Worcestershire County Council

Agenda

Corporate and Communities Overview and Scrutiny Panel

**Thursday, 23 November 2023, 2.00 pm
County Hall, Worcester**

All County Councillors are invited to attend and participate

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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.

Head of Legal and Democratic Services July 2012   WCC/SPM summary/f

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Corporate and Communities Overview and Scrutiny Panel
Thursday, 23 November 2023, 2.00 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** *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 day 22 November 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.*	
4	**Confirmation of the Minutes of the Previous Meeting** Previously circulated	
5	**Libraries Unlocked Implementation Update** (Indicative timing: 2.05-2.35pm)	1 - 4
6	**Performance and 2023/24 In-Year Budget Monitoring** (Indicative timing: 2.35-3.05pm)	5 - 38
7	**Overview of Worcestershire County Council's Contractual and Pay Inflation** (Indicative timing: 3.05-3.35pm)	39 - 44
8	**Worcestershire County Council's Workplace Menopause Support Programme** (Indicative timing: 3.35-3.55pm)	45 - 48

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: Wednesday, 15 November 2023

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CORPORATE AND COMMUNITIES OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY PANEL 23 NOVEMBER 2023

LIBRARIES UNLOCKED IMPLEMENTATION UPDATE

Summary

1. The Cabinet Member with Responsibility for Communities and the Assistant Director for Communities have been invited to the meeting to update the Panel on developments relating to the implementation of Libraries Unlocked.

Background

2. A Library Strategy for Worcestershire was written in 2019/20 following formal public engagement, a Local Government Association Library Peer Challenge and the creation of a Library Needs Assessment.

3. The Strategy, which set out a medium-term vision for the service and a context for future service transformation, received Cabinet approval on 20 December 2019 and included the implementation of an open library service delivery model (Libraries Unlocked), aimed at securing the future of Worcestershire's library network while providing opportunities to deliver efficiencies and meet the needs of Worcestershire residents.

4. Libraries Unlocked introduces technology into Libraries that allows Library Members to access Library facilities outside of staffed hours. A briefing paper on the implementation of Libraries Unlocked has been requested by the Panel following on from the more detailed report provided on the 8 June 2023 (see background papers).

Libraries Unlocked Implementation

5. In June 2022, Libraires Unlocked was successfully implemented in Droitwich and Stourport Libraries. Opening hours increased by 85% at both libraries, allowing community groups and library members to visit their local library outside of staffed opening hours. On the back of the success of the early adopter sites, a decision was made to commence feasibility work on introducing Libraries Unlocked at Malvern, Evesham, Redditch, Kidderminster, Wythall, Pershore, Bromsgrove, Hagley, Alvechurch, Rubery, Warndon and St John's Libraries.

6. A phased approach is being taken to both feasibility work and implementation, given the number of Libraries being considered and the complexity of building arrangements, co-located partners, leases and licences in places, as no two libraries are the same.

7. Libraries Unlocked is expected to be operational at **Evesham, Pershore, Rubery, St John's , Kidderminster, Bromsgrove and Malvern** libraries in early 2024. This is still subject to:
   - closure of staff consultation
   - successful outcome to negotiations with Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) over Job Centre Plus customer access during Libraries Unlocked opening hours
   - identification of additional utilities costs and successful outcome to negotiations with Pershore Town Council
   - satisfactory asbestos surveys at all sites
   - receipt of Listed Building Consent for Malvern Library from Malvern Hills District Council.

8. Libraries Unlocked will be progressed at **Redditch** and **Warndon** libraries in 2024/25 or 2025/26 subject to the:
   - re-location of Redditch Library to Redditch Town Hall
   - identification of a satisfactory alternative location for Warndon Library in the Fairfield Centre
   - progress of Fairfield Centre project.

9. Feasibility work will be progressed at **Wythall**, **Alvechurch, Hagley** libraries over the next 3-6 months. Implementation will be subject to:
   - the successful outcome of negotiations with Hagley Parish Council, Woodrush High School, Alvechurch Middle School and Crown Meadow Nursery and Primary School
   - identification of associated Private Finance Initiative (PFI) costs at Alvechurch Library
   - the identification of additional utility costs at Wythall, Alvechurch and Hagley.

Libraries Unlocked Engagement

10. Worcestershire County Council's Library Service is committed to working with existing library members and local communities. Using the learning from the early adopter sites, local customer engagement sessions will be arranged once there is a confirmed go-live date for a site. The timing of these sessions is important in order to provide library members and local communities with clarity on how Libraries Unlocked will work at their library, and to be able to answer specific questions that may be raised.

11. A specific section of the County Council's website has been developed to provide more information on Libraries Unlocked and to answer any generic questions that individuals may have. The link to the relevant webpage is here: Libraries Unlocked | Worcestershire County Council

Purpose of the Meeting

12. The Panel is asked to:
   - consider and comment on the information provided on Libraries Unlocked;
   - agree any comments to highlight to the Cabinet Member, and

- determine whether any further information or scrutiny on a particular topic is required.

Contact Points

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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 for Corporate and Communities Overview and Scrutiny Panel on 8 June 2023
- Agenda and Minutes for Cabinet on 20 December 2019

All agendas and minutes are available on the Council's website here.

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CORPORATE AND COMMUNITIES OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY PANEL 23 NOVEMBER 2023

PERFORMANCE AND 2023/24 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 will also have the opportunity to review the current range of performance indicator data provided.

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 2 (July to September 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.

7. The Panel has the opportunity to review the set of performance data it receives and consider whether any changes or new information would be helpful. The full range of data collected is attached at Appendix 2.

Financial Information

8. The Panel also receives in-year budget information. The information provided is for Period 6 and is attached in the form of presentation slides at Appendix 3. This information flows from the Resources Report which is contained within the agenda for the 23 November 2023 Cabinet meeting.

Purpose of the Meeting

9. 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 December 2023 2023
   - Agree any changes or additions to the performance data received
   - whether any further information or scrutiny on a particular topic is required.

Supporting Information

Appendix 1 – Performance Report for Quarter 2 (July to September 2023)
Appendix 2 – Performance Data Set collected
Appendix 3 – Budget Monitoring Information for Period 6.

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 29 September, 25 July and 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.

Scrutiny Report Corporate & Communities 2023/2024 Quarter 2

Contents

Registration and Coroner's

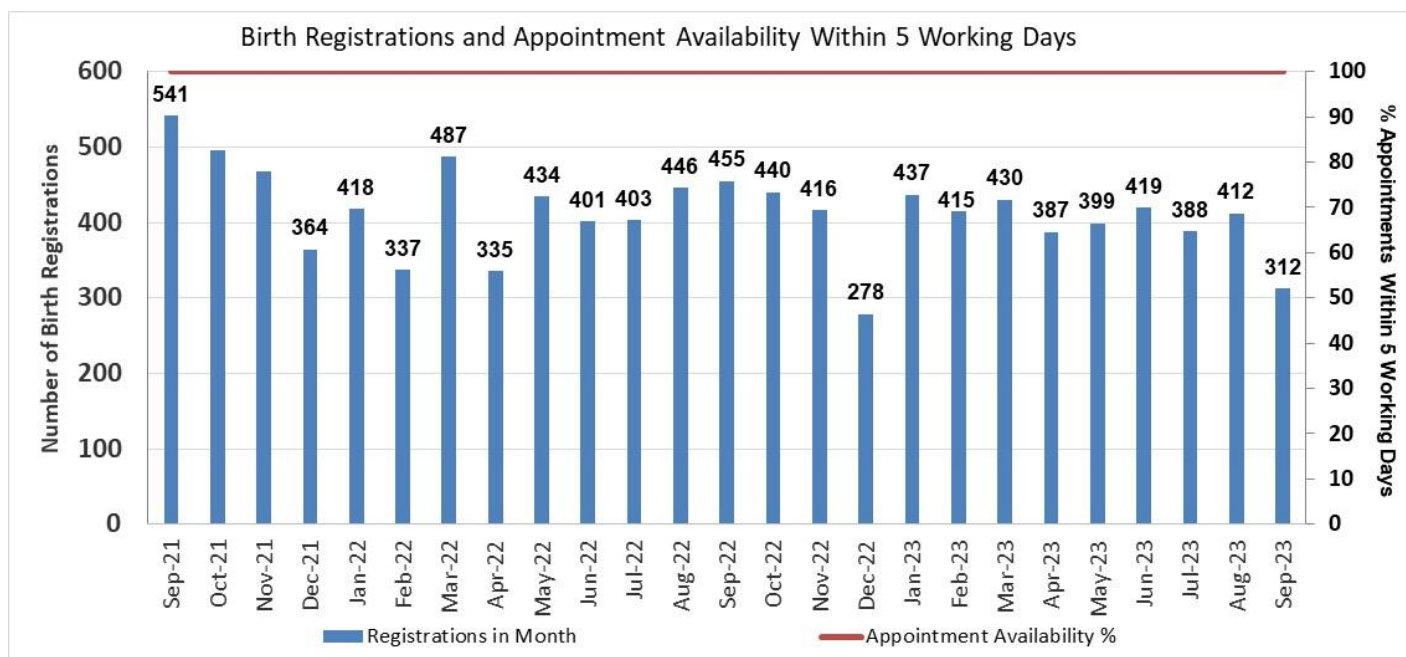<u>Birth registration appointments within 5 working days</u>
RAG: Green

Direction of Travel: No Noticeable Change

Performance Details: Anyone contacting the service from April to September 2023 to register a birth was offered a convenient appointment within 5 working days. Birth registrations in the first half of this financial year totalled 2,317, down 157 (6.3%) compared with the 2,474 registered in the same April-to-September period of 2022. In the July-to-September quarter, the total registered was 1,112. That figure was 192 (14.7%) less than the 1,304 registered in the same three months last year.

Current Activity: 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. Extra calendars have been put in place to accommodate more death-registration appointments, thereby ensuring full availability of all appointment types (including to register births).

Future Activity: The service will follow all national guidelines in respect of the registration of births. Residents will be kept 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.

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

Birth Registrations and Appointment Availability Within 5 Working Days

<u>Death registration appointments within 2 working days</u>
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 half of the financial year, as was the case throughout 2022/2023. There was an issue with the on-line booking system in September. Pending the problem's resolution, a message on the website explained all appointments would be booked manually by staff. The on-line system was quickly restored and feedback from staff is that the system is working better than previously.

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
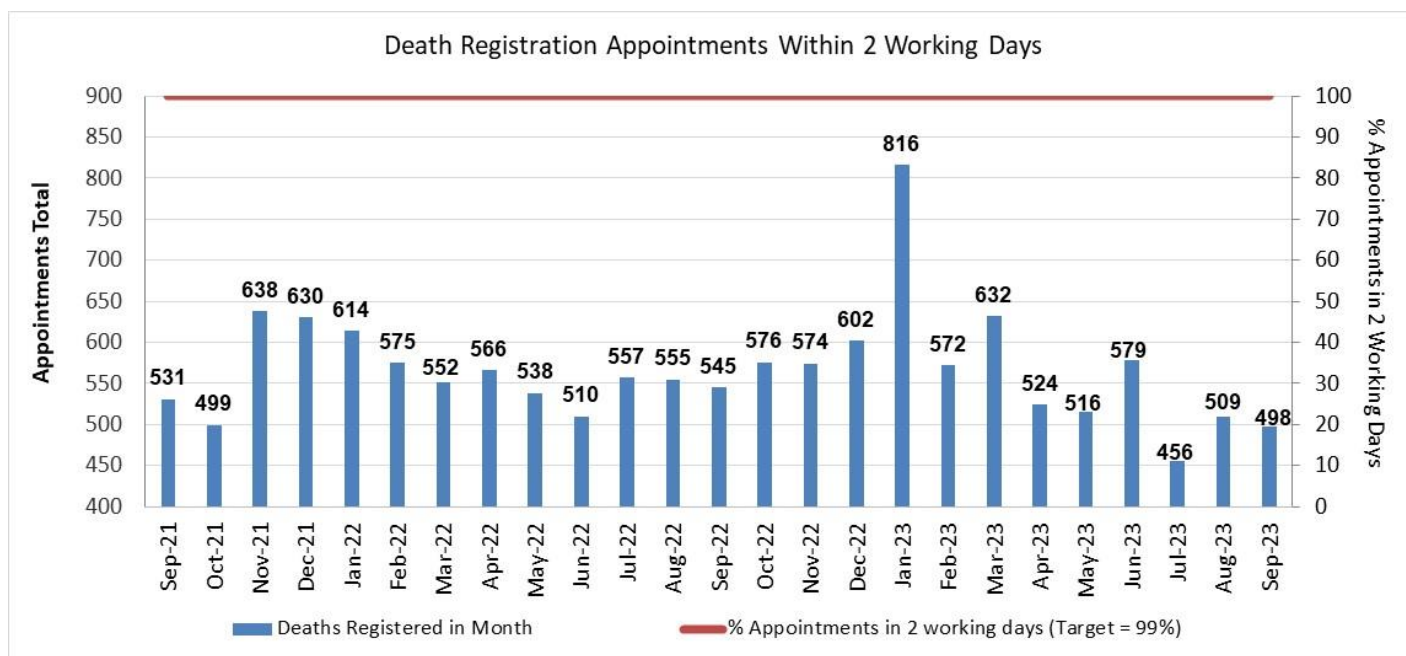
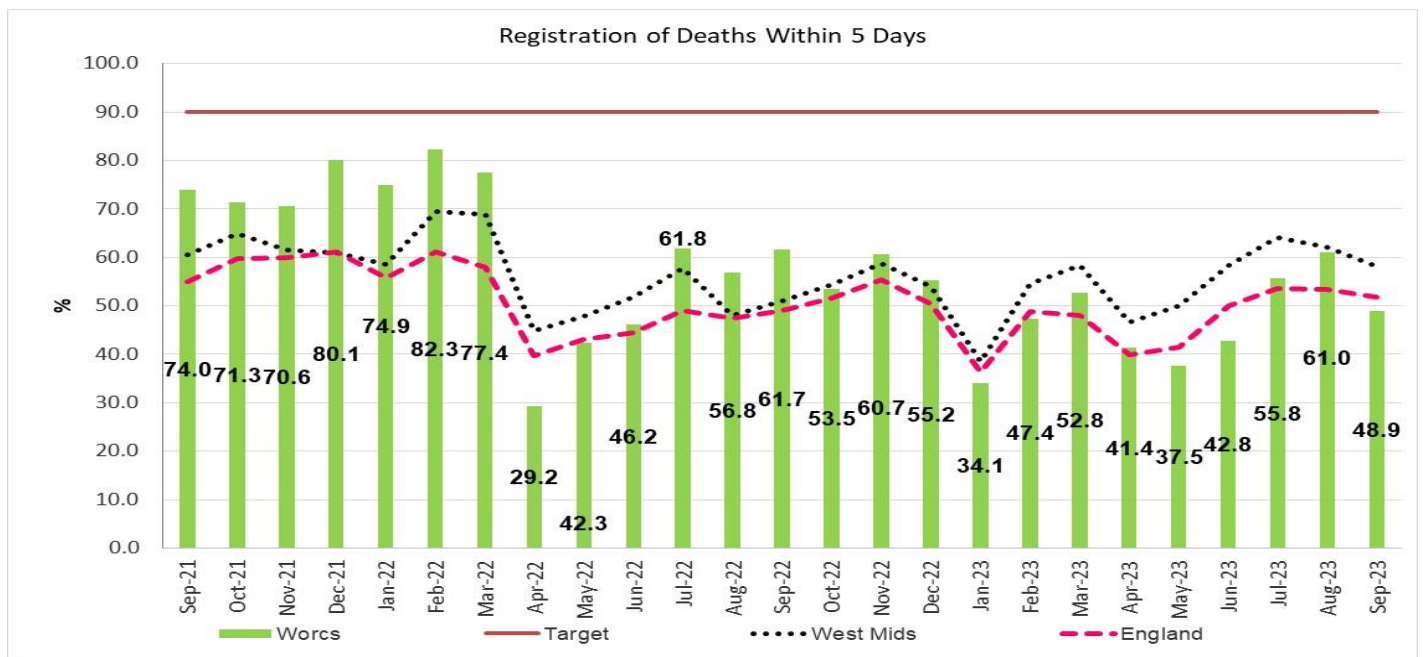## Registration of deaths within 5 days

