion.

WHAT ABOUT MEMBERSHIP OF ANOTHER AUTHORITY OR PUBLIC BODY?

You will not normally even need to declare this as an interest. The only exception is where the conflict of interest is so significant it is seen as likely to prejudice your judgement of the public interest.

DO I HAVE TO WITHDRAW IF I HAVE A DISCLOSABLE INTEREST WHICH ISN'T A DPI?

Not normally. You must withdraw only if it:

- affects your **pecuniary interests** **OR** relates to a **planning or regulatory** matter
- **AND** it is seen as likely to **prejudice your judgement** of the public interest.

DON'T FORGET

- If you have a disclosable interest at a meeting you must **disclose both its existence and nature** – 'as noted/recorded' is insufficient
- **Declarations must relate to specific business** on the agenda
 - General scattergun declarations are not needed and achieve little
- Breaches of most of the **DPI provisions** are now **criminal offences** which may be referred to the police which can on conviction by a court lead to fines up to £5,000 and disqualification up to 5 years
- Formal **dispensation** in respect of interests can be sought in appropriate cases.

Corporate and Communities Overview and Scrutiny Panel Friday, 29 September 2023, 1.30 pm, County Hall, Worcester

Membership

Councillors:

Cllr Emma Stokes (Chairman), Cllr Emma Marshall (Vice Chairman), Cllr Laura Gretton, Cllr Peter Griffiths, Cllr Natalie McVey, Cllr James Stanley, Cllr Richard Udall, Cllr Craig Warhurst and Vacancy

Agenda

| Item No | Subject | Page No |
|---------|--|-----------|
| 1 | Apologies and Welcome | |
| 2 | Declarations of Interest and of any Party Whip | |
| 3 | Public Participation <i>Members of the public wishing to take part should notify the Assistant Director for Legal and Governance in writing or by e-mail indicating both the nature and content of their proposed participation no later than 9.00am on the working day before the meeting (in this case Thursday 28 September 2023). Further details are available on the Council's website. Enquiries can also be made through the telephone number/e-mail address listed in this agenda and on the website.</i> | |
| 4 | Confirmation of the Minutes of the Previous Meeting Previously circulated | |
| 5 | Performance and 2022/23 In-Year Budget Monitoring (Indicative timing: 1.35 – 2.05pm) | 1 - 32 |
| 6 | Performance of Comments, Compliments and Complaints (Indicative timing: 2.05–2.35pm) | 33 - 58 |
| 7 | Member Portal (Indicative timing: 2.35–3.15pm) | 59 - 68 |
| 8 | Artificial Intelligence (AI) (Indicative timing: 3.15–3.55pm) | 69 - 84 |
| 9 | Customer Contact Centre (Indicative timing: 3.55–4.25pm) | 85 - 100 |
| 10 | Work Programme (Indicative timing: 4.25–4.35pm) | 101 - 106 |

Agenda produced and published by the Assistant Director for Legal and Governance, County Hall, Spetchley Road, Worcester WR5 2NP. To obtain further information or hard copies of this agenda, please contact Emma James / Jo Weston 01905 844964 / 01905 844965 email: scrutiny@worcestershire.gov.uk

All the above reports and supporting information can be accessed via the [Council's Website](#)

Date of Issue: Thursday, 21 September 2023

| Item No | Subject | Page No |
|---------|---------|---------|
| | | |

NOTES

CORPORATE AND COMMUNITIES OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY PANEL 29 SEPTEMBER 2023

PERFORMANCE AND 2022/23 IN YEAR BUDGET MONITORING

Summary

1. The Panel will be updated on performance and financial information for services relating to Commercial and Change, and Community Services.
2. The Panel was also asked by Overview and Scrutiny Panel to review contract and pay inflation as part of its remit on budget scrutiny.
3. The Cabinet Members with Responsibility for Communities and for Corporate Services and Communication, the Strategic Director of Commercial and Change, the Strategic Director for People, the Assistant Director for Communities and the Deputy Chief Finance Officer have been invited to attend the meeting in order to respond to any queries from Panel Members.

Performance Information

4. Attached at Appendix 1 is a performance report for Quarter 1 (April to June 2023). It covers the performance indicators from the Directorate and corporate level and other management information (as appropriate) which relate to services relevant to this Scrutiny Panel's remit.
5. A summary of the performance information is also provided by a Power BI report. The link to the Power BI Summary report can be found here [Our performance | Worcestershire County Council](#)
6. The Scrutiny Panels consider this information on a quarterly basis and then report by exception to the Overview and Scrutiny Performance Board (OSPB) any suggestions for further scrutiny or areas of concern.

Financial Information

7. The Panel also receives in-year budget information. The information provided is for Period 4 and is attached in the form of presentation slides at Appendix 2. This information flows from the Resources Report which is contained within the agenda for the 28 September Cabinet meeting.

Pay Award

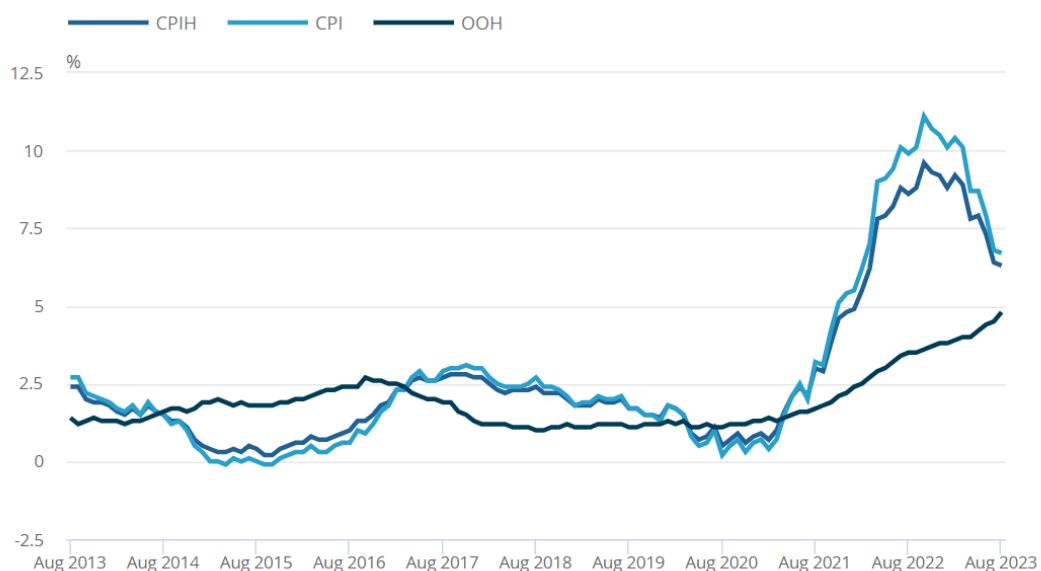
8. In February the Local Government Employers made their 'full and final' pay offer to Local Government workers in 2023-24. The offer is a second year of a fixed £1,925 (pro rata for part-time employees) on National Joint Council (NJC) pay points 2 to 43, and 3.55% for those above the maximum of the pay spine but below chief officer. There will also be a 3.88% increase on all allowances.
9. As part of the budget setting process for 2023/24, 4% was included for the pay award across all posts. It has been estimated that, should the pay award be approved as per paragraph 8, this will be a further pressure of c£2.6m to the current years budget. A provision for this amount has been made within the Finance Risk Reserve.

Contract Inflation

10. At the time of writing the Consumer Prices Index (CPI) rose by 6.7% in the 12 months to August 2023, down from 6.8% in July and the UK interest rates are 5.25%. Whilst the council made significant provision in the 2023/24 budget to support price and demand fluctuations, the on-going high inflation combined with the cost-of-living pressures and higher than budgeted prices for goods and services have significantly impacted both the local and national economy. It is important to highlight that all these pressures cannot be managed by the Council alone, for context across the country a significant number of authorities are experiencing these similar pressures that are impacting their financial position.

Figure 1 – CPI Rates

CPIH, OOH component and CPI annual inflation rates for the last 10 years,
UK, August 2013 to August 2023



Source – [Consumer price inflation, UK - Office for National Statistics](#)

11. A total of £17 million was added to the 2023/24 budget for contract inflation, however it is becoming clear that pressures relating to inflation are causing a forecast overspend on a number of budget areas. Within adult and children's social care, inflation will be based on a number of factors being seen within the market including pay inflation as well as general inflationary factors.

Purpose of the Meeting

12. Following discussion of the information provided, the Scrutiny Panel is asked to determine:

- any comments to highlight to the Cabinet Members at the meeting and/or to Overview and Scrutiny Performance Board at its meeting on 19 October 2023.
- whether any further information or scrutiny on a particular topic is required.

Supporting Information

Appendix 1 – Performance Report for Quarter 1 (April to June 2023)

Appendix 2 – Budget Monitoring Information for Period 4 (July month end)

Contact Points

Emma James / Jo Weston, Overview and Scrutiny Officers, Tel: 01905 844964/ 844965
Email: scrutiny@worcestershire.gov.uk

Background Papers

In the opinion of the proper officer (in this case the Assistant Director for Legal and Governance) the following are the background papers relating to the subject matter of this report:

- Agendas and minutes of the Corporate and Communities Overview and Scrutiny Panel on 25 July, 28 March 2023, 13 July and 17 March 2022, 8 November, 24 September and 20 July 2021
- Agendas and minutes of the Overview and Scrutiny Performance Board on 28 April, 29 March and 30 January 2023, 7 December, 29 September, 20 July and 23 March 2022

[All agendas and minutes are available on the Council's website here.](#)

This page is intentionally left blank

Scrutiny Report Corporate & Communities 2023/2024 Quarter 1

Contents

| | |
|--|----|
| Scrutiny Report Corporate & Communities 2023/2024 Quarter 1 | 1 |
| Registration and Coroner’s | 2 |
| Birth registration appointments within 5 working days | 2 |
| Death registration appointments within 2 working days | 2 |
| Registration of deaths within 5 days..... | 3 |
| Communications and Consumer Relations | 4 |
| Increasing staff engagement..... | 4 |
| HR, ICT and Corporate Information Governance Team | 5 |
| Employees - Actual Full-Time Equivalents | 5 |
| Sickness Rates (Cumulative)..... | 5 |
| Days lost through long-term sickness | 6 |
| Days lost through short-term sickness..... | 6 |
| Staff turnover rate | 7 |
| Cost of agency staff as a percentage of the total pay-bill..... | 7 |
| Communities | 8 |
| Library Visits and Issues | 8 |
| Library Issues: e-books, e-audio books, e-magazines, and e-newspapers | 10 |
| Museum Visits..... | 11 |
| Countryside Standards Achieved | 13 |
| Bikeability – Children Trained in Level 2 | 14 |
| Bikeability – Children Trained in Other Levels | 15 |
| Appendix – Link to Power BI Performance Summary | 16 |

Registration and Coroner's

Birth registration appointments within 5 working days

RAG: Green

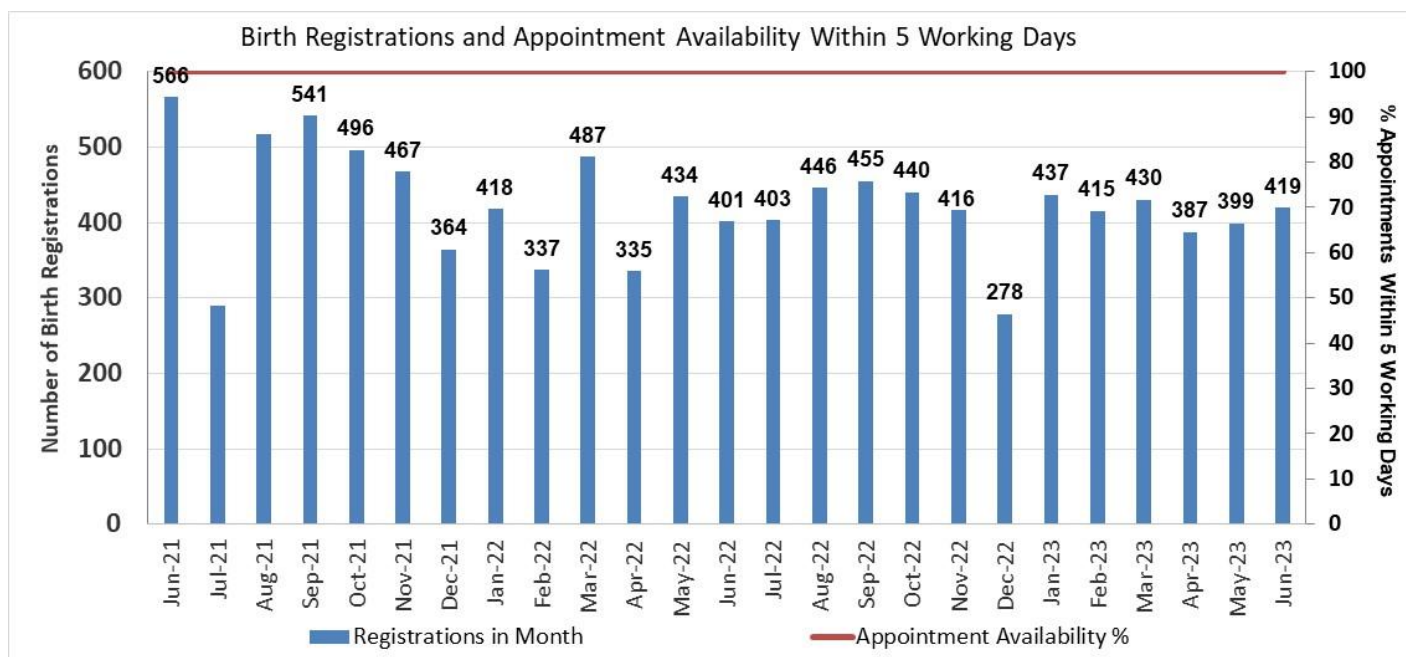
Direction of Travel: No Noticeable Change

Performance Details: Anyone contacting the service from April to June 2023 to register a birth was offered a convenient appointment within 5 working days. Birth registrations in the first quarter of this financial year totalled 1,205, up 35 (3%) compared with the 1,170 registered in the same quarter last year.

Current Activity: Extra calendars were put in place prior to Easter to accommodate more death-registration appointments, thereby ensuring full availability of all appointment types was maintained throughout April. When registering births, the service continues to hand over a free book pack. This constitutes the refreshed Bookstart Scheme, which is run in partnership with Library Service. It is being publicised on the two services' websites and social media streams.

Future Activity: The service will follow all national guidelines in respect of the registration of births. Opening hours will continue to be reviewed to ensure they offer the maximum number of appointments at the times most convenient for residents. The public will be informed of any changes to those and any alterations to opening times at any of the county's offices via the website, social media, and local media. Evening opening will

Graph: Number of Birth Registrations and Percentage Appointment Availability Within 5 Working Days



Death registration appointments within 2 working days

RAG: Green

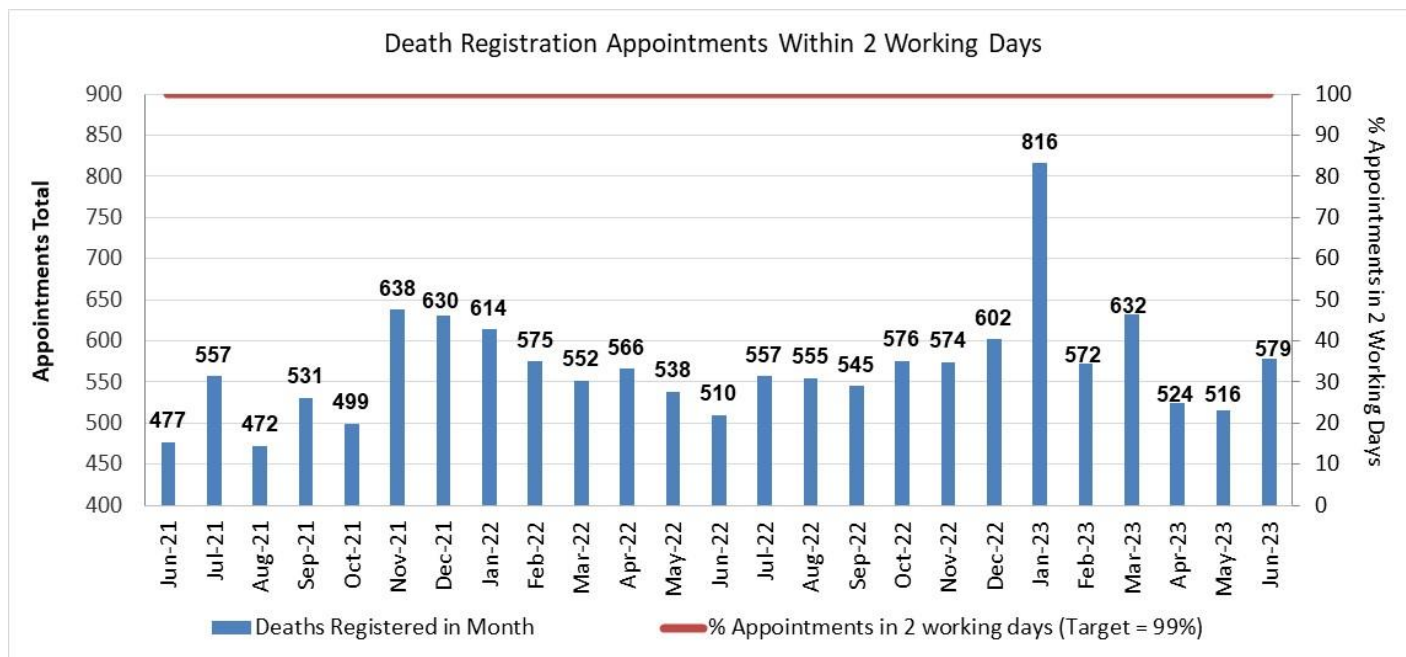
Direction of Travel: No noticeable change

Performance Details: Demand for appointments is not focussed on one office. Despite the additional demands, full availability of appointments was maintained throughout the first quarter of the financial year, as was the case throughout 2022/2023.

Current Activity: More death-registration appointments are being offered as quickly as possible and the processes for registration of deaths have recently been revised. The impact of those changes is being monitored. There continue to be instances of paperwork being received from GPs on or after the fourth day following a death. Current actions to address this are engagement with Practice Managers to try to speed up the processing of paperwork and a reminder to staff to contact informants about deaths of which the service is aware.

Future Activity: Current arrangements will be reviewed and altered if required. The service and local GP surgeries will need to continue to work with the office of the local Medical Examiner (ME), increasing the time needed to sign off the paperwork enabling deaths to be registered. The number of deaths to be registered is likely to drop during the summer.

Graph: Number of Death Registration Appointments and Percentage of Availability of Appointments



Registration of deaths within 5 days

RAG: Red

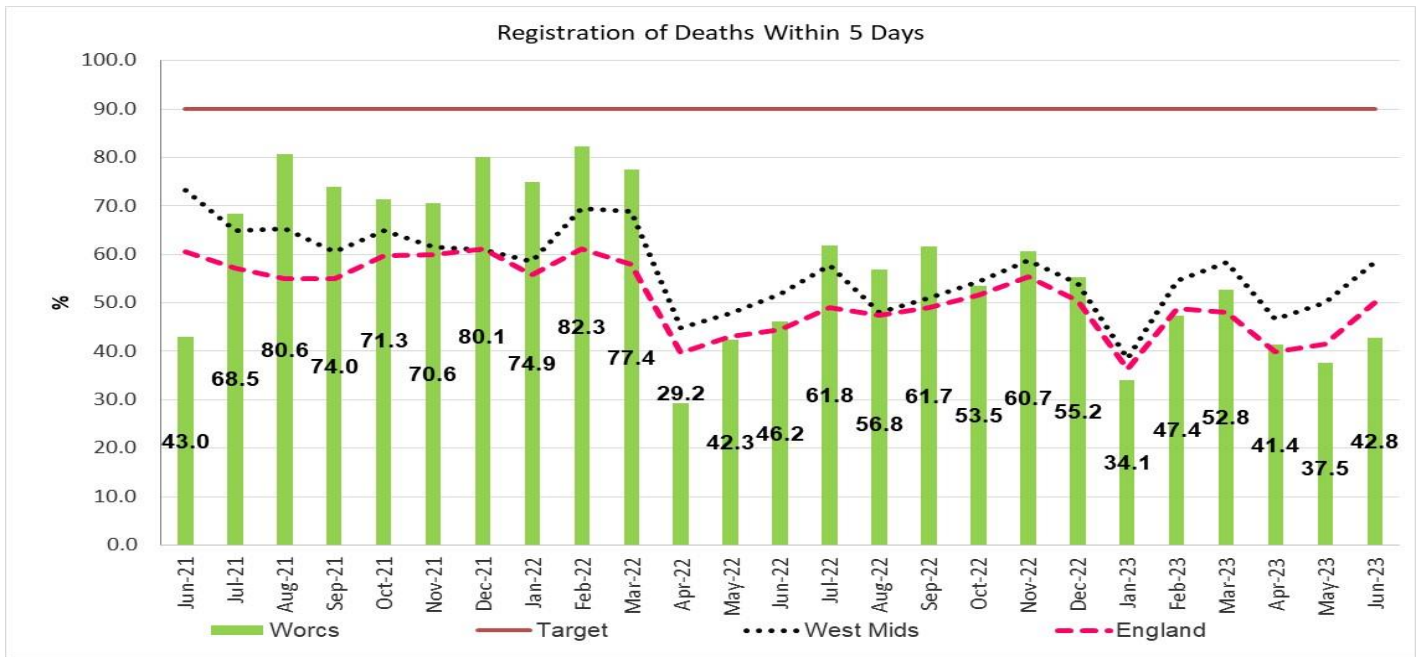
Direction of Travel: Improving

Performance Details: In June, 145 (42.8%) of the 362 deaths registered in Worcestershire were within 5 days. The percentage represented an improvement compared with May's 37.5%, but was below June's out-turns for the West Midlands (58.4%) and England as a whole (50.1%). The main influence on performance remains the need for the service and local GP surgeries to work with the office of the local Medical Examiner (ME), increasing the time needed to sign off the paperwork enabling deaths to be registered. Worcestershire is currently one of only two registration authorities in the West Midlands region in which *all* deaths are subject to ME review.

Current Activity: More death-registration appointments are being offered as quickly as possible and the processes for registration of deaths have recently been revised. The impact of those changes is being monitored. There continue to be instances of paperwork being received from GPs on or after the fourth day following a death. Current actions to address this are engagement with Practice Managers to try to speed up the processing of paperwork and a reminder to staff to contact informants about deaths of which the service is aware.

Future Activity: Performance may improve further if the number of deaths to be registered drops during the remaining summer months, a trend that would be in keeping with previous years. Benchmarking against other authorities' figures will continue. An increase in the number of authorities in which the local office of the Medical Examiner examines all deaths is likely to impact on national and regional out-turns.

Graph: Percentage of Deaths Registered in 5 Working Days



Communications and Consumer Relations

Increasing staff engagement

RAG: Green

Direction of Travel: Improving

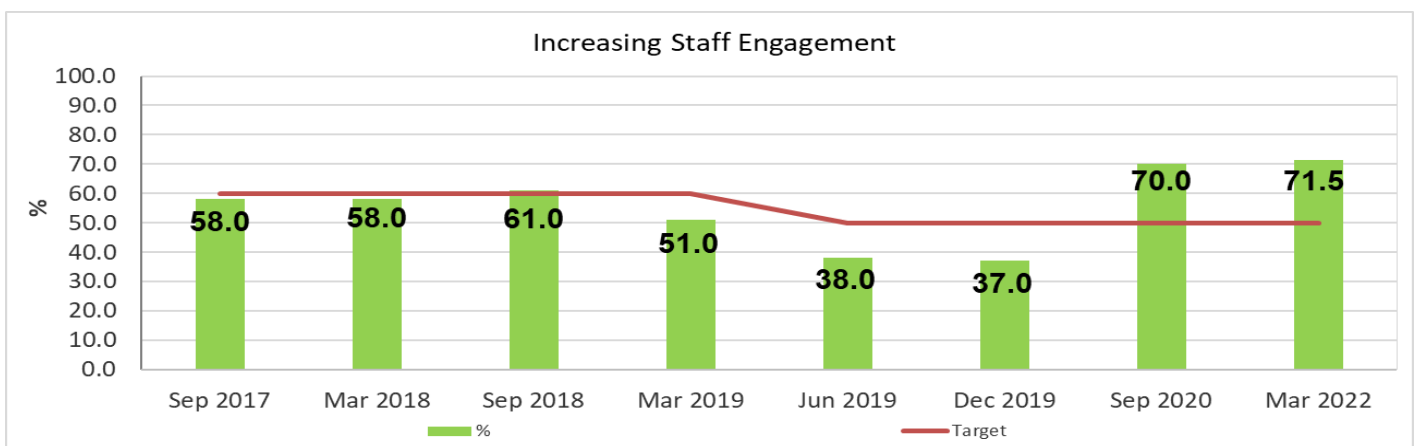
Performance Details: The 2023 staff survey ("Your Voice") was open from 16th January to 19th February. The latest survey for which full results are confirmed is 2022's, which ran from 7th February to 7th March inclusive. It had a 71.5% response rate, the best to date. The previous-highest response rate was 70% for September 2020's survey. A shorter survey (Winter Pulse) was carried out over the course of a week in early December 2022. Its focus was on wellbeing, equality, and inclusion. The completion rate (52%) is the highest ever for a WCC Pulse Survey.

There was an extended gap following the September 2020 survey due to the County Council's COVID-19 response.

Current Activity: The results and actions relevant to this year's survey will be communicated to staff later this year. Workforce updates about actions and commitments relating to 2022's survey continue to be provided via Staff Briefings and regular emails. These will provide progress reports about the actions put in place in response to the themes raised in the 2022 survey, aligned to the Workforce Strategy.

Future Activity: Following completion of the 2023 Survey and confirmation of the results, an action plan will be devised.

Graph: Percentage of Staff That Completed the Staff Survey



HR, ICT and Corporate Information Governance Team

Employees - Actual Full-Time Equivalents

RAG: N/A

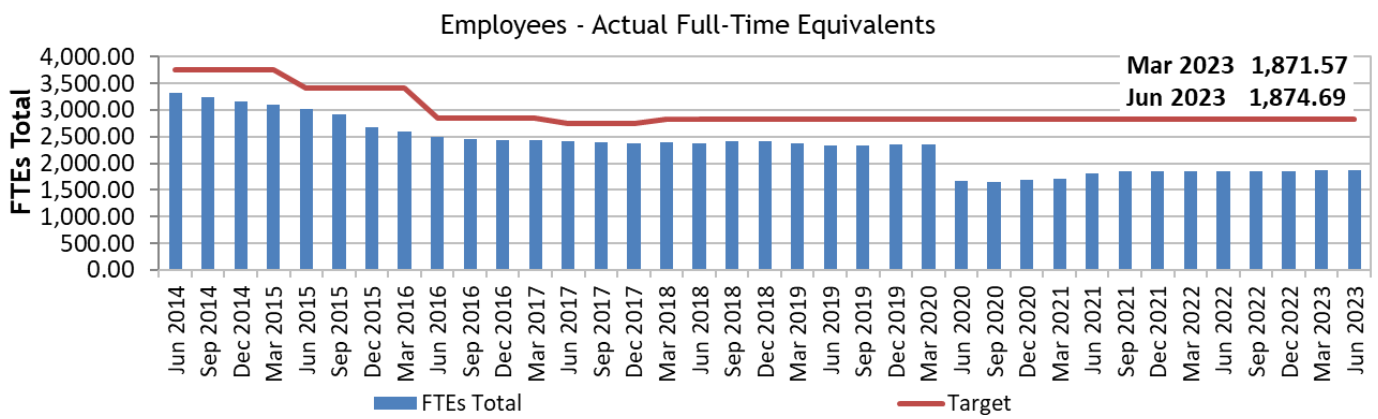
Direction of Travel: N/A

Performance Details: FTEs at the end of the first quarter of 2023/2024 equated to 1,874.69, up 0.2% from 1,871.57 at the end of March and 1.1% higher than at the end of June 2022 (1,854.13). Changes in headcount from quarter to quarter reflect some of the initiatives active at any one time (e.g., TUPE in/out, recruitment drives).

Current Activity: Confirmed data for each quarter is normally available towards the end of the first month of the following quarter.

Future Activity:

Graph: Number of Employees- Actual Full-Time Equivalents by Quarter



Sickness Rates (Cumulative)

RAG: Red

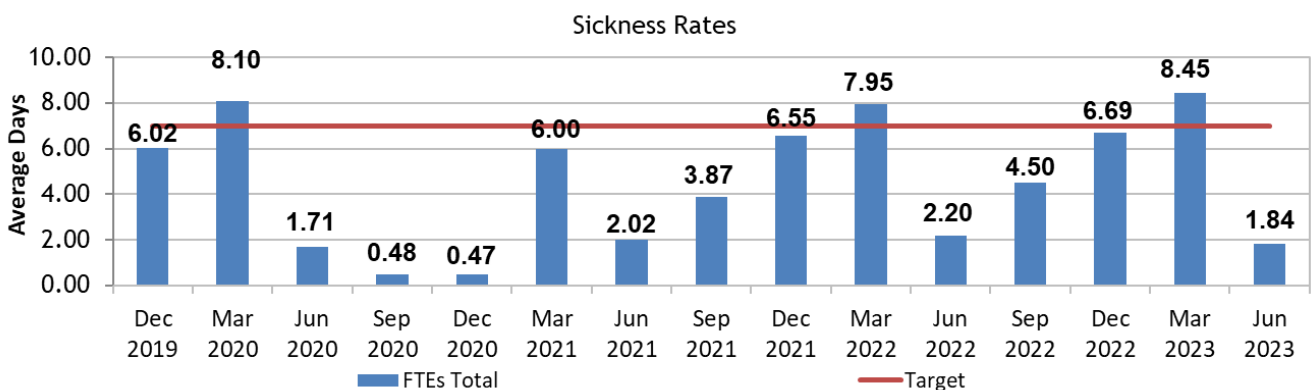
Direction of Travel: Deteriorating

Performance Details: At the end of quarter 1 of 2023/2024, the average days sick per person (FTE) was 1.84, down compared to the same period last year (2.20).