RAG: Red

Direction of Travel: Improving

Performance Details: In the July-to September quarter, 504 (55.3%) of the 912 deaths registered in Worcestershire were within 5 days (April-to-June percentage: 40.8%). The equivalent July-to-September percentage for the West Midlands region was 61.4%; for the whole of England it was 53%. 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. Of a sample of 276 deaths registered in August and September, paperwork in 112 cases (40.6%) was received four or more days after death, making meeting the target of five days difficult. 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: If, as is to be expected, the number of deaths to be registered increases in the autumn and winter, it may be hard to sustain a month-on-month improvement in this indicator's out-turns. Benchmarking against other authorities' figures will continue. Given that only one other authority in the West Midlands region has all deaths subjected to ME review, a more meaningful comparison is with the all-England percentage. 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

Registration of Deaths Within 5 Days

Legend: Worcs | Target | West Mids | England

Data labels (Worcs): 74.0, 71.3, 70.6, 80.1, 74.9, 82.3, 77.4, 29.2, 42.3, 46.2, 61.8, 56.8, 61.7, 53.5, 60.7, 55.2, 34.1, 47.4, 52.8, 41.4, 37.5, 42.8, 55.8, 61.0, 48.9

Months (x-axis): Sep-21, Oct-21, Nov-21, Dec-21, Jan-22, Feb-22, Mar-22, Apr-22, May-22, Jun-22, Jul-22, Aug-22, Sep-22, Oct-22, Nov-22, Dec-22, Jan-23, Feb-23, Mar-23, Apr-23, May-23, Jun-23, Jul-23, Aug-23, Sep-23

Communications and Consumer Relations

## Increasing staff engagement

RAG: Green

Direction of Travel: Improving

Performance Details: The extended gap following the September 2020 survey was due solely to the County Council's COVID-19 response. The 2023 staff survey ("Your Voice") was open from 16th January to 19th February. The response rate of 44.3% was down on the previous year's 71.5% (the highest ever) but well within the tolerance levels for other authorities' surveys. 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.

Current Activity: The headline results and planned actions were shared with staff during the Staff Briefing on 16th October and were published on Our Space the same day. Directorate Leadership Teams are developing actions plans and a Slido survey is to be undertaken to ascertain whether staff would prefer a survey each year or every other year. (Staff are to be asked whether they would prefer shorter Pulse Surveys, designed to provide feedback on specific questions and themes.)

Future Activity: Staff Briefings, updates on Our Space, and HR updates emailed to all staff will provide updates about progress towards meeting the required actions identified from the 2023 survey results. Reviewing and continuing to promote the now-well-established Workforce Strategy in light of the survey results remains a key priority.

Graph: Percentage of Staff That Completed the Staff Survey

Increasing Staff Engagement
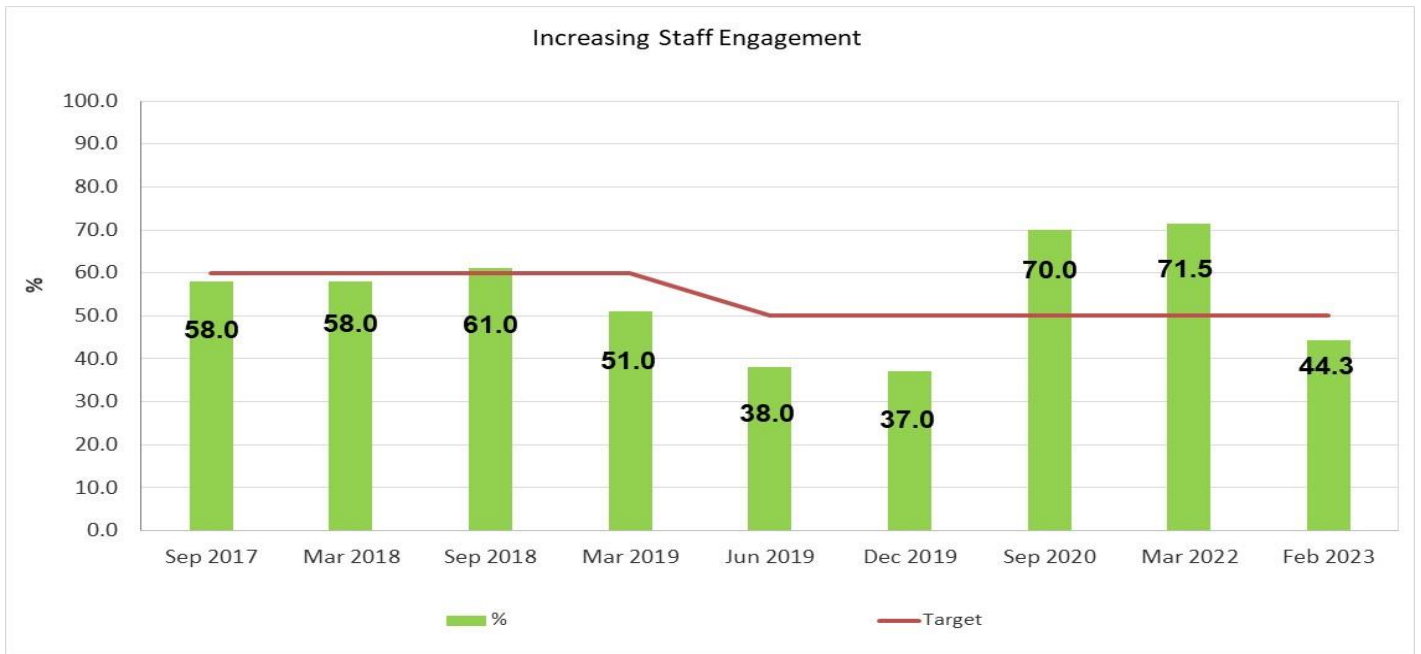
HR, ICT and Corporate Information Governance Team

<u>Employees - Actual Full-Time Equivalents</u>
RAG: N/A

Direction of Travel: N/A

Performance Details: The FTE figure at the end of the second quarter of 2023/2024 was 1,921.02, an increase of 2.4% from 1,874.69 at the end of June and 4.1% higher than at the end of September 2022 (1,842.40). 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

Employees - Actual Full-Time Equivalents
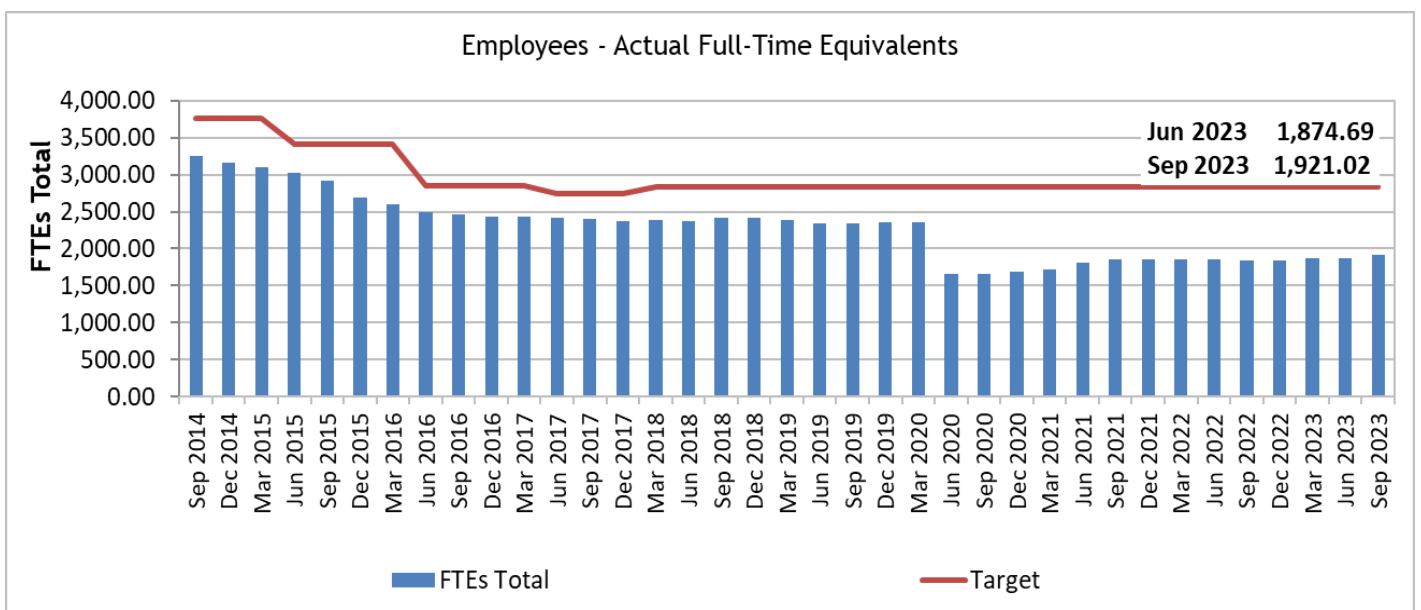
Sickness Rates (Cumulative)
RAG: N/A

Direction of Travel: Improving

Performance Details: At the end of the second quarter of the 2023/2024 financial year, the average days sick per person (Full-Time Equivalent) was 4.25, down compared to the same period last year (4.50).

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
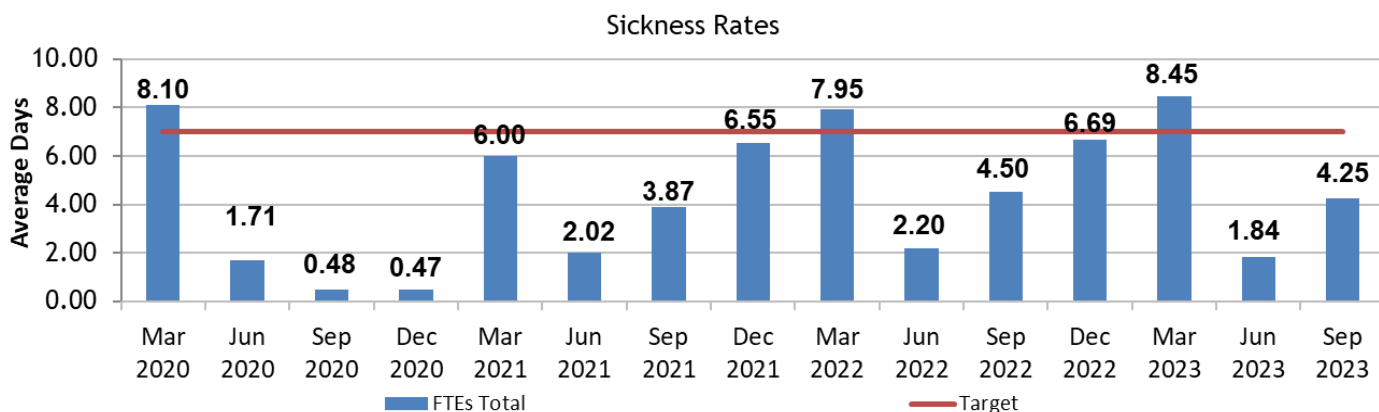
Days lost through long-term sickness
RAG: N/A

Direction of Travel: N/A

Performance Details: Long-term absences are episodes of 21 or more calendar days. In the second quarter of 2023/2024, long-term absences totalled 3,722 days, an increase of 14.1% compared to total days absent in quarter 2 of 2022/2023 (3,262).