Current Activity: Monitoring and management of sickness absence continues. Confirmed data for each quarter is normally available towards the end of the first month of the following quarter.

Future Activity:

Graph: Average Days Sick per FTE (Full Time Equivalents) Cumulative



Days lost through long-term sickness

RAG: N/A

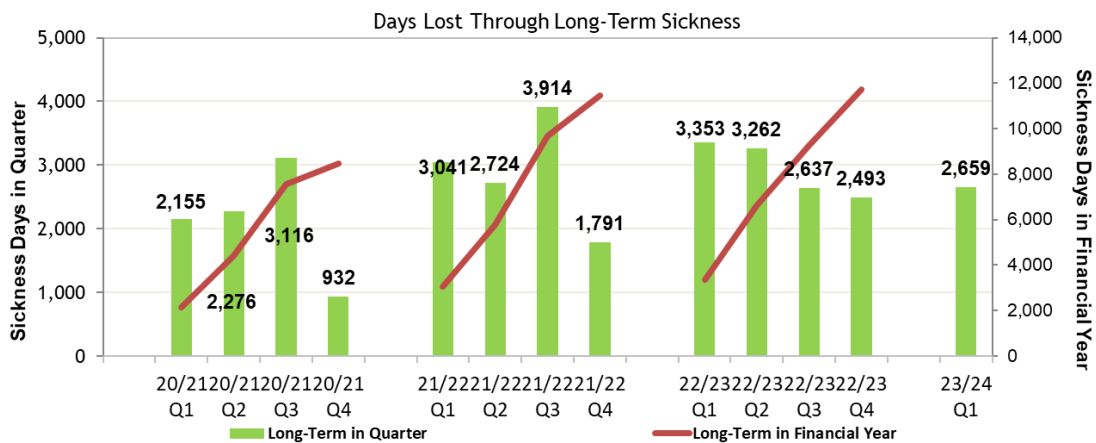
Direction of Travel: N/A

Performance Details: Long-term absences are episodes of 21 or more calendar days. At the beginning of 2023/2024 long-term absences totalled 2,659 days, a decrease of 20.7% compared to total days absent in quarter 1 of 2022/2023 (3,353).

Current Activity: Monitoring and management of sickness absence continues. Confirmed data for each quarter is normally available towards the end of the first month of the following quarter.

Future Activity:

Graph: Total Days Lost Through Long-Term Sickness



Days lost through short-term sickness

RAG: N/A

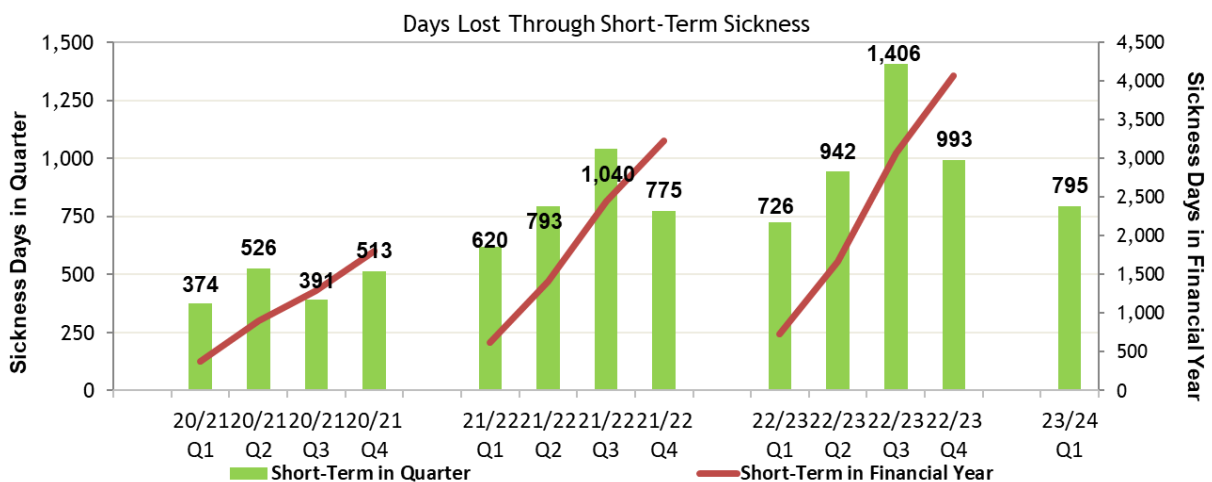
Direction of Travel: N/A

Performance Details: Short-term absences at the start of 2023/2024 totalled 794.5. This represents an increase of 9.4% compared to the same period in 2022/2023, when the total was 726 days.

Current Activity: Monitoring and management of sickness absence continues. Confirmed data for each quarter is normally available towards the end of the first month of the following quarter.

Future Activity:

Graph: Total Days Lost Through Short-Term Sickness



Staff turnover rate

RAG: N/A

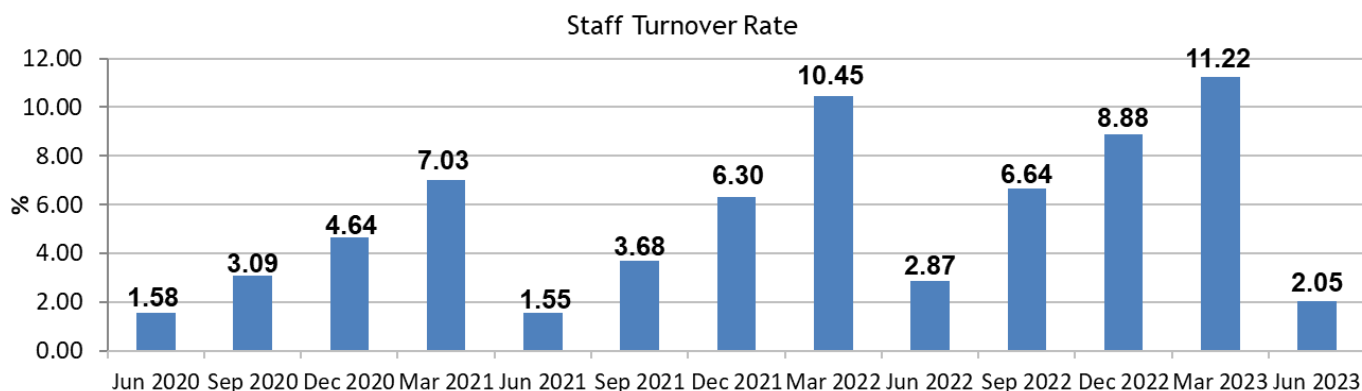
Direction of Travel: N/A

Performance Details: Leavers in the financial year as a percentage of the workforce. Turnover rate for quarter 1 2023/2024 was 2.05. This is a reduction compared to the same period last year, when the figure was 2.87.

Current Activity:

Future Activity:

Graph: Turnover Rate



Cost of agency staff as a percentage of the total pay-bill

RAG: N/A

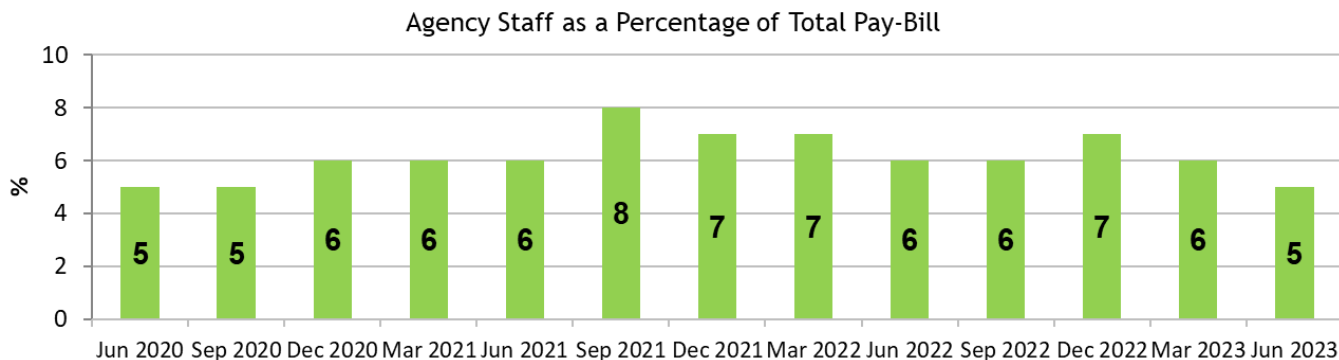
Direction of Travel: No Noticeable change

Performance Details: This relates to agency spend at each quarter-end as a percentage of the total pay bill. Since 1st October 2019, the figure has excluded WCF. The percentage on 30th June was 5%, down from 6% on 31st March. On 30th June last year, the figure was also 6%.

Current Activity:

Future Activity:

Graph: Agency Staff as a Percentage of Total Pay-Bill



Communities

Library Visits and Issues

RAG: No Status

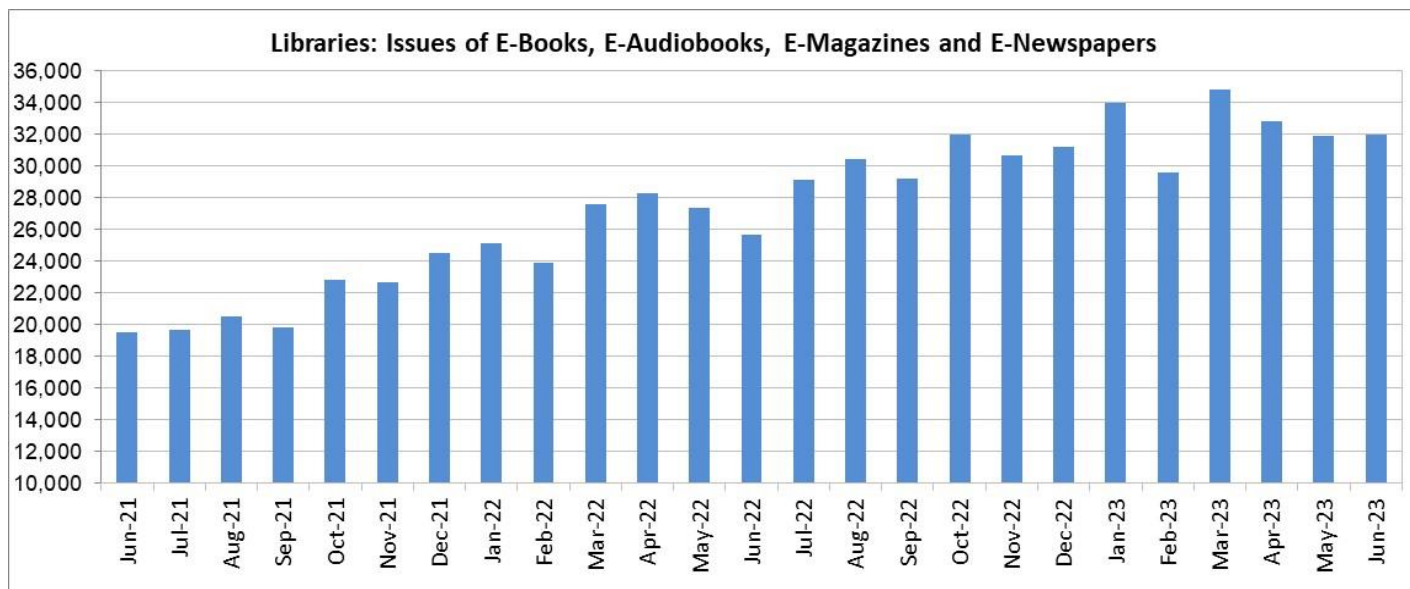
Direction of Travel: Underlying trend for both visits and issues - Improving

Performance Details: Nationally, visits to libraries in June were estimated to be at 65% of their June 2019 level. Visits to Worcestershire's libraries in the first quarter of this financial year totalled 420,455, equating to 63.8% of the total for April to June 2019 (659,537). Of this year's April-to-June total, 3,942 (0.6%) were visits to Droitwich and Stourport during hours when Libraries Unlocked was operative. The latest Libraries Connected national comparator data indicates physical book-borrowing was at 82% of the 2019/2020 level. Worcestershire's book issues total for April to June was 371,571, equivalent to 89.2% of the April-to-June 2019 book-issues total of 416,663.

Current Activity: Libraries continue to provide the full range of on-site services. These include meetings of social-connecting groups, children's activities, adult learning courses, digital support, and employability sessions. Libraries are home to Worcestershire Business & Intellectual Property Centre, giving free advice, information, and resources to businesses. The 2023 Summer Reading Challenge ("Ready, Set, Read") began on 8th July and ran until 16th September. Young volunteers were recruited to assist with events. Monitoring of the usage of Droitwich and Stourport libraries in Libraries Unlocked hours continues, with detailed analysis of visiting patterns and room bookings by community groups.

Future Activity: Actions to increase library usage will include further Libraries Unlocked schemes. Local events and activities will be promoted. The opt-in e-mail service will better inform residents about new library services and future plans, as well as giving a feedback facility. Customer Voice Survey responses will also help inform planning and promotional activities. Reading Agency's survey of Reading Challenge participants will provide qualitative information about the benefits and outcomes experienced by a cross-section of children and families.

Graph: Number of Visits and Issues per Month



Library Visits: Library-by-library totals

| Library | 2019/2020 | 2020/2021 | 2021/2022 | 2022/2023 | 2023/2024 |
|---------------|------------------|----------------|------------------|------------------|----------------|
| Alvechurch | 57,788 | 5,781 | 40,703 | 48,694 | 9,873 |
| Bewdley | 52,404 | 4,730 | 39,798 | 49,727 | 13,133 |
| Broadway | 18,229 | 1,446 | 4,277 | 7,714 | 1,766 |
| Bromsgrove | 165,219 | 15,014 | 73,555 | 112,595 | 25,911 |
| Catshill | 10,403 | 389 | 1,901 | 3,907 | 1,072 |
| County Mobile | 7,121 | 704 | 3,464 | 4,025 | 642 |
| Droitwich | 124,184 | 16,757 | 60,859 | 71,971 | 19,595 |
| Evesham | 275,958 | 12,760 | 60,991 | 101,163 | 25,722 |
| Hagley | 31,304 | 3,836 | 19,795 | 27,075 | 6,969 |
| Hive | 655,789 | 66,680 | 251,197 | 410,125 | 126,225 |
| Kidderminster | 259,564 | 39,099 | 119,234 | 135,555 | 34,483 |
| Malvern | 173,601 | 23,267 | 97,052 | 133,290 | 32,368 |
| Martley | 787 | 0 | 77 | 94 | 21 |
| Pershore | 88,743 | 10,187 | 42,437 | 55,723 | 13,624 |
| Redditch | 269,777 | 39,008 | 143,502 | 144,857 | 38,412 |
| Rubery | 36,500 | 2,893 | 19,297 | 25,814 | 6,423 |
| St John's | 63,565 | 9,503 | 26,951 | 40,364 | 12,126 |
| Stourport | 101,761 | 8,977 | 53,226 | 78,682 | 21,568 |
| Tenbury | 73,058 | 7,965 | 40,708 | 51,082 | 13,990 |
| Upton | 18,092 | 1,184 | 6,075 | 9,748 | 2,834 |
| Warndon | 33,118 | 2,448 | 20,682 | 21,760 | 4,799 |
| Welland | 729 | 0 | 38 | 130 | 44 |
| Woodrow | 11,036 | 1,834 | 13,938 | 18,238 | 3,802 |
| Wythall | 78,715 | 4,137 | 35,494 | 28,753 | 5,053 |
| Totals | 2,607,445 | 278,599 | 1,175,251 | 1,581,086 | 420,455 |

Library Issues: Library-by-library totals

| Library | 2019/2020 | 2020/2021 | 2021/2022 | 2022/2023 | 2023/2024 |
|---------------|-----------|-----------|-----------|-----------|-----------|
| Alvechurch | 47,407 | 11,510 | 39,006 | 43,670 | 9,627 |
| Bewdley | 44,509 | 11,359 | 36,726 | 41,339 | 10,285 |
| Broadway | 19,913 | 4,446 | 12,511 | 14,486 | 3,635 |
| Bromsgrove | 123,395 | 34,081 | 97,823 | 113,287 | 27,786 |
| Catshill | 9,789 | 1,678 | 6,189 | 7,985 | 2,091 |
| County Mobile | 22,858 | 4,431 | 16,322 | 17,063 | 4,005 |
| Droitwich | 114,182 | 33,474 | 89,599 | 94,409 | 23,281 |
| E-Audiobooks | 36,334 | 67,296 | 77,706 | 98,854 | 26,474 |
| E-Books | 32,139 | 72,830 | 62,950 | 67,936 | 17,950 |
| E-Magazines | 31,452 | 49,783 | 42,422 | 44,206 | 11,156 |
| E-Newspapers | 0 | 0 | 83,089 | 150,960 | 41,073 |
| Evesham | 121,662 | 29,086 | 86,096 | 97,657 | 23,078 |
| Hagley | 41,293 | 9,752 | 33,272 | 34,837 | 8,309 |
| Hive | 581,646 | 127,786 | 370,020 | 394,161 | 94,983 |
| Kidderminster | 126,283 | 29,435 | 88,568 | 100,777 | 24,657 |
| Malvern | 224,195 | 57,559 | 163,369 | 185,914 | 43,499 |
| Martley | 1,321 | 110 | 699 | 996 | 280 |
| Pershore | 80,568 | 22,809 | 63,075 | 68,633 | 16,378 |
| Redditch | 126,592 | 33,861 | 90,553 | 103,383 | 24,405 |
| Rubery | 30,723 | 6,407 | 23,773 | 25,584 | 6,866 |

| | | | | | |
|---------------|------------------|----------------|------------------|------------------|----------------|
| St John's | 59,183 | 16,657 | 44,886 | 47,534 | 11,908 |
| Stourport | 73,624 | 21,081 | 50,991 | 55,818 | 12,664 |
| Tenbury | 36,918 | 10,796 | 28,767 | 32,011 | 7,839 |
| Upton | 16,322 | 3,408 | 10,189 | 12,020 | 3,333 |
| Warndon | 27,305 | 5,714 | 18,678 | 18,740 | 4,804 |
| Welland | 1,849 | 249 | 698 | 1,189 | 358 |
| Woodrow | 12,979 | 2,023 | 9,746 | 11,001 | 2,078 |
| Worcester Hub | 5,780 | 890 | 1,477 | 2,503 | 598 |
| Wythall | 38,482 | 9,301 | 29,025 | 30,725 | 7,435 |
| Totals | 2,088,703 | 677,812 | 1,678,225 | 1,917,678 | 470,835 |

Library Issues: e-books, e-audio books, e-magazines, and e-newspapers

RAG: No Status

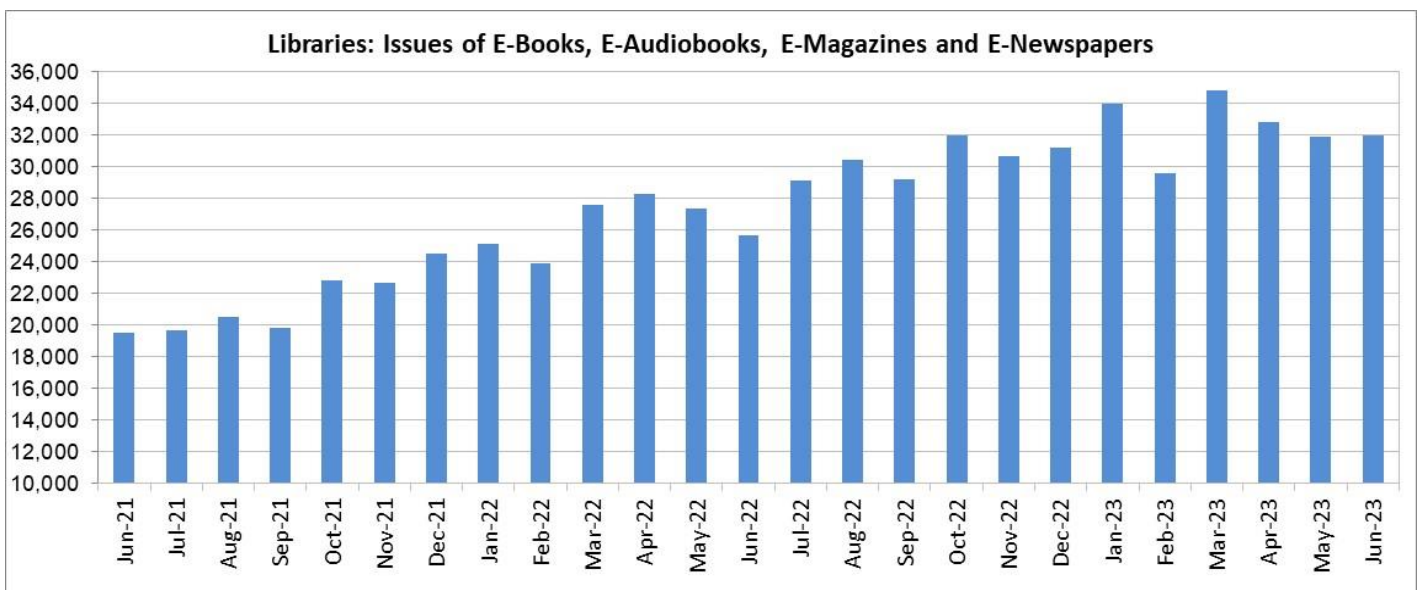
Direction of Travel: No noticeable change

Performance Details: The April-to-June total of 96,653 (an April-to-June record) was 4¼ times the total for the same period four years ago (22,778). Of this year’s April-to-June tally, 41,073 (42.5%) were of e-newspapers, 26,474 (27.4%) were of e-audiobooks, 17,950 (18.6%) were of e-books, and 11,156 (11.5%) were e-magazines issues. In the whole of the 2022/2023 financial year, the lion’s share of the overall e-issues total of 361,956 was e-newspapers’ 150,960 (41.7%). In this year’s April-to-June quarter, 5,722 people borrowed at least one e-item, equivalent to 228.8% of April-to-June’s 2019’s unique borrowers total of 2,501.

Current Activity: Efforts continue to promote and expand the e-library. These include setting up Borrowbox displays in libraries and highlighting on the Library Service website the Digital Library Hub, which provides a one-stop shop for e-services. Nationally, Libraries Connected is in discussions with publishers about libraries being given access to e-versions of the most-recent published titles.

Future Activity: Monitoring of e-issues and the number of active users (including new users) will continue as a means of tracking the appeal to residents of the e-collections and the effectiveness of promotional campaigns, as well as providing evidence to support any review discussions with the service providers (BorrowBox for e-books, Overdrive for e-magazines, Press Reader for e-papers).

Graph: Number of Issues of E-Books, E-Audiobooks and E-Magazines per month



Museum Visits

RAG: No Status

Direction of Travel: Improving

Performance Details: County Museum's overall total for April, May, and June was 6,647. This constituted the museum's highest April-to-June total since 2013's 7,609. Events in the first three months of this financial year included family crafts and trails activities spanning the school Easter holiday period, bank-holiday events (including a 'Coronation Celebration' on the Monday of the long Coronation bank-holiday weekend and Superhero events on the Spring bank holiday Monday). Visits to County Museum in the 2022/2023 financial year totalled 21,927, up 18.5% compared with the total for 2021/2022 (18,506) and 12.4% greater than the 19,501 visits made in 2019/2020.

Current Activity: The museum's information leaflet is available in a variety of formats, including on-line. It details the partnership with Hartlebury Castle Preservation Trust, providing details of all the buildings on the site, the grounds themselves, and the activities and live events the County Museum and the Trust are staging between them. Throughout August, families can book places on summer-holiday crafts, activities and trails, which have natural history/environment themes (e.g. dinosaurs, beneath the sea, birds, and bugs). Autumn-term visits to the museum by school groups and outreach visits to schools inside and outside the county's borders are being booked.

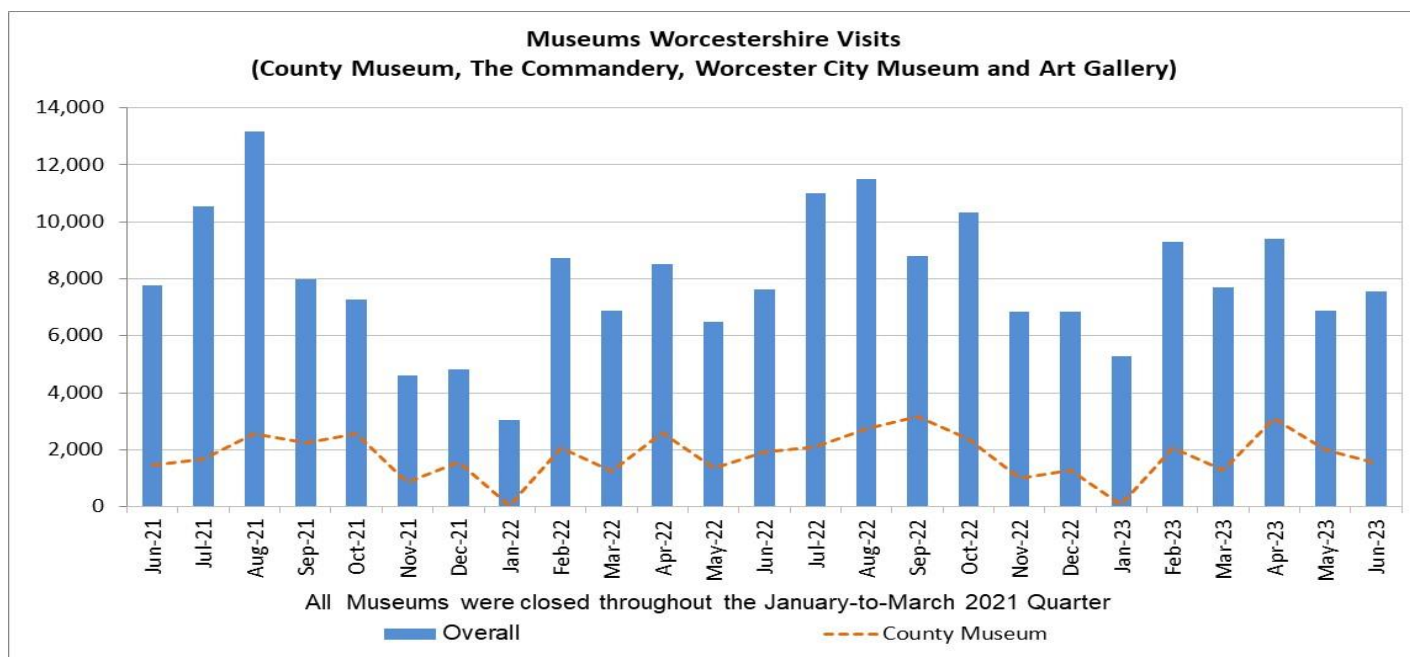
Future Activity: Work will continue with the Hartlebury Castle Preservation Trust to further promote the whole site, accredited by the Visit England Visitor Attraction Quality Scheme for the high standard of the museum and visitor experience. Property Services is currently working with Museums Worcestershire to develop options for County Museum and the Collections Centre Store following the end of their leases at Hartlebury in 2026. Options are due to be presented to Joint Museums Committee and then to County Council Cabinet this year.