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
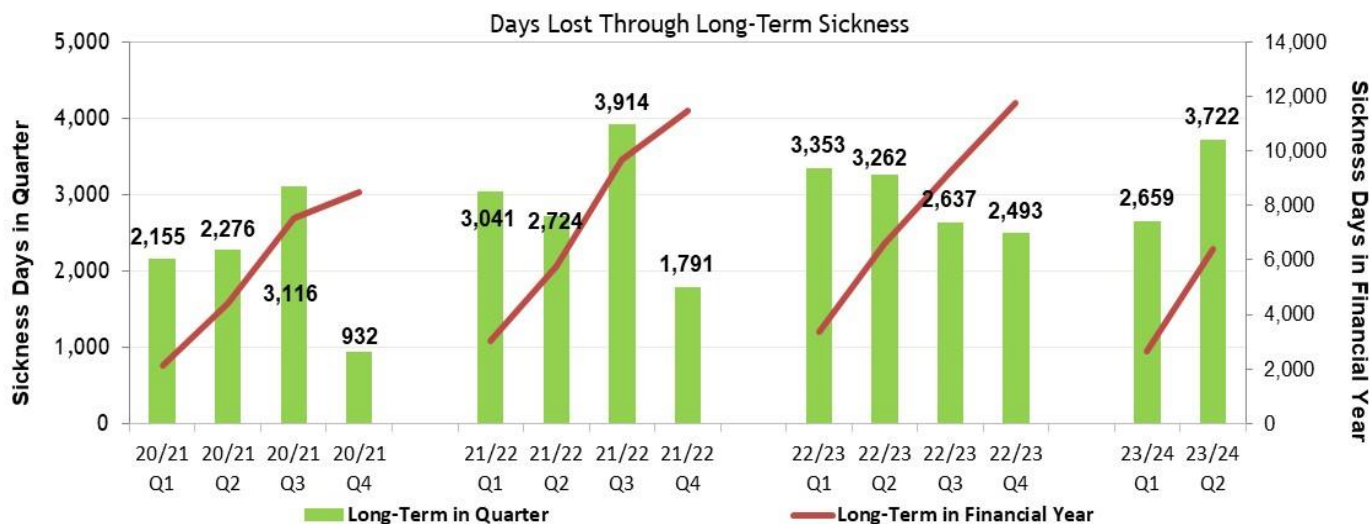
Days lost through short-term sickness

RAG: N/A

Direction of Travel: N/A

Performance Details: Short-term absences in the second quarter of 2023/2024 totalled 979.50. This represents an increase of 4.0% compared to the same period in 2022/2023, when the total was 942 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
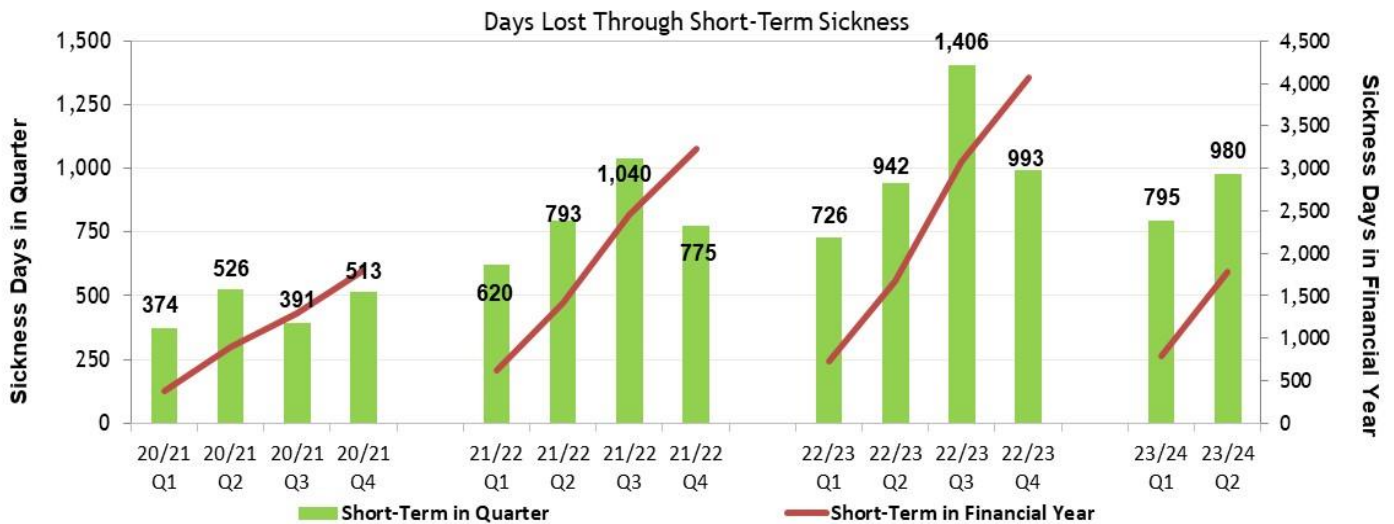
Staff turnover rate

RAG: N/A

Direction of Travel: N/A

Performance Details: This measure relates to leavers in the financial year as a percentage of the workforce. The turnover rate for quarter 2 of this financial year was 3.75. This is a reduction compared to the same period last year when the figure was 6.64.

Current Activity:

Future Activity:

Graph: Turnover Rate
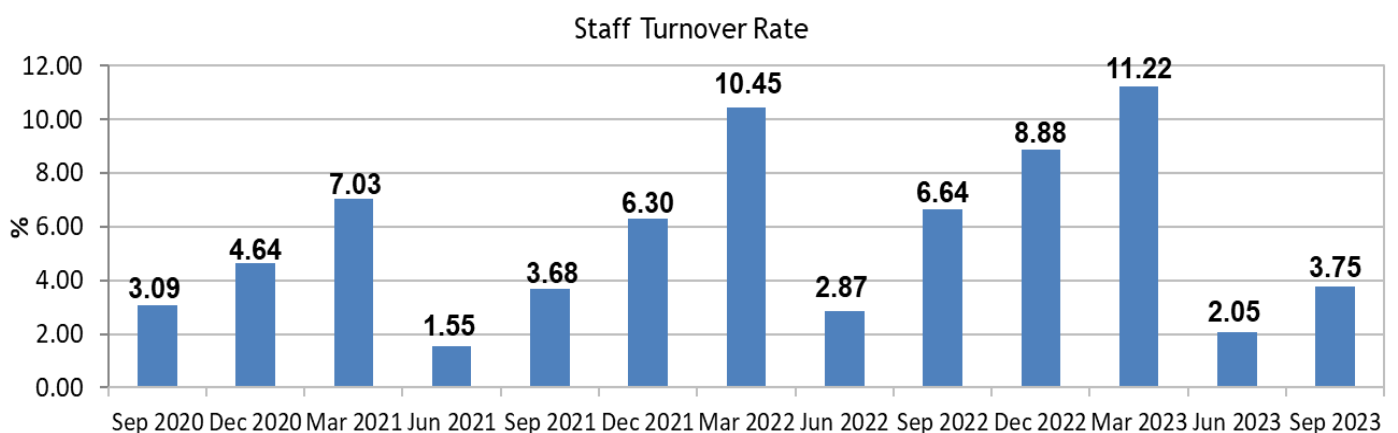
Cost of agency staff as a percentage of the total pay-bill

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 September was 6%, up from 5% on 30th June. On 30th September last year, the figure was also 6%.

Current Activity:

Future Activity:

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

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: The April-to-September visits total of 877,391 equated to 64.5% of the total for the same period in 2019 (1,360,3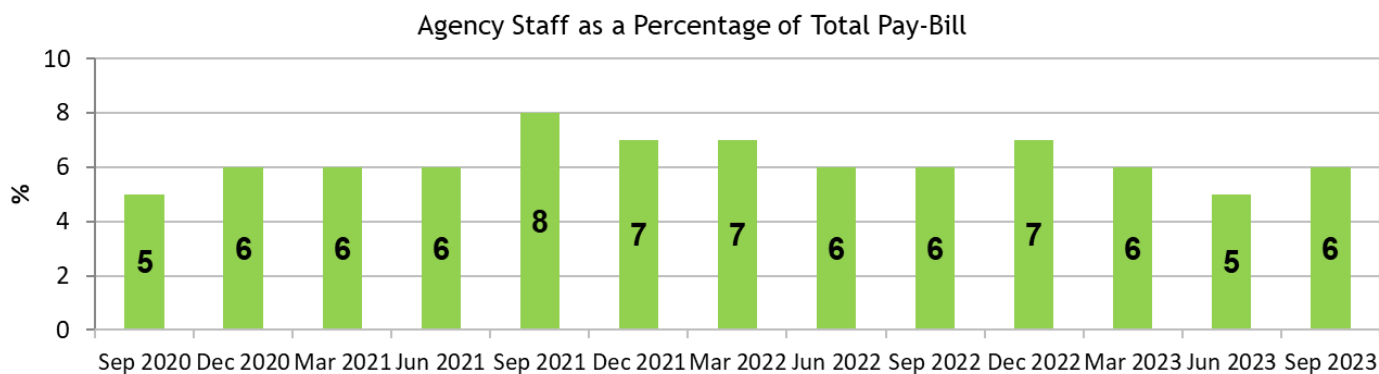04). For September, the visits total was 151,993, which was 66.3% of September 2019's total. Nationally, it is estimated visits to libraries are at about 70% of their pre-COVID-19 level. The equivalent September estimate in respect of issues was 84%. Locally, however, Worcestershire's September issues total (165,990) equated to 99.1% of the total four years previously. The April-to-September issues total of 999,822 amounted to 91.8% of the total for the same period in 2019 (1,088,929).

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. Half-term and Christmas activities are scheduled for all libraries. Study Happy sessions have resumed at The Hive for University of Worcester and secondary-school children. 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: All services, groups, and events available at libraries will continue to be promoted, the opt-in e-mail service making it easier to tell residents about new services and future plans, as well as giving a feedback facility. Customer Voice Survey responses will also help inform planning and promotional activities, stock management and event planning, and will provide qualitative feedback about the library offer and its health and well-being benefits. Plans to increase library usage will include proposals for further Libraries Unlocked schemes.

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Graph: Number of Visits and Issues per Month

Libraries: Visits and Issues
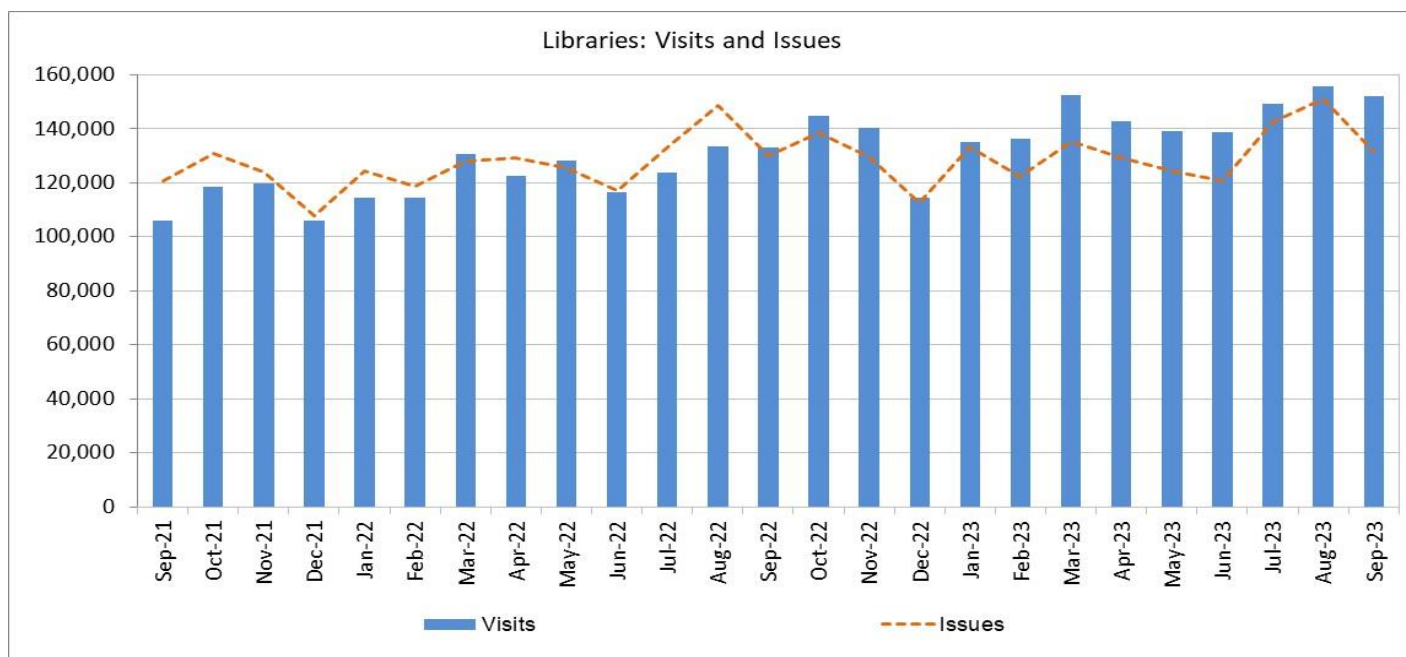
Library Visits: Library-by-library financial-year totals (2023/2024 totals are as at the end of September)