County Museum Visits: Monthly totals

| Month | Visits | Children's Visits |
|----------|--------|-------------------|
| Jan 2018 | 406 | 363 |
| Feb 2018 | 1,362 | 599 |
| Mar 2018 | 757 | 388 |
| Apr 2018 | 1,855 | 448 |
| May 2018 | 2,215 | 446 |
| Jun 2018 | 1,320 | 256 |
| Jul 2018 | 1,910 | 364 |
| Aug 2018 | 2,961 | 602 |
| Sep 2018 | 2,247 | 220 |
| Oct 2018 | 1,837 | 397 |
| Nov 2018 | 1,377 | 574 |
| Dec 2018 | 1,348 | 367 |
| Jan 2019 | 112 | 80 |
| Feb 2019 | 1,630 | 426 |
| Mar 2019 | 1,604 | 236 |
| Apr 2019 | 2,026 | 281 |
| May 2019 | 2,575 | 416 |
| Jun 2019 | 1,575 | 287 |
| Jul 2019 | 1,589 | 317 |
| Aug 2019 | 2,817 | 451 |
| Sep 2019 | 2,551 | 100 |
| Oct 2019 | 1,581 | 478 |
| Nov 2019 | 987 | 313 |
| Dec 2019 | 1,484 | 457 |
| Jan 2020 | 60 | 52 |
| Feb 2020 | 1,778 | 470 |
| Mar 2020 | 478 | 115 |
| Apr 2020 | 0 | 0 |

| | | |
|----------|-------|-----|
| May 2020 | 0 | 0 |
| Jun 2020 | 1,226 | 0 |
| Jul 2020 | 756 | 106 |
| Aug 2020 | 1,378 | 187 |
| Sep 2020 | 937 | 22 |
| Oct 2020 | 930 | 119 |
| Nov 2020 | 44 | 4 |
| Dec 2020 | 519 | 119 |
| Jan 2021 | 0 | 0 |
| Feb 2021 | 0 | 0 |
| Mar 2021 | 0 | 0 |
| Apr 2021 | 1,291 | 0 |
| May 2021 | 930 | 71 |
| Jun 2021 | 1,466 | 203 |
| Jul 2021 | 1,677 | 241 |
| Aug 2021 | 2,551 | 400 |
| Sep 2021 | 2,247 | 118 |
| Oct 2021 | 2,575 | 522 |
| Nov 2021 | 869 | 303 |
| Dec 2021 | 1,555 | 295 |
| Jan 2022 | 26 | 22 |
| Feb 2022 | 2,077 | 435 |
| Mar 2022 | 1,242 | 126 |
| Apr 2022 | 2,595 | 560 |
| May 2022 | 1,342 | 171 |
| Jun 2022 | 1,913 | 414 |
| Jul 2022 | 2,091 | 355 |
| Aug 2022 | 2,740 | 468 |
| Sep 2022 | 3,151 | 139 |
| Oct 2022 | 2,380 | 548 |
| Nov 2022 | 996 | 361 |
| Dec 2022 | 1,284 | 348 |
| Jan 2023 | 83 | 73 |
| Feb 2023 | 2,061 | 529 |
| Mar 2023 | 1,291 | 236 |
| Apr 2023 | 3,110 | 594 |
| May 2023 | 2,008 | 326 |
| Jun 2023 | 1,529 | 342 |

Graph: Monthly visits totals for County Museum, The Commandery, and Worcester City Museum and Art Gallery



Countryside Standards Achieved

RAG: Quarter 1 – Green; 2022/2023 overall - Amber

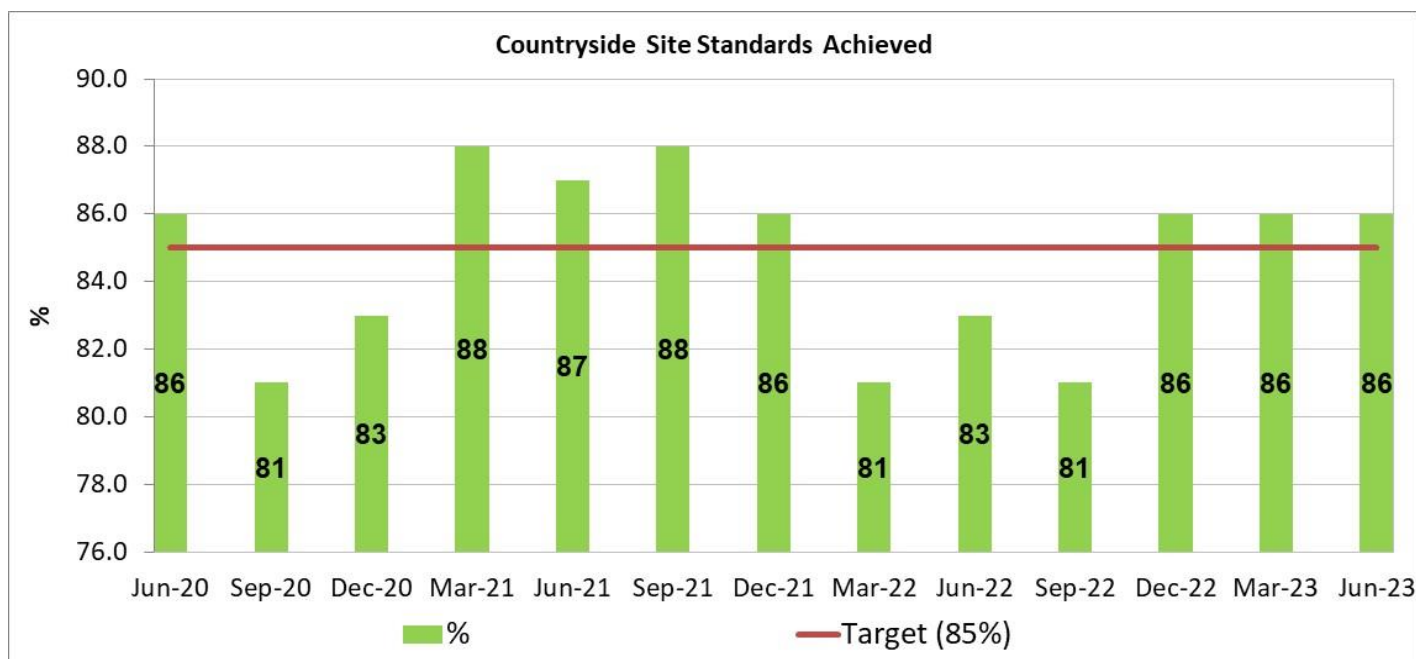
Direction of Travel: Improving

Performance Details: The average percentage rating for the Countryside Sites Standards indicator over the whole of the last financial year was an amber-rated 84%. In the last two quarters of the financial year, however, performance rose to an above-target 86%. This level was maintained in the first three months of this financial year. The improvement over the last nine months has been because the Greenspace Team has been restored to full capacity, facilitating the carrying out of extensive programmes of work to replace worn-out picnic benches and address other maintenance issues.

Current Activity: Although a lot of site furniture such as permanent picnic benches and signage has been (or is) coming to the end of its life, the regular programme of inspections, groundworks, and repairs ensures signs and notices, buildings, site furniture, and trails are repaired and well-maintained. Weathering and normal or above-average levels of usage are the main reasons for infrastructure deterioration.

Future Activity: The service will continue to promote each site's natural attractions and facilities and any events, activities or group meetings being staged. The schedule of regular inspections will identify any issues arising from increased usage, but any issues or concerns raised by visitors will be monitored and addressed as necessary. Site usage will increase as the days lengthen and the weather improves.

Graph: Countryside Site Standards Achieved



Bikeability – Children Trained in Level 2

RAG: No status.

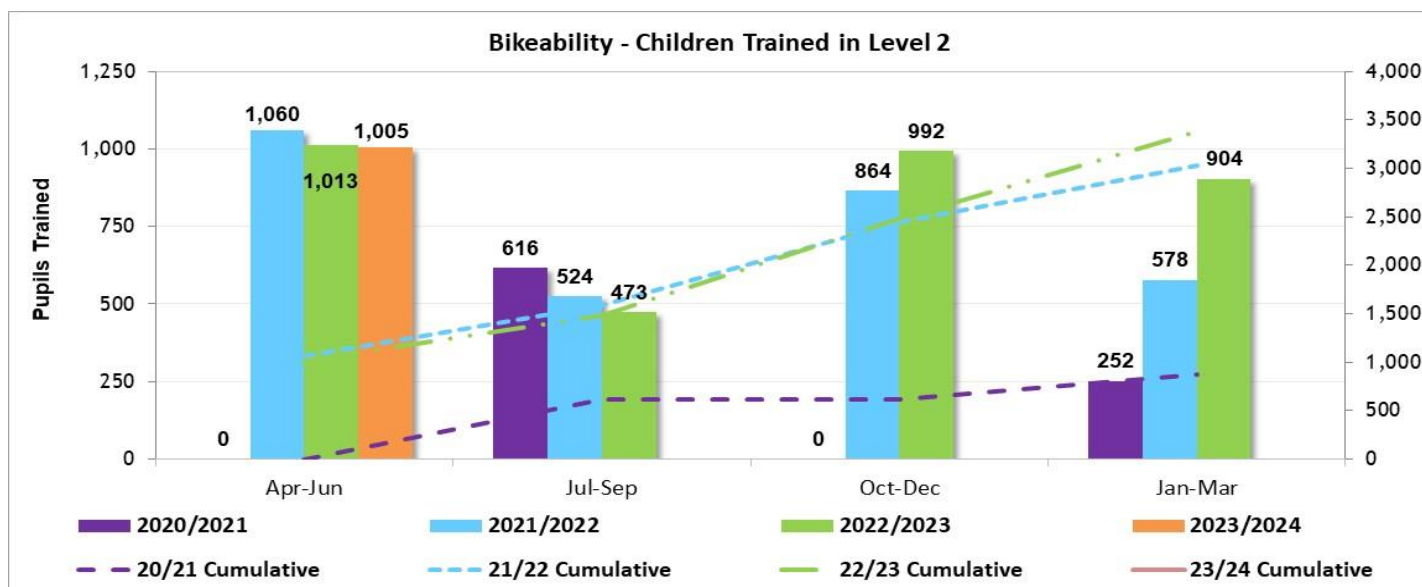
Direction of Travel: Improving

Performance Details: The number of pupils receiving Bikeability training in the first three months of this financial year was 1,995. Of that total, 1,005 (50.4%) received on-the-road training at Level 2. The first quarter of the financial year is normally the time when more requests for training are received from schools. Requests received and the total of children trained have been steadily increasing since the end of the COVID-19 pandemic, which prevented pupils from receiving in-person training. During that time, schools were provided with on-line learning resources.

Current Activity: Bookings from schools for the 2023/2024 academic year are being taken. There are two schedules of charges, one for maintained schools, another for independent ones. Free training is available to those schools with the highest proportion of children receiving free school meals. In addition, this year the Bikeability Team is running five free summer-holiday sessions, one on 29th July, the other four during August. Each session starts from County Hall. People of all abilities will be welcome, as long as they have a bike and a helmet. Pre-booking has been recommended.

Future Activity: The July-to-September total will be lower than that for the preceding three months due to the school summer holidays. It is also possible that some sessions booked for July may be lost due to industrial action by teaching unions.

Graph: Children Trained in Bikeability Level 2



Bikeability – Children Trained in Other Levels

RAG: No status.

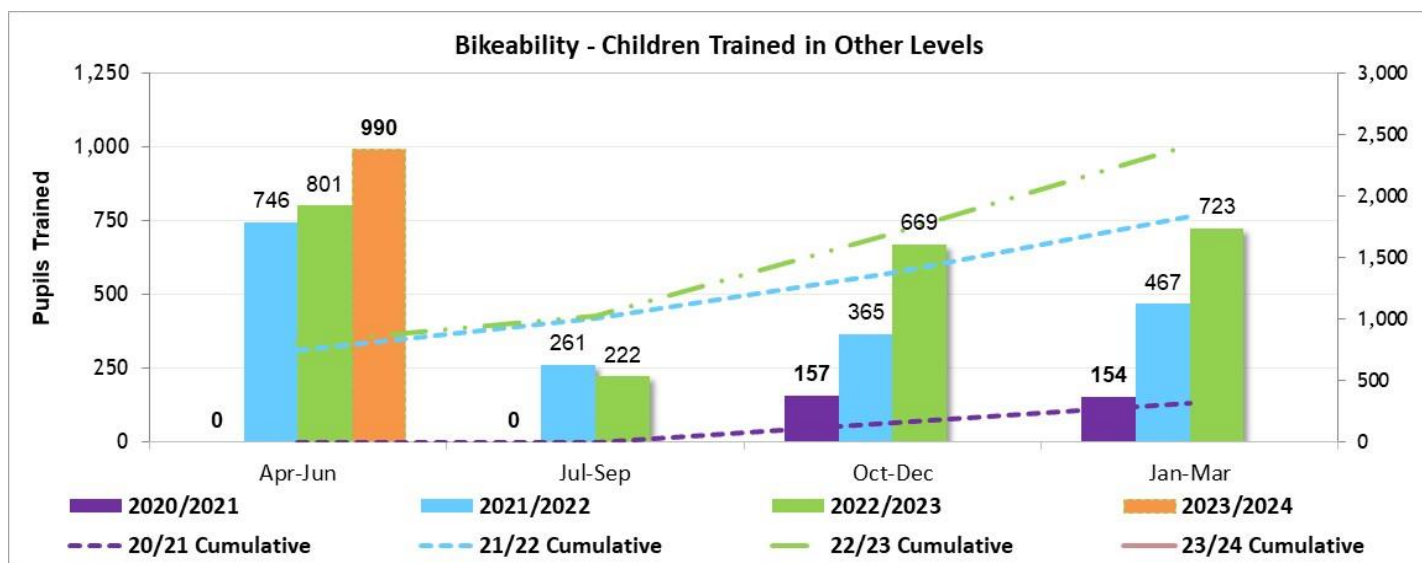
Direction of Travel: Improving

Performance Details: The number of pupils receiving Bikeability training in the first three months of this financial year was 1,995, of which 990 received training at Level 1. This was 189 (23.6%) more than the 801 receiving the same level of training in the same period last year, and 244 (32.7%) more than the 746 trained between April and June 2022 two years ago.

Current Activity: The first quarter of 2023/2024 continues the improvement seen in previous quarters relative to 2020/2021 when the COVID-19 pandemic lockdown periods caused in-person training to be paused. Previously-vacant positions are now filled and new staff members have received required training.

Future Activity: The July-to-September total will be lower than that for the preceding three months due to the school summer holidays. It is also possible that some sessions booked for July may be lost due to industrial action by teaching unions.

Graph: Children Trained in Bikeability Levels Other than Level 2



Appendix – Link to Power BI Performance Summary

The information contained in this performance summary is available as a PowerBI report. It is available [here on the Worcestershire County Council website](#).

2023/24 Period 4 Budget Position

**Corporate and Communities Overview
and Scrutiny Panel**

29 September 2023

Corporate Budget Position – P4

Page 22

- Budget Report to Cabinet on 28 September 2023 summarises the financial position for Council and each of the service areas.
- The overall outturn forecast at Period 4 is for a net overspend of £18.2m after the use of budgeted risk reserves.
- The council has an underlying structural deficit that needs to be addressed due to demand and adults and children's social care and Home to School Transport.
- At budget setting, £7m was identified as likely to be required from reserves (£2m risk for Children's Social Care placements and £5m risk for non-delivery of savings).
- Additional business rates income of £4.1m is also forecast to be received this financial year.
- Applying these mitigations would leave a net forecast overspend of £18.2m
- Significant pressures in Adults, Childrens and Home to School Transport – price and demand, this position is similar for other Local Authorities

Forecast Financial Position – P4

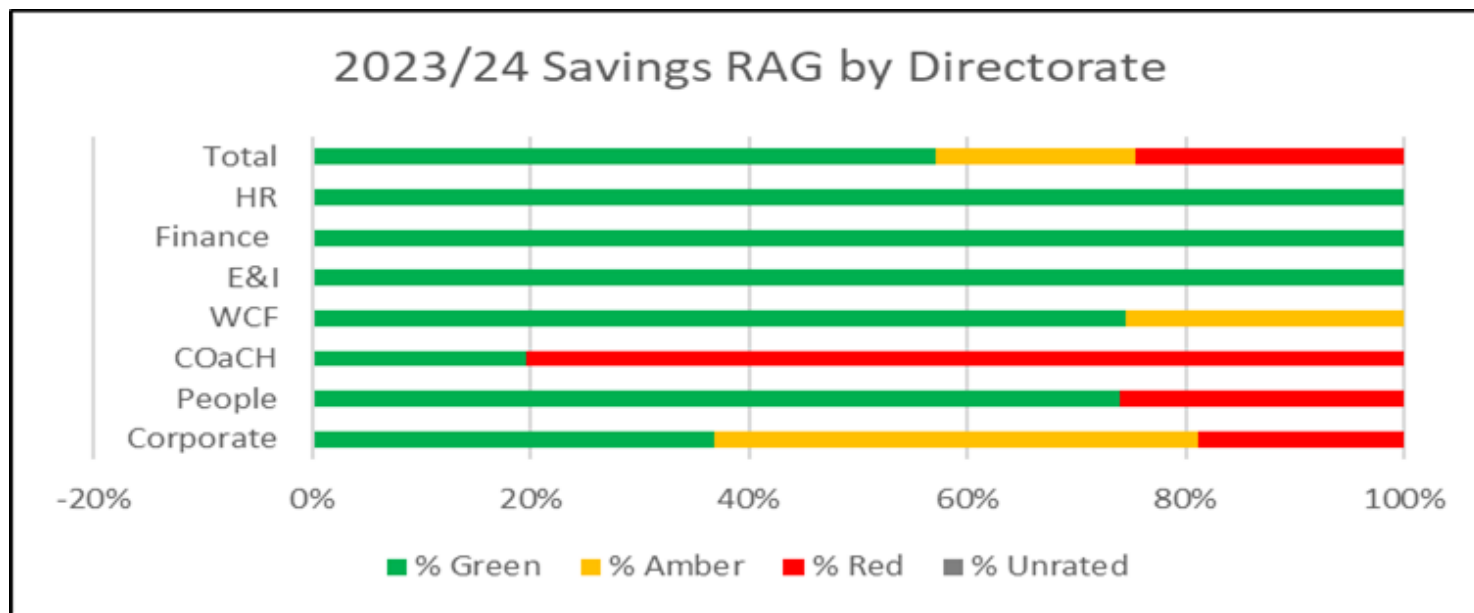
| FY 2023/24 P4 | | | |
|---|----------------|----------------|---------------|
| Service Area | Budget £m | Forecast £m | Variance £m |
| People – Adults | 146.417 | 152.299 | 5.882 |
| People – Communities | 21.596 | 22.188 | 0.592 |
| Children’s Services/WCF | 111.003 | 111.003 | 0.000 |
| Economy & Infrastructure | 72.072 | 72.733 | 0.661 |
| Commercial & Change | 9.690 | 10.707 | 1.017 |
| Chief Executive / HR / Finance | 3.222 | 3.237 | 0.015 |
| Public Health | 0.186 | 0.186 | 0.000 |
| Total: Service excl DSG | 364.186 | 372.353 | 8.167 |
| Corporate Items | 36.630 | 35.130 | -1.500 |
| Non-assigned items | 0.000 | 0.000 | 0.000 |
| WCC TOTAL | 400.816 | 407.483 | 6.667 |
| WCF Total (Including HTST) | 145.277 | 167.956 | 22.679 |
| WCC & WCF Total Services | 546.093 | 575.439 | 29.346 |
| Additional Funding: | | | |
| Business Rates | | | -4.100 |
| WCC & WCF Underlying Budget Pressure | | | 25.246 |
| Use of Reserves agreed at Budget Setting | | | -7.000 |
| Net WCC & WCF Overspend | | | 18.246 |

Within this position Provider Services is included within Communities rather than Adults

Savings within the Budget

- £22.4m of savings built into the overall budget
- 57% rated as green i.e., delivered or expected to be fully delivered, 18% rated amber where there is some risk of non-delivery, and 25% rated red where there is significant risk of non-delivery
- £1.6m relate to one-off use of grants, including Public Health, and a further £1.5m are one-off, giving a recurrent pressure from 2024/25 of £3.1m

Page 25



- Current value of the Capital Programme for 2023/24 to 2026/27, subject to approval by Full Council, totals £370.2m
- 48% is funded via external sources, namely developer contributions (s106 funding) and government grants including those allocated to the County Council for scheme delivery by district partners. The remainder is a mixture of borrowing (40%), capital receipts (5%) and use of earmarked reserves held for capital (7%).

Page 26

| Total Expenditure | 2023/24 revised | 2024/25 revised | 2025/26 revised | 2026/27 + revised | Total 2023/24 + Forecast |
|-------------------------------|-----------------|-----------------|-----------------|-------------------|--------------------------|
| | £000 | £000 | £000 | £000 | £000 |
| Open For Business | 36,561 | 39,905 | 7,751 | 5,607 | 89,824 |
| The Environment | 85,671 | 49,777 | 6,000 | 3,400 | 144,848 |
| Children and Families | 46,156 | 46,283 | 16,606 | 8,319 | 117,364 |
| Efficiency and Transformation | 9,620 | 5,492 | 0 | 0 | 15,112 |
| Health and Well-Being | 2,851 | 191 | 27 | 0 | 3,069 |
| TOTAL | 180,858 | 141,649 | 30,384 | 17,326 | 370,217 |

Financial planning, strategy and the Medium-Term Financial Plan

- Updated Capital Strategy being requested to be approved.
- Updated data on Treasury Management reported.
- Required refresh of the MTFP has commenced.
- Significant and sustained inflation.
- Extremely challenging time for local government.
- Council remains focused on living within its means.
- 2024/25 budget setting process will once again prove to be extremely tough as the Council seeks to achieve its priorities whilst meeting the growing cost of demand, all from within limited funds.

Page 27

Specific 2023/24 Period 4 information

Areas within remit of the Corporate and Communities Panel

P4 Financial Position – COACH & CEU

| COACH & CEU | 2023-24 Gross Budget Q1 | 2023-24 Net Budget Q1 | 2023-24 Forecast Outturn Q1 | 2023-24 Forecast Variance Q1 |
|--------------------------------------|-------------------------------|--------------------------|-----------------------------------|---------------------------------------|
| | £'000 | £'000 | £'000 | £'000 |
| COACH - Management | 188 | -170 | -65 | 105 |
| Legal and Democratic Services | 9,228 | 6,008 | 5,986 | -22 |
| Commercial Management | 2,207 | 622 | 1,303 | 681 |
| Property Services | 10,672 | 987 | 1,225 | 238 |
| Digital, IT and Customer Services | 10,294 | 757 | 757 | 0 |
| Transformation & Change Team | 1,913 | 1,486 | 1,501 | 15 |
| TOTAL COMMERCIAL & CHANGE | 34,502 | 9,690 | 10,707 | 1,017 |
| | | | | |
| Engagement & Communications | 1,178 | 345 | 339 | -6 |
| Health & Safety | 358 | 45 | 76 | 31 |
| HR-Core | 5,316 | 454 | 426 | -28 |
| Financial Services | 8,891 | 1,999 | 1,999 | 0 |
| Chief Executive | 379 | 379 | 397 | 18 |
| TOTAL CHIEF EXECUTIVE UNIT | 16,122 | 3,222 | 3,237 | 15 |

P4 Headlines – COACH & CEU

- The Commercial and Change Directorate is forecasting to overspend its £9.7m net budget by c£1m (10%), with the most significant variances from budget being:-
 - £0.7 million underachievement in-year of the Wildwood Tenancy Income Target. A six month rent free period has been agreed as part of the lease (to facilitate remedials), resulting in income being delayed until the final quarter of 2023/24.
 - £0.3 million pressure due to the use of consultants for specific corporate projects and pressure on delivery of the vacancy management target.
- The Chief Executives Unit (including finance and HR) are expecting to broadly break-even

P4 Financial Position – Communities

| Communities Revenue Forecast | 2023-24 Gross Budget Q1 | 2023-24 Net Budget Q1 | 2023-24 Forecast Outturn Q1 | 2023-24 Forecast Variance Q1 |
|------------------------------------|-------------------------------|--------------------------|-----------------------------------|---------------------------------------|
| | £'000 | £'000 | £'000 | £'000 |
| Strategic Libraries | 11,660 | 4,307 | 4,682 | 375 |
| Museum Services | 837 | 715 | 714 | -1 |
| Archives & Archaeology | 3,756 | 1,576 | 1,589 | 13 |
| Greenspace & Gypsy Services | 2,271 | 308 | 334 | 26 |
| Community Services Leadership Team | 160 | 148 | 148 | 0 |
| Registration & Coroner | 2,321 | 717 | 776 | 59 |
| Public Analyst | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| Trading Standards | 956 | 186 | 186 | 0 |
| Communities and Partnerships | 14,360 | 417 | 387 | -30 |
| Adult Front Door | 788 | 429 | 564 | 135 |
| | | | | |
| TOTAL COMMUNITIES | 37,109 | 8,803 | 9,380 | 577 |

Page 31

P4 Headlines – Communities

- Communities is forecasting to overspend its £8.8m net budget by c£0.7m (8%), with the most significant variances from budget being:-
 - Inflationary increases above budget within Hive PFI contract due to higher than expected RPI
 - Timing delay in achievement of the Libraries Unlocked saving until Quarter 4 of the financial year
 - Partial under-achievement of vacancy management target
- The service is investigating areas of income generation and spend reductions to work towards a balanced budget by the year end however risks remain relating to these.



CORPORATE AND COMMUNITIES OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY PANEL 29 SEPTEMBER 2023

PERFORMANCE OF COMMENTS, COMPLIMENTS AND COMPLAINTS

Summary

1. The Corporate and Communities Overview and Scrutiny Panel has requested an update on the performance of the representation procedures that Worcestershire County Council (the Council) follows for Children's Social Care, Adult Social Care and Corporate Services.
2. The Cabinet Member with Responsibility for Corporate Services and Communication and the Complaints Manager have been invited to the meeting in order to respond to any queries the Panel may have.

Background

3. The Panel has previously received a detailed report in September 2022, setting out the 3 different representation procedures that the Council follows for Children's Social Care, Adult Social Care and Corporate Services (which includes all other Council services). In addition to the 3 procedures, the Council is also subject to the complaints process of the Local Government & Social Care Ombudsman (LGO) service.

Annual Reports for Adult Social Care, Children's Social Care and Corporate Representations

4. The 2022/23 Annual Reports for Adult Social Care representations, Children's Social Care representations and Corporate Representations are available on the Council's website:
 - Adults Social Care Statutory Representations Procedure – Annual Report 2022-2023 (Report pending approval from People Directorate Leadership Team)
 - [Children's Social Care Statutory Representations Procedure - Annual Report 2022-2023](#)
 - [Corporate Representations Procedure - Annual Report 2022-2023](#)
5. The Annual Reports cover the period from 1 April 2022 to 31 March 2023 and provide information on the number and nature of all representations received and the outcomes. They also look at some of the issues raised by them and what changes have resulted.

6. Finally, they give a flavour of some of the compliments received over the 12-month period. The two social care reports are a statutory requirement, the corporate report is done by choice to give information to the public.

Comments

7. Fewer comments are received than complaints, but these can cover the wide range of services that the Council provides, from major infrastructure projects, Covid-19 policies and advice and household recycling centres. Comments are passed to the relevant directorates to respond to as appropriate.

Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman (LGSCO) Annual Review Letter for 2022/23

8. Each year every local authority receives a letter from the LGSCO which summarises complaints upheld, compliance with the Ombudsman's recommendations and how many cases the local authority had remedied before consideration by the Ombudsman. The LGSCO Annual Review Letter for 2022/23 was received on 22 July 2023, and is attached at Appendix 1. The LGSCO accepts that their published figures do not match the data collected by Local Authorities. The LGSCO does not have the capacity to provide further information about the data supplied, therefore the data collected by the Council will be used.
9. 55 complaints were submitted to the LGSCO-in 2022-2023, which represents 5.1% of the total number (1,082 complaints) submitted to the Council in 2022-23 and are split as follows:
 - 12 (4.2%) out of 283 complaints made related to Worcestershire Children First (WCF) Social Care.
 - 15 (6%) out of 250 complaints made related to Adult Social Care
 - 28 (5.1%) out of 549 complaints made related to Corporate Services which are split into the following categories:
 - 13 WCF Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND)
 - 12 Economy and Infrastructure
 - 3 Commercial and Commissioning
10. There were 36 complaints determined by the LGSCO in the 2021-22 year. They covered WCF Social Care (12), Adult Social Care (10), Commercial and Change (1), Worcestershire Children First SEND (5) and Economy and Infrastructure (8).
11. Of the 26 determinations from the LGSCO on Corporate matters, 3 were closed after initial investigation as outside jurisdiction, 11 were closed after initial investigation with no further action, 3 were closed after initial investigation and deemed as premature, 1 was upheld with no further action required by the Council and 8 were upheld with maladministration and injustice. In terms of payments as a result of findings, WCF SEND paid a total of £25,902 to 8 complainants.

12. Of the 16 determinations from the LGSCO relating to Adult Social Care, 4 were upheld as maladministration with injustice, 1 was upheld with no further action, 5 were closed after initial inquiries with no further action, 4 were closed after initial inquiries as out of jurisdiction, 1 was closed as premature, with no further action and 1 Public Report was issued as maladministration and injustice. In terms of payments as a result of findings, the Directorate of People (PD) paid a total of £5,600 to 4 complainants.
13. Of the 9 Children's Social Care complaints determined by LGSCO, 2 were closed after initial inquiries: out of jurisdiction, 5 were closed after initial inquiries: no further action, 1 was upheld maladministration and injustice and 1 was deemed as premature. In terms of payments as a result of findings, 2 complainants were paid a total of £1,000.
14. The Annual Review letter sets out that 92% of complaints about the Council investigated by the LGSCO were upheld, compared to an average of 80% in similar organisations. This was based on 24 investigations. This is a deterioration on 2021/22 when 63% of the 19 investigations conducted by the Ombudsman were upheld, as more complaints were investigated but the percentage upheld has increased. Compliance with the LGSCO's recommendations remains the same as the previous year at 100% and this is based on 19 outcomes for the 2022/23 year compared to only 12 the year before. Finally, in none of upheld cases, the Council had provided a satisfactory remedy before the complaint reached the Ombudsman. This is compared to an average of 6% in similar organisations and is based on 22 upheld decisions. This shows deterioration on the previous year when our percentage was 17% and based on 19 cases.
15. The LGSCO noted that out of the upheld complaints, the remedies for 4 were late and has asked the Council to improve this, noting that this is the fourth consecutive year where they have asked for late compliance with their recommendations to be addressed.
16. The LGSCO's comment on the Council's performance was as follows:

During the year, we issued [one public report](#) about your Council after it took five months to complete a social care assessment and care and support plan and failed to agree the complainant's request for a direct payment, even though they met the conditions to have one.

We recommended the Council apologise and make a payment of £3,000 to reflect the impact of the lack of care and support caused by the delay. We also asked the Council to update us on its progress to provide a direct payment and to identify and review other cases that may have been similarly affected. The Council identified two cases where there had been a delay and we were satisfied with the Council's assessment that those people did not suffer an injustice.

This year your Council agreed to, and implemented, the recommendations we made in 19 cases.

However, it is disappointing that in more than a fifth of these cases, the remedy was not completed within the agreed timescale. Delay completing agreed recommendations undermines confidence in the Council and the complaints process itself. The Council has the opportunity to consider our recommendations and the proposed timescales when we issue a draft of our

decision. It is at this stage you should consider the timescales and tell us if more time will be needed to complete the recommended actions.

Concerningly, this is the fourth consecutive year we have reported your Council's late compliance with our recommendations, which we have asked you to address each year. I ask that you contact my office to arrange a meeting with my officers to discuss what steps the Council can take to improve and any support we can offer you to do so.

Improvements to Managing LGSCO Complaints

17. To help address the issues raised in the 2022/23 letter from the LGSCO the Council is making immediate improvements to ensure that there is greater visibility of these complaints and their progress at a senior level. This includes notifying the Head of IT Customer Service, Assistant Director for IT & Digital, Assistant Director for Legal & Governance and the relevant Assistant Director for the service in relation to the complaint.
18. In addition there will be automated notifications sent to the Senior Officers detailed in paragraph 17 from the new Representations Management System as well as escalations to Director for Commercial and Change and the Chief Executive when 75% of the deadline for completing the requested remedies has been exceeded.
19. A meeting has also been held with the LGSCO and the Chief Executive, Strategic Director of Commercial and Change, Head of IT Customer Services, Customer Services and Representations Manager and Consumer Relations Officer to discuss the current position.
20. This was an extremely positive meeting where the LGSCO was reassured to hear about the changes the Council has made and is continuing to make. During the meeting it was agreed to set up quarterly meetings with their External Training & Relationship Lead to help facilitate any further learning and improvements. The Council is also establishing some additional training from the LGSCO for service area staff in the handling of complaints.

Performance

21. The performance figures provided are for the outcomes and response timescales for the complaints that were resolved between 1 April 2022 to 31 March 2023.

Children Social Care Complaints, Compliments & Comments

22. The Number of Complaints received is:.

| Children Services Complaints | 2021/22 | 2022/23 |
|--|----------------|----------------|
| Local / Stage 1 Complaints | 213 | 283 |
| Formal / Stage 2 Complaints | 25 | 39 |
| Review Panels / Stage 3's held | 6 | 12 |
| Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman | 11 | 11 |
| Total | 255 | 345 |

23. It should be noted that-complaints that go through more than 1 stage of the procedure are only counted once in the following categories, although they may cover more than one service.

| Children Services Team | 2021/22 | 2022/23 |
|---|----------------|----------------|
| Family Front Door | 51 | 63 |
| Adoption (now ACE ¹) | 0 | 6 |
| Children with Disabilities | 15 | 24 |
| Fostering & Kinship | 8 | 4 |
| Safeguarding Teams | 89 | 97 |
| Safeguarding and Quality Assurance | 0 | 9 |
| Support Services (including Supervised Contact) | 1 | 0 |
| Targeted Early Help / Targeted Family Support | 9 | 20 |
| Through Care | 40 | 60 |
| Total | 213 | 283 |

Nature of Complaints

24. It should be noted that the-number of complaints is higher than previous year due to the change of recording practice. The Consumer Relations Team is now also recording each individual complaint point, in line with WCF hence the heightened figure. The same applies to the outcomes in table 9.3.

| Nature of Complaints | 2021/22 | 2022/23 |
|--|----------------|----------------|
| General lack of Communication | 88 | 226 |
| Staff Attitude / Behaviour | 91 | 157 |
| Decision Making | 85 | 198 |
| Discrimination | 4 | 0 |
| Lack or delay in providing assessed service | 16 | 363 |
| Quality and Timeliness of social worker assessment | 56 | 46 |
| Practice Non-Compliant | 21 | 71 |
| Total | 361 | 1061 |

Stage 1 Outcomes & Timescales

| Stage 1 Outcomes | 2021/22 | 2022/23 |
|--------------------------|----------------|----------------|
| Upheld | 15 | 25 |
| Partially Upheld | 57 | 50 |
| Not Upheld | 96 | 126 |
| No finding | 7 | 1 |
| Discontinued / Withdrawn | 13 | 41 |
| Redirected | 0 | 5 |
| Total | 188 | 248 |

| Timescales of Stage 1 Complaint Resolutions | 2021/22 | 2022/23 |
|--|----------------|----------------|
| Within 20 working days | 97.5% | 97.5% |

¹ ACE is a regional adoption agency

| | | |
|------------------------|------|------|
| Within 40 working days | 2% | 2.5% |
| After 40 working days | 0.5% | 0% |

25. Overall, 97.5% of all stage 1 Complaints have been dealt with in the required timescales, this is the same figure as last year despite a 33% increase in complaints received. Those over 20 working days do not go over an additional 5 days, the reason for this will be due to the complexity of the case issue or they require interviews with specific people who were not available in the initial 20 day period.
26. Complaints may be suspended when further information is required from the complainant or when court proceedings are underway.

Stage 2 Outcomes & Timescales

| Stage 2 Outcomes | 2021/2022 | 2022/23 |
|----------------------------|------------------|----------------|
| Complaint Fully Upheld | 2 | 5 |
| Complaint Partially Upheld | 12 | 8 |
| Complaint Not Upheld | 12 | 22 |
| Discontinued | 1 | 1 |
| Total | 27 | 36 |

| Timescales of Stage 2 Complaint Resolutions | 2021/22 | 2022/23 |
|--|----------------|----------------|
| Within 25 working days | 0% | 0% |
| Within 65 working days | 70% | 83% |
| More than 65 working days | 30% | 17% |

27. The target for stage 2's complaints within 65 working days is 90%. Although this has not been reached, there have been significant improvements over the past 3 years. In 20/21, only 17% of stage 2 complaints were completed within the 65 working days. This increased to 70% in year 21/22, and up to 83% this year.
28. Further development is needed in this area and continues to be a focus.

Compliments

| Service Area | 2021/2022 | 2022/2023 |
|--|------------------|------------------|
| Children with Disabilities | 4 | 1 |
| Fostering & Kinship | 2 | 2 |
| QA and Independent Review | 11 | 10 |
| Safeguarding Area | 33 | 49 |
| Family Front Door | 15 | 11 |
| Supporting Families First/Targeted Early Help | 10 | 6 |
| Through Care | 6 | 12 |
| Child Protection Chairs and Local Authority Designated Officer | 1 | 0 |
| Care Leaver and Outreach | 0 | 1 |
| Other | 0 | 2 |
| Total | 82 | 94 |

Adult Social Care Complaints, Compliments & Comments

29. The Numbers of complaints received is:

| Level | 2021/22 | 2022/23 |
|--|------------|------------|
| Low Risk | 190 | 203 |
| Moderate /High Risk | 43 | 47 |
| Informal | 14 | 14 |
| Local Government & Social Care Ombudsman | 13 | 15 |
| Total | 260 | 279 |

Number of Complaints by Service Area

| Service Area | 2021/22 | 2022/23 |
|--|------------|------------|
| Central Services | 57 | 61 |
| Commissioning | 7 | 3 |
| Mental Health | 19 | 22 |
| Learning Disabilities | 17 | 17 |
| Area Social Work Teams | 78 | 79 |
| Provider Services | 74 | 78 |
| Safeguarding, Deprivation of Liberty & Prisons | 17 | 15 |
| Urgent Care | 12 | 11 |
| Young Adults Team | 6 | 0 |
| Total | 287 | 286 |

Number of Complaints by Service

| Service | 2021/22 | 2022/23 |
|-------------------------------------|---------|---------|
| Brokerage Process | 1 | 1 |
| Continuing Health Care | 2 | 2 |
| Complaint Process not followed | 1 | 0 |
| Contracted out (Day Care) | 2 | 2 |
| Decision Making | 34 | 68 |
| Discrimination | 1 | 0 |
| Duty, Care and Support Planning | 39 | 37 |
| Financial Assessment/Direct Payment | 25 | 25 |
| Finance | 22 | 33 |
| Externally Commissioned Home Care | 29 | 29 |
| Externally Commissioned Respite | 1 | 0 |
| Externally Commissioned Res/Nursing | 4 | 11 |
| Lack of Service | 0 | 2 |
| Supported Living | 2 | 2 |
| Other | 1 | 4 |
| Learning Disability | 2 | 1 |
| Mental Capacity Assessment | 4 | 1 |
| Process | 0 | 5 |
| Promoting Independence | 14 | 3 |
| Safeguarding Processes | 5 | 10 |
| Staff Attitude/Behaviour | 11 | 11 |
| Standard of Service | 176 | 145 |

| | | |
|--------------|------------|------------|
| Total | 376 | 392 |
|--------------|------------|------------|

Nature of Complaints

| Nature of Complaint | 2021/22 | 2022/23 |
|--|----------------|----------------|
| Adult Safeguarding | 2 | 3 |
| Breach of Confidentiality | 5 | 3 |
| Care Plan Assessment | 1 | 0 |
| Changes to call Times | 2 | 1 |
| Continuing Health Care | 1 | 0 |
| Decision Making | 0 | 3 |
| Delay in Providing Service | 2 | 6 |
| Delay/Failure to Keep Informed | 1 | 1 |
| Direct Payments | 8 | 8 |
| Discrimination | 1 | 0 |
| Deprivation of Liberty | 0 | 2 |
| Deferred Payment Agreement Process | 0 | 1 |
| Financial | 14 | 2 |
| General lack of Communication | 35 | 38 |
| Health/Personal Care | 0 | 1 |
| Hospital Discharge | 0 | 2 |
| Inaccurate Information | 2 | 8 |
| Info from Provider | 1 | 1 |
| Lack of or delay in providing assessment | 1 | 0 |
| Lack of Service | 5 | 3 |
| Late Calls | 0 | 1 |
| Medication | 2 | 1 |
| Mental Capacity Assessment | 3 | 0 |
| Missed Calls | 0 | 1 |
| No return of telephone calls | 6 | 12 |
| Other | 1 | 1 |
| Outcome of Decision/Assessment | 5 | 1 |
| Practice non-compliant with leg/process | 2 | 0 |
| Process dec/Res Alloc | 4 | 3 |
| Provider Management Admin | 0 | 1 |
| Purchase Services | 0 | 1 |
| Staff Attitude/Behaviour | 16 | 7 |
| Staff/Training/Qualifications | 1 | 0 |
| Standard of Service Delivery | 176 | 216 |
| Support Planning | 4 | 4 |
| Unavailability of Staff to take calls | 0 | 1 |
| Total | 301 | 333 |

Outcomes of Complaints

30. Low Risk complaints are relatively straight forward and relate to a single or a few issues that can be readily resolved. Some complaints were redirected, such as to other partner organisations or to the provider's own complaints process.

| Outcomes of Low Risk Complaints | 2021/22 | 2022/23 |
|--|----------------|----------------|
| Upheld | 26 | 19 |

| | | |
|--|------------|------------|
| Partially Upheld | 30 | 24 |
| Not Upheld | 45 | 39 |
| Re-directed | 3 | 2 |
| Discontinued (includes referred to Safeguarding) | 62 | 17 |
| Withdrawn | 6 | 0 |
| Total | 172 | 101 |

31. Moderate Risk complaints are generally those that deal with a number of issues, or a number of teams and cross organisational issues. These are either dealt with by a relevant Social Care manager or Advanced Social Work Practitioner or the Investigating Officer for Adult Social Care.

| Moderate / High Risk Complaints Outcomes | 2021/22 | 2022/23 |
|---|----------------|----------------|
| Upheld | 3 | 0 |
| Partially Upheld | 8 | 11 |
| Not Upheld | 4 | 7 |
| Discontinued | 17 | 5 |
| Redirected | 2 | 2 |
| Withdrawn | 2 | 0 |
| Total | 36 | 25 |

Timescales

32. There are no prescribed time limits for dealing with complaints, although the legislation suggests a maximum of 6 months. The expectation is that reasonable timescales are negotiated and agreed with the complainant. Adult Social Care have set default time limits of 35 working days for the completion of complaints, although it is possible that such timescales are extended for more complex complaints.

| Timescales of Low-Risk Complaint Resolution | 2021/22 | 2022/23 |
|--|----------------|----------------|
| Over 65 Days | 9% | 25% |
| Within 55 Days | 5% | 3% |
| Within 45 Days | 8% | 8% |
| Within 35 Days | 78% | 64% |

| Timescales of Moderate/High Risk Complaint Resolution | 2021/22 | 2022/23 |
|--|----------------|----------------|
| Over 65 Days | 28% | 28% |
| Within 55 Days | 3% | 8% |
| Within 45 Days | 11% | 16% |
| Within 35 Days | 58% | 48% |

Compliments

| Compliments | 2021/22 | 2022/23 |
|---------------------------------------|----------------|----------------|
| Central Services | 10 | 10 |
| Commissioning | 1 | 1 |
| Mental Health & Learning Disabilities | 39 | 40 |
| Operations & Intergration | 68 | 97 |
| Provider Services | 92 | 63 |

| | | |
|---|------------|------------|
| Quality, Safeguarding, Deprivation of Liberty & Prisons | 3 | 5 |
| Urgent Care | 9 | 21 |
| Total | 222 | 237 |

Corporate Complaints, Compliments & Comments

Number of Complaints by Directorate

| Directorate | 2021/22 | 2022/23 |
|-------------------------------------|----------------|----------------|
| Economy & Infrastructure (E&I) | 334 | 353 |
| Chief Executive Unit (CEU) | 5 | 14 |
| Worcestershire Children First (WCF) | 58 | 140 |
| People | 32 | 38 |
| COaCH | 23 | 31 |
| Public Health | 8 | 0 |
| Total | 460 | 576 |

Number of Complaints by Service Area

| Economy and Infrastructure | 2021/22 | 2022/23 |
|--|----------------|----------------|
| Transport Operations | 111 | 11 |
| Strategic Planning | 1 | 0 |
| Strategic Infrastructure & Economy | 19 | 23 |
| Planning Development Control | 3 | 10 |
| Network Control | 1 | 15 |
| Highways Transport Operations | 0 | 101 |
| Highways & Right of Way Operations | 10 | 7 |
| Highways Maintenance Operations – Routine & Cyclic | 144 | 166 |
| Highways Maintenance Operations – Design & Build | 2 | 0 |
| Flood Risk & Highways Drainage | 3 | 3 |
| Economy, Major Projects & Waste | 40 | 17 |
| Total | 334 | 353 |

| Worcestershire Children First | 2021/22 | 2022/23 |
|---|----------------|----------------|
| Through Care | 1 | 0 |
| Sufficiency & Place Planning | 3 | 0 |
| SEND & Vulnerable Learners | 53 | 123 |
| Operational Safeguarding | 1 | 0 |
| North East | 0 | 1 |
| Management Information | 2 | 0 |
| Fostering | 1 | 1 |
| Children with Disabilities (CWD), Short Breaks & Residential Care | 1 | 2 |
| Business Systems | 1 | 0 |
| Early Help Partnership | 0 | 1 |
| Assessment Teams | 0 | 7 |
| Child Protection & Local Authority Designated Officer (LADO) | 0 | 2 |

| | | |
|-------------------|-----------|------------|
| Adoption Services | 0 | 3 |
| Total | 63 | 140 |

| People Directorate | 2021/22 | 2022/23 |
|---|----------------|----------------|
| Worcestershire Safeguarding Adults Board (WSAB) | 1 | 0 |
| Vulnerable Resettlement Programme | 0 | 2 |
| Safeguarding | 0 | 1 |
| Road Safety Education & Skills | 1 | 0 |
| Registrars | 9 | 6 |
| Older People/Physical Disabilities (OP/OD) | 2 | 3 |
| Learning Disability – North | 1 | 0 |
| Mental Health – South | 1 | 0 |
| Gypsy Sites | 1 | 1 |
| Deprivation Of Liberty Safeguarding (DoLS) | 0 | 1 |
| Delivery Lead & The Hive | 10 | 11 |
| Countryside Sites South | 0 | 1 |
| Countryside Sites North | 1 | 4 |
| Community Greenspace | 1 | 0 |
| Care Contributions Assessment Team (CCA) | 2 | 0 |
| Commissioning | 0 | 4 |
| Area Team Wyre Forest | 0 | 1 |
| Area Team Redditch | 0 | 2 |
| Area Team Malvern Hills | 2 | 0 |
| Adult Contact Team/Here2Help | 0 | 1 |
| Total | 32 | 38 |

| Commerical and Change | 2021/22 | 2022/23 |
|--|----------------|----------------|
| Web Manager | 1 | 0 |
| Technology | 1 | 0 |
| Legal & Democratic | 2 | 2 |
| Contact Centre | 4 | 10 |
| Consumer Relations | 9 | 7 |
| Commercial & Change | 7 | 9 |
| Corporate Information Governance Team (CIGT) | 0 | 3 |
| Total | 25 | 31 |

| Public Health | 2021/22 | 2022/23 |
|---------------------------|----------------|----------------|
| Public Health Consultants | 8 | 0 |
| Total | 8 | 0 |

| Chief Executive Unit | 2021/22 | 2022/23 |
|--|----------------|----------------|
| Human Resources, Organisational Development & Engagement | 0 | 2 |
| Finance | 5 | 6 |
| Corporate Legal Services | 0 | 1 |
| Content & Communications | 0 | 3 |
| Accountancy & Treasury | 0 | 2 |
| Total | 5 | 14 |

Nature of Complaints

33. As in previous years, many of the complaints fall under the more general headings of Communication, Decision making and Standard of Service. The most noticeable change is the increase in complaints relating to Standard of Service. This appears to be due to increased demand in certain areas including Special Needs Education and School Transport.

| Nature of Complaint | 2021/22 | 2022/23 |
|--|----------------|----------------|
| Transport | 2 | 2 |
| Standard of Service | 159 | 301 |
| Staff Attitude / Behaviour | 38 | 45 |
| Requests | 22 | 49 |
| Race | 2 | 2 |
| Publications | 1 | 0 |
| Policy Decision/Resource Allocation | 0 | 1 |
| Other Service Users | 1 | 0 |
| Miscellaneous | 10 | 6 |
| Lack of Service | 55 | 21 |
| Information Communication Technology (ICT) | 6 | 0 |
| Gender | 0 | 1 |
| Freedom of Information Request | 17 | 32 |
| Facilities | 0 | 1 |
| Disability | 1 | 2 |
| Decision Making | 110 | 108 |
| Damage to property or persons | 10 | 14 |
| Contractors | 21 | 7 |
| Communication | 80 | 89 |
| Total | 535 | 681 |

Stage 1 Outcomes

| Stage 1 Outcomes | 2021/22 | 2022/23 |
|-------------------------|----------------|----------------|
| Upheld | 64 | 97 |
| Partially Upheld | 131 | 172 |
| Not Upheld | 139 | 147 |
| Discontinued | 19 | 40 |
| Withdrawn | 4 | 7 |
| Redirected | 47 | 26 |
| Total | 404 | 489 |

Stage 2 Outcomes

| Stage 1 Outcomes | 2021/22 | 2022/23 |
|-------------------------|----------------|----------------|
| Upheld | 3 | 11 |
| Partially Upheld | 9 | 11 |
| Not Upheld | 14 | 14 |
| Discontinued | 0 | 1 |
| Total | 26 | 37 |

Timescales

34. For Stage 1 Complaints, the majority (82.80%) were responded to within the 20-day target. The average response time for all Stage 1 responses was 13.37 days. This is a slight improvement compared to the 2021-22 average which was 15 days.

| Timescales of Stage 1 Complaint Resolution | 2021/22 | 2022/23 |
|---|----------------|----------------|
| Within 20 Days | 73.13% | 82.80% |
| After 20 Days | 26.87% | 17.20% |

35. For Stage 2 Complaints, 89.80% were responded to inside the 25 working day target. The average response time for all Stage 2 responses was 18.83 days.

| Timescales of Stage 2 Complaint Resolution | 2021/22 | 2022/23 |
|---|----------------|----------------|
| Within 25 Days | 83.33% | 89.80% |
| After 25 Days | 16.67% | 10.20% |

Key Performance Indicators (KPIs)

2022 to 2023 KPI Performance

Green – Target met or exceeded.

Amber – Within 10% of meeting target.

Red – Outside 10% of meeting target.

| KPI | Target | 2021/22 | 2022/23 |
|---|---------------|----------------|----------------|
| Children’s Social Care Stage 1 complaints completed in timescale (within 20 days) | 90% | 97.50% | 97.50% |
| Children’s Social Care Stage 2 complaints completed in 65 days | 90% | 70.00% | 83.00% |
| Adult Social Care complaints completed in timescale (within 6 months) | 100% | 98.72% | 96.04% |
| Corporate Stage 1 complaints completed in timescale (within 20 days) | 90% | 73.13% | 82.80% |
| Corporate Stage 2 complaints completed in timescale (within 25 days) | 90% | 83.33% | 89.80% |
| E&I Stage 1 complaints completed in timescale (within 20 days) | 90% | 78.90% | 81.00% |
| E&I Stage 2 complaints completed in timescale (within 25 days) | 90% | 83.33% | 100.00% |
| Adult Social Care complaints that progress to the Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman | 25% | 4.45% | 6.00% |
| Corporate complaints that progress from Stage 1 to Stage 2 | 25% | 1.70% | 0.72% |
| Children’s Social Care complaints that progress from Stage 1 to Stage 2 | 25% | 11.75% | 13.75% |

Consumer Relations Team Commentary on KPI Performance

36. Children's Social Care Stage 2 complaints completed in 65 days:
 - Although there has been significant improvements in this area, further development is needed. There will be a focus on responding to stage 2 complaints within 25 working days, although it is appreciated that this is a tight timescale. The increase in Investigating Officers and the continued collaboration between Consumer Relations and WCF will be key to achieving this goal.
37. Adult Social Care complaints completed in timescale (within 6 months):
 - This target was narrowly missed due to an external Investigating Officer who had to discontinue with their investigation which was 80% completed. It was necessary to commission a new Investigating Officer which resulted in the complaint timescale being exceeded.
38. Corporate Stage 1 complaints (inc E&I) completed in timescale (within 20 days):
 - Whilst there has been an improvement in performance year on year, the high volumes of complaints received in a short period of time regarding the Copcut Junction and School Transport have impacted the overall figure.
39. Corporate Stage 2 complaints (Inc E&I) completed in timescale (within 25 days):
 - Again, an improvement on previous year. A small number of complex investigations were outside timescale. This was mainly due to the time required to complete interviews and gather required information.
40. E&I Stage 1 complaints completed in timescale (within 20 days):
 - High volumes of complaints received in a short period of time regarding the Copcut Junction and School Transport have impacted performance.

Learning from Complaints

41. When a complaint is upheld (and the Council is at fault) and the findings of a subsequent investigation is for a change to policy or service delivery, the Consumer Relations Unit will produce an action plan report and follow up with the Service any learning/action that needs to be carried out. Recommendations within these reports are agreed with the appropriate Assistant Director and shared with the relevant Director.
42. Learning from complaints is an important aspect of the Complaints procedure. Examples from 2022/23 include:
43. Worcestershire Children's First
 - WCF have updated their Supervision Recording Template to include a specific recording section to evidence reflective discussion from learning from complaints, audits, and feedback.
 - All Complaint Outcomes are shared with the relevant manager and group manager to ensure they are cited on learning, and this can be discussed with individual practitioners.
 - Developed a learning/case scenario document that has been shared with all Social Care Teams for a learning/reflective session in all Team Meetings –

based on complaints received from children, young people, and care leavers.

44. Adults Social Care

- In house provider managers addressed issues with their front-line staff. A communication strategy was agreed with a new provider and the Council's Quality Assurance Team works with the Provider through developing and monitoring the action plan is in place.
- Additional training for staff that monitor alerts to ensure they are actioning anything straight away is in place. Possibility of a report being generated to the management team to ensure that there is good oversight of this is being explored.
- Reviewed the information pack that is left with people to ensure that it includes information regarding Council processes and the levels of service that can be expected. This is also shared with partners in Worcestershire Acute Hospitals NHS Trust in order that there is wider learning.

45. Corporate (SEND)

- Staff have been asked to log into meetings 10 mins in advance in case of technical difficulties and check the format the day before (e.g. confirm if face-to-face or virtual).
- Staff have been asked to request additional information immediately if a mainstream parental preference states they cannot meet need and does not state what additional support would be required
- Staff have been asked to inform parents if their mainstream parental preference responds negatively, to outline the additional support needed by mainstream to meet need and consider holding an early Annual Review to assess if this support was successful if it is decided the child should attend there. If progress has not been made, specialist provision could then be revisited.
- Staff have been asked to ensure that letters being sent to service users are explanatory and contain all the information required for the service user to respond easily. There has been work undertaken previously relating to this and at the current time WCF are working with a number of parent/carers to ensure continued improvements are made.
- The SEND Service are in the process of transferring to a new case management system, with the go live date scheduled for January 2023. Work is being undertaken in this area to ensure that there is clear guidance and practice standards in place for all staff within the service.
- Staff have been reminded to respond to enquiries within 5 working days and agree a date to respond fully.
- The SEND Service are making ongoing improvements in the Annual Review process and as part of this are developing a tracker to monitor Annual Reviews and ensure they take place on time.

Complaint Training

46. Consumer Relations Officers provide training sessions for staff on the operation of the 3 different complaints procedures, as and when required. So far in the

current year 7 sessions have been provided for staff in the People Directorate (18 attendees). This is in addition to the guidance available on the staff intranet.

Vexatious Complainant Procedure

47. There are procedures for dealing with vexatious complainants and they are set out in the legislation for the Adult and Children's representations procedures. A similar procedure has been adopted for Corporate Complaints. It is a serious measure to take, and the criteria must be evidenced and met to instigate it.
48. The Team manage this process, in conjunction with senior managers of the affected service. However, identifying someone as vexatious does not mean that the Council can refuse to take new complaints from them or to communicate with them on some level. The team give advice to managers on how to handle difficult or persistent complainants before reaching the question of using the vexatious process. So far this year, no complainant has been registered as vexatious.

Independent Investigating Officers and Independent Persons

49. The Children's Act 1989, subsequent legislation and guidance determine the Children's Social Care procedure in place in the Council. At Stage 1, WCF staff carry out the investigation and respond to the complainant direct, as the requirement is to deal with matters as close to the point of service delivery as possible. They have 10 working days to do so, extendable to 20 working days if necessary.
50. At Stage 2, the appointment of an Independent Person (IP) is required, together with an Investigating Officer (IO). Whilst an IO can be an employee of the authority, they cannot be from the service complained about. In the past, the Consumer Relations Officer for Children's Services did conduct some investigations themselves, whilst also using IOs from the pool, but workloads are now such that they are rarely able to do so, particularly given the tight timescale of 25 - 65 working days. Most local authorities use external IOs.
51. The roles of the IO and IP are set out in the guidance. The IO must be impartial and open-minded, and their investigation based on an analysis of information and interviews. Their conclusions must be evidenced and reasonable based on the balance of probability. An IP is involved at all stages of the investigation and cannot be an elected member, employee, former employee or spouse of a former employee (if less than 3 years has passed). Their role is to ensure the investigation is open, transparent and fair (particularly with regard to the young person concerned). If the complaint progresses to Stage 3 both the IO and IP are required to attend the Review Panel and speak to their reports.
52. IOs are also used for Moderate and High-Risk Adult Social Care complaints and Stage 2 Corporate complaints where the Consumer Relations Officers are unable to undertake the investigations themselves.

Representation Management System

53. A new Representation Management System (RMS) is being implemented in October 2023 which is a bespoke digital system, with integrated online forms and dashboards for the Consumer Relations Team, Service Areas and Independent

Investigators. Representations will follow an automated workflow between stages, and automatic reminders will be triggered in advance of the deadlines for responses. The new RMS system will deliver a range of benefits as outlined below:

- Improved and integrated customer centric online form ensuring more information is captured at the point of submission and assessments of representations can be made more quickly.
- Service Area staff can directly submit representations into the RMS via a staff facing form.
- Increased efficiency and productivity for the Consumer Relations Team through the avoidance of double handling information / data which needs to be entered into the system.
- Use of pre-defined email templates for communication with the complainant.
- Avoidance of using emails and spreadsheets to track the progress of complaints with service areas.
- Increased efficiency and productivity for services areas through direct access to the system, streamlining the process for investigating and providing responses to complaints.
- Complaints that progress to stage 2 or 3 will be automatically linked back to the original complaint to ensure continuity.
- Automatic reminders and SLA count downs will help ensure targets for initial acknowledgments of complaints and responses within the statutory timescales are achieved.
- Improved reporting capability through the direct integration into Power Bi, reducing the demand on the team to extract data and provide reports to the business.