Library	2019/2020	2020/2021	2021/2022	2022/2023	2023/2024
Alvechurch	57,788	5,781	40,703	48,694	22,441
Bewdley	52,404	4,730	39,798	49,727	27,560
Broadway	18,229	1,446	4,277	7,714	3,778
Bromsgrove	165,219	15,014	73,555	112,595	57,128
Catshill	10,403	389	1,901	3,907	2,405
County Mobile	7,121	704	3,464	4,025	1,074
Droitwich	124,184	16,757	60,859	71,971	41,357
Evesham	275,958	12,760	60,991	101,163	56,262
Hagley	31,304	3,836	19,795	27,075	15,509
Hive	655,789	66,680	251,197	410,125	238,779
Kidderminster	259,564	39,099	119,234	135,555	75,860
Malvern	173,601	23,267	97,052	133,290	69,058
Martley	787	0	77	94	35
Pershore	88,743	10,187	42,437	55,723	30,091
Redditch	269,777	39,008	143,502	144,857	82,199
Rubery	36,500	2,893	19,297	25,814	14,112
St John's	63,565	9,503	26,951	40,364	25,656
Stourport	101,761	8,977	53,226	78,682	47,644
Tenbury	73,058	7,965	40,708	51,082	29,311
Upton	18,092	1,184	6,075	9,748	6,161
Warndon	33,118	2,448	20,682	21,760	10,569
Welland	729	0	38	130	71
Woodrow	11,036	1,834	13,938	18,238	9,715
Wythall	78,715	4,137	35,494	28,753	10,395
Totals	**2,607,445**	**278,599**	**1,175,251**	**1,581,086**	**877,170**

Library Issues: Library-by-library financial-year totals (2023/2024 totals are as at the end of September)

Library	2019/2020	2020/2021	2021/2022	2022/2023	2023/2024
Alvechurch	47,407	11,510	39,006	43,670	21,700
Bewdley	44,509	11,359	36,726	41,339	21,839
Broadway	19,913	4,446	12,511	14,486	7,899
Bromsgrove	123,395	34,081	97,823	113,287	61,477
Catshill	9,789	1,678	6,189	7,985	4,694
County Mobile	22,858	4,431	16,322	17,063	8,126
Droitwich	114,182	33,474	89,599	94,409	50,099
E-Audiobooks	36,334	67,296	77,706	98,854	54,520
E-Books	32,139	72,830	62,950	67,936	36,689
E-Magazines	31,452	49,783	42,422	44,206	21,566
E-Newspapers	0	0	83,089	150,960	87,677
Evesham	121,662	29,086	86,096	97,657	51,209
Hagley	41,293	9,752	33,272	34,837	18,375
Hive	581,646	127,786	370,020	394,161	194,903
Kidderminster	126,283	29,435	88,568	100,777	53,826
Malvern	224,195	57,559	163,369	185,914	94,044
Martley	1,321	110	699	996	555
Pershore	80,568	22,809	63,075	68,633	35,781
Redditch	126,592	33,861	90,553	103,383	53,021
Rubery	30,723	6,407	23,773	25,584	14,793
St John's	59,183	16,657	44,886	47,534	24,699
Stourport	73,624	21,081	50,991	55,818	26,274
Tenbury	36,918	10,796	28,767	32,011	16,825
Upton	16,322	3,408	10,189	12,020	7,275
Warndon	27,305	5,714	18,678	18,740	9,955
Welland	1,849	249	698	1,189	830
Woodrow	12,979	2,023	9,746	11,001	4,649
Worcester Hub	5,780	890	1,477	2,503	1,184
Wythall	38,482	9,301	29,025	30,725	15,338
Totals	**2,088,703**	**677,812**	**1,678,225**	**1,917,678**	**999,822**

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

RAG: No Status

Direction of Travel: Improving

Performance Details: The April-to-September e-issues total of 200,452 suggests the 2023/2024 total will exceed 2022/2023's 361,956, the highest-ever financial-year. Of this year's April-to-September total, 87,677 (43.7%) were of e-newspapers, 54,520 (27.2%) were of e-audiobooks, 36,689 (18.3%) were of e-books, and 21,566 (10.8%) were e-magazines issues. In the first half of this financial year, 7,445 different people borrowed at least one e-item. The unique-users total at the same point of the last financial year was 6,554. The eventual total for the year was 8,620.

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

Libraries: Issues of E-Books, E-Audiobooks, E-Magazines and E-Newspapers
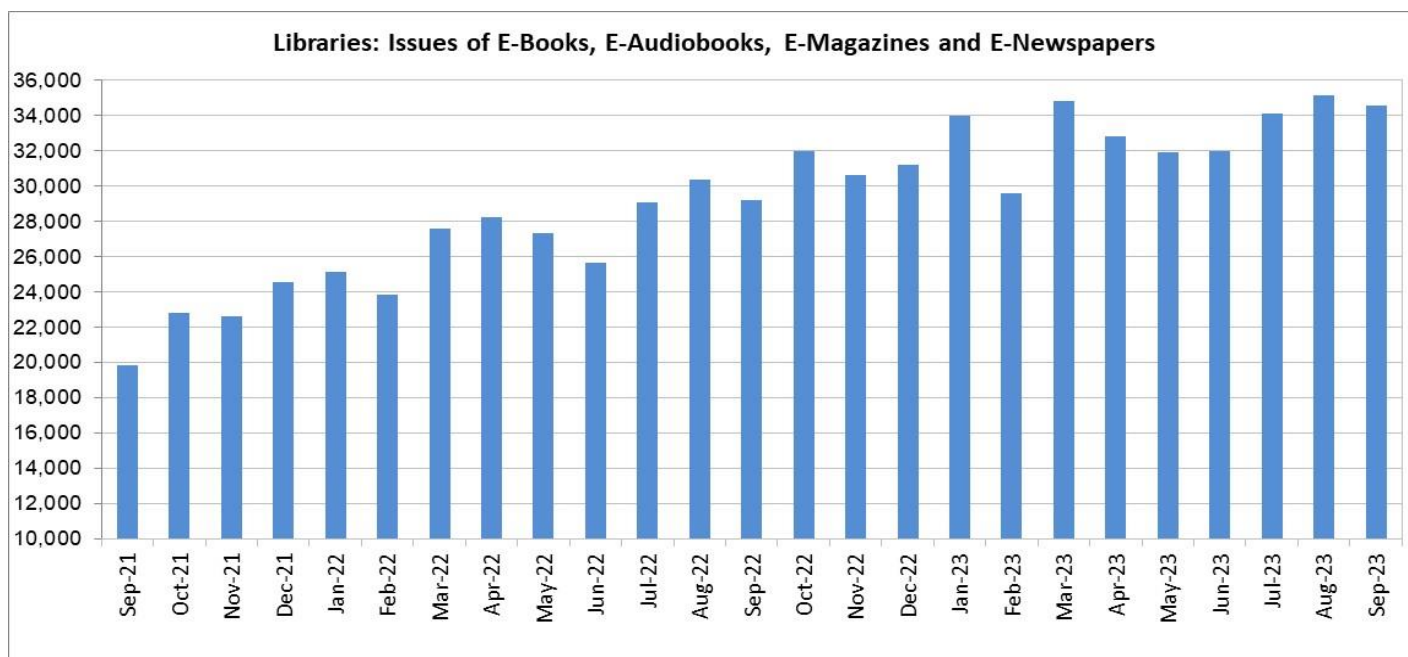
Museum Visits

RAG: No Status

Direction of Travel: No noticeable change.

Performance Details: Visits to County Museum visits in the July-to-September quarter (7,439) were 6.8% down compared with the total for 2022's equivalent period (7,982), but the April-to-September total of 14,118 was 2.1% above the 13,832 visits received in the same period last year. Visits to County Museum in the 2022/2023 financial year (21,927) were up 18.5% from 18,506 in 2021/2022 (18,506) and 12.4% greater than the 19,501 visits made in 2019/2020. Based on 2022/2023's visits patterns, the projected total for 2023/2024 is 22,380. Of the visits made in the July-to-September quarter, 714 (9.6%) were by children. In the same period last year, 962 visits were by children, 12.1% of the overall tally.

Current Activity: The museum's information leaflet (available in a variety of formats, including on-line) provides details of the partnership with Hartlebury Castle Preservation Trust and describes all the buildings on the site, the grounds themselves, and the activities and live events the County Museum and the Trust stage between them. The traditional programme of autumn and winter events and activities is in place. Half-term activities have a Halloween and Bonfire Night theme. The first weekend of December sees the staging of the annual pre-Christmas celebration, two days of seasonal activities that also provide the chance for visitors to buy Christmas gifts from the shop.

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 has worked 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 were presented to Joint Museums Committee at their June meeting, with the preferred option to be passed to County Council Cabinet for consideration later 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	1,561	342
Jul 2023	2,332	253
Aug 2023	2,903	375
Sep 2023	2,204	86

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

Museums Worcestershire Visits
(County Museum, The Commandery, Worcester City Museum and Art Gallery)

All Museums were closed throughout the January-to-March 2021 Quarter

Overall ▪ — County Museum

Countryside Standards Achieved

RAG: Quarter 2 – Green; 2022/2023 overall - Amber
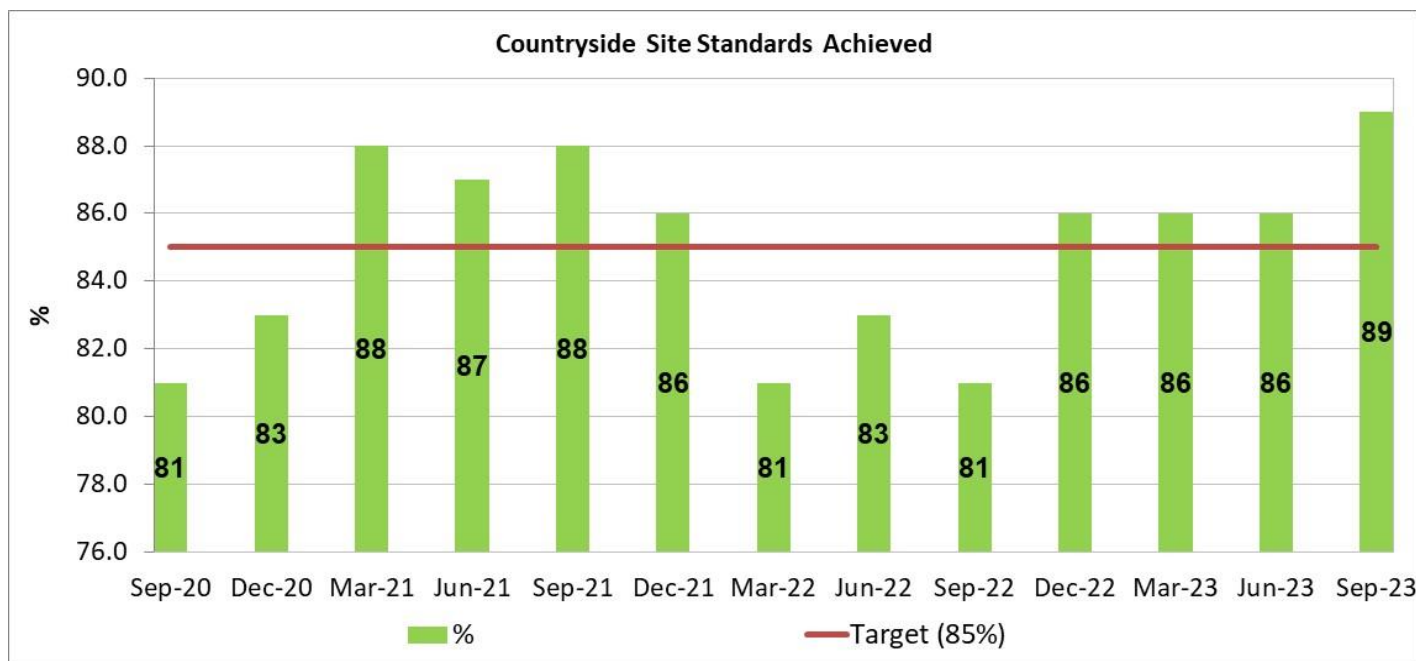
Direction of Travel: Improving

Performance Details: The average percentage for the Countryside Sites Standards indicator in the first half of this financial year was 88%. The target is 85%. The average for the whole of 2022/2023 was an amber-rated 84%. In the last two quarters of 2022/2023 and the first two of 2023/2024, however, performance has been above-target (e.g. July-to-September's out-turn: 89%). This sustained improvement is due mainly to the Greenspace Team being restored to full capacity, facilitating the carrying out of 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. Usage by the public tends to decline in the winter with fewer defect reports being received as a result, but adverse weather can impact on pre-planned and ad hoc maintenance works.

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 decrease during the winter months.

Graph: Countryside Site Standards Achieved

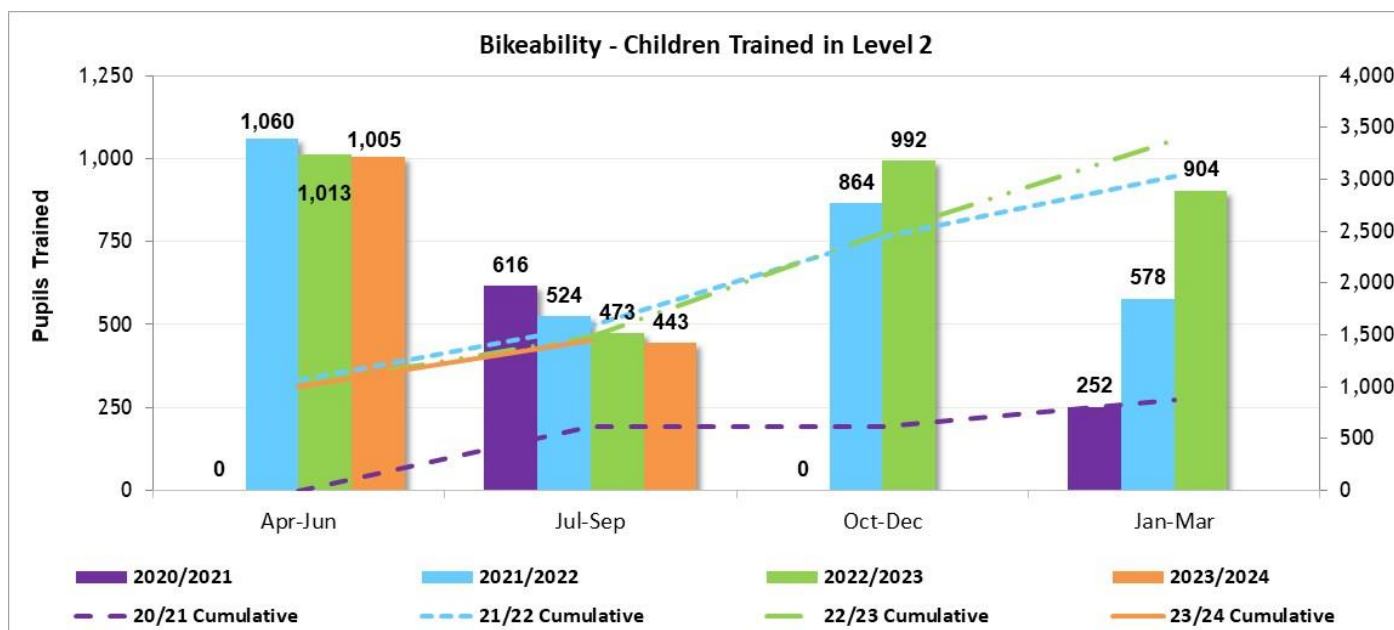Bikeability – Children Trained in Level 2

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: Positions vacant for a time in 2022/2023 are now filled and all staff have received the required training. Bookings from schools for the 2023/2024 academic year continue to be 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.