Monitoring Information

54. The Council does not currently collect any demographic information to support data analysis or capturing evidence of any groups being disproportionately affected. The Council, being under the Public-Sector Equality Duty must, on an on- going basis, consider how its policies are working for the diverse communities the Council serves.

Relevant Legislation

55. Children and Family Services - The Children Act 1989, Representations Procedure (England) Regulations 2006. The Local Authority functions covered include services provided under Parts III, IV and V of the Children Act 1989.
56. Adult Social Care – The Local Authority Social Services and National Health Service Complaints (England) Regulations 2009, which came into force on 1 April 2009.
57. Public Health - The NHS Bodies and Local Authorities (Partnership Arrangements, Care Trusts, Public Health and Local Healthwatch) Regulations 2012.

Health and Wellbeing Implications

58. The complaints element of the social care and corporate procedure is part of a wider assurance process supporting quality in service delivery standards. This can then be a positive experience for customers and contribute to their health and well-being. For those occasions where the experience which has led to a complaint is a less positive one, then there is an opportunity for appropriate action or redress so that the health and well-being of the complainant and/or relevant others is secured. The compliments process allows customers to note great practice by the Council; positive experience of officers working in many different settings will support improved experience of health and well-being for individuals as well as for staff who can be satisfied that their work is appreciated.

Purpose of the Meeting

59. The Corporate and Communities Overview and Scrutiny Panel is asked to:

- consider the information provided in the report
- decide whether any further Scrutiny is required; and
- agree any comments to highlight to the Cabinet Member with Responsibility for Corporate Services and Communication.

Supporting Information

Appendix 1: Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman (LGSCO) Annual Review Letter for 2022/23

Appendix 2: Examples of compliments received during 2022/23

Contact Points

Geoff Hedges, Head of IT Customer Service

Tel: 01905 843154, Email: ghedges@worcestershire.gov.uk

Emma James / Jo Weston, Overview and Scrutiny Officers

Tel: 01905 844965 / 844964, Email: scrutiny@worcestershire.gov.uk

Background Papers

In the opinion of the proper officer, in this case the Assistant Director for Legal and Governance the following are the background papers relating to the subject matter of this report:

- Agenda and Minutes of the Corporate and Communities Overview and Scrutiny Panel on 21 September 2022, 8 November, 20 July and 11 March 2021.

[All agendas and minutes are available on the Council's website here.](#)

19 July 2023

By email

Mr Robinson
Head of Paid Service
Worcestershire County Council

Dear Mr Robinson

Annual Review letter 2022-23

I write to you with your annual summary of complaint statistics from the Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman for the year ending 31 March 2023. The information offers valuable insight about your organisation's approach to complaints. As always, I would encourage you to consider it as part of your corporate governance processes. As such, I have sought to share this letter with the Leader of your Council and Chair of the appropriate Scrutiny Committee, to encourage effective ownership and oversight of complaint outcomes, which offer such valuable opportunities to learn and improve.

The end of the reporting year, saw the retirement of Michael King, drawing his tenure as Local Government Ombudsman to a close. I was delighted to be appointed to the role of Interim Ombudsman in April and look forward to working with you and colleagues across the local government sector in the coming months. I will be building on the strong foundations already in place and will continue to focus on promoting improvement through our work.

Complaint statistics

Our statistics focus on three key areas that help to assess your organisation's commitment to putting things right when they go wrong:

Complaints upheld - We uphold complaints when we find fault in an organisation's actions, including where the organisation accepted fault before we investigated. We include the total number of investigations completed to provide important context for the statistic.

Over the past two years, we have reviewed our processes to ensure we do the most we can with the resources we have. One outcome is that we are more selective about the complaints we look at in detail, prioritising where it is in the public interest to investigate. While providing a more sustainable way for us to work, it has meant that changes in uphold rates this year are not solely down to the nature of the cases coming to us. We are less likely to carry out investigations on 'borderline' issues, so we are naturally finding a higher proportion of fault overall.

Our average uphold rate for all investigations has increased this year and you may find that your organisation's uphold rate is higher than previous years. This means that comparing uphold rates with previous years carries a note of caution. Therefore, I recommend comparing this statistic with

that of similar organisations, rather than previous years, to better understand your organisation's performance.

Compliance with recommendations - We recommend ways for organisations to put things right when faults have caused injustice and monitor their compliance with our recommendations. Failure to comply is rare and a compliance rate below 100% is a cause for concern.

Satisfactory remedy provided by the authority - In these cases, the organisation upheld the complaint and we were satisfied with how it offered to put things right. We encourage the early resolution of complaints and credit organisations that accept fault and find appropriate ways to put things right.

Finally, we compare the three key annual statistics for your organisation with similar authorities to provide an average marker of performance. We do this for County Councils, District Councils, Metropolitan Boroughs, Unitary Councils, and London Boroughs.

Your annual data, and a copy of this letter, will be uploaded to our interactive map, [Your council's performance](#), on 26 July 2023. This useful tool places all our data and information about councils in one place. You can find the detail of the decisions we have made about your Council, read the public reports we have issued, and view the service improvements your Council has agreed to make as a result of our investigations, as well as previous annual review letters.

Your organisation's performance

During the year, we [issued one public report](#) about your Council after it took five months to complete a social care assessment and care and support plan and failed to agree the complainant's request for a direct payment, even though they met the conditions to have one.

We recommended the Council apologise and make a payment of £3,000 to reflect the impact of the lack of care and support caused by the delay. We also asked the Council to update us on its progress to provide a direct payment and to identify and review other cases that may have been similarly affected. The Council identified two cases where there had been a delay and we were satisfied with the Council's assessment that those people did not suffer an injustice.

This year your Council agreed to, and implemented, the recommendations we made in 19 cases. However, it is disappointing that in more than a fifth of these cases, the remedy was not completed within the agreed timescale. Delay completing agreed recommendations undermines confidence in the Council and the complaints process itself. The Council has the opportunity to consider our recommendations and the proposed timescales when we issue a draft of our decision. It is at this stage you should consider the timescales and tell us if more time will be needed to complete the recommended actions.

Concerningly, this is the fourth consecutive year we have reported your Council's late compliance with our recommendations, which we have asked you to address each year. I ask that you contact my office to arrange a meeting with my officers to discuss what steps the Council can take to improve and any support we can offer you to do so.

Supporting complaint and service improvement

I know that complaints offer organisations a rich source of intelligence and insight that has the potential to be transformational. These insights can indicate a problem with a specific area of

service delivery or, more broadly, provide a perspective on an organisation's culture and ability to learn. To realise the potential complaints have to support service improvements, organisations need to have the fundamentals of complaint handling in place. To support you to do so, we have continued our work with the Housing Ombudsman Service to develop a joint complaint handling code that will provide a standard for organisations to work to. We will consult on the code and its implications prior to launch and will be in touch with further details.

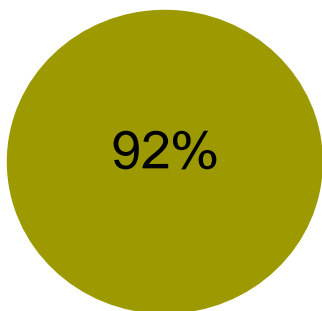
In addition, our successful training programme includes practical interactive workshops that help participants develop their complaint handling skills. We can also offer tailored support and bespoke training to target specific issues your organisation might have identified. We delivered 105 online workshops during the year, reaching more than 1350 people. To find out more visit www.lgo.org.uk/training or get in touch at training@lgo.org.uk.

Yours sincerely,



Paul Najsarek
Interim Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman
Interim Chair, Commission for Local Administration in England

Complaints upheld



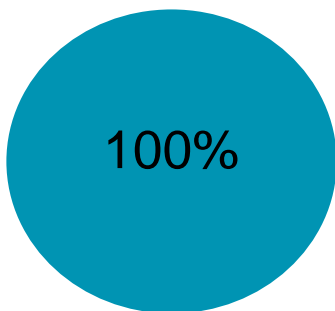
92% of complaints we investigated were upheld.

This compares to an average of **80%** in similar organisations.

22
upheld decisions

Statistics are based on a total of **24** investigations for the period between 1 April 2022 to 31 March 2023

Compliance with Ombudsman recommendations



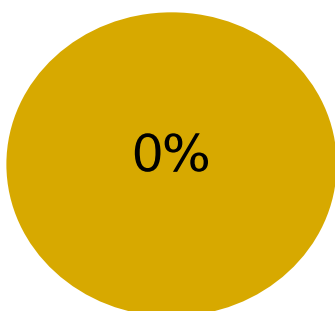
In **100%** of cases we were satisfied the organisation had successfully implemented our recommendations.

This compares to an average of **100%** in similar organisations.

Statistics are based on a total of **19** compliance outcomes for the period between 1 April 2022 to 31 March 2023

- Failure to comply with our recommendations is rare. An organisation with a compliance rate below 100% should scrutinise those complaints where it failed to comply and identify any learning.

Satisfactory remedy provided by the organisation



In **0%** of upheld cases we found the organisation had provided a satisfactory remedy before the complaint reached the Ombudsman.

This compares to an average of **6%** in similar organisations.

0
satisfactory remedy decisions

Statistics are based on a total of **22** upheld decisions for the period between 1 April 2022 to 31 March 2023

Appendix 2: Examples of Compliments Received during 2022/23

Feedback from a grandparent to a Children's Social Worker:

"I wanted to say a huge big thank you for your involvement in safe guarding my grandson.

You have worked closely with me as well as himself to ensure his well being. I have found you to be honest and professional at all times and I don't know where we would be had you not come on board with this case.

I am going to miss your input and genuine concern for and myself, but want to wish you luck as you move forward with your career and your life."

Feedback from a fostering agency:

"can we just say you have been a fantastic manager to work with. Your oversight on this case has helped us support our carers and achieve a settled and successful Match for the children.

Thank you for working so closely with us as a multi-agency team."

Feedback from a service user about a Social Worker:

"Thank you for the wonderful care you have given to my mom."

Feedback from a relative of a service user about a Social Worker:

"Thank you for your support you have stood beside me and my mum at a time when I felt very alone. You did not make assumptions or misinterpret my mum's presentation listening carefully to her history and behaviour traits."

Feedback from a service user about a Social Worker:

"Thank you so very much for all your work with us, you have been of enormous support to us all and we have felt you had a great understanding of our situation. You were always ready to help and explain and guide when needed, we have really appreciated that. You have also shown great empathy in our darkest times."

Feedback from a relative of a service user about a Social Worker:

"From the minute you became Mom's caseworker you went over and above to make sure everything was done in a timely manner. Nothing was too much trouble, you never made me feel as if I was a nuisance. You explained everything and put me at ease. Your actions mean more than I or my family can say, thank you."

Corporate Compliments 2022-23

- *"I just wanted to pass on a huge thank you from our patient XXXXXXXXXX. His blue badge arrived on Saturday and he says that it has been brilliant. Life changing! He had a hospital appointment the other day and it was so less stressful. He his next chemo treatment will be on Friday, and he says that this has now so reduced his anxiety about parking at the hospital. It is amazing".
(COaCH/Contact Centre) 06/04/2022*
- *Hi I would just like to say how good is your footpath defect report online, I reported a path at Hampton by the ferry up over Clarke hill and I walked there last*

week and what a brilliant job your team has made of clearing the path what a joy it was to walk it again many thanks keep up the great work. (E&I/PROW) 07/04/2022

- A huge thank you for installing a good width pavement from the Bowling Alley Car Park to the Worcester Motorcycle Club , Perdiswell Park WR3 7SN. Thanks . The walking from home WR37LT to school at North Worcester Primary Academy has been dangerous because of the absence of a decent footpath. Now it's better . (E&I/Highways) 04/05/2022*
- I'm writing to thank you for the professional way you managed today's planning meeting and your assistance in putting us at our ease and explaining the process of speaking to the committee. (COaCH/Legal & Democratic) 24/05/2022*
- I would like to take this opportunity to thank Worcestershire County Council for their speedy action in the removal of the unlawful encampment of travellers on the A449 Kidderminster to Worcester Road. These travellers had caused great distress in 2021 with their Anti-Social Behaviour which included 2 attempted break-ins, trespassing, dogs barking throughout nights, rubbish and much much more. The quick response to remove these people has given great peace of mind in the understanding that the Council does consider the wider picture and rights of those settled and living in Hartlebury. I must add that I respect the values of these travellers and their choice of living, however when their actions affect the wider environment and others lives, there must be a line drawn. I do sincerely thank Worcestershire County Council. (People/Gypsy Services Team) 17/06/2022*
- I've been asked to pass on thanks to WCC's Highways Dept. PLUS to the contractors who did the following work: - arranging to have the eastern end of this footpath 'properly' re-surfaced, this section is between Oakly Rd. and the metal barriers. (E&I/Highways) 17/06/2022*
- I have been using Hallow Road 'tip' for more than 50 years, but I have never experienced anything like the service I received from XXXXX, on Saturday 9th July. He helped me unload, some very heavy rubble sacks, directed me to the correct skip, and could not have been kinder. He deserves high praise for the service he gave and I sincerely wish the council recognise this and ensure he is commended for going above and beyond what he is expected of him. My own personal thanks do not go far enough. I will be forever grateful to him. (E&I/Waste Services) 12/07/2022*
- I am a OAP Worcester resident (23 years here). I've used the Recycling Centre many times and have always been struck by the helpfulness and politeness of the people who work there. (E&I/Waste Services) 10/08/2022*
- Resurfacing in Back Lane South - I have spent the last day and a half being amazed and impressed by the work being done by Ringway. The big machines are tremendous, the planning was meticulous and the hard work, diligence and*

teamwork of the workforce on the ground were a delight to watch. Could my thanks be passed on to all involved. (E&I/Maintenance) 09/09/2022

- *I would like to thank the Bus Pass staff I only applied at the end of last week and today have received my Bus Pass I am very happy at the efficiency of whoever was responsible It seems all we do nowadays is complain but I believe that credit where credit is due Thanks so much I can catch the bus and further support the bus companies Thanks so much this has not gone unnoticed I'm very grateful. (COaCH/Contact Centre) 26/09/2022*
- *I want to say a big thank you to whoever it was who processed my concessionary travel pass. I didn't realise it had expired until the bus driver pointed it out to me when I boarded his bus last Saturday. I filled in the online application for a new one on the same day, and I received my replacement today (Friday 21st). I think that is excellent service, and very welcome as I rely on om my senior bus pass a lot. As we have also had a postal strike this week it's super-efficient. !0 out of 10 from me!. (COaCH/Contact Centre) 21/10/2022*
- *Really impressed with the team and look forward to being able to find a suitable guest soon. By the way I was very impressed with the professionalism and attitude of the Ukrainian lady from Kharkiv who checked my documents. (People/Vulnerable Resettlement Programme) 04/11/2022*
- *A month or two ago I drew attention to potholes on the Cornmeadow Lane junction by Claines Church. I would like to belatedly commend the speed with which action was taken to make the road surface safe for cyclists and motorcyclists. (E&I/Maintenance) 04/01/2023*
- *When a new streetlight bulb was installed, I wrote in to complain that it was very bright and appeared to be tilted upwards which led to the light shining into my home all night and was extremely bright. Within a few hours my complaint was answered and within a week the council have agreed with me and the issue will be resolved within 3 weeks of the initial complaint. All with very little chasing or follow ups from myself, very impressed with the service and everyone's help is appreciated. (E&I/Strategic Infrastructure) 12/01/2023*
- *Streetlighting Report (Reference #14860) REPORTED 10PM 14/02/23 Fixed AM 15/02/23. I was amazed to see an engineer turn up this morning and repair the streetlight considering it was only reported at about 10pm last night 14/02/22! That is very good response and unexpectedly prompt. Thanks very much! PLEASE PASS ON MY THANKS ETC FOR A PROMPT REPAIR. (E&I/Strategic Infrastructure) 16/02/2023*

This page is intentionally left blank



CORPORATE AND COMMUNITIES OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY PANEL 29 SEPTEMBER 2023

MEMBER PORTAL

Summary

1. The Corporate and Communities Overview and Scrutiny Panel (the Panel) has requested an update on the Member Portal.
2. The Cabinet Member with Responsibility for Corporate Services and Communication and the Strategic Director of Commercial and Change have been invited to attend the meeting.

Background

3. The Member Portal provides elected County Councillors (Members), with a system to manage their enquiries to the County Council (the Council), including:
 - An on-line form to log an enquiry regarding a service area detailing the name and contact information for the Member, details of the enquiry and the facility to upload any supporting documents as required.
 - An on-line Dashboard to view all their submitted enquiries, review the status of enquiries, responses to enquiries, check response deadlines, request updates or ask questions about enquiries.
 - Officers responsible for coordinating Member enquiries can:
 - View all new Member enquiries relevant to their service area, the details of the enquiry and the documents uploaded with the enquiry.
 - Contact and co-ordinate responses to an enquiry from relevant managers and Council officers.
 - Update Members with progress on an enquiry.
 - Respond to Members questions and updates on an enquiry.
 - Monitor and manage response times for each enquiry effectively to make sure they are responded to within the required SLA.
4. The Member Portal was developed on the Council's low code platform OutSystems. OutSystems was the preferred technology option as it enabled rapid development of the system and will enable the seamless integration with other systems as required, for example Highways reporting.
5. In 2020, the Corporate and Communities Overview and Scrutiny Panel had identified the need for a Member Query Case Management System as there was no system in place to manage Member queries to service areas. At its meeting on 17 June 2020, the Panel was presented with a number of proposals and Members supported the recommended proposal for the Council's Digital

Transformation Team to build a system. The agenda and minutes are available in the Background Papers of this Report. The resulting Member Portal was launched in 2021.

Recent improvements to the Member Portal

- Integration with the Highways Report It system:** The Member Portal is fully integrated with the Highways Report It (HRI) system, and Members can report a safety issue which raises a report direct on the HRI system. Enhanced features include mapping for easy identification of issues relating to street lighting, grit bins, drainage assets, etc, as displayed in Figure 1 below. Enquiries are then updated from the HRI and PEM (public enquiry manager) systems.

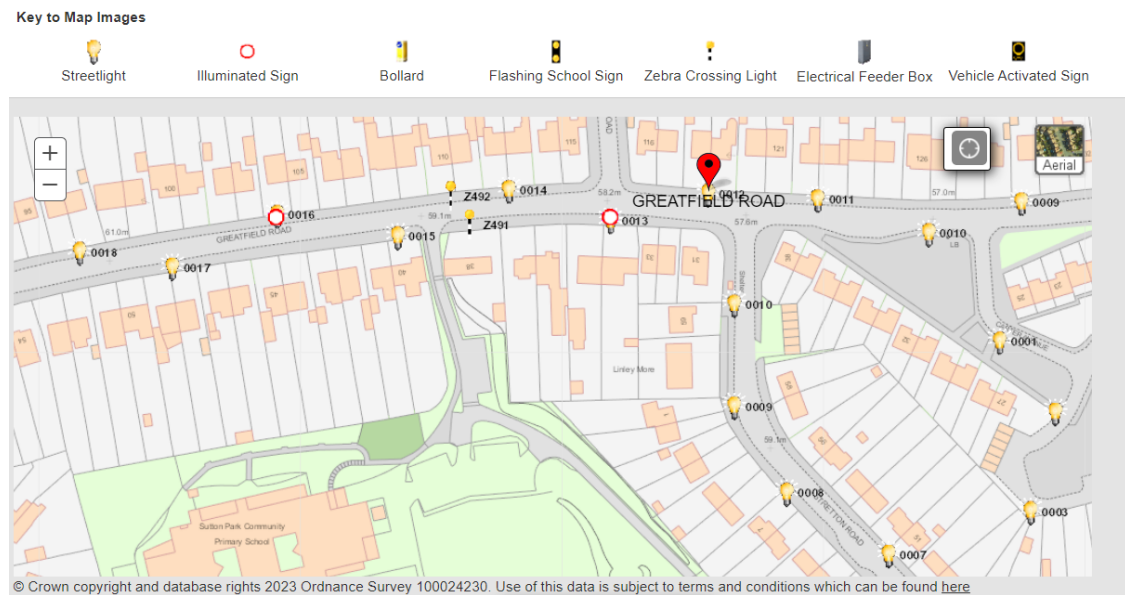


Figure 1: Report-IT interactive map for identifying the location of an issue

- New features for Members:** The Member Homepage has been updated with new visuals and wording to increase ease of use. A pending queue has been added to the system for Members to monitor closed enquiries and to create draft enquiries for submission later. Close enquiry functionality has been added for Members to facilitate the closure of enquiries by Members. An example of a Member's Homepage is displayed below in Figure 2.



Figure 2: Member Portal homepage

8. **Further Enquiry Types:** Speed Issue Request and Improvement Request have been added as enquiry types in the Member Portal enabling Members to request items including Speed Surveys, Speed Reduction Request, New Vehicle Activated Sign (VAS), Relocation of Vehicle Activated Sign, Carriageway Dressing, Footway Reconstruction and Traffic Regulation Orders.
9. **New feature for Officers:** A fresh look & feel for the question-and-answer Responder Dashboard has been introduced to increase ease of use for Council officers responding to co-ordinator questions. An example of the Responder Dashboard is displayed below in Figure 3.

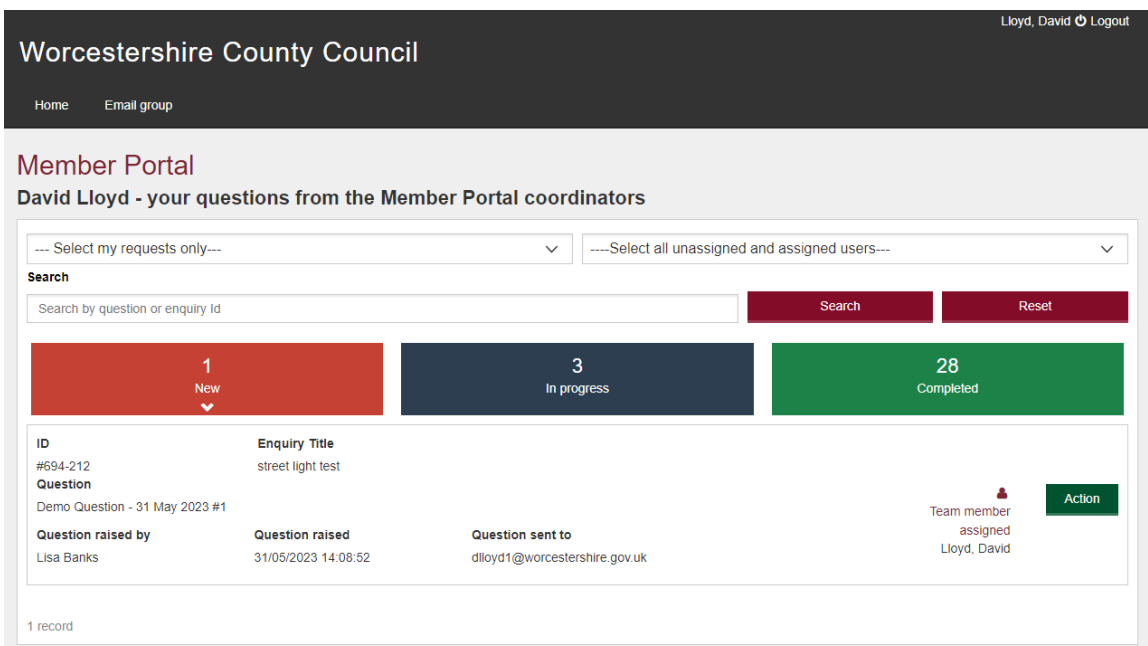


Figure 3: The Responder Dashboard for Officers to answer questions from Co-ordinators about Member enquiries.

10. New features for Member Enquiry Co-ordinators:

- The search and filter functionality on enquiries has been updated and improved, including the addition of a new Works Area assignment and filter for Environment and Infrastructure Directorate (E&I) co-ordinators.
- The ability to update details on an Enquiry has been added.
- A new queue has been developed for E&I co-ordinators to group enquiries that are long term and awaiting work to be carried out.
- An enquiry conversion function has been developed to allow E&I co-ordinators to convert any Enquiry type e.g., Information Request to a Report a Safety Issue request which will then integrate with the HRI system.
- Functionality has also been developed to remove a question to another Officer from a Co-ordinator where it may result in the duplication of activity, with full audit trail.

11. Member Portal Teams Site: A Microsoft Teams Site for the Member Portal has been established for Member and officer (Coordinator) groups promoting information and resources to support the understanding and use of the Member Portal and includes Member Portal User Guides for Members and co-ordinators and User Guide Videos for Members and co-ordinators.

Usage of the system

12. Member enquiries have been made to a range of service areas across the organisation including Adult Social Care, Bikeability, Broadband 5G & Connectivity, Children's Social Care, Countryside Greenspace, Health, Highways, Human Resources & Organisational Development, Libraries & Learning, Pollution, Public Rights of Way, Public Transport, Registration Services, Rural Estates, School Admissions, School & College Travel, Schools, Education & Learning and Transport & Travel. Most enquiries submitted are to the Highways Service Area (96.91%) these enquiries are managed by the County Liaison Officers who are the co-ordinators for all Member enquiries across the E&I Directorate.

13. Analysis of Members Portal from 31 July 2022 to 31 July 2023 has been undertaken.

14. Figure 4 shows the volume of enquiries by district and enquiry type.

Enquiries by District and Enquiry Type

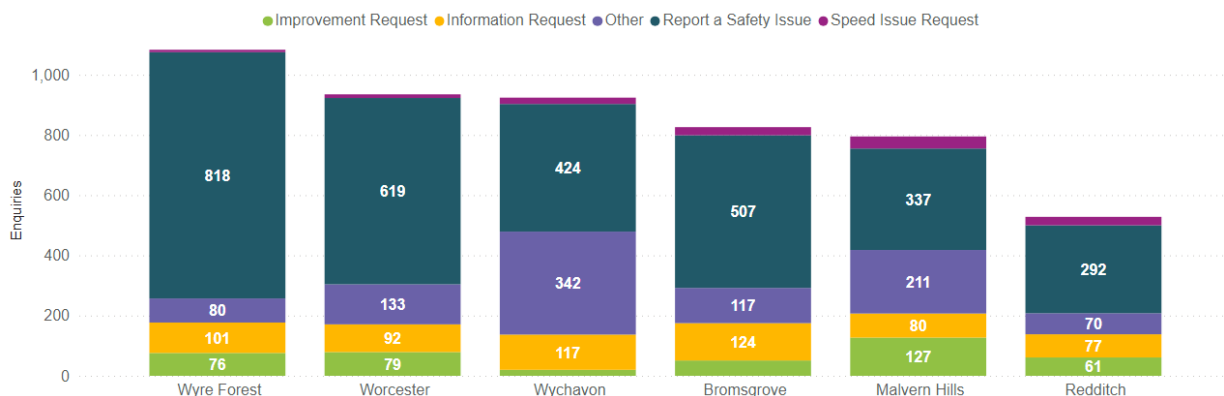


Figure 4: Enquiries by District and Enquiry Type

15. Figure 5 shows the volume of enquiries created by councillors and officers by month:

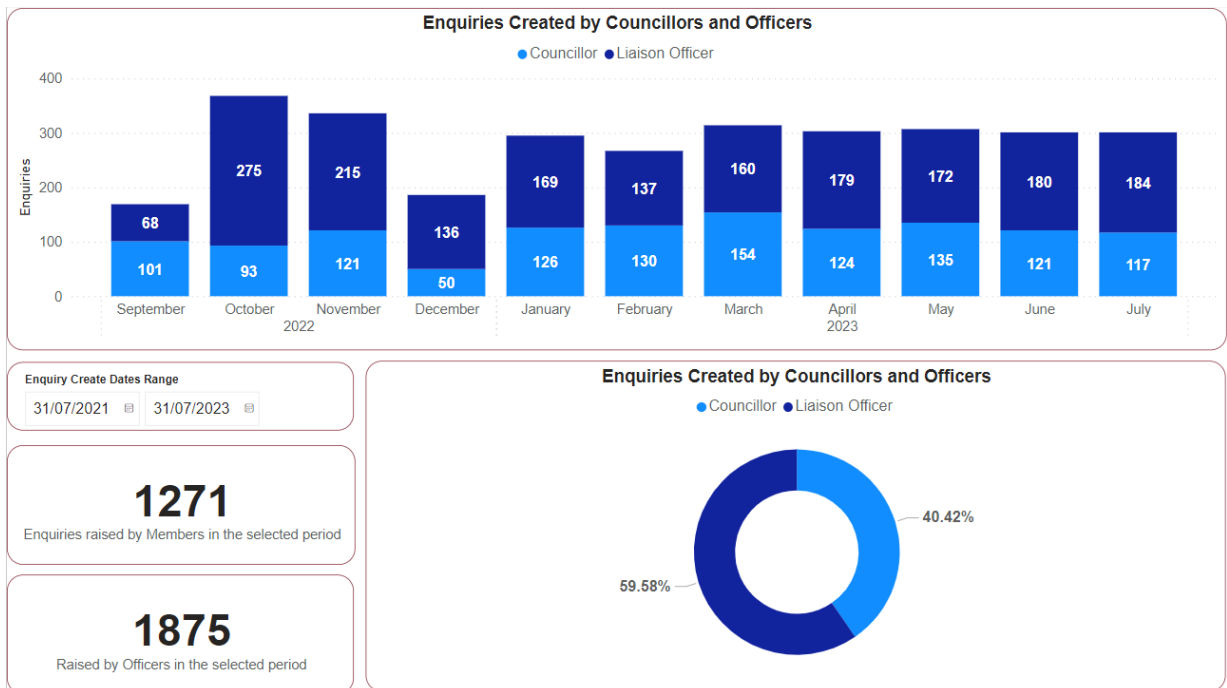


Figure 5: Volume of enquiries by created by councillors and officers by month.

16. All Member enquiries that come through the Highways & Transport Control Centre will be entered onto the system. The Member Portal is being embedded across other teams within the E&I Directorate and feedback will also inform further development opportunities.

17. Figure 6 illustrates the average working days to first response for enquiries raised in each month. Following the improvements to the system and processes, the average working days to first response has improved and is now well within the 10-day Service Level Agreement (SLA).

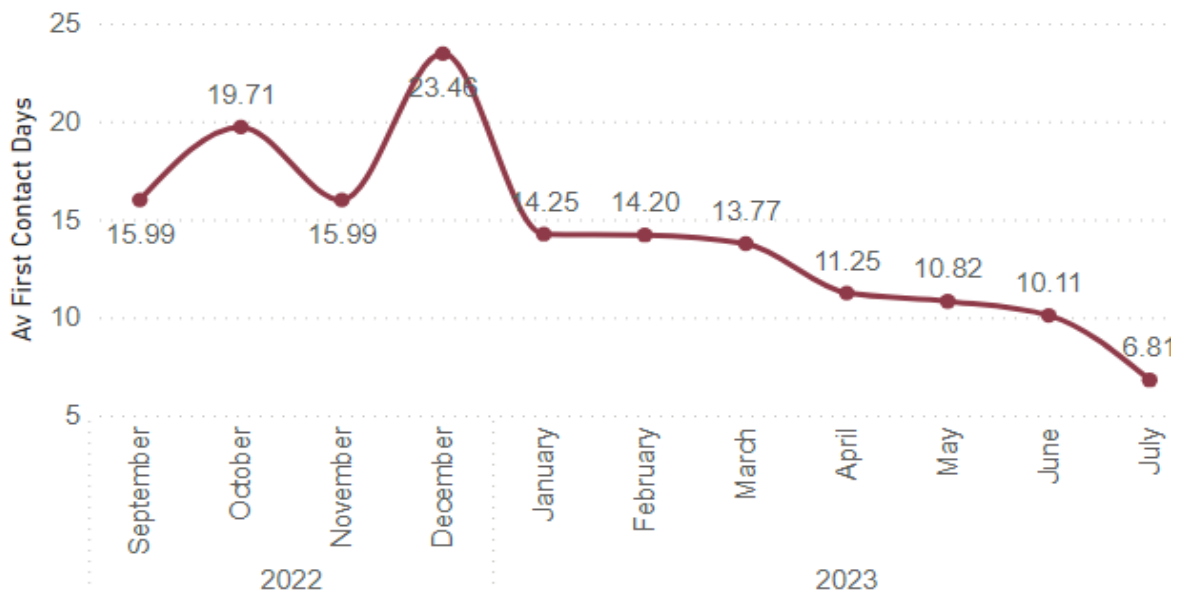


Figure 6: Average working days to first response for enquiries raised in each month.

18. Figure 7 illustrates the Average working days to complete enquiries raised in each month. Following the improvements to the system and processes, the average working days to complete has substantially improved.



Figure 7: Average working days to complete enquiries raised in each month.

19. Figure 8 shows the analysis of first response time, where there is a 10-working day Service Level Agreement.

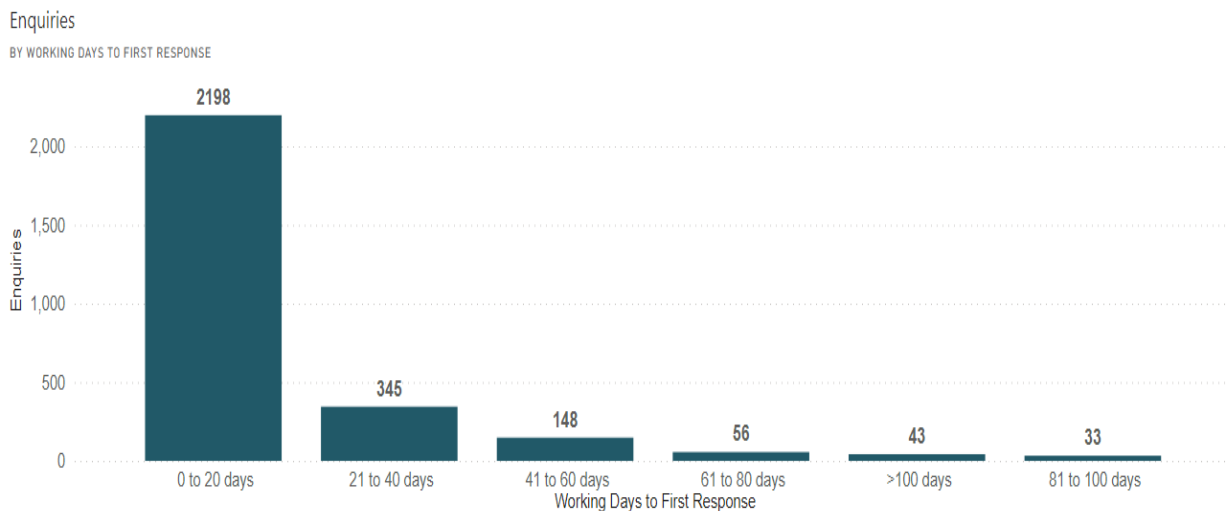


Figure 8: Enquiries by working days to first response.

20. Figure 9 shows the number of enquiries by working days to complete where there is a 28 working day Service Level Agreement. Within that time, officers will have inspected or reviewed the situation to determine the appropriate action. This can sometimes take longer than the 28 days, for example where a third party might be involved or where there is a complex drainage issue. An enquiry is not closed until it has been fully actioned and works (if appropriate) delivered on the ground.

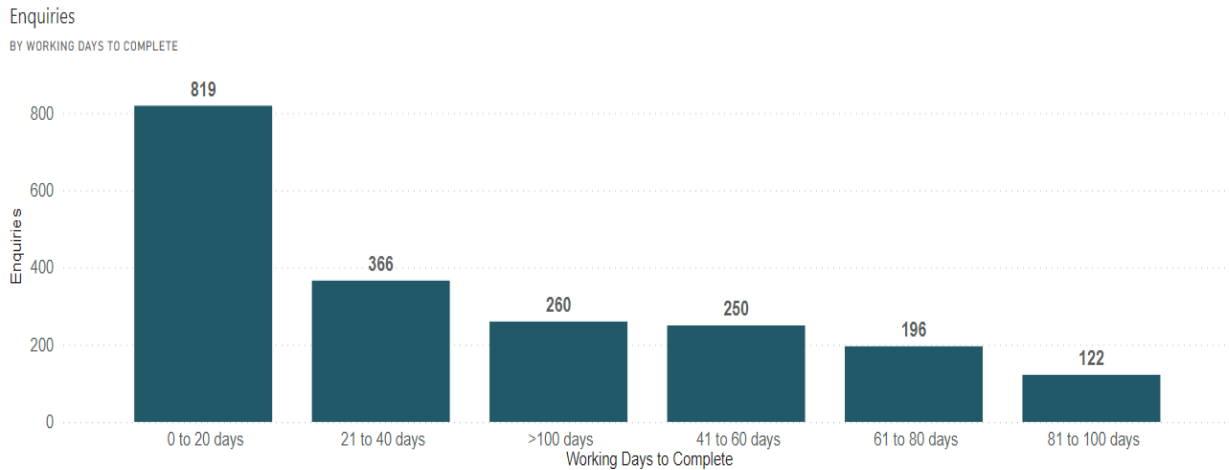


Figure 9: Enquiries by working days to complete.

21. As outlined in Figure 10, in summary, during the period 31/07/2022 to 31/07/2023:

- a. 3146 enquiries were raised on the system.
- b. 96.91% of the enquiries were for Highways.
- c. 58.58% of enquiries were raised by officers on behalf of members.
- d. 60.46% of enquiries have been completed.

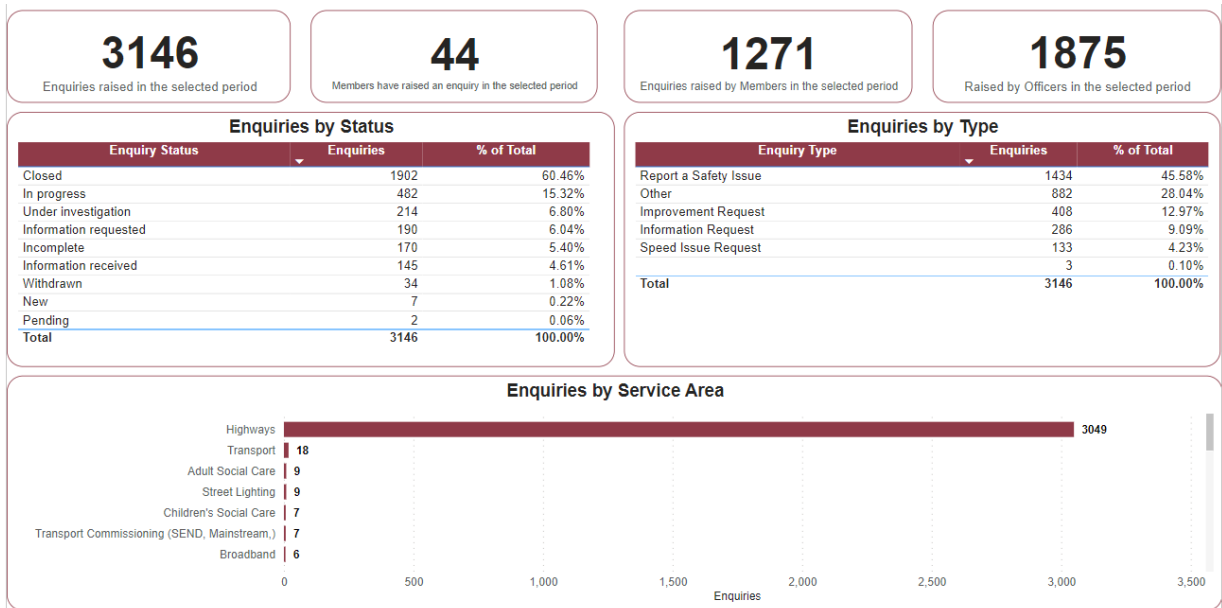


Figure 10: Enquiries by status, type and service area

22. Enquiries/Reports can be reopened by both the Member and officers. These occurrences might occur when Members feel that the information provided is insufficient to enable them to respond to their residents, or in cases where new information has come to light. The total of enquiries re-opened includes any re-opened by an officer to enable them to add information or upload a document, as opposed to it being re-opened at the request of a Member. Figure 11 provides an overview of the re-opened cases dashboard statistics.

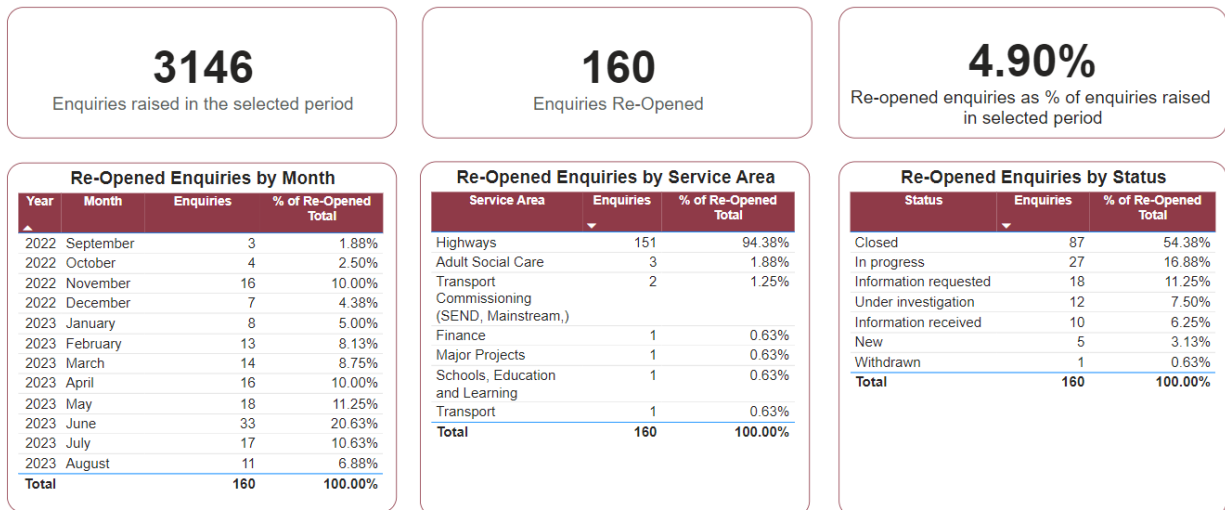


Figure 11: Re-opened cases dashboard

Transformational and Change Activities

23. Between September 2022 and February 2023, working in partnership with colleagues in E&I Directorate and IT & Digital, the Transformation and Change Team delivered a project of activity to:

- encourage increased Member engagement and understanding of the improved Member Portal functionality.
- promote the Member Portal with all Members and specific operational officers, as the preferred single channel for all Member enquiries to be processed through.

24. This included a significant amount of Project and Change Management activity incorporating changes in service working practices, improved management information and reporting, training and ongoing support for officers and Members.

25. The project team worked closely with all stakeholders to ensure development, full visibility and accessibility to all training materials, information advice and guidance. This included presence at Full Council meetings of a Member Portal Clinic, creation of an MS Teams site with bespoke Member and officer channels, comprehensive written aide memoires, process maps, training guides and videos, bespoke political group meeting communications. officer communications, one-to-one sessions with Members on request, and attendance at service team meetings.

26. Feedback was sought from both Members and officers to inform the ongoing project development and management information reporting transition to PowerBI. The involvement of the Transformation and Change Team ceased with the advent of directorate lead project management (see section below on project HEART), from February 2023.

E&I Directorate Improvement Activities Project - HEART

27. Project Heart was established in February 2023 to review the handling of enquiries via the Member Portal. The focus of the project was initially prioritised to E&I, and specifically Highways Operations and Traffic Management.
28. Project HEART recognised that whilst the Member Portal was intuitive to use and provided a good information database, it was not easy to filter the enquiry information. This has been resolved by the implementation of additional filters. The request is now clear and the reason for the enquiry is understood, ensuring the enquiry can be easily directed to the correct service area for faster resolution.
29. A few system issues were identified, which have been resolved. Bespoke training was delivered to staff ahead of the wider roll out. A glossary of service areas, teams and work streams has been produced to ensure correct enquiry allocation.
30. The Member Portal is supported by good management reporting, which focuses on statistics and resolution of enquiries. There is a degree of complexity involved in Member issues and these remain visible on the portal, until closed.

Benefits Achieved

31. The benefits achieved include:
 - Overview for all Members' enquiries increasing transparency of issues raised and actions taken to resolution of enquiry.
 - All enquiries captured in one place providing a full audit trail of activity and progress.
 - Local Members and officers can collate issues in usable format ahead of meetings to inform discussions e.g., Parish Council meetings, site visits etc.
 - Information in the system enables officers to review demand and allocate resources appropriately.
 - All enquiries can be effectively managed using the Member Portal.

Next Steps

32. **Member Portal Enquiry Map for Members and Co-ordinators:** The facility will enable Members and Co-ordinators to visualise their enquiries in a variety of ways including a heat map to see highlighted issues or hotspots of activity by Division, District, Parish.
33. **Feedback survey:** to obtain Member feedback and ensure future developments accord with their requirements.
34. **Phase 3 Development** to include the following:
 - Review options for members to report and receive updates more easily from a mobile device.
 - Additional file management functions for Members and Co-ordinators to provide improved file management facilities, file naming, adding files to Councillor updates and adding files to completed enquiries.

- Integration of the Customer Access Platform within the Member Portal, which will enable Members to log their requests for walking and cycling improvements.

Purpose of the Meeting

35. The Corporate and Communities Overview and Scrutiny Panel is asked to:

- consider the information provided in the report; and
- determine whether any further information or scrutiny is required.

Contact Points

Emma James / Jo Weston, Overview and Scrutiny Officers

Tel: 01905 844965 / 844964, Email: scrutiny@worcestershire.gov.uk

Background Papers

In the opinion of the proper officer (in this case the Assistant Director for Legal and Governance) the following are background papers relating to the subject matter of this report:

[Agenda and Minutes of the Corporate and Communities Overview and Scrutiny Panel 17 June 2020](#)

All Agendas and Minutes are available on the Council's website [weblink to Agendas and Minutes](#)

CORPORATE AND COMMUNITIES OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY PANEL 29 SEPTEMBER 2023

ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE (AI)

Summary

1. The Panel has requested an update on the County Council's (the Council) use of Artificial Intelligence (AI) and the Council's future Strategy.
2. The Cabinet Member with Responsibility (CMR) for Corporate Services and Communication and the Strategic Director of Commercial and Change have been invited to the meeting to respond to any queries the Panel may have.

Background

3. The Council faces various challenges in delivering services to its constituents. Budget constraints, limited resources, and the increasing complexity of service delivery require innovative approaches to provide quality services. Artificial intelligence (AI) has the potential to transform the Council by improving efficiency, increasing citizen engagement, and providing data-driven insights.
4. This paper outlines areas where the use of AI could benefit the Council and the Council's current position.

What is Artificial Intelligence

5. AI is a number of different technologies working together to enable machines to sense, comprehend, act, and learn with human-like levels of intelligence.
6. AI is a transformative technology, which is already revolutionising many areas of people's lives. Without necessarily realising it, everyone interacts with AI every day - whether it is in social media feeds and smart speakers, or on online banking. AI, and the data that fuels people's algorithms, help to provide protection from fraud and diagnose serious illness. This technology is evolving every day and Examples¹ of daily activities that rely on AI, data science and machine learning are:
 - a. **Search engines:** Google, Bing and other search engines use sophisticated machine learning methods to find and rank webpages that match search criteria. These engines not only use machine learning to provide relevant results, but also combine data science and machine learning. The backend algorithms monitor responses, pages opened, how many are opened, length of stay on pages, etc. In this way, the engines tailor the search results.

¹ Source: [The Dstl Biscuit Book WEB.pdf \(publishing.service.gov.uk\)](#)

- b. **Virtual Personal Assistants:** Alexa, Siri and Google home are all examples of personal assistants that apply data science to complete tasks such as answering simple questions, telling the news or weather, or playing music and podcasts. To do this they collect information about what is being said, as well as when, where and how they are being said. The assistants use this information to produce results that are tailored to preferences. They use machine learning for speech processing and understanding (to understand a person's speech better), improve performance based on previous transactions, and communicate back dialogue management.
 - c. **Traffic status:** traffic and map apps provide information on traffic congestion by using GPS location and speed of users. Data science methods are then used to build maps of current traffic to estimate the density of traffic. Machine learning is used to predict regions of heavy traffic.
 - d. **Chatbots:** Websites use chats to provide customer support. Often the person you are chatting with is a chatbot, not a person. These bots use machine learning to identify relevant information in the chat and provide relevant answers to queries. If the bots are not able to provide the information customers need, they are then transferred to a human representative.
 - e. **Recommendation systems:** these systems collect and pre-process data from activity within their site (i.e. What was looked at, for how long, wish-lists or shopping basket), to produce recommendation based on behaviours compared to the rest of the users on the site. Using data science, customers can be grouped by behaviour and recommendations shared with the group.
7. AI can support innovation and creativity in a range of ways. It can be a tool for scientists, entrepreneurs, and artists, enabling new human inventions and creations. Some believe that AI will soon be inventing and creating things in ways that make it impossible to identify the human intellectual input in the final invention or work.

National AI Strategy

8. The [UK's National AI Strategy](#) (attached at Appendix 1) recognises that AI is the fastest growing deep technology² in the world, with huge potential to rewrite the rules of entire industries, drive substantial economic growth and transform all areas of life. It aims to:
- i. Invest and plan for the long-term needs of the AI ecosystem to continue our leadership as a science and AI superpower.
 - ii. Support the transition to an AI-enabled economy, capturing the benefits of innovation in the UK, and ensuring AI benefits all sectors and regions.
 - iii. Ensure the UK gets the national and international governance of AI technologies right, to encourage innovation, investment, and protect the public and our fundamental values.

² Deep technologies are based on significant scientific advances or engineering innovations, but which require a longer period of development before commercial application.

Potential uses of AI in the Council

9. The areas where use of the AI could be beneficial include:
10. **Improved Service Delivery:** AI can improve service delivery in various ways. Firstly, AI-powered chatbots can provide 24/7 assistance to citizens, answering frequently asked questions and directing them to relevant resources. This reduces the workload of human customer service agents and provides citizens with faster access to information. Secondly, AI can be used to optimise routes for service delivery, such as bin collections and public transportation. This can reduce travel time and fuel consumption, resulting in cost savings for the Council.
11. **Data Driven Decision making:** The Council has access to vast amounts of data but analysing this data can be time-consuming and challenging. AI can help the Council make better use of its data by automating data analysis, identifying patterns and trends, and providing data-driven insights. For example, AI can analyse traffic patterns to optimise traffic flow or predict the demand for public services, such as healthcare and education. This can enable the Council to make informed decisions and allocate resources more efficiently.
12. **Citizen Engagement:** Citizen engagement is critical for the Council to understand and meet the needs of its constituents. AI can improve citizen engagement by providing personalised services and communication. For example, AI can analyse citizen data to provide personalised recommendations for services, such as healthcare and education. AI-powered chatbots can also provide personalised assistance to citizens, improving their experience with Council services.
13. **Fraud Detection:** AI can help with fraud detection by analysing large amounts of data to identify patterns and anomalies that may indicate fraudulent activity. AI can also be used to detect suspicious behaviour in real-time, such as unusual spending patterns or suspicious account activity. While AI can significantly enhance fraud detection, it should be used in conjunction with human expertise. Human analysts can provide domain knowledge, interpret complex cases, and make informed decisions based on AI-generated insights.
14. **Citizen Engagement:** AI can improve citizen engagement in several ways, by providing more personalised services, facilitating access to information, and enabling efficient communication. It is important to ensure that AI systems used for citizen engagement are designed with transparency, fairness, and accountability in mind. Clear communication, privacy protection, and ethical considerations should be at the forefront to build trust and maintain the positive impact of AI on citizen engagement. Examples of how AI can enhance citizen engagement include:
 - Chatbots and Virtual Assistants
 - Natural Language Processing
 - Personalised Services
 - Data Analysis and Predictive Analytics
 - Social Media Monitoring
 - Citizen Feedback Analysis

- Open Data Initiatives

15. **Traffic Management:** AI can help with traffic management in several ways, improving efficiency, reducing congestion, and enhancing overall transportation systems. By utilising AI-powered solutions, traffic management authorities can make better-informed decisions, respond more effectively to incidents, and optimise transportation systems to improve overall traffic flow, reduce congestion, and enhance the commuting experience for citizens. Examples of how AI can contribute to traffic management include:

- Traffic Prediction and Optimisation
- Intelligent Transportation Systems
- Adaptive Traffic Signal Control
- Smart Parking Solutions
- Intelligent Routing and Navigation
- Incident Detection and Management
- Public Transportation Optimisation
- Integration with Connected Vehicles

16. **Environmental monitoring:** AI can play a significant role in environmental monitoring by collecting and analysing vast amounts of data, facilitating more accurate and efficient monitoring of various environmental factors. By leveraging AI's capabilities, environmental monitoring can be conducted at a larger scale, with increased accuracy, and in near real-time. This can enable proactive environmental management, support conservation efforts, and contribute to sustainable development and the protection of our planet.

Examples of how AI can help with environmental monitoring include:

- Remote Sensing and Image Analysis
- Air Quality Monitoring
- Water Quality Monitoring
- Species Monitoring and Conservation
- Climate Modelling and Prediction
- Environmental Risk Assessment
- Ecosystem Monitoring and Restoration
- Data Integration and Decision Support

17. **Social Services and Support:** AI can contribute to social services and support in various ways, helping to improve efficiency, accessibility, and effectiveness of programs and initiatives. Examples of how AI can assist in social services include:

- Case Management and Resource Allocation
- Personalised Assistance
- Predictive Analytics
- Mental Health Support
- Social Sentiment Analysis
- Data Integration and Collaboration
- Accessibility and Language Support

18. **Revenue Generation:** AI can play a significant role in revenue generation by improving operational efficiency, enhancing customer experiences, and

enabling data-driven decision-making. Examples of how AI can help in revenue generation include:

- Sales and Marketing Optimisation
- Customer Relationship Management (CRM): analysing customer interactions, purchase history, and behaviour to provide insights and recommendations
- Personalised Recommendations
- Pricing Optimisation
- Supply Chain Optimisation
- Revenue Forecasting and Predictive Analytics
- Intelligent Pricing and Bundling

19. Public Safety and Crime Prevention: AI can contribute to public safety and crime prevention in various ways, enhancing law enforcement efforts, improving response times, and aiding in proactive measures. Examples of how AI can assist in public safety and crime prevention include:

- Video Surveillance and Monitoring
- Facial Recognition and Biometrics
- Predictive Policing
- Emergency Response Optimisation
- Anomaly Detection
- Crime Analysis and Investigation Support
- Gunshot Detection
- Crime Reporting and Citizen Engagement

What is ChatGPT?

20. ChatGPT is a language model developed by OpenAI. It is based on the GPT (Generative Pre-trained Transformer) architecture, specifically GPT-3.5. GPT-3.5 is an advanced version of the model that has been trained on a vast amount of text data from the internet.

21. ChatGPT is designed to generate human-like responses to user inputs in natural language. It can understand and generate text in a conversational manner, making it useful for chatbots, virtual assistants, and other interactive applications. The model uses unsupervised learning to pre-train on a large corpus of text data, allowing it to learn grammar, facts, and patterns in language. It can then generate coherent and contextually appropriate responses based on the input it receives.

22. It is important to note that while ChatGPT can generate impressive responses, it may occasionally produce incorrect or nonsensical answers. It also does not possess real-time information beyond its knowledge cut-off date, which, according to ChatGPT itself, is September 2021.

23. Appendix 3 sets out ChatGPT Alternatives.

What are Large Language Models (LLM)?