Future Activity: The October-to-December total will be higher than that for the preceding three months. Instructors may also have to cover the long-term sickness absence of a member of the road safety education team, but priority will be given to delivery of Bikeability sessions.

Graph: Children Trained in Bikeability Level 2

Bikeability - Children Trained in 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 six months of this financial year was 2,809. Of that total, 1,361 received training at Level 1, which is aimed at providing an introduction to cycling and basic bike control for children aged eight or in school year four. This year's April-to-September total was 338 (33%) more than the 1,023 receiving the same level of training in the same period last year, and 354 (35.2%) more than the 1,007 trained between April and September 2022.

Current Activity: Bookings from schools for the 2023/2024 academic year continue to be 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. Positions vacant for a time in 2022/2023 are now filled and all staff have received the required training.

Future Activity: The October-to-December total will be higher than that for the preceding three months. Instructors may have to cover the long-term sickness absence of a member of the road safety education team, but priority will be given to delivery of Bikeability sessions.

Graph: Children Trained in Bikeability Levels Other than Level 2

Bikeability - Children Trained in Other Levels

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](#).

Appendix 2 - Performance Data Collected

Tables A to G below show all of the Communities indicators currently monitored and reported on a monthly basis at Directorate Leadership Team level. These are in addition to those Communities indicators currently reported to the Corporate and Communities Overview and Scrutiny Panel. The last column in each table shows the frequency with which data currently can be (and is) updated.

A. Archive and Archaeology	Indicator	Format	Frequency
Visits	Visitors signed-in to Original Archives at The Hive	Number	Monthly
Planning applications	Planning applications checked	Number	Monthly
Planning application responses	Planning applications responded to in timescale (21 days)	%	Monthly
Archaeological interventions	Written Scheme of Investigation (WSI) documents issued	Number	Monthly
Events and outreach	Attendees at events	Number	Monthly
Enquiries	Customer enquiries relating to Archives, Historic Environment Record, Learning and Outreach	Number	Monthly
Digitisation	Archive deposits catalogued or existing collections converted ("retroconverted")	Number	Monthly
Archaeology Field Section Bids	Project Bids Won	Number	Quarterly
Archaeology Field Section Projects	Value of Projects Won	£s	Quarterly

B. Countryside Greenspace	Indicator	Format	Frequency
Gypsy Service	Compliance with protocols for unauthorised encampments on local authority land	%	Quarterly
Volunteers	Hours gifted by volunteers	Number	Quarterly
Worcestershire Health Walks	Participants	Number	Quarterly

C. County Museum	Indicator	Format	Frequency
Ticket sales by visitor category	Adult, children, concessionary, school-pupil visits	Number	Monthly
Outreach visits	Pupils engaged during visits to in-county and out-of-county schools	Number	Monthly

D. Library Service	Indicator	Format	Frequency
Computer Use	Computer users	Number	Monthly
Computer Use	Hours of computer use as proportion of available computer time	%	Monthly
Borrowers of physical stock	Unique borrowers of all books and audio-visual items	Number	Monthly
Borrowers of e-stock	Unique borrowers of e-books, e-audiobooks, and e-magazines	Number	Monthly
Membership enrolments	People enrolling as members	Number	Monthly
Events	Attendees at events staged in libraries	Number	Monthly

E. Malvern Hills AONB Team	Indicator	Format	Frequency
Habitat conservation	Hectares of habitat conserved/enhanced for biodiversity	Number	Quarterly
Partnerships	Joint-working arrangements for which AONB Team is a supporting partner	Number	Quarterly
Land-management	Schemes appraised	Number	Quarterly
Strategy planning	Strategies and plans developed or appraised	Number	Quarterly
Landowner engagement	Landowners/managers supported	Number	Quarterly
Volunteers	People gifting hours in any role that supports the work of the AONB Team	Number	Quarterly

F. Registration	Indicator	Format	Frequency
Appointment availability - births	Birth registration appointments within 5 days	%	Monthly
Appointment availability - deaths	Death registration appointments within 2 working days	%	Monthly
Appointment availability - marriages/civil partnerships	Notice appointments within 10 working days	%	Monthly
Appointment availability - still-births	Still-birth registration appointments within 2 working days	%	Monthly
Customer Satisfaction	Users rating the service they received as either 'very good' or 'good'	%	Annual

G. Road Safety	Indicator	Format	Frequency
Road safety education	Pupils receiving training	Number	Quarterly
School Crossing Patrol safety	Patrols visited once per term	%	Quarterly
Pre-Driver Training	Young people receiving training	Number	Annual

The Human Resources table below offers indicators that are either new or an enhancement to those currently reported to the Panel. For example, sickness measures already reported provide the total number days of both short- and long-term sickness absence. The list below provides an option to report instead by rates, thereby aligning Panel reporting with internal reporting methodology. For example, the 2023/2024 Quarter 2 sickness rate of 4.25 days would in this case be broken down into 3.32 days long-term and 0.92 short-term sickness, rather than the number of days. This could also be reported in one chart, rather than the current three.

Human Resources	Indicator	Format	Frequency
Sickness – short-term	Average number of days	Days	Quarterly
Sickness – long-term	Average number of days	Days	Quarterly
Workforce - starters	Starters	Number	Quarterly
Workforce - leavers	Leavers (resignations)	Number	Quarterly
Performance reviews	Compliance (completed reviews)	%	Twice-Yearly

Budget Position – Quarter 2 (Period 6)

Corporate and Communities Overview and Scrutiny Panel

23 November 2023

Corporate Budget Position – Quarter 2 (Period 6)

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- Budget Report to Cabinet on 23 November 2023 summarises the financial position for Council and each of the service areas.

- The overall outturn forecast at Period 6 is for a net overspend of £21.9m 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). A further £2m was held for pressures within Home to School Transport (HTST)

- 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 £21.9m

- Significant pressures in Adults, Childrens and Home to School Transport – price and demand, this position is similar for other Local Authorities

FY 2023/24 P6			
Service Area	Budget £m	Forecast £m	Variance £m
People – Adults	145.815	151.678	5.863
People – Communities	21.596	22.110	0.514
Children's Services/WCF	111.003	111.003	0.000
Economy & Infrastructure	72.072	72.788	0.716
Commercial & Change	10.291	11.134	0.843
Chief Executive / HR / Finance	3.222	3.184	-0.038
Public Health	0.186	0.186	0.000
Total: Service excl DSG	**364.185**	**372.083**	**7.898**
Corporate Items	36.630	35.130	-1.500
Non-assigned items	0.000	0.000	0.000
WCC TOTAL	**400.815**	**407.213**	**6.398**
WCF	123.325	142.403	19.078
Home to School Transport	22.477	31.977	9.500
WCF Total	**145.802**	**174.380**	**28.578**
WCC & WCF Total Services	**546.617**	**581.593**	**34.976**
Additional Funding:			
Business Rates			-4.100
Use of Reserves			-9.000
Net WCC & WCF Overspend			**21.876**

Savings within the Budget

- £22.4m of savings built into the overall budget

- 61% rated as green i.e., delivered or expected to be fully delivered, 15% rated amber where there is some risk of non-delivery, and 24% 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

2023/24 Savings RAG by Directorate
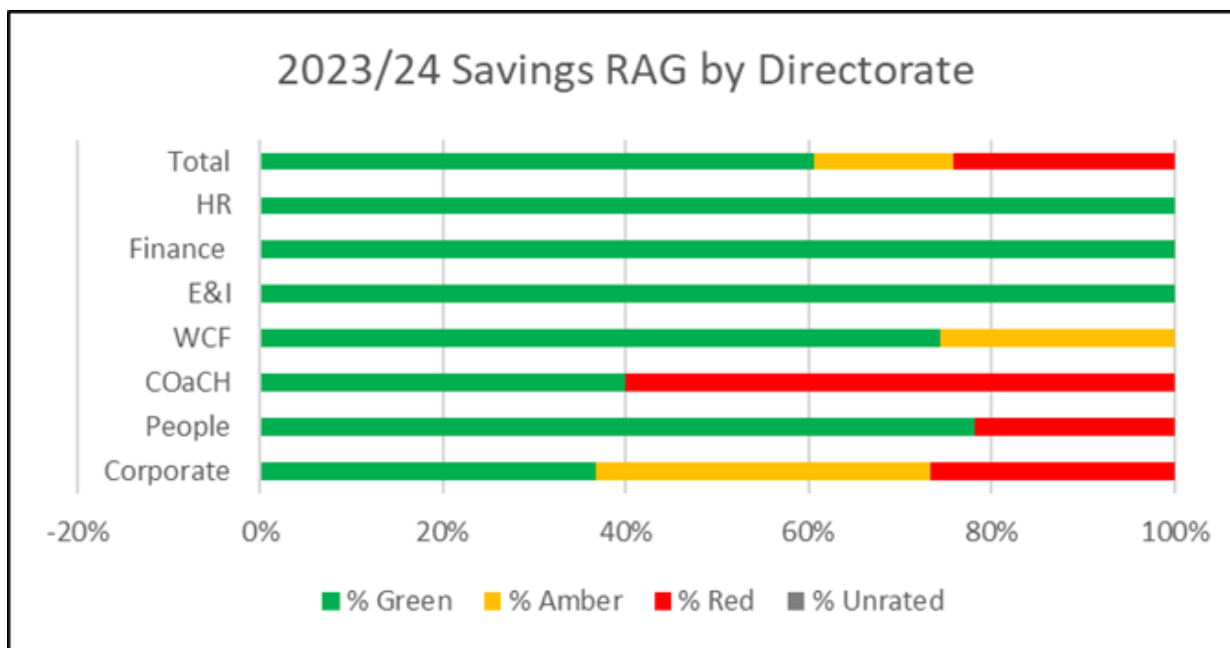
Capital Programme

- Current value of the Capital Programme for 2023/24 to 2026/27, subject to approval by Full Council, totals £372m

- 51% 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 (42%), capital receipts (4%) and use of earmarked reserves held for capital (1%) and revenue funding (2%)

Total Expenditure	23/24 Actuals YTD £'000	23/24 Revised Budget £'000	24/25 Revised Budget £'000	25/26 Revised Budget £'000	26/27 Onwards Revised Budget £'000	Total 23/24 + Revised Budget £'000
Open for Business	4,035	30,224	41,218	12,763	5,619	89,824
The Environment	29,777	83,970	51,589	6,000	3,400	144,959
Children and Families	9,978	46,572	55,026	10,474	6,630	118,702
Efficiency and Transformation	529	10,387	5,492	0	0	15,879
Health and Well-Being	37	2,101	891	27	0	3,019
TOTAL	44,356	173,254	154,216	29,264	15,649	372,383

Financial planning, strategy and the Medium-Term Financial Plan

- 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.

- Any overspend not dealt with in 2023/24 would, potentially, carry over into 2024/25 thereby increasing the requirement for savings in that year.

- 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.

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Spending Controls for the Council

Management actions have been put in place to control spending across the council to reduce the deficit in the current financial year based on the following principles:

- Existing permanent staffing and payroll costs,

- expenditure on goods and services which have already been received,

- contractually committed expenditure,

- urgent expenditure to safeguard vulnerable residents (Adults and Children),

- expenditure required to deliver the council's provision of essential statutory services at a minimum possible level, which includes adults and children's services including HTST,

- agreed political priorities of the council,

- expenditure necessary to achieve value for money and / or mitigate additional in year costs and / or generate additional income where evidenced through an "invest to save" business case.

Specific 2023/24 Period 6 information

Areas within remit of the Corporate and Communities Panel

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P6 Financial Position – COACH & CEU

COACH & CEU	2023-24 Gross Budget Q2	2023-24 Net Budget Q2	2023-24 Forecast Outturn Q2	2023-24 Forecast Variance Q2	2023-24 Forecast Variance Q1
	£'000	£'000	£'000	£'000	£'000
COACH - Management	188	-170	84	254	105
Legal and Democratic Services	9,228	6,008	6,063	55	-22
Commercial Management	2,207	622	1,216	594	681
Property Services	10,672	987	1,012	25	238
Digital, IT and Customer Services	10,294	757	722	-35	0
Transformation & Change Team	2,514	2,087	2,037	-50	15
TOTAL COMMERCIAL & CHANGE	**35,103**	**10,291**	**11,134**	**843**	**1,017**
					0
Engagement & Communications	1,178	345	337	-8	-6
Health & Safety	358	45	45	0	31
HR-Core	5,316	454	405	-49	-28
Financial Services	8,891	1,999	1,999	0	0
Chief Executive	379	379	398	19	18
TOTAL CHIEF EXECUTIVE UNIT	**16,122**	**3,222**	**3,184**	**-38**	**15**

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P6 Headlines – COACH & CEU

- The Commercial and Change Directorate is forecasting to overspend its £10.3m net budget by c£0.8m (8%), with the most significant variances from budget being:-

  - £0.6 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.