24. LLMs are advanced deep learning models that are designed to process and generate human-like text. They are trained on massive amounts of text data to learn the patterns, structure, and semantics of language.
25. LLMs, such as ChatGPT models, utilise a transformer architecture that allows them to capture long-range dependencies in text and generate coherent and contextually appropriate responses. These models have millions or even billions of parameters, enabling them to handle complex language tasks.
26. The training of LLMs typically involves unsupervised learning, where the model learns from a large corpus of text data without any specific task or goal in mind. During training, the model predicts the next word in a sentence based on the previous words, learning the statistical patterns and relationships within the data.
27. Once trained, LLMs can be fine-tuned on specific tasks by providing supervised training data. This fine-tuning process allows the model to adapt its learned knowledge to perform various language-related tasks like text classification, question answering, translation, summarisation, and more.
28. LLMs have demonstrated impressive capabilities in natural language understanding and generation. They have a wide range of applications, including chatbots, virtual assistants, content generation, language translation, and aiding in various language-intensive tasks.
29. LLMs are undoubtedly impressive for their ability to generate a huge range of convincing content in multiple human and computer languages. However, importantly, they are not artificial general intelligence, and contain some serious flaws, including:
 - they can get things wrong and ‘hallucinate’ incorrect facts
 - they can be biased, are often gullible (in responding to leading questions)
 - they require huge computing resources and vast data to train from scratch
 - they can be coaxed into creating toxic content
30. For further information, please see [ChatGPT and large language models: what's the risk?](#)

Current use of AI in the Council

31. The following are examples of the use of AI in the Council:

| | System | Purpose of system | Application of AI |
|----|--------------------|---|--|
| 1. | Microsoft Sentinel | Microsoft Sentinel is a solution used by the Council that provides Security information and event management (SIEM) and security orchestration, | Microsoft Sentinel uses Fusion, a correlation engine based on scalable machine learning algorithms, to automatically detect multistage attacks (also known as advanced persistent threats or APT) by identifying combinations of anomalous behaviours and suspicious activities that are observed at various stages of the kill chain. |

| | | |
|----|---|---|
| | automation, and response (SOAR). | On the basis of these discoveries, Microsoft Sentinel generates incidents that would otherwise be difficult to catch. These incidents comprise two or more alerts or activities. By design, these incidents are low-volume, high-fidelity, and high-severity. See Advanced multistage attack detection in Microsoft Sentinel Microsoft Learn . |
| 2. | OutSystems OutSystems is a Low-code development platform which provides tools for us to develop, deploy and manage omnichannel enterprise applications. | A powerful combination of AI and machine learning that infuses AI throughout the OutSystems platform to eliminate friction, long lead times, errors, and technical debt. AI mentors guide developers through the OutSystems platform, dramatically accelerating and improving application development. It scans, reviews, and validates application portfolios, enabling the delivery of high-quality smart apps up to 100x faster. |
| 3. | Commercial vehicle and trailer permit system The Commercial Vehicle and Trailer (CVT) permit scheme for vehicles and trailers that wish to use a Household Recycling Centre for the disposal of household waste. | Automatic number-plate recognition (ANPR) is the technology that uses optical character recognition on images to read vehicle registration plates. This technology will be used within our commercial vehicle and trailer permits system developed on our low code platform, OutSystems, to identify vehicles and look up number of permits available to use against the vehicle. |
| 4. | Netcall Connect Chatbot Netcall Connect is the solution used by the council to provide the Chatbot service on our public facing website. | The chatbot uses an active learning technique to automatically match phrases entered by customers to specific service information held within the chatbot flows. The more phrases that are matched increases the accuracy of the chatbot in providing the correct answer. |
| 5. | CLB & AllyLabs Acoustic Monitoring The Acoustic Monitoring system, an intelligent nurse call system from CLB, helps staff improve care quality and provide greater privacy for residents, targeting of resources for staff to focus on residents that need their help, while reducing operational costs. | A requirement by the NHS for acoustic monitoring in care homes. A sensor monitors sounds in a room at night. When any sound profile exceeds its individually set threshold, or unusual behaviour for the resident, then an alert is sent to a central station or forwarded to a mobile device to Care workers to notify them that they need to check on the resident and ensure their health and wellbeing needs are being met. This is part of a 12-month NHS pilot. |

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| 6. Technicare (Armed) | Predict and detect early deterioration of patients to avoid admissions, and identify and monitor patients for earlier discharge, virtual wards and hospital at home services, using our real-time remote monitoring platform. | <p>AI is used in four 3 types of technology:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Vitals for people with health conditions where it is useful to see constantly monitored vital signs, such as COPD. • The Fit bit watch shows sedentary behaviours and promotes activity. Perfect for people who are starting to worry about falling at home. linked up with Community OT and neighbourhood teams • Your Meds (instead of Biodose) assists with the delivery of right medication, at the right time to avoid over or inappropriate self-medication. <p>It is intended these products will also be used to create virtual wards in conjunction with the NHS trial scheme. This is part of a 12-month NHS pilot</p> |
| 7. Cascade3D | Cascade3d Connected Care” is Cascade3d’s flagship healthcare platform that integrates smart IoT sensors and Bluetooth medical devices to support elderly and vulnerable people in their own homes | Behavioral insights are picked up by the small, discrete sensors that are located around the home collecting activity data (i.e on a kettle, in a fridge). Their data is sent back to the Cascade3d secure servers. This information is shared with family, caregivers, professionals and call centres to alert changes in daily routine in real time. This promotes early intervention, which in turn leads to higher standards of proactive care and cost savings. |
| 8. Tendertec (Hestia) - | is a non–wearable fall detector that learns the users behaviour and gait. It’s machine learning identifies insights about their health and identifies risk of the user falling. This is perfect for social care referrals. | The integrated machine learning platform captures, reconstructs and shares incidents and living activities to provide 24/7 reassurance. Built on thermal sensing data and integrating 3 rd party health and activity data sources, the system monitors remotely behaviours. |
| 9. Stroll DTx software | is a non–wearable device, used during physiotherapy sessions for people with neurological disorders (i.e. Parkinson’s Disease) that are at high risk of falls | Stroll Digital Therapeutics (DTx) software is the world’s first, patented augmented reality (AR) solution for cueing therapy and gamified exercise to improve gait, balance and reduce fall risk for people living with neurological disorders. |

The Council's AI Policy

32. The Council's AI policy is designed to establish guidelines and best practices for the responsible and ethical use of AI within the Council. It ensures employees are using AI systems and platforms in a manner that aligns with the corporate values, adheres to legal and regulatory standards, the Council's existing information governance and security policies, and promotes the safety and well-being of the Council's stakeholders.
33. The Policy states that the use of AI must be in a manner that is responsible and ethical, avoiding any actions that could harm others, violate privacy, or facilitate malicious activities. Use of AI should promote fairness and avoid bias to prevent discrimination and promote equal treatment and be in such a way as to contribute positively to the Council's goals and values.
34. Staff may use AI for work-related purposes subject to adherence to the guidelines provided. This includes tasks such as generating text or content for reports, emails, presentations, images and customer service communications.
35. Particular attention should be given to transparency, governance, vendor practices, copyright, accuracy, confidentiality, disclosure and integration with other tools.

Future Strategy

36. The use of AI is referenced in both the Council's [IT Strategy](#) and the [Digital Strategy](#). Individual projects progressing this will form part of the strategy implementation plans.

Risks

37. There are risks associated with the use of AI, including:
38. **Ethics:** ensuring that the technologies currently being developed are used for the common good, rather than for the benefit of a select few.
39. **Bias:** in AI is when the machine gives consistently different outputs for one group of people compared to another. Typically, these bias outputs follow classical societal biases like race, gender, biological, sex, nationality or age.
40. **Privacy:** in the context of AI has different considerations to data privacy in general. One of the challenges of protecting privacy in artificial intelligence concerns how to create suitable regulations that protect privacy without stifling advances in AI technology. The data contexts at stake are both the scanning mechanisms that enable the AI tools to learn about their environments, as well as the nature of the data itself and how it is used to create the AI capability. The traditional consent requirement for organisations looking to use personal data is weak, and victims of spill over data have no say in the matter as they do not even know they are involved. Consent is also not as powerful a tool as one may be led to believe, even if the requirements for consent are that it is informed and freely given. For example, Microsoft removed its database of 10 million facial photographs – which were being used by organisations like IBM,

Panasonic, Alibaba, military researchers and Chinese surveillance firms – as most of the people whose faces were in the dataset were not aware their image had been included.

41. **Copyright infringement:** Robotic artists have been involved in various types of creative works for a long time. Since the 1970s computers have been producing crude works of art, and these efforts continue today. Most of these computer-generated works of art relied heavily on the creative input of the programmer; the machine was at most an instrument or a tool very much like a brush or canvas. The technological revolution that may require us to rethink the interaction between computers and the creative process.
42. **Secondary mining of the Metadata:** Extensible metadata that adds custom data labelling is common in object storage and available in some distributed filesystems. The metadata can be used to track data origin, add labels and even tag data used for different AI models.
43. **Consistency of output:** In the context of AI, reproducibility refers to the ability to achieve the same or similar results using the same dataset and AI algorithm within the same environment.
44. **Data Protection (UK GDPR):** Giving the right to query automated decisions. The Guidance on AI and Data Protection has been updated after requests from UK industry to clarify requirements for fairness in AI. It also delivers on a key ICO25 commitment, which is to help organisations adopt new technologies while protecting people and vulnerable groups. The UK GDPR has provisions on:
 - automated individual decision-making (making a decision solely by automated means without any human involvement); and
 - profiling (automated processing of personal data to evaluate certain things about an individual). Profiling can be part of an automated decision-making process.
 - Article 22 of the UK GDPR has additional rules to protect individuals if you are carrying out solely automated decision-making that has legal or similarly significant effects on them.
45. **Legal implications** – vicarious responsibility for Chatbot-GPT generated answers and advice.

Conclusion

46. In conclusion, the use of AI can benefit the Council in various ways, including improving service delivery, data-driven decision making, cost savings, and citizen engagement. While AI presents challenges, these can be overcome with careful planning, investment, and workforce development. The Council that embraces AI can deliver more efficient and effective services to their constituents, improving their quality of life and the overall well-being of the community.

Purpose of the Meeting

47. The Panel is asked to consider the information provided and:

- determine any comments to make to the Cabinet Member with Responsibility for Corporate Services and Communication
- agree whether any further Scrutiny is required at this stage.

Supporting Information

Appendix 1: The UK's National AI Strategy

Appendix 2: Definitions for Artificial Intelligence, Data Science and Machine Learning.

Appendix 3: ChatGPT Alternatives.

Disclosure

48. Disclosure: Some of the content of this report was generated with the assistance of an Artificial Intelligence (AI) based system to augment the effort. AI generated content has been reviewed by the author for accuracy and edited/revised where necessary. The author takes responsibility for this content.

Contact Points

Andrew Spice, Strategic Director of Commercial and Change

Telephone: 01905 846678

Email: aspice@worcestershire.gov.uk

Sandra Taylor, Assistant Director for IT and Digital

Telephone: 01905 845447

Email: staylor12@worcestershire.gov.uk

Emma James / Jo Weston, Overview and Scrutiny Officers

Telephone: 01905 844964

Email: scrutiny@worcestershire.gov.uk

Background Papers

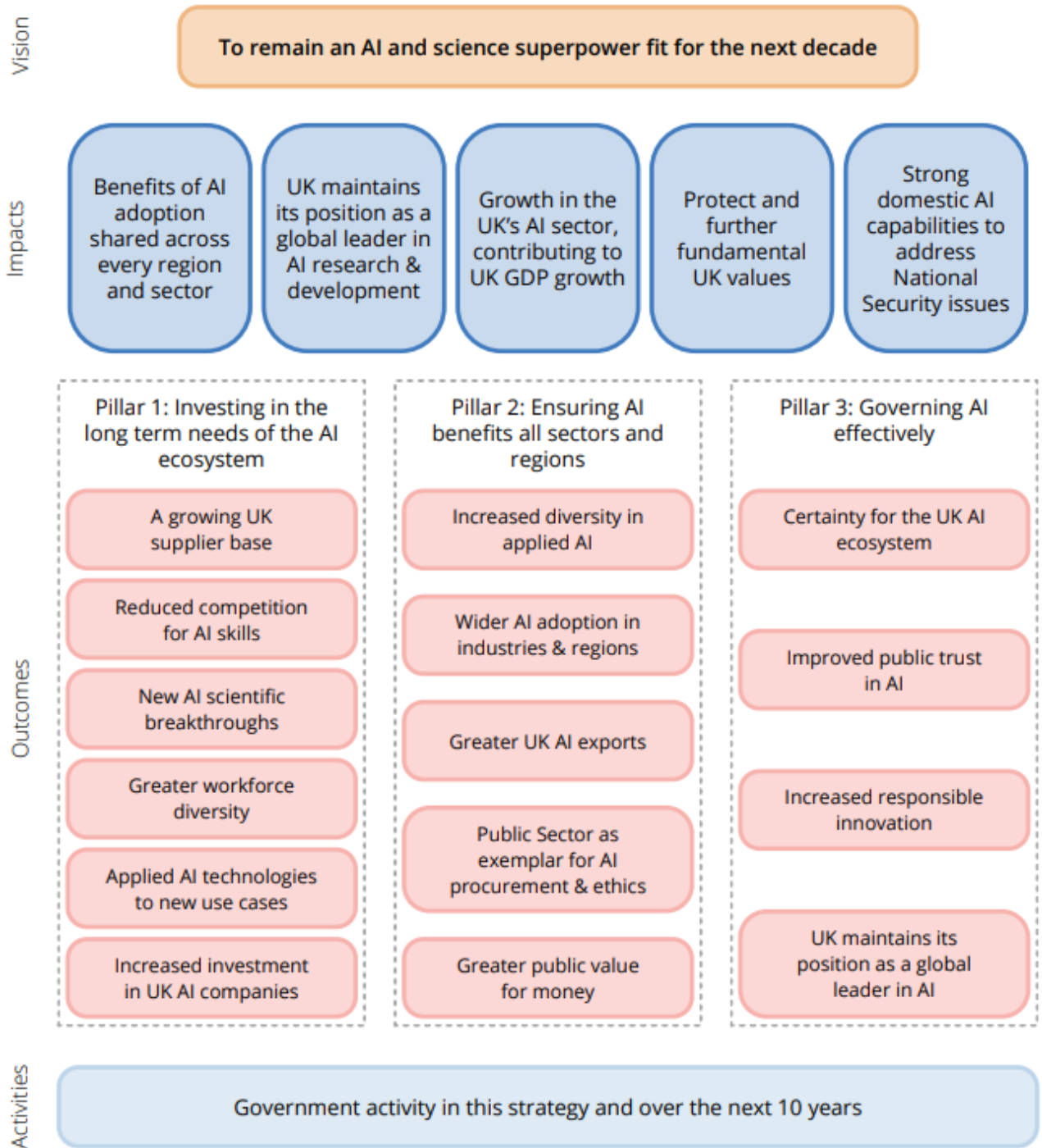
In the opinion of the proper officer, in this case the Assistant Director for Legal and Governance there are no background papers relating to the subject matter of this report:

[All agendas and minutes are available on the Council's website here.](#)

Appendix 1: The UK’s National AI Strategy

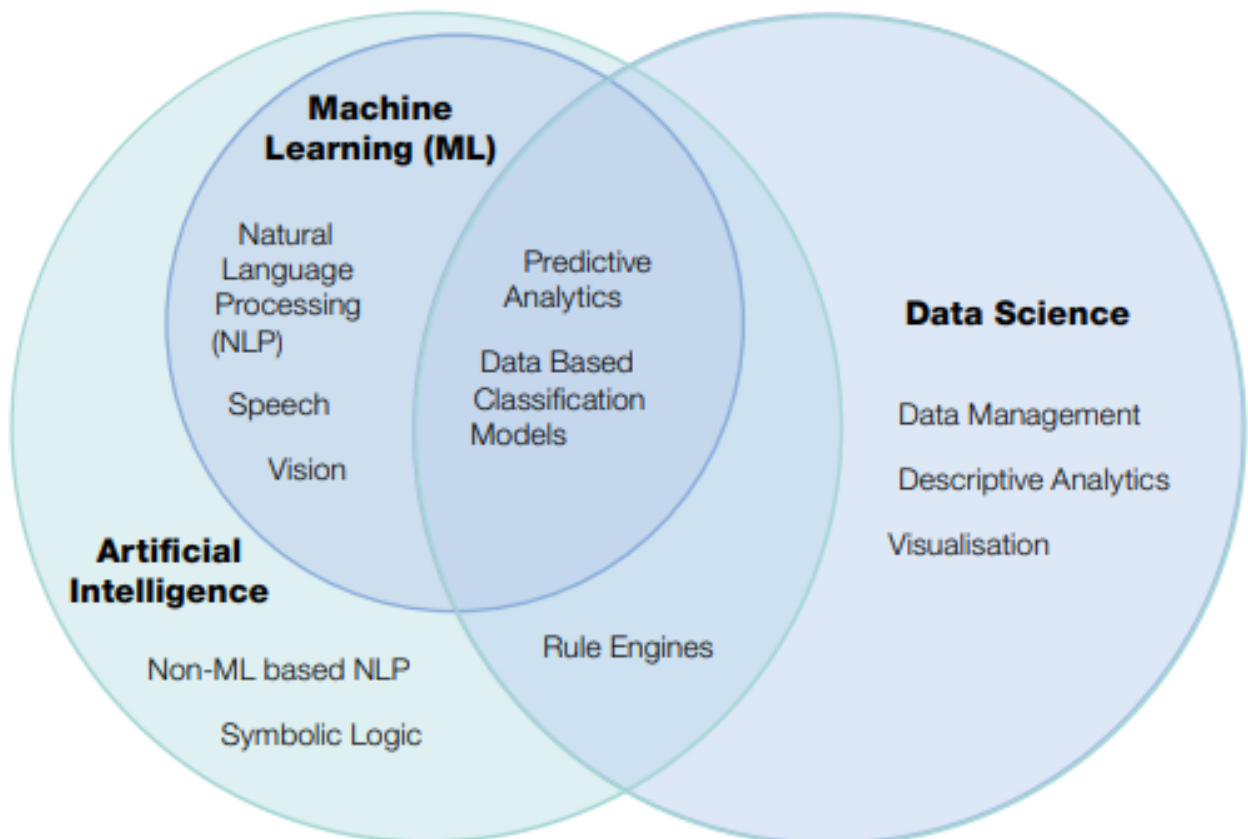
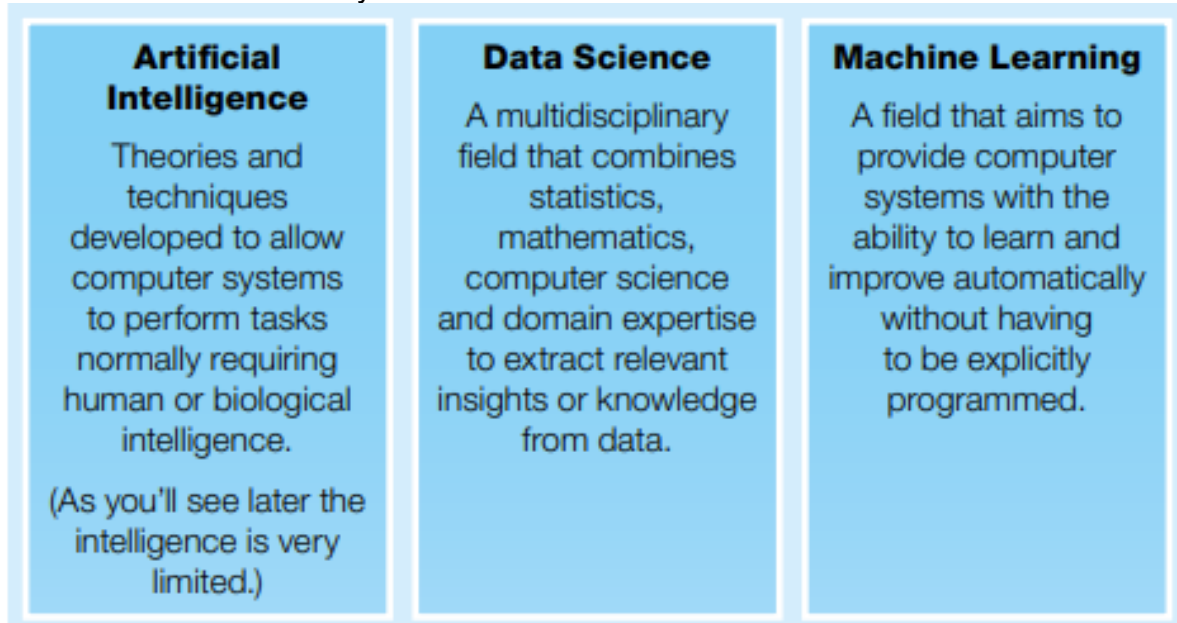
The National AI Strategy builds on the UK’s strengths but also represents the start of a step-change for AI in the UK, recognising the power of AI to increase resilience, productivity, growth and innovation across the private and public sectors. [National AI Strategy - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](https://www.gov.uk/national-ai-strategy)

The UK’s National AI Strategy Flow Diagram



Appendix 2: Definitions for Artificial Intelligence, Data Science and Machine Learning

It is not unusual to see Artificial Intelligence, Data Science and Machine Learning used interchangeably in industrial, commercial or non-expert settings. The following definitions provide a sense of how they differ from each other³.



³ Source: [The Dstl Biscuit Book WEB.pdf \(publishing.service.gov.uk\)](#)

Appendix 3: ChatGPT Alternatives

ChatSonic

India's Chatsonic was introduced in 2021, far earlier than Open AI's ChatGPT. Contrary to ChatGPT, ChatSonic incorporates text-to-speech and Google Search into its operation, making it effective enough to provide the most recent responses to your inquiries. processing to provide accurate summaries of current events, trends, and conversations.

Jasper AI

Jasper AI, originally known as Jarvis, enables individuals and teams to scale their content initiatives using AI. It makes the claim that it can assist users with translating the text as well as writing "blog articles, social media postings, marketing emails, and more." Jasper also promises to deliver content that is "word-by-word original" and "plagiarism-free". In Jasper AI, the content is produced by selecting a topic and filling out a form with the necessary information.

Bard AI

Like ChatGPT, Bard AI, Google's newest AI-powered chatbot, is an experimental conversational AI service that is expected to have a significant impact on the AI industry. LaMDA eliminates the limitation of having data confined to a specific year and revolutionises Bard's natural language processing capabilities by enabling it to interpret and respond to human input with more precision. Google claims that Bard can generate texts and answer questions.

Microsoft Bing AI

Recently, Microsoft added artificial intelligence to their search engine, which is now referred to as Bing AI. The OpenAI large language model, which is far more potent than ChatGPT and GPT-3.5, is the foundation of Bing AI, has been optimised to maximum speed, accuracy, and efficiency. Microsoft unveiled new, AI-enhanced features for their Edge browser called "Chat" and "Compose." Additionally, Microsoft released Bing and Edge mobile apps for iOS and Android users. Bing gives users the ability to ask queries with up to 1,000 words and get AI-powered responses.

DialoGPT

Microsoft's DialoGPT is a large-scale pre-trained dialogue response generation model specifically built for multi-turn conversations. DialoGPT is a significant pre-trained system for producing replies that can be used in multiple dialogue exchanges. It was trained using a massive dataset of 147 million multi-turn discussions extracted from Reddit discussion threads between 2005 and 2017.

Similar to the outputs of GPT-2, the sentences that DialoGPT generates are astonishingly diverse and include information that relates to the initial prompt. According to Microsoft, DialoGPT is more conversational, animated, frequently lighthearted, and generally extremely dynamic. DialoGPT, however, does not offer voice search, voice response, or personalities.

NeevaAI

NeevaAI combines the efficiency and most recent data of the Neeva search engine with the strength of ChatGPT and other large language models. The system is capable of searching and sorting through hundreds of millions of web pages to produce a single, comprehensive response that includes pertinent sources. Neeva can be compared to a search engine that has been given AI enhancements, but it is not yet a fully functional chatbot that is powered by AI. Neeva AI also provides references in its outcomes.

CoPilot

CoPilot, uses the GPT-3 model from OpenAI Codex for auto-completion. This application supports various well-known coding environments, including VS Code, Neovim, and JetBrains. It also supports cloud workflows via GitHub Codespaces. It can produce syntax in up to 12 languages, including JavaScript, Go, Perl, PHP, Ruby/Swift/TypeScript, and BASH. In addition, it supports multi-language scripting, and the model is powered by trillions of lines of open-source code from the public domain, such as those found on GitHub repositories.

Character AI

Character AI is based on neural language models and has been trained from the ground up with conversations in mind. Instead of talking with a single AI chatbot, Character AI allows users to select from a variety of personas, including: Elon Musk, Tony Stark, Socrates, Joe Biden, and Kanye West. The AI adjusts its conversational style according to the person you selected. The AI has a built-in image generator for avatar creation.

YouChat

YouChat was introduced by the search engine You.com. It functions similarly to ChatGPT and essentially performs what other generic chatbots do. Artificial intelligence and natural language processing are used by YouChat's AI to mimic human speech. It can create emails, write code, translate, summarise, and react to general inquiries. It offers average responses because it is still in the development phase. While you can just talk to it, YouChat can also write code, give advice, break down complicated concepts, summarise books, and a lot more.

Elsa Speak

Elsa Speak is a language-learning programme powered by AI. It analyses the user's voice using AI and creates a set of tasks that are simple for the user to understand. Elsa Speak is thus another of the best ChatGPT alternatives to consider.

Elsa as an English-speaking speech assistant may aid you in translating between many tongues and English. The AI system used by ELSA was developed using voice recordings of English speakers with a variety of accents. This gives ELSA an advantage over most other voice recognition algorithms by allowing it to recognise the vocal patterns of people who do not speak with a native level of ability.

This page is intentionally left blank



**CORPORATE AND COMMUNITIES
OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY PANEL
29 SEPTEMBER 2023**

CUSTOMER CONTACT CENTRE

Summary

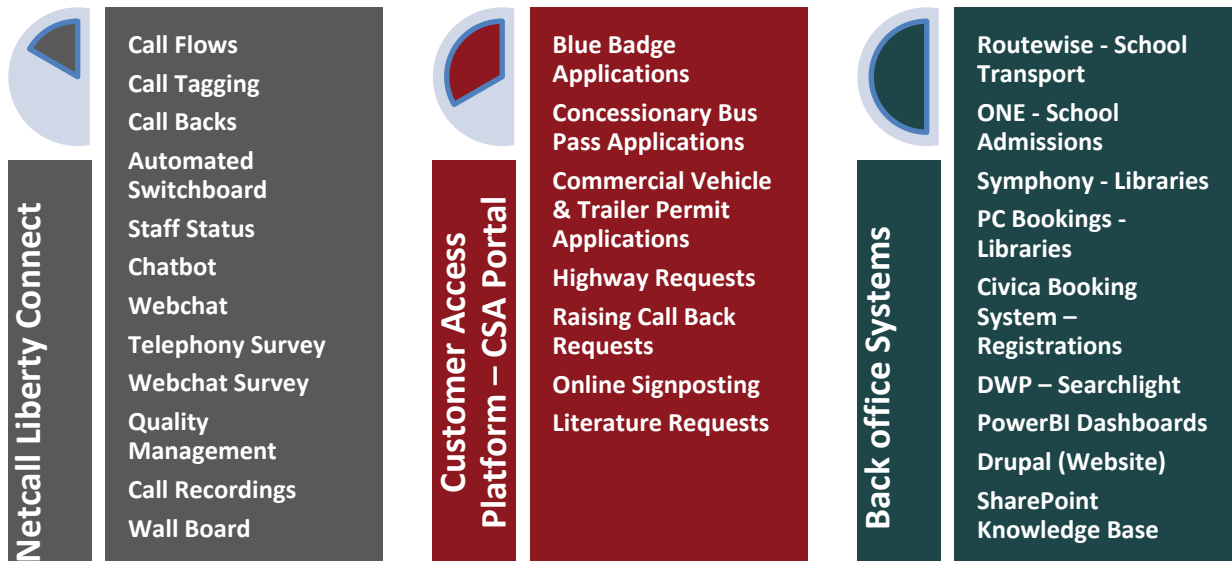
1. The Corporate and Communities Overview and Scrutiny Panel has requested an overview of the Council’s Customer Contact Centre.
2. The Cabinet Member with Responsibility for Corporate Services and Communication and the Strategic Director of Commercial and Change have been invited to attend the meeting in order to respond to any questions the Panel may have.

Overview of the Customer Services Contact Centre

3. The Customer Services Contact Centre provides a first point of contact for Worcestershire residents’ enquiries, offering a choice of channels including telephony, webchat, chatbot (a computer program designed to simulate conversation with human users especially over the internet), online self-service, and paper applications (limited to Blue Badge only). The aim is to make things simple, clear, easy to use and accessible for residents, whilst supporting them.
4. The team provides advice, guidance and processes a range of applications for 20 different services which are distinctly unique, and each require specific service knowledge of the processes to be followed. The enquiries received in relation to these services span broad areas of knowledge ranging from Social Care, School Admissions, to Highways and Travel. They include:

| | | | | | |
|-------------------------------------|-------------------|----------------------------------|--------------------------------------|--------------------------|---|
| General County enquiries | Libraries | Highways | Here2Help | Payment & Client Charges | Care Contributions |
| Demand Responsive Transport Service | School admissions | School Transport / SEN Transport | Countryside and Public Rights of Way | Registrations | Concessionary Travel / Public Transport |
| Blue Badge | Gypsy services | Streetlighting | Switchboard | Waste Management | Accounts Payable / Accounts Receivable |

5. For Blue Badge, Concessionary bus pass and waste management, an end-to-end application process is delivered that includes initial enquires right through to assessing and ordering badges, passes or permits.
6. Approximately 115,000 assisted contacts per annum are dealt with, and an additional 71,434 applications are received and processed per annum.
7. The team currently consists of 18 team members working a mixture of full time and part time, equating to a total Full Time Equivalent (FTE) of 14.93.
8. The team uses a range of technologies, including those set out below:



9. The Customer Services Contact Centre is open 9am - 5pm Monday to Friday. Most of the enquiries dealt with are under the umbrella of 'once and done' and 'right first time' where there is an 'end to end' process. The services provided come under the following categories: Simple Transaction, Registered Service, Facilitated Service, Advocacy Service, and Information Provision.

Telephony

10. The Contact Centre uses Netcall Liberty Converse Contact Centre solution for telephony and webchat.
11. The Netcall platform includes a range of features that enable us to provide efficient and effective customer communications.
12. A summary of the features of Netcall are included below:
 - **Call Flows** provide configurable prompts that are played to callers over the telephone to direct their call to the appropriate queue.
 - **Skills Based Routing** allows telephone calls to be routed to advisers based on the skills and knowledge groups they are allocated to.
 - **Call Tagging** offers the ability to identify the nature of the call at a high level to help establish trends on the types of calls received for each service or queue.

- **Queue Buster** offers the caller an option to leave a contact number and be called back, instead of holding in the queue for an advisor.
 - The caller retains their position in the queue and will receive a call back at the same time as they would if they remained in the queue.
 - Queue buster is turned off for last hour of day to aide in clearing queues.
 - If a returned call goes to Voicemail, the advisor will leave a message and the call clears from the queue.
 - If the caller does not have a voicemail, the call is requeued and attempted two further times.
- **Activity Codes** provide the ability to identify the amount of time advisers spend in activity type (e.g. awaiting call, in call, wrap up time, etc)
- **Call Recordings** enable telephone calls to be recorded for the purposes of training and for quality management monitoring.
- **Quality Management** provides the capability to undertake assessments of advisers' performance by listening to a call recording and scoring them based a pre-defined assessment criteria. This is used to identify areas for training or best practice to pass on to other advisers.
- **Telephone Survey** enables the customer to be presented-with a short survey at the end of the telephone interaction so customer satisfaction data can be captured.
- **Webchat Survey** enables the Council to present the customer with a short survey at the end of a webchat interaction to capture customer satisfaction data.
- **Webchat** provides the capability to have a text based conversational chat with a customer via the website if they cannot resolve their query using the automated chatbot.
- **Chatbot** provides the capability to present the customer with a range of automated workflows to help signpost the customer to the relevant information or to present them with the information to resolve their query without them needing to speak to or contact an adviser.
- **Social Media & Messaging** provides the capability to automatically send web links to customers via SMS directly from the call flows to help avoid unnecessary telephone demand. It also provides the ability to present chatbot flows and webchat service via different social media channels such as Facebook Messenger and Twitter.
- **Wallboard** enables key data to be presented on a screen in the Contact Centre for example the number of calls queuing, answered, adviser status, and relevant data.