  - £0.4 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

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P6 Financial Position – Communities

Communities Revenue Forecast	2023-24 Gross Budget Q2	2023-24 Net Budget Q2	2023-24 Forecast Outturn Q2	2023-24 Forecast Variance Q2	2023-24 Forecast Variance Q1
	£'000	£'000	£'000	£'000	£'000
Strategic Libraries	0	4,307	4,695	388	375
Museum Services	0	715	715	0	-1
Archives & Archaeology	0	1,576	1,650	74	13
Greenspace & Gypsy Services	0	308	273	-35	26
Community Services Leadership Team	0	148	148	0	0
Registration & Coroner	0	717	778	61	59
Public Analyst	0	0	0	0	0
Trading Standards	0	186	186	0	0
Communities and Partnerships	0	417	357	-60	-30
Adult Front Door	788	429	564	135	135
					0
TOTAL COMMUNITIES	**788**	**8,803**	**9,366**	**563**	**577**

P6 Headlines – Communities

- Communities is forecasting to overspend its £8.8m net budget by c£0.6m (7%), 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.

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CORPORATE AND COMMUNITIES OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY PANEL
23 NOVEMBER 2023

OVERVIEW OF WORCESTERSHIRE COUNTY COUNCIL'S CONTRACTUAL AND PAY INFLATION

Summary

1. The Panel will receive an overview of:

    a. Contractual inflation
    b. Pay inflation

2. This overview follows initial information provided to the Panel at its meeting on 29 September 2023.

3. The Cabinet Members with Responsibility for Corporate Services and Communication / Communities, the Strategic Director of Commercial and Change and the Chief Financial Officer have been invited to the meeting to update the Panel and respond to any questions the Panel may have.

Part A – Contractual and Market Inflation

4. Worcestershire County Council's (the Council's) expenditure on third party goods, works and services during financial year 2022/23 was approximately £670m (including capital and grant funded projects). This is an increase of £37m from the previous year's spend of £633m and represents a majority of the Council's budgetary expenditure. Managing Council third party contracts effectively is therefore vitally important if the Council is to ensure its financial resources are used appropriately and remain sufficient.

5. A significant element of the increased third party spend has been driven from contractual price increases. With inflation being above 10% for much of the 2022/23 financial year and maintaining an average of 8.7% during 2023/24. It would be reasonable to anticipate increases totalling in excess of £65m from inflation alone, before increasing demand is taken in to account. Whilst inflation is now reducing during 2023/24, in the areas of the Council's majority spend, these reductions are slower to materialise, and average inflation across some of the key cost drivers remain much higher than the national average figure for the Consumer Price Index (CPI) (detailed below). It should also be noted that any reduction in levels of inflation does not mean a reduction in contracted costs, but rather a slow down in the rate at which they increase. For those areas contributing most significantly to Council overspend (Children's Services, Adult Services, and Home to School Transport), the nature of the cost increases are systemic, and it limits the Council's ability to mitigate those costs.

6. The chart below outlines UK inflation across specific categories of spend and how these are continuing to translate into higher contractual costs during 2023/24. CPI has averaged 6.93% during 2023/23 and has fallen to 4.6% in the 12 months year to date. However, those areas that impact the Council most acutely have generally seen much bigger increases on average.

Category of spend	UK national average inflation
Adults Social Care	10%
Childrens Social Care	10.80%
Construction	8.50%
Transport (taxi)	5.50%
Software	8.70%
Wage growth	8.20%
Gas	1.70%
Electricity	6.70%
Food and Beverage	12.20%
Property leases	10.10%

7. Areas of particular concern for the Council are children's and adults' placement costs, where there is forecast increases of in excess of 19% on children's placements over a 12 month period, and 10.8% on adult placements

8. Details of increased placement costs have been provided to the Children and Families Overview and Scrutiny Panel on 27 September 2023 (appendix 1), and the Adult Care and Wellbeing Overview and Scrutiny Panel on 13 October (appendix 2), with more information due for the 5 December meeting (see background papers).

9. There are a number of factors which are exacerbating these increases, including:

   a. Fewer providers in the market following the COVID 19 pandemic
   b. Greater demand for services driving up costs
   c. Lag in inflationary pressures translating into contractual cost increases (for example, only 3% placement cost increase during 2021/22 for children's placements despite inflation peaking at 11.1% mid-way through the financial year).

10. In respect of adult placement costs, whilst increases have been delayed for a short period, the Council is not able to delay these indefinitely, and they will continue to translate into higher costs in this financial year.

11. When considering Adult and Childrens placements, the top four direct factors impacting provider costs most acutely are:

   o Food and Beverages
   o Electricity
   o Property lease and maintenance
   o Employee wages

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12. In each of these areas, inflation is tracking at above the national average rate, and in some areas has been as much as three times the national average at points in the year.

13. Other areas of concern for the Council relate to construction and building material costs which will directly impact on the capital programme. Average inflation, year to date for the construction industry has been 8.5%. Whilst the Commercial Team, working closely with colleagues in the Economy and Infrastructure Directorate, have sought to mitigate these increases through value engineering processes (challenging proposals, resources, specification etc), contractor proposals continue to show significant increases on a like for like basis.

14. In order to support service areas across the Council as a whole, the Commercial Team are endeavouring to commit more resources, and more time and effort, into contract and supplier relationship management. On average, 30% of any benefits derived from effective sourcing are lost in the first year of the agreement where they are not effectively managed, and consequently the benefits for supporting these activities are significant given the level of spend. The Council's commercial team is however constrained by recruitment challenges which are endemic across the Midlands, and the continued increasing demand on resources.

Part B – Pay Inflation

15. The Council remains committed to national pay bargaining as a way of determining the annual pay award for its staff groups.

16. Under the provisions of the Localism Act the Council is required to publish an annual pay policy statement. The statement includes information on:
    a. Salary scales
    b. Chief Officer pay information
    c. Gender pay gap figures (since 2018)

17. The Pay policy statement | Worcestershire County Council sets out the County Council's strategic stance on pay in order to provide direction for councillors and officers making detailed decisions on pay and to provide the citizens of Worcestershire with a clear statement of the principles underpinning decisions on the use of public funds.

18. A number of negotiating bodies exist for staff employed by the Council. These are as follows:

    d. National Joint Council for Local Government Services (NJC)
    e. Joint Negotiating Committee for Chief Executives of Local Authorities
    f. Joint Negotiating Committee for Local Authority Craft and Associated Employees
    g. Joint Negotiating Committee for Chief Officers of Local Authorities (JNC)
    h. Soulbury Officers (Soulbury Committee)

19. The following table provides an overview of the current status and outcome (where applicable) of national pay bargaining for these groups:

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Negotiating Body	Current Status	Summary of agreed outcome/latest position
NJC	Agreed	Effective from 1 April 2023: • an increase of £1,925 on all NJC spinal column points 2 to 39 based on a 37-hour working week. Normal pro-rata rules will apply • an increase of 3.88% for PO4 and above • an increase of 3.88% on all NJC allowances i.e. Standby, sleep in
JNC – Chief Execs	Agreed	Effective from 1 April 2023: • an increase of 3.50%
JNC – Chief Officers	Agreed	Effective from 1 April 2023: • an increase of 3.50%
JNC – Craft Workers	Not agreed	As yet no indication of when the pay deal for JNC ('Red Book') Craftworkers might be reached. Both unions (Unite and GMB) continue to reject the Employers' full and final pay offer
Soulbury	Not agreed	National Employers remain in dispute with the Soulbury Officers' Side (TUs) on pay for 2022. The National Employers made a revised final multi year offer on 27 September which consisted of a £1,925 pay increase for 2022, a 3.5% pay increase for 2023 and some additional changes to the Soulbury pay spines. The Officers' Side has formally rejected this offer and called for mediation.

20. The budget for 2023/24 included an assumption that the pay award would be 4% for the Council and provision was made at this rate. As the final offer is a flat rate of £1,925 on a 37 hour working week, this is bottom loaded with increases ranging from 9.42% spinal column points 2 to 4.23% at spinal column point 39.

21. The Council was aware of the final offer from the national employers which was made earlier in the year and the additional costs are in the region of £2.6m which is currently held within the Finance Risk Reserve to cover the amount that was assumed in the 2023/24 budget. This national agreement was made on 1 November 2023 and the pay increase will be paid to staff including backpay in their November salary which is positive news for Council employees.

Purpose of the Meeting

22. The Panel is asked to:
    • Consider the information provided on pay and contract inflation.
    • agree any comments to highlight to the Cabinet Member and the Strategic Director of Commercial and Change

- Agree any comments for the Panel Chair to highlight to the Overview and Scrutiny Performance Board on the 15 December, as part of scrutiny of the 2024/25 budget
- Determine whether any further information or scrutiny on a particular topic is required.

Supporting Information

Appendix 1 - Childrens Placements 27 September 2023

Appendix 2 - Adults Placements 13 October 2023

Contact Points

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Background Papers

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

- Agenda and Minutes for Children and Families Overview and Scrutiny Panel on 27 September 2023
- Agenda and Minutes for Adult Care and Well Being Overview and Scrutiny Panel on 13 October

All agendas and minutes are available on the Council's website here.

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CORPORATE AND COMMUNITIES OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY PANEL
23 NOVEMBER 2023

WORCESTERSHIRE COUNTY COUNCIL'S WORKPLACE MENOPAUSE SUPPORT PROGRAMME

Summary

1. The Cabinet Member with Responsibility for Corporate Services and Communication and the Strategic Director of Commercial and Change have been invited to the meeting to update the Panel on developments relating to Worcestershire County Council's (the Council) Workplace Menopause Support Programme.

Background

2. The health and wellbeing of the workforce is set out as one of the Council's top priorities in its Workforce Strategy 2021-2024.

3. The Wellbeing Needs Analysis 2022 and workforce feedback regarding the delivery of a diverse health and wellbeing agenda highlighted the organisational need for support for the menopause.

4. This was further supported by:

   o House of Commons Menopause and the workplace survey results Fourth Special Report of Session 2021–22
   o CIPD Report 'The Menopause and the Workplace'
   o CIPD, The menopause at work: guidance for people professionals.

5. There is also a legal compliance case, as there has been a significant rise in the number of employment tribunals that involve the treatment of workers going through the menopause.

6. A number of documents, referenced in paragraph 3 and 4, informed the Council's proposals, along with assessment of the existing workplace support and policy framework and the results of the menopause questionnaire – April 2022. A report outlining the Council's proposal was considered by the Chief Officer in November 2021.

7. The Workplace Menopause Support Programme was launched in April 2023, as a 2-year programme, with three main objectives:

   1. Create an open, inclusive and supportive culture for menopause
   2. Develop a framework to manage menopause in workplace
   3. Promote good people management including awareness training and management of health and sickness absence.

8. From the outset, it was a priority for the programme to:

- Include all employees, irrespective of gender or identity, and provide relevant resources to everyone within the organisation
- Be accessible to everyone, with on-demand resources available at any time and a level of longevity built in the materials for new employees joining the Council
- Be delivered in a sustainable way, complimenting wider health and wellbeing provisions.

9. Low/no cost principles were applied to funding requirements, focusing on maximising internal resources, furthering the existing relationships with local health and wellbeing providers and sharing knowledge and resources within the NHS Herefordshire and Worcestershire Integrated Care Board (HWICB).

10. A number of initiatives and support mechanisms were considered and critically assessed, resulting in the action plan, as follows:

   1. Create an open, inclusive and supportive culture for menopause
      a. Appointment of a senior sponsor for the Menopause Programme
      b. Development of leaders' and managers' knowledge and understanding and to consider the organisational and individual needs concerning management of menopause transition in the workplace
      c. Creating a menopause-oriented communications plan.

   2. Develop a framework to manage menopause in workplace
      a. 12-month programme of menopause awareness talks delivered by a medically trained menopause specialist
      b. Introduction of regular peer-to-peer support events across the organisation both face to face and online
      c. Development of employee support network and linking it with the existing Yammer group
      d. Review of existing policies and procedures with focus on menopause support (incl. performance management, absence management, flexible working policy, local workwear guidance etc.)
      e. Development of Wellbeing Hub inclusive of useful resources and signposting.

   3. Promote good people management incl. awareness training and management of health and sickness absence
      a. Development and facilitation of a regular and ongoing menopause training for management
      b. Development of management menopause support guidance document.

11. Research suggests consideration of a formally outlined support for those affected by menopause symptoms such as a menopause policy. An assessment of the existing framework of workplace support was made and it was recommended to incorporate the menopause support though the existing policy and procedures framework, as opposed to introducing a standalone menopause policy. It was also

considered important not to single out menopause in a way of a specific policy provision.

12. Consideration was also given to provision of menopause clinics facilitated by medical professionals, setting up a menopause champions network, amongst others. Those were deemed as options for future considerations, approximately 12 months into the programme, if considered valuable, based on workforce feedback and wellbeing needs identified.

13. Participation is monitored on an ongoing basis with reports produced periodically. An evaluation of the programme was carried out in August 2023 reviewing the initial 4-months of the programme. Based on the findings a recommendation was taken forward to continue with the programme, whilst making some adjustments, as outlined.

14. October 2023 marked 6 months of the Workplace Menopause Support Programme. At present, Officers are gathering quantitative data (menopause questionnaire – October 2023) and qualitative data (Stories of difference) to evaluate the impact of the programme, evidence the value it provides and gather feedback for future development of the workplace support. A further report with recommendations and next steps will be considered by the Council's Chief Officer Group and the Strategic Leadership Team.

Legal, Financial, and HR Implications

15. There are positive implications for Legal and HR.

16. From a Legal perspective, there is positive impact in terms of mitigation of litigation risk. From a HR perspective positive impact on individual and collective health and wellbeing, resulting in a healthier more productive workforce and reduced absence levels. It also impacts positively on employee engagement and retention rates.