13. Appendix 1 includes further Customer Services Contact Centre Statistics

Chatbot and Webchat

14. The “Worcestershire web assistant” chatbot was launched using Netcall on 1 February 2021 including numerous chatbot flows¹. Where the chatbot is unable to answer the enquiry, then the customer is given the option to either liaise with a Customer Adviser via webchat or request further assistance via an online form. Ad hoc Chat Flows are added during ‘peak’ times, for example regarding school admissions and school transport.
15. Following introduction of the Netcall “Worcestershire Web Assistant” chatbot, over 90% of enquiries made via the chatbot are handled automatically without the need to be transferred to a Customer Services Adviser.
16. The benefits to customers include:
 - Customer still can liaise with an experienced Customer Services Adviser if required, via the webchat functionality, during normal office hours.
 - Fewer webchat requests releases capacity for Customer Services Advisers to focus on calls and other service fulfilment tasks, providing a better overall customer experience.
 - User friendly service for both for the customer and the Customer Services Adviser.
 - The availability of the chatbot is having a positive impact on the customers’ experience of the website and their ability to find information on the site. This is evidenced by the number of chats which are being automatically handled via the chatbot, which has successfully used content on the website to answer the customers query or to signpost the customer to the relevant online form to submit their request.

Key Benefits of the Chatbot



17. The chatbot features the ability to create flow-based chats (e.g. pre-defined questions and answers) and intelligent conversational chats (e.g. when will my bus pass expire?). If the customer is not able to resolve their query via the automated chatbot then they can choose to start a real-time text-based conversation with a Customer Services Adviser through the chatbot (often referred to as a webchat).

¹ A flow-based chatbot is one that works by using a pre-defined conversational flow. In other words, they have their conversations already mapped out like a flowchart.

Customer Satisfaction

18. Customer satisfaction has been built into the chatbot conversation to elicit feedback on the service provided. Feedback from customers is as follows:



Paper Applications

19. The only paper applications that the Contact Centre processes are blue badge applications because there is a statutory obligation to do so.
20. Blue Badge paper applications are received, assessed and processed by the Customer Services Team. There has been a real focus on promoting the online form and now 90% of Blue Badge applications are completed online. However, residents also have the options of making an application by paper or by an appointment at a local Library for assistance in completing an online application.

Quality Management

21. The Netcall Quality Management solution incorporates both adviser performance monitoring and customer feedback surveys.
22. The Council's customer surveys are presented at the end of each telephone and webchat interaction so that customer satisfaction can be tracked.
23. The telephony survey currently includes the following 2 questions:
 - Q1. Were you happy with the how the call was handled by the Adviser today? (Yes / No)
 - Q2. Did the Adviser resolve your enquiry today? (Yes / No)
24. The webchat survey currently includes the following 3 questions:
 - Q1. How would you rate your experience with our Web Assistant today? (Star Rating – 5 Highest & 1 Lowest)
 - Q2. Did the Web Assistant resolve your enquiry today? (Yes / No)
 - Q3. How easy was it to contact us today? (Very Easy, Fairly Easy, Easy, Difficult or Very Difficult)
25. Through adviser performance monitoring advisers' calls with customers can be assessed and monitored.
26. At least four or more calls are evaluated per adviser per month based on a predefined set of questions with each question having a weighted % score.

27. Once a call has been evaluated it is sent directly to the adviser along with any comments that have been added by the reviewer.
28. The adviser can listen back to the call as part of their learning and coaching and they are required to acknowledge the evaluation and the outcome.
29. Call Monitoring Questions each have a result of Yes / No / Not applicable for each of the below questions.
 - Did the Adviser politely greet the customer and state their name either at the beginning of the call or somewhere during the call?
 - Did the advisor explain to the customer what they were doing to avoid any long silences?
 - Did the advisor make it clear to the customer that they were putting them on hold and how long for?
 - Was key information repeated and confirmed regarding the enquiry?
 - Was the customer's enquiry correctly diagnosed.
 - Was correct advice/information given to the customer and the correct process followed?
 - Did the advisor signpost to self-serve if appropriate and / or send a channel shift link to the online option?
 - Did the advisor check or take an email address and/or a telephone and confirm details back to caller?
 - Did the Advisor confirm what they had done to resolve the enquiry or advised what the next steps will be?
 - Was a reference number given or advised it would be sent in an email?
 - Was Service Level Agreement given or advised it would be sent in an email?

Channel Shift

30. Channel shift refers to the process of encouraging or enabling customers to switch from one communication or interaction channel to another, often from traditional or in-person channels to digital or self-service channels. There are several benefits associated with channel shift for both businesses and customers:
 - **Cost Savings:** Digital and self-service channels are often more cost-effective for businesses to operate compared to traditional channels.
 - **Efficiency:** Self-service channels, such as FAQs, chatbots, and automated systems, can handle a large volume of customer inquiries simultaneously without the need for human intervention. This improves the efficiency of customer service operations.
 - **24/7 Availability:** Digital channels allow customers to interact with a business at any time of the day, regardless of business hours. This enhances customer convenience and responsiveness.
 - **Faster Response Times:** Automated systems and chatbots can provide instant responses to common customer queries, reducing the time customers have to wait for assistance.

- **Personalisation:** Digital channels can use customer data and preferences to offer personalized experiences. This can lead to more relevant recommendations and solutions, enhancing customer satisfaction.
- **Reduced Wait Times:** Moving customers to digital channels can alleviate congestion in call centres and reduce wait times for those who do require assistance through traditional channels.
- **Flexibility:** Customers can choose the channel that best suits their preferences and needs. Some may prefer self-service options, while others might still prefer to interact with a human agent.
- **Data Collection and Analysis:** Digital channels provide businesses with valuable data about customer interactions, preferences, and behaviours. This data can be used to improve products, services, and customer experiences.
- **Scalability:** Digital channels can be easily scaled to accommodate increases in customer volume without significant additional resources.
- **Consistency:** Automated systems and digital channels can ensure consistent responses and service quality across interactions, reducing the risk of human error.
- **Customer Empowerment:** Self-service options empower customers to find answers and solutions on their own terms, which can lead to increased customer satisfaction and loyalty.
- **Reduced Friction:** Digital channels can simplify the customer journey by providing easily accessible information and quick solutions, reducing the effort required on the customer's part.
- **Environmental Impact:** Encouraging digital interactions can lead to reduced paper usage and overall environmental impact, contributing to sustainability efforts.
- **Accessibility:** Digital channels can offer features like screen readers, language translations, and other accessibility tools to cater to a wider range of customers.

31. However, it's important to note that channel shift should be approached strategically and considerately. Not all customers may be comfortable with or capable of using digital channels, and some inquiries or interactions may be more effectively handled through traditional channels. Balancing the benefits of channel shift with the diverse needs and preferences of customers is essential for a successful transition.

32. Analysis on the cost per transaction by channel has been undertaken based on staff costs, system costs and time to process, which is set out below:

| Channel | Total Cost of Service Provision | Total Contacts Per Annum | Total Cost Per Contact |
|-----------|---------------------------------|--------------------------|------------------------|
| Telephony | £507,398 | 114,392 | £4.44 |
| Webchat | £15,613 | 3,520 | £6.48 ² |

² Staff also undertake telephony and administrative tasks whilst dealing with webchats

| | | | |
|----------------|----------|--------|---------------|
| Chatbot | £5,398 | 59,006 | £0.09 |
| Online | £141,446 | 81,243 | £1.74 |
| Paper | £14,485 | 1,789 | £16.19 |

Call Centre Management Association (CCMA) Awards

33. The Customer Services Contact Centre was recently a finalist in the National Contact Centre Awards, in the category of Small Contact Centre of the Year category.
34. The Council has received the following feedback from the CCMA following the Council's successful entry and selection as finalists in the Contact Centre of the Year Award. The feedback from the judges is outlined below.
35. The strengths for this nomination were:
- A great visit that showcased a great thirst for digital innovation
 - A very good first entry and one you should feel rightly proud of.
 - Clear set of results across a number of KPI's with some solid and exceptional results.
 - Strong leaders in your field - open to feedback, learning and development.
 - Customer centric
36. Development areas for this nomination are:
- We would have liked to have heard more feedback from employees and "felt" the culture more. KPI's and performance only tell so much.
 - It's clear that the Council has a good approach to the people culture, so tell us how this works in the contact centre.
37. Advice from the judging panel for this nomination:
- Continue to challenge the status quo and seek out what good looks like from outside your own industry.
 - Utilise the power of the CCMA to understand and benchmark what others are doing to raise the bar on performance.
 - Look to go on as many best practice visits to pick up industry relevance (not just other councils).
 - Continue to push the digital innovation.
 - Consider challenging your own QA model as it is very much in its embryonic stage versus others across the industry.
 - Don't just invest in online - customers "demand" a true omni channel experience, hence consider using virtual bots in your model, virtual IVR's etc - appreciating that you have to balance the delivery of a service against a backdrop of continual cost reduction.

Key Performance Indicators (KPIs)

38. The Contact Centre has a range of KPIs to measure team performance and individual adviser performance.

39. The last full year KPI performance figures are included below.

| Current Metric | Target | 2022/23 Q2 Performance | 2022/23 Q3 Performance | 2022/23 Q4 Performance | 2023/24 Q1 Performance |
|--|---------------|-------------------------------|-------------------------------|-------------------------------|-------------------------------|
| Calls answered within 90 seconds | 70% | 74.33% | 82.67% | 82.67% | 80.67% |
| Calls answered within 120 seconds | 80% | Not captured | Not captured | Not captured | 88.00% |
| Call backs responded to | 90% | 94.33% | 100.00% | 100.00% | 100.00% |
| Self-Service Contact | 80% | 78.00% | 83.00% | 82.00% | 85.00% |
| Administration tasks completed within service level | 77% | 94.63% | 96.69% | 92.67% | 92.13% |
| Customers satisfied with telephony contact | 80% | 86.10% | 87.33% | 88.67% | 89.67% |
| Customers satisfied with Webchat contact | 80% | 82.20% | 90.57% | 88.60% | 90.13% |
| Performance monitoring meeting quality criteria | 90% | 98.67% | 99.00% | 99.33% | 99.67% |

40. The following performance figures and metrics relate to the period 1 April 2022 and 31 March 2023.

Quality Targets

| Objective | Target | Performance |
|--|------------------------------|--------------------|
| Adherence to schedule (Ensuring staff adhere to their working schedule) | 100% | 100% |
| After Call Work | <5% of the total working day | 1.29% |
| Average handling time | 200 seconds | 178 seconds |
| No. of Quality Checks | 4 calls per agent per month | 100% |
| Quality of calls by service operators | 90% | 96.50% |

Online Form SLAs - 77% Overall SLA Target

| Fulfilment | Service Level | Average Performance |
|--|----------------------|----------------------------|
| Commercial Vehicle Trailer Permit (Household Waste Sites) | 1 working Day | 86% |
| Bus Pass | 10 Working Days | 99% |
| Literature (Information Leaflets, etc) | 1 Working Day | 100% |
| Tell Us Once (TU0) | 10 Working Days | 96% |
| Application/Evidence Triaged | 5 Working Days | 100% |
| Blue Badge | 20 Working Days | 100% |

Webchat SLAs

| Webchat Channel | Service Level – To Respond to a Webchat Request | Average Performance |
|--------------------------|--|----------------------------|
| Blue Badge | 30 Secs | 13 Secs |
| Bus Pass | 30 Secs | 33 Secs |
| County Waste | 30 Secs | 27 Secs |
| School Admissions | 30 Secs | 28 Secs |
| School Transport | 30 Secs | 24 Secs |
| Travel | 30 Secs | 8 Secs |
| All Services | 30 Secs | 25 Secs |

Postal / Paper SLAs (Blue Badge postal applications)

| Fulfilment | Service Level | Average Performance |
|----------------------------|----------------------|----------------------------|
| Postal applications | 20 Working Days | 100% |

First Call Resolution (FCR)

41. 93% of calls handled are resolved at first call resolution.

AHT (Average Handling Time)

| Telephony | Target | Average Performance |
|------------------------------|---------------|----------------------------|
| Average Handling Time | 200 Secs | 178cs (2m 58secs) |

Customer Satisfaction

Telephony

| Question | Target | Average Performance |
|---|---------------|----------------------------|
| Were you happy with how the call was handled by the Adviser today? | 80% | 87% (Yes) |

Webchat

| Question | Target | Average Performance |
|--|--------|---------------------|
| How would you rate your experience with our Web Assistant today? | 80% | 84% (5 or 4 stars) |

Customer Effort Score (CES)

| Question | Target | Average Performance |
|--------------------------------------|--------|---------------------|
| How easy was it to contact us today? | 80% | 91% (Very Easy) |

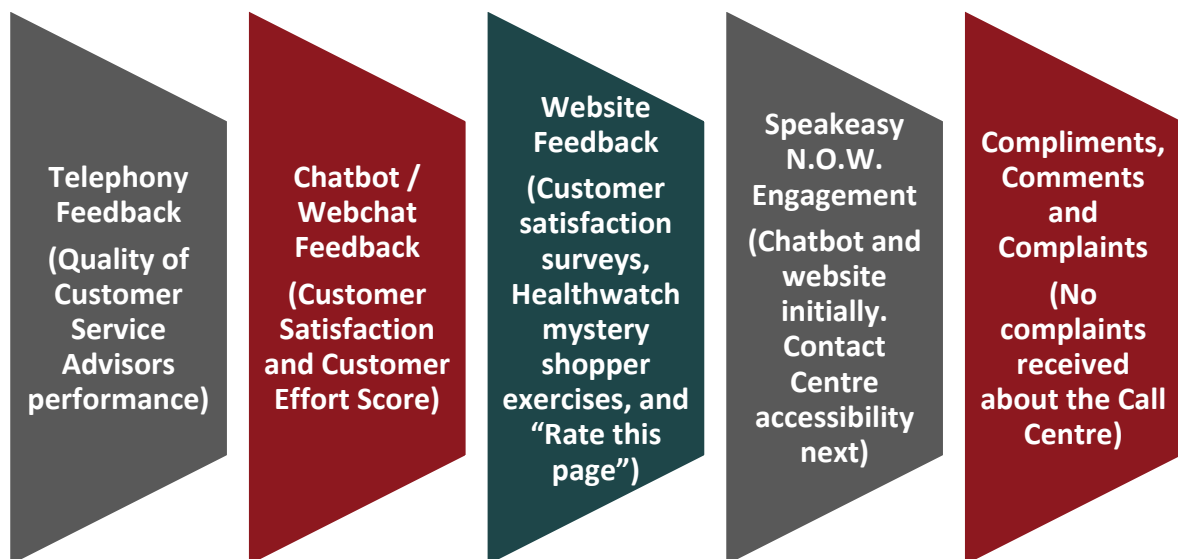
Complaints per Customer

42. Customer Services itself did not receive any complaints during 2022/23. The number of complaints about the contact centre against number of contacts (Complaints per Customer) is therefore 0%.

Customer Feedback

43. Customer feedback provides valuable insights into what is working well and what is not. It highlights specific pain points, bottlenecks, and helps in understanding customer needs.

44. Customer feedback is gained in the following ways:



45. [SpeakEasy NOW](#) is a self-advocacy charity for people with learning disabilities, across Worcestershire. They run projects that help to ensure that health, social care and local government services, meet the needs of people with learning disabilities.

Translation Services (Clear Voice)

46. If a resident requires a translation service if English is not their first language, the services of Clear Voice are used. Clear Voice offers on-demand telephone

interpreting, face to face interpreting as well as a translation and transcription service.

Accessibility / Digital Champions

47. Residents in Worcestershire have several channels where they can request assistance with their enquiry. As well as telephony, online and Web Assistant options, residents also have the option of face-to-face help and support at any local library in Worcestershire. Digital Champions in the libraries offer online assistance to residents in applying for a Blue Badge or Concessionary Travel Pass for example.

Next Steps

48. A corporate approach is being adopted to the use of contact centre technologies and practices to provide a consistent and improved customer experience across the Council.

49. The following objectives, taken from Contact Centre Best Practice Report which has been taken to Chief Officers Group (COG), outlines a programme of work to implement a corporate approach to contact centre best practice across all contact centres within the Council.

| Objective | Description |
|--|---|
| Netcall Converse Features | <p>Consistent usage of all the features available within Netcall by all customer facing contact centres.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Call Flows • Skills Based Routing • Call Tagging • Queue Buster • Activity Codes • Call Recordings • Quality Management • Telephony Survey • Webchat Survey • Social Messaging (Messenger, Twitter & SMS) • Wall Board |
| Chatbot & Webchat | <p>Expand the content of the Chatbot to include all service areas.</p> <p>Where appropriate expand the use of Webchat across all customer facing contact centres:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Adults Access Centre • Family Front Door • Highways Control Centre • Homecare Reablement • Emergency Duty Team (EDT) |
| Paper Applications | <p>Wherever possible replace paper-based applications or contact from customers with online forms.</p> |

| | |
|--------------------------|--|
| Emails on website | Replace all @worcestershire.gov.uk and @worschildrenfirst.org.uk email addresses are replaced by a single, intelligent 'generic contact form'. |
| KPIs | Adopt a consistent set of KPIs and targets across all customer-facing contact centres. |

Purpose of the Meeting

50. The Corporate and Communities Overview and Scrutiny Panel is asked to consider:

- the information provided in the report;
- decide whether any further Scrutiny is required; and
- agree any comments to highlight to the Cabinet Member with Responsibility for Corporate Services and Communication.

Supporting Information

Appendix 1 – Customer Services Contact Centre Statistics

Contact Points

Emma James / Jo Weston, Overview and Scrutiny Officers

Tel: 01905 844965 / 844964, Email: scrutiny@worcestershire.gov.uk

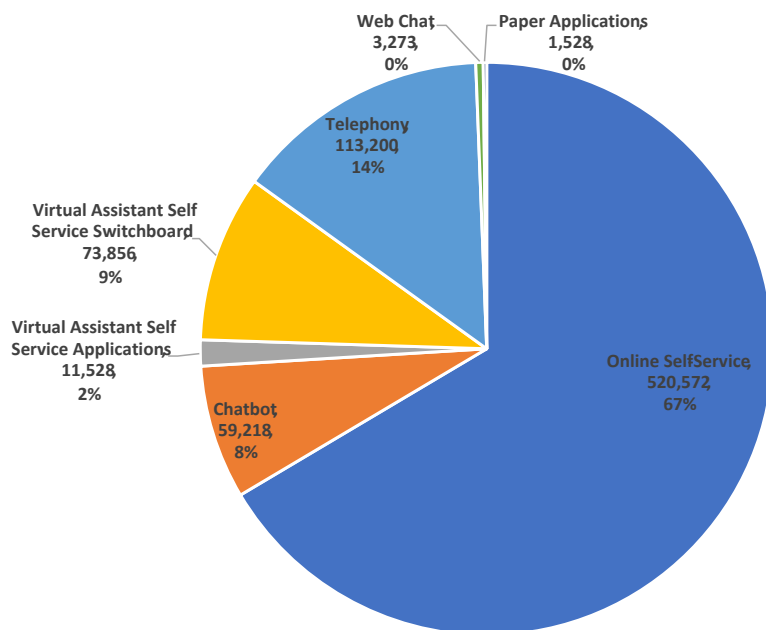
Background Papers

In the opinion of the proper officer (in this case the Assistant Director for Legal and Governance) there are no background papers relating to the subject matter of this report.

All Agendas and Minutes are available on the Council's website [weblink to Agendas and Minutes](#)

Annual Volumes by Channel

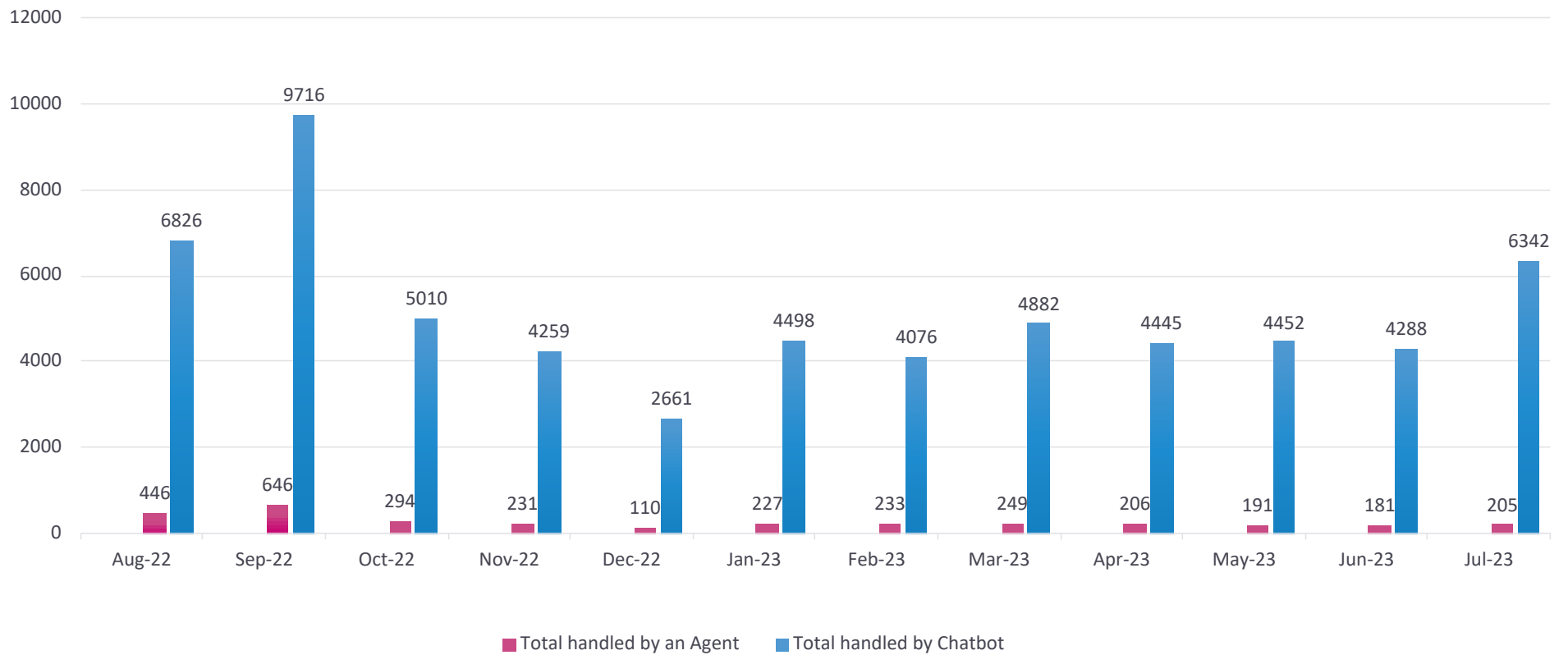
Volume of Contact by Channel



| Channel | Volume of Contact by Channel | Contact Type |
|---|------------------------------|----------------------|
| Online Self-Service | 520,572 | Self-Service Contact |
| Chatbot | 59,218 | Self-Service Contact |
| Virtual Assistant Self Service Applications | 11,528 | Self-Service Contact |
| Virtual Assistant Self Service Switchboard | 73,856 | Self-Service Contact |
| Telephony | 113,200 | Assisted Contact |
| Web Chat | 3,273 | Assisted Contact |
| Paper Applications | 1,528 | Assisted Contact |

| | Volume | Percentage |
|-----------------------|----------------|------------|
| Assisted Contacts | 118,001 | 15.07% |
| Self-Service Contacts | 665,174 | 84.93% |
| Total | 783,175 | |

Chatbot and Webchat Volumes



This page is intentionally left blank

CORPORATE AND COMMUNITIES OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY PANEL 29 SEPTEMBER 2023

WORK PROGRAMME

Summary

1. From time to time the Corporate and Communities Overview and Scrutiny Panel will review its work programme and consider which issues should be investigated as a priority.

Background

2. Worcestershire County Council has a rolling annual Work Programme for Overview and Scrutiny. The 2023/24 Work Programme has been developed by taking into account issues still to be completed from 2023/23, the views of Overview and Scrutiny Members and other stakeholders and the findings of the budget scrutiny process.
3. Suggested issues have been prioritised using scrutiny feasibility criteria in order to ensure that topics are selected subjectively and the 'added value' of a review is considered right from the beginning.
4. The Corporate and Communities Overview and Scrutiny Panel is responsible for scrutiny of:
 - Commissioning, contracts and commerce and ensuring the corporate commissioning cycle works well
 - Transformation
 - Finance
 - Localism and Communities
 - Organisation and employees
5. The scrutiny work programme was discussed by the Overview and Scrutiny Performance Board (OSPB) on 28 April and was agreed by Council on 18 May 2023.

Dates of Future Meetings

- 23 November 2023

Purpose of the Meeting

6. The Panel is asked to consider the 2023/24 Work Programme and agree whether it would like to make any amendments. The Panel will wish to retain the flexibility to take into account any urgent issues which may arise.

Supporting Information

Appendix 1 – Corporate and Communities Overview and Scrutiny Panel Work Programme 2023/24

Contact Points

Emma James / Jo Weston, Overview and Scrutiny Officers, Tel: 01905 844964/ 844965
Email: scrutiny@worcestershire.gov.uk

Background Papers

In the opinion of the proper officer (in this case the Assistant Director for Legal and Governance) the following are the background papers relating to the subject matter of this report:

[Agenda and Minutes for Overview and Scrutiny Performance Board on 28 April 2023](#)

[Agenda for Council on 18 May 2023](#)

All Agendas and Minutes are available on the Council's website [weblink to Agendas and Minutes](#)

SCRUTINY WORK PROGRAMME 2023/24

Corporate and Communities Overview and Scrutiny Panel

| Date of Meeting | Issue for Scrutiny | Date of Last Report | Notes/Follow-up Action |
|-------------------|---|---------------------|---|
| 29 September 2023 | Performance and In-Year Budget Monitoring (Q1 April to June) | 25 July 2023 | Including pay and inflation generally and relation to contracts (as requested by OSPB as part of 2024/25 budget scrutiny) |
| | Performance Monitoring of Comments, Compliments and Complaints | 21 September 2022 | |
| | Member Portal – Case Management System | 24 September 2021 | Suggested at 28 March 2023 meeting |
| | The Council's Customer Contact Centre | | |
| | Artificial Intelligence (AI) | | Suggested at 28 March 2023 meeting |
| 23 November 2023 | Performance and In-Year Budget Monitoring (Q2 July to September) | 25 July 2023 | |
| | Review of Museums, Arts and Culture Strategy 2023/24 | 1 November 2022 | |
| | Pay and inflation generally and relation to contracts - TBC | | Requested by OSPB on 27 July 2023 (as part of 2024/25 budget scrutiny) |
| | Income Generation including results of scoping exercise undertaken for the provision of weddings on countryside sites | | Suggested at 28 March Meeting |
| January 2024 | Scrutiny of 2024/25 Budget | | |
| March 2024 | Performance (Q3 October to December) and In-Year Budget Monitoring | | |

| Possible Future Items | | | |
|------------------------------|---|------------------------------------|--|
| TBC | Digital Inclusion | | Agenda planning August 2023 |
| | Update on Rewards System for Staff: Employer of Choice | | Agenda Planning August 2023 |
| TBC | Menopause Policy | | Agenda Planning August 2023 |
| TBC – early 2024 | Worcestershire County Museum Review of Lease | | Suggested at OSPB July 2023 |
| TBC | Farming and Rural Estates | | Suggested at 8 June 2023 meeting |
| TBC – early 2024 | Update on review of Libraries Unlocked | 8 June 2023 | Requested at 8 June 2023 meeting. To be considered by Panel in early 2024. |
| TBC | TV and Film Policy Briefing | | Raised at 18 May 2023 agenda planning meeting |
| TBC | Update on role of Here2Help (including the Executive Summary of the Business Plan). | 19 January 2023, 24 September 2021 | Suggested at 19 January 2023 meeting |
| TBC | Worcestershire One Public Estate | | Suggested at 14 February 2022 meeting |
| TBC | Electric Vehicle charging points on the County Council Estate | | Suggested at 14 February 2022 meeting |
| TBC | Council Communication | 8 November 2021 | Suggested at 8 November 2021 meeting |
| TBC | West Mercia Energy Joint Committee Business Plan | 17 January 2022 | |
| Standing Items | | | |
| November/January | Budget Scrutiny | | Annually |
| | Annual update on the Council's energy purchasing arrangement via the West Mercia Energy Joint Committee including the Business Plan | 17 January 2022 | Agreed at October 2021 Overview and Scrutiny Performance Board |

| | | | |
|-----|---|---|--|
| TBC | Councillors Divisional Funding Scheme | 20 July 2021 | A regular report to Scrutiny on the operation of the WCDF is required under the Scheme |
| TBC | Worcestershire County Council Regulation of Investigatory Powers Act 2000 Policy (RIPA) | | |
| TBC | Performance monitoring of comments, compliments and complaints | 25 July 2023 28 March 2023 1 November 2022 21 September 2022 | |

This page is intentionally left blank