17. In respect of the financial implications, the Workplace Menopause Support Programme is delivered on no/low cost basis.

18. Due to lack of suitable internal resources capable and qualified to deliver a 12-month programme of menopause awareness talks delivered by a medically trained menopause specialist, this activity is externally facilitated.

19. The total cost of this is £3,640 for the 12-month externally delivered programme. This includes 12 different menopause focussed topics, each delivered in three ways: virtually, in person and uploaded to on-demand resources as a pre-recording.

Equality and Diversity Implications

20. An Equality Impact Assessment is being completed to identify impact and any necessary mitigating actions.

Purpose of the Meeting

21. The Panel is asked to:

- consider and comment on the information provided in this report and supporting documents
- determine whether any further information or scrutiny on a particular topic is required; and
- agree any comments to highlight to the Cabinet Member with Responsibility.

Contact Points

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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.

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CORPORATE AND COMMUNITIES OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY PANEL 23 NOVEMBER 2023

DIGITAL INCLUSION

Summary

1. The Panel has requested an update on the County Council's (the Council) position with digital inclusion and digital inclusion initiatives within the Council.

2. The Cabinet Member with Responsibility (CMR) for Corporate Services and Communication and the Strategic Director for 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. Digital inclusion refers to the equitable and meaningful access to digital technologies, including the internet, computers, and mobile devices, as well as the skills and knowledge needed to use them effectively.

5. In today's increasingly connected world, digital inclusion plays a crucial role in promoting social and economic development, enhancing educational opportunities, and fostering civic engagement. However, despite the numerous benefits, a significant portion of the population still faces barriers to accessing and using digital technologies.

6. The benefits of digital technology on the delivery, experience and quality of services are well understood. However, there is no guarantee that the benefits of digitally enabled services will be realised by all members of the population until they are inclusive, designed for change, and meet the expectations of staff and the public.

7. The common barriers to digital inclusion can be broken down into three broad categories:
   - access and accessibility
   - skills and confidence
   - motivation and trust

8. In England 27 per cent (14 million) people have the lowest digital capability. This means they do not have regular access to a device or the skills and confidence

to turn on a device, use an app, log in and/or enter information on a digital device by themselves.

Digital Divide

9. The digital divide refers to the gap that exists between those who have access to and can effectively utilise digital technologies and those who do not. This divide is multifaceted and can be influenced by factors such as socio-economic status, geographical location, age, gender, and level of education. The consequences of the digital divide are far-reaching, contributing to social inequalities and limiting opportunities for marginalized communities.

10. As more services are delivered through websites, apps, email, and SMS, and as online becomes the preferred means of contact - digitally excluded people are in danger of being left behind. National level evidence suggests the groups commonly considered digitally excluded or who experience poorer care through lack of digital services include:
    - older people
    - people with disabilities
    - ethnic minorities
    - people who are homeless
    - sex workers
    - people from Gypsy, Roma, and Traveller communities
    - people living in rural areas
    - people from low socio-economic background
    - people with low digital or literacy skills

Importance of Digital Inclusion

11. Digital inclusion is more than just providing access to technology; it is about empowering individuals and communities to fully participate in the digital age. Embracing digital inclusion can lead to improved access to information and services, enhanced communication and collaboration, and increased economic opportunities. It also enables marginalised and underrepresented groups to voice their concerns, participate in decision-making processes, and advocate for their rights.

12. The COVID-19 pandemic further underscored the importance of digital inclusion. As governments and organisations shifted many services and activities online to curb the spread of the virus, those without access to digital technologies or the necessary skills faced increased isolation and limited access to essential services. The pandemic served as a wake-up call, highlighting the urgency of addressing digital disparities to build more resilient and inclusive societies.

Local evidence and intelligence

13. Healthwatch Worcestershire ran a digital access to health care survey from August to November 2021, which had 712 respondents, of which 465 people completed paper copies. The survey highlighted the following barriers to digital services:

- 16% of respondents said they do not use the internet and many people experienced difficulties using functions on digital devices, such as sending photographs and making video calls.
- Only 27% of respondents said they would find it easy to discuss health concerns via phone or video call. Many people prefer face to face appointments, saying remote appointments lack personal interaction and make communication difficult.
- People had concerns about the privacy, confidentiality, and security of accessing services online and many found it difficult to find a private place to have a conversation via telephone or video call.
- Online access and remote appointments were found to be especially difficult for:
  - Older people.
  - People with a disability, including learning disability, Autism and hearing and visual impairment.
  - People with long term conditions including MS, Parkinson's, Dementia and for those who have had a stroke.
  - People with mental health issues.
  - People experiencing homelessness or on lower incomes.
  - Those for who English is not their first language.

14. From January to October 2022, Public Health in Worcestershire ran a series of focus groups and community research to better understand some of the barriers to access experienced by our communities, particularly since the COVID-19 pandemic. This engagement highlighted the following key themes around digital technology, as shown in the table below.

Area	Comments and Findings
Digital exclusion Some of the participants challenged the assumption that everyone could or should be digitally enabled. Some participants felt penalised because they were not able to access services digitally.	*"Please remember that not everyone has or wants access to technology, so if you are going to offer services / advice, then don't just do a webcast or a YouTube."* Source: HWBS Consultation Survey – Healthy Living at all ages *"People are getting sanctioned for messages they're not receiving and not understanding."* Source: People of working age with a mental health condition - COVID-19 Focus Group *"Those who had previously had face to face meetings had to learn to use zoom or Teams and if they couldn't (which most in our group couldn't) they missed out."* Source: Older adults over 65+ - COVID-19 Focus Group
Information & advice Providing information in a range of languages and formats is important to prevent exacerbating inequalities,	*"I've looked at it on the website and everything is in written English only, no BSL. It's really difficult to understand. It states that if anybody has problems they should phone and gives a*

particularly those whose first language is not English; for those who are Deaf or hard or hearing, and for those who have autism or learning disabilities.	*phone number. Obviously, this is completely inaccessible to Deaf people like us."* Source: Deaf and Hard of hearing - Covid-19 Focus Group
Service provision Services adapted to online delivery and supported members of the community by providing equipment and training.	*"[The charity organisation] got some money to provide tablets and internet access to people who needed it, they gave me a tablet and put data on my phone, I so needed it and wasn't made to feel embarrassed for asking."* Source: Young Women 18-25 years COVID-19 Focus Group *"[The charity organisation's] provision of technology such as mobiles and computer access helped people, to learn how to use them and chat to others."* Source: Deaf and Hard of hearing - Covid-19 Focus Group
Loneliness & Isolation Digital technology helped reduce social isolation with social groups going online. However, this further isolated those without digital skills or devices.	*"Accessing social groups electronically for this age group was sparse"* Source: Older adults over 65+ - COVID-19 Focus Group
New skills and further training The pandemic forced some people to learn IT skills to enable them to continue to access services. However, it also highlighted the need for further support for disadvantaged groups.	*"Covid has also forced Mum to learn new IT skills which she finds mentally exhausting & demanding – Zoom to replace face-to-face contact with family who don't live locally and to virtually attend family funerals, which upset her greatly."* Source: Carers - COVID-19 Focus Group *"We need more groups at [the] library... I did a computer course and also [the] mental health one helped me so much with day to day living... they are free we need more of these please."* Source: HWBS consultation survey – what does being well mean to you?

Digital Inclusion Initiatives

15. A range of activities are being offered across the districts and at a county level to address digital exclusion, for example basic computer literacy support and training, back to work workshops and safety online courses.

16. The Council provides adult learning courses at Fairfield Learning Centre in Bromsgrove and Redditch Library. Libraries reduce digital exclusion through free access to computers and internet and services that promote the development of IT skills and confident access of online information and services and basic computer courses.

17. IT and Digital are in the process of developing a new Digital Inclusion Triage tool with the backing of the Local Government Association. The tool can be used by staff and residents to identify needs and to signpost to the relevant local services and national services. This tool will be piloted in three libraries before rolling out across all services.

18. Several strategies are in place that will address the local response to digital inclusion such as the Council's Digital Strategy and the Integrated Care System (ICS) Digital, Data, Analytics and Technology Strategy.

19. District Councils offer basic computer skills, training and loan of equipment aimed at those aged 50 years plus and for housing tenants of all ages. This offer varies slightly between areas for example, in Bromsgrove and Redditch basic computer skills courses are a universal offer; in Worcester City there is additional support aimed at non-UK citizens living in the county, in Wychavon there is targeted support to digitally excluded communities such as Gypsy, Roma Travellers and in Wyre Forest, there is 'back to work' support for those aged 18 years or older. Worcester City has an online safety workshop aimed at young people and is about to launch a digital skills course for women of Asian heritage.

20. Appendix 2 sets out Countywide digital inclusion initiatives.

Website Accessibility

21. The Council has a statutory requirement to comply to the legislation **of The Public Sector Bodies (Websites and Mobile Applications) (No. 2) Accessibility Regulations 2018 (legislation.gov.uk)** that came into force on 23 September 2018.

22. The Council uses Silktide to monitor the corporate website, which is a comprehensive web accessibility testing platform that deciphers all the jargon, and helps to find and fix accessibility, content, search engine optimisation, and quality issues.

23. Website Content editors have been trained on Plain English principles. The website content will continue to be rewritten in Plain English to ensure that the Council's information, advice and guidance is easy to read and understand.

24. The Council uses Google Translate, a multilingual neural machine translation service developed by Google to translate the website and content from one language into another.

25. During the development of the new website, engagement took place with Speakeasy N.O.W.[1] to gather the requirements of people with learning disabilities for the new site and feedback on the wireframes, this has been taken on board and will be reflected in the final wireframes.

26. A live accessibility audit was carried out on the Council website which involved an accessibility expert spending two half-days remotely with the Council's Web Development team identifying issues with the website. The majority of issues identified have been resolved.

27. The Council's Web Development team are continuing to build their skills in accessibility and inclusive design.

28. Please see Appendix 1 for the Silktide Website Accessibility score.

Digital Accessibility Strategy 2022 – 2024

29. The Digital Accessibility Strategy for 2022-2024 sets out the Council's ambition to achieve a culture of digital inclusion that will ensure Council websites and web-based systems and services are accessible to all customers.

30. When digital information and services are made accessible, tangible benefits are realised for everyone, not just individuals with disabilities:
    - Service delivery is broadened, by removing barriers to access.
    - legal, regulatory, and compliance issues are addressed.
    - customer experience, and customer satisfaction is improved.
    - A more diverse, and inclusive workforce is enabled.

31. The Council's vision is:

> To make digital information and services available to, accessible to, and usable by, the broadest audience possible, in a sustainable manner, through broad organisational buy-in and a culture of digital inclusion

[1] SpeakEasy N.O.W. is a self-advocacy charity run by people with learning disabilities who have lived experience.

32. The Council's priorities are:

Priority 1 – Inclusive Culture
- Promoting best practice, developing, and sustaining a digital accessibility culture throughout the Council

Priority 2 – Compliance
- We will adhere to accessibility legislation, standards, guidance, and best practice to ensure our customers can fully engage with us through all digital services, systems and website

Priority 3 – Equality of access
- Providing all customers and employees, including those with disabilities, equal access to information, digital systems and services

Priority 4 – Skills and Training
- Ensure staff who develop documents for websites have the required training and access to resources to support them

33. The delivery of this Strategy will fall under the overall control of the Assistant Director for IT and Digital. Progress on the implementation of the strategy will be overseen by the Web Governance Board.

Digital Accessibility Maturity

34. 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.

35. 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.

36. To review the effectiveness of the Council's current systems and processes for accessibility across the organisation, key stakeholders within the organisation were invited to undertake a full accessibility maturity assessment using the [Socitm and Haddell Inclusion Digital Accessibility Maturity Self-Assessment Tool](#).

37. Key findings from the assessment showed that there is a clear understanding of the benefits that can be achieved by developing websites and systems that are accessible.

38. Digital accessibility is embedded efficiently within the Council's software development lifecycle and risk is assessed and managed in the level of accessibility in digital products that are developed or procured before and after launching them.

39. The assessment recognised that the web team had the strengths and practices in place that are required for digital accessibility, they have the specialist experience, knowledge and skills required to address and monitor accessibility in digital product developments and websites. The team also has the skills required to support users across the organisation to develop accessible web content and documents, which has resulted in the website performing well for accessibility overall.

40. The report highlighted that there is not expertise in all areas of the organisation. Although there is a central web team this team is small and there is a requirement for other staff in the organisation to have a certain level of skills and understanding. The main area of focus should be on the creation of accessible policies and documents that need to be uploaded to the web site. This is being addressed through eLearning, [SCULPT](#) and support from the web team.

Digital Inclusion Group

41. A corporate Digital Inclusion Group is being established to ensure the Council is digitally inclusive by ensuring residents have the capability to use the internet to do things that benefit them day to day'.

42. The activities necessary to ensure that all individuals and communities, including the most disadvantaged, have access to and use of information and communication technologies and this includes five elements:
    - Affordable, robust broadband internet service.
    - Internet-enabled devices that meet the needs of the user.
    - Access to digital literacy training.
    - Quality technical support.
    - Applications and online content designed to enable and encourage. self-sufficiency, participation, and collaboration.

Accommodating non-digital access to information and services

43. Despite the proliferation of digital services, there will always be individuals who prefer non-digital means of accessing information. This preference may stem from cultural factors, personal comfort, limited digital literacy, or physical limitations. Neglecting this cohort could result in further marginalisation and hinder their ability to fully participate in society.

44. The Council therefore will continue to provide 121 services, which include telephone calls, SMS, and chatbots, to bridge the gap between digital and non-digital information access. These services provide an avenue for individuals who are digitally excluded to obtain the information they need, seek assistance, and engage with the Council.

Plain English

45. Plain-language documents are accessible and present information in a way that is easy to absorb. Because they use short sentences and common words, plain-language documents allow every member of the audience to understand the piece in a single read.

46. Like every other form of accessibility designed to accommodate broad categories of disability, Plain Language writing isn't an exact science, and it can never meet everyone's needs; it aims for a major improvement, not for total access.

47. The broader goal of Plain Language is to prevent cognitively disabled people from being left "out of the loop" on information that most of the community can access with little difficulty. This includes information vital to health, safety, legal rights and opportunities, and financial security.

48. Plain Language done correctly ensures that accessible information is complete and fully informative — not over-simplified, heavily edited, or censored.
Providing less information on a subject, or significantly editing out details and ideas is not access, as truncated text may be easier to read, but if it leaves out important content, it's not accessible.

49. A Plain English course is currently being developed. Once available, COG is asked to promote the adoption of Plain English and ensure appropriate staff undertake the training.

Risk Management

50. The risk implications of not being digitally accessible can have far-reaching consequences for individuals and businesses. Key risk factors associated with digital inaccessibility include:
    a. **Reduced Productivity and Competitiveness**: Businesses and organisations that are not digitally accessible may suffer from decreased efficiency and productivity. Digital tools and technologies can be used to streamline operations and engage with customers more effectively.
    b. **Cybersecurity Vulnerabilities**: The Council is more vulnerable to cyber threats and scams if staff lack the digital literacy to identify and protect themselves and the organisation from online risks.
    c. **Decreased Civic Participation**: Inaccessible digital services can hinder civic participation, making it difficult for citizens to engage with government services, participate in public discourse, or access critical information related to public policies and events.

d. **Legal and Regulatory Compliance**: The Council is legally required to provide digital accessibility, and non-compliance can result in legal liabilities and reputational damage.
   e. **Reputational Damage**: Inaccessible digital services can lead to negative perceptions of the Council, causing reputational harm and eroding trust among stakeholders.
   f. **Government and Public Services Challenges**: If the Council does not prioritise digital accessibility, it may face difficulties in efficiently delivering public services, such as processing applications, disseminating information, and facilitating public engagements.
   g. **Environmental Impact**: A lack of digital accessibility may result in increased reliance on traditional paper-based methods, contributing to higher paper consumption and environmental impact.

51. In conclusion, the absence of digital accessibility poses significant risks to individuals, businesses, and society at large. Emphasising digital inclusion and ensuring equitable access to digital technologies is not only a matter of social responsibility but also a critical factor for sustainable development and progress in the digital age.

Equality Impact

52. The risk implications of not being digitally accessible can have far-reaching consequences for individuals and businesses. Key equality impact factors associated with digital inaccessibility include:

   a. **Social Exclusion and Inequality**: Without access to digital technologies, individuals and communities can be socially excluded from vital services, opportunities, and information. This can perpetuate existing inequalities, leaving marginalised groups at a severe disadvantage.
   b. **Economic Disadvantage**: In today's digital-driven economy, being digitally inaccessible can hinder access to job opportunities, online marketplaces, and financial services. This creates economic disparities and limits upward mobility for those unable to participate fully in the digital job market.
   c. **Educational Limitations**: Lack of digital access can impede access to online educational resources and eLearning platforms, affecting students' academic performance and prospects. This educational disadvantage can perpetuate the cycle of poverty and limit social mobility.
   d. **Cybersecurity Vulnerabilities**: Some individuals and organisations may inadvertently become more vulnerable to cyber threats and scams if they lack the digital literacy to identify and protect themselves from online risks.
   e. **Decreased Civic Participation**: Inaccessible digital services can hinder civic participation, making it difficult for citizens to engage with government services, participate in public discourse, or access critical information related to public policies and events.
   f. **Health and Well-being Impact**: Inaccessibility to telehealth services and digital health information can limit individuals' ability to access

medical advice and care, especially in remote areas or during emergencies.

53. Addressing the digital divide and promoting digital inclusivity is essential for creating more equitable and vibrant communities. Councils play a crucial role in bridging this gap by investing in digital infrastructure, promoting digital literacy programs, and ensuring that online services are accessible to all residents. By fostering digital inclusion, the Council can build stronger connections with communities, improve service delivery, and enhance overall quality of life for citizens.

Purpose of the Meeting

54. 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: Silktide Website Content Accessibility Guidelines (WCAG) Score;
Appendix 2: Countywide digital inclusion initiatives

Disclosure

55. 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.

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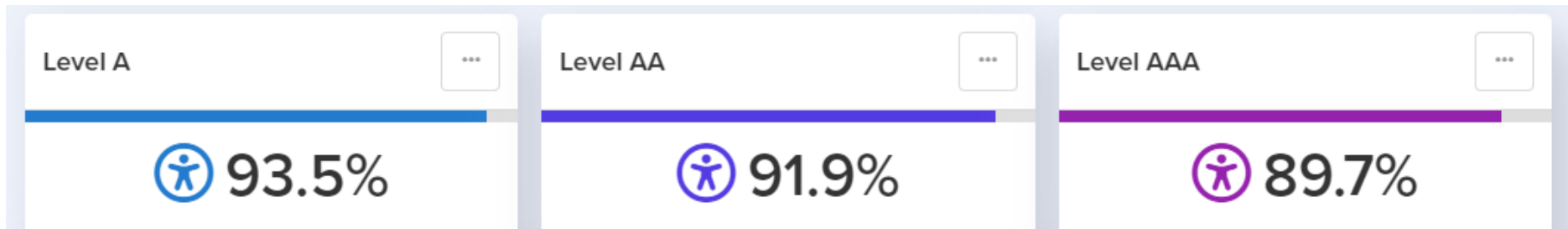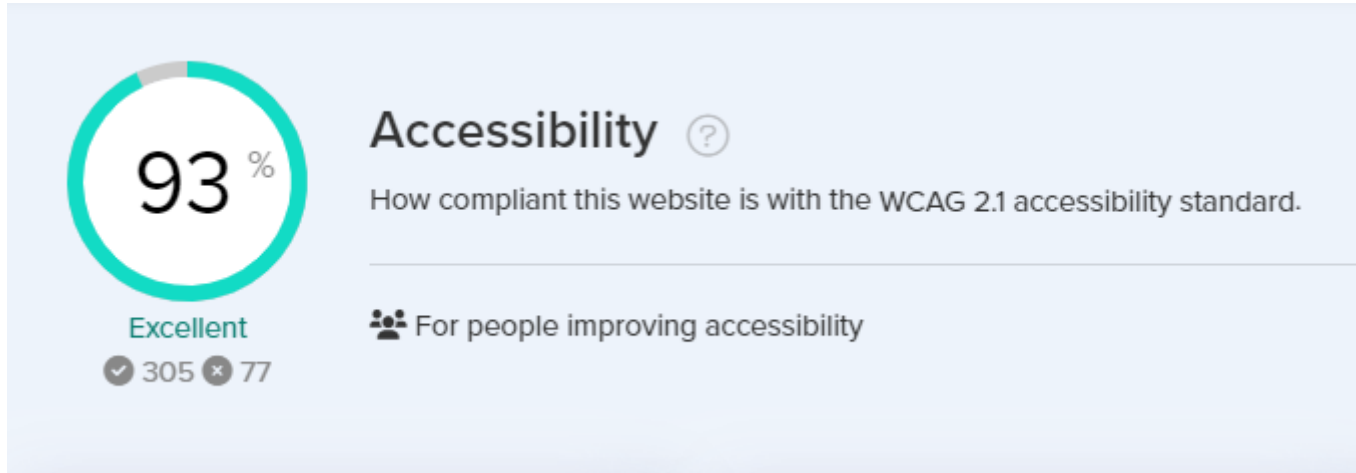Email: scrutiny@worcestershire.gov.uk

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:

- Agenda and Minutes of the Corporate and Communities Overview and Scrutiny Panel on 29 September 2023

All agendas and minutes are available on the Council's website here.

Appendix 1: Silktide Website Content Accessibility Guidelines (WCAG) Score

93 %

Excellent

✓ 305 ✗ 77

Accessibility ⑦

How compliant this website is with the WCAG 2.1 accessibility standard.

👥 For people improving accessibility

Level A		Level AA		Level AAA	
🧍 93.5%	⋯	🧍 91.9%	⋯	🧍 89.7%	⋯

Appendix 2: Countywide digital inclusion initiatives

Organisation	Project name	Area	Offer	When	Target Population
Age UK Redditch, Bromsgrove & Wyre Forest	Amphlett Hall Computer Club	Bromsgrove	• Learn more about modern technology and how it can help them:	Tuesday 10 – 12 Noon Tuesday 1.30- 3.30pm Wednesday 1.30 – 3.30pm £3 charge	50+
Age UK Worcester & Malvern Hills (including Tenbury)	Digital Champion Programme	Worcester Malvern Hills	• Access online services/fill in online forms • Basic computer skills • Loan of equipment	6x 1:1 session 10 tutors Can do home visits if mobility is an issue	50₊
Bromsgrove District Housing Trust (BDHT)		Charford, Bromsgrove (The POD)	• Access online services/fill in online forms	Every Friday drop-in session 11-1pm	Open to anyone (tenants & non tenants)
Midland Migrant Centre		Commandery Worcester	• offering face to face advice to people struggling with internet services		non-UK citizens living in Worcestershire
Platform Housing https://www.digital-champion.co.uk/	Digital Inclusion Worcestershire	Worcestershire (However definitely targeting Worc City, Malvern Hills, Wychavon	• **Help Centres – General Needs** Basic IT support, plus help looking for work, form filling, registering for Platform portal, reporting repairs, anti-social behaviour, plus referrals for homelessness, debt and advice on energy, registering with GP online, and online prescriptions. Run with the DWP, Shaw Trust, the Shared Prosperity Fund, CAP	**Help Centres – General Needs** • Every Tue, 12-2pm to 2pm, The Hive, 3rd Floor, Worcester • Every Wed, 2pm- 4pm, Malvern Library, Worcester • Every Thur, 10am – 12 Malvern Town Football Club • Fortnightly Fri, 10am - 12, The Octagon Centre, Malvern	Tenants' - late teens to 60+

- Every Fri, 10am to 12pm, Warndon Library, Worcester

Help Centres – Retirement Living
- Every Mon, 10.30-12noon, Clarence Park Village, Malvern
- Every Mon 10-12 noon, The Heriotts, Droitwich
- Every two months rotating through Dancox House, Worcester, Meadow Court, Worcester, The Hamptons, Ombersley, and Copcutt Court, Droitwich

- **Help Centres – Retirement Living.** Basic IT support for 55+ in our schemes, including keeping in touch with family, online quizzes, ancestry, plus form filling, registering for Platform portal, reporting repairs, anti-social behaviour, plus referrals for debt and advice on energy, plus registering with GP online, online prescriptions. Run with Age UK Malvern Hills & Worcester.

- **Laptop Lending Library** Run a laptop lending library in Malvern where customers can loan a laptop and dongle for two months and can refer Platform Customers to the Wellbeing Fund where they can access free laptops.
- **Help Centre – Redditch Library (**Setting up a Help Centre)
- **Other support**

- **Help Centre – Redditch** Library - which will run every Wed.

			Loaned equipment to Perry Wood Primary School Oasis Academy Hub Worcester Community Trust, Cranham Primary School Worcester St Pauls Church Worcester, who deliver IT courses and support on our behalf.		
Rooftop housing	No programme	Evesham Properties across Worcestershire	• Access online services/fill in online forms	Drop into office, also housing officers support with access online services in districts	Tenants (Inc Travel community and eastern Europeans)
Sandycroft Centre (run with HOW college)		Redditch	• Basic computer skills	Monday 10am -12 FOC	Open to anyone who wants to learn
Simply Limitless		Wyre Forest (however open to other areas)	• Basic computer skills • Back into work skills • Help with devices	Appointment only	50+ 18+ All ages

Worcester Community Trust	Joy Project	Worcester	• laptop for use with clients and tablets.	Depots	All ages
			• introductory digital skills course with women of Asian heritage in Ronkswood.	That will be redelivered at some point soon.	Asian women
	Online safety workshops		• Online safety workshops	Planned for the future	Young People
	Wellbeing & Social Isolation project		• Plus (Loneliness services in partnership with Onside) has also run a beginner's IT course.		Older people

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CORPORATE AND COMMUNITIES OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY PANEL 23 NOVEMBER 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

- 18 January 2024
- 26 March 2024
- 3 June 2024
- 23 July 2024
- 1 October 2024
- 25 November 2024

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

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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
23 November 2023	Performance and In-Year Budget Monitoring (Q2 July to September)	29 September 2023	To include review of the current performance indicators
	Digital Inclusion		Agenda planning August 2023
	Pay and Contract Inflation	29 September 2023 (as part of performance and budget monitoring)	Requested by OSPB on 27 July 2023 (as part of 2024/25 budget scrutiny)
	Menopause Policy		Agenda Planning August 2023
	Libraries Unlocked Implementation Update	8 June 2023	Requested at 8 June 2023 meeting
18 January 2024	Scrutiny of 2024/25 Budget		
	Update on the Council's Preparedness for the PSTN/ISDN Switch off		Requested by Chairman November 2023
26 March 2024	Performance (Q3 October to December) and In-Year Budget Monitoring		

Possible Future Items			
	Income Generation including results of scoping exercise undertaken for the provision of weddings on countryside sites		Suggested at 28 March Meeting
	Review of Museums, Arts and Culture Strategy 2023/24	1 November 2022	

	Update on Rewards System for Staff: Employer of Choice		Agenda Planning August 2023
TBC – Spring 2024	Worcestershire County Museum Review of Lease		Suggested at OSPB July 2023
TBC	Farming and Rural Estates		Suggested at 8 June 2023 meeting
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	Performance monitoring of comments, compliments and complaints	29 September 2023 25 July 2023 28 March 2023 1 November 2022	