

13 JANUARY 2022

ANNUAL REPORT OF THE CHIEF EXECUTIVE

1. The Annual Report of the Chief Executive provides an overview of the organisation's priorities, actions and achievements over the previous 12 months. It aligns closely with the Annual Report of the Leader, and whilst that highlights external achievements we've delivered across Worcestershire, this report focuses on the internal workings of the organisation, and our priorities to be lean, efficient and maximise value for money. Together these reports paint a strong picture of achievement, with many examples of delivering on key priorities and demonstrating excellent outcomes for Worcestershire and its residents.

2. Once again I must lead by thanking all our amazing staff working for and behalf of Worcestershire County Council. Over the last year I have been consistently reminded by the dedication and passion our staff have to deliver critical services for the communities and businesses of Worcestershire. They have done a tremendous job, meeting the exceptional demands that Covid-19 placed on us all, whilst continuing to deliver our core services each and every day of the pandemic.

3. Covid-19 continues to place significant pressure on us as an organisation and for our partners across Worcestershire. We've worked more closely together than perhaps ever before, and helped Worcestershire get back on its feet from the impact of the pandemic. Internally, our organisational structure has shown great resilience and flexibility to manage the additional demands placed on us all by the pandemic. It's allowed us to transition managing the impact of Covid-19 whilst being able to push on with our key transformation programmes. This has also been supported by ensuring we all demonstrate our core behaviours and operate as 'One Council'.

4. We've proven to be a diligent and well-run organisation and 2021 was no exception. We continued to operate within budget, and managed the additional income and expenditure caused by the pandemic to return a balanced budget which has continued to invest in core services whilst responding to immediate pressures.

5. Our focus, to build a resilient, responsive organisation has been proven again in 2021. We will continue to build on this, honing the key relationships between elected members and senior officers, to support clear and transparent decision making and performance management of our organisation. We are in a strong place as we move towards 2022.

Public Health

6. The past year was once again dominated by the nation's response to Covid-19. Public Health had a dual role to play, supporting the immediate response to the pandemic, whilst enabling the transition to business as usual as we started lifting restrictions.

7. The governance arrangements and Local Outbreak Response Team, established under the Outbreak Control Plan, remain operational, working to restrict the spread of COVID-19 and supporting high risk settings such as care homes, schools and businesses. In addition, Public Health continues to work closely with the NHS Clinical Commissioning Group to target and promote vaccination uptake in the county, linking with district councils, and further across the system to reduce disparities

heightened by the pandemic.

8. Whilst responding to and managing the impact of COVID-19 locally, the Director of Public Health (DPH) has reported directly to the Chief Executive, working together across Worcestershire and with wider partners. The benefits of this approach have been widely recognised and continue, as the Public Health response remains a high priority.

9. As was intended prior to the pandemic, the DPH has initiated a strategic review of the Public Health Emergency Planning, Resilience, Response and Recovery function. The intention is to ensure it is well structured with sufficient capacity to meet the Council's significant current and future duties and responsibilities. The review will incorporate learning from COVID-19, emerging national requirements, and include consideration of the Council's corporate business continuity arrangements.

10. Public Health is working across the Council to achieve better health outcomes for the residents of Worcestershire. It does this in support of the corporate priorities. For example, focusing on utilising green space, preventing fuel poverty and supporting planning decisions. Public Health supports the local population throughout life, with a focus on early intervention services for children, young people and families, alongside early years and education to help reduce demand for children's social care. The team works closely with Adult Social Care, through an adult preventative offer including strength and resistance training, balance and falls prevention and loneliness services.

11. Public Health continues to work with HR, Organisational Development and Engagement to deliver a workplace wellbeing programme, recognising the value of mental, social and physical wellbeing. It also supports initiatives such as Worcestershire Works Well, a free accreditation scheme supporting businesses to improve the health and wellbeing of their employees, in turn increasing profitability and productivity.

Financial Management

12. Strengthening financial management remains a key strand of the Strategic Leadership team and the wider management team's agenda. Our Finance Service continues to support all directorate and Strategic Leadership Teams as well as Chief Officers Group relating to financial management including challenge and value for money. Through this work I am pleased to report back today several improvements over the last 12 months which have contributed to this and ensured we have a good financial position and are aware and able to forward plan to meet the pressures and challenges facing us.

13. We set a balanced budget for 2021/22 despite the significant disruption caused by Covid-19 and the additional income and expenditure we were responsible for managing. Importantly we are forecasting to deliver a balanced budget at year end 31 March 2022.

14. We brought responsibility for the accounts payable and accounts receivable back in-house during 2021 and have started to make significant improvements in the use and operation of the finance system. We have an ambitious improvement programme to continue this development to drive out efficiencies in the system over the next 18 months. This includes further centralisation and improvement in income and debt management which has seen £7.7 million more debt collected in 2021/22 and a £4

million reduction in our overall debt level since 1 April 2021.

15. We also brought back in the financial support and budget monitoring for schools in partnership with WCF which will strengthen our financial monitoring of our schools.

16. Our Pension Fund has returned a strong valuation of 103% despite the impact of COVID on the global economy. This is due to high performance on our asset management. We have also been investing resources into responsible investment and working with the Pension Committee to develop our Environmental, Social and Governance (ESG) policy; and we were one of the first Funds to have a Stewardship Code signed off by the Financial Reporting Council (FRC).

17. We continue to strengthen the governance of our Pension Fund in light of national recommendations from the Pension Regulator and the Scheme Advisory Board.

18. The Internal Audit service has continued to develop over the year, with a combined focus on high level assurance audits and service and school-based audits. Our audit approach has enabled us to respond to emerging risks from the corporate risk approach, whilst also providing assurance to financial and asset management, and operational services. Internal Audit has supported operational managers by certifying nine grants with a value of over £31 million, with a further 13 due before the end of the year. That is 11 more than in 2020/21

19. Our focus on risk has seen significant developments in the risk management process, with engagement from all directorates via the Corporate Risk Management Group. We have implemented new risk management software, which will be rolled out across the Council in 2022.

20. Our Appointees and Deputies team have worked with our most vulnerable clients in very different ways to give them access to their money and ensure they are financially protected.

21. We have worked with our commissioning colleagues to ensure the social care grants for providers are sent out quickly and accurately resulting in over 4,500 additional payments, whilst changing core systems and reporting, to ensure we can quickly and accurately provide the returns required by Central Government.

22. WCC Finance Service was shortlisted for two Public Finance Awards this year, for Financial Reporting and Training and Development. There was huge national competition and our Finance and Training Initiative submission relating to our excellent work with finance apprentices received the Highly Commended award in the Training and Development category.

23. The Finance call centre was established to ensure a better response to internal and external queries and takes approximately 1300 contacts per month. The response time has since reduced from six weeks to 48 hours, gaining positive customer feedback.

24. The brokerage team supports Social workers and Health colleagues to place services users with providers. In the current climate this has been particularly challenging but has gained high praise from our Health colleagues.

25. There is still more to do, and we are not resting on our laurels with several key projects ongoing for the future.

26. The Finance Improvement Programme is driving efficiencies in the way we pay and collect monies, as well as make improvements to our general ledger, training and financial regulations. This is being monitored by the Audit and Governance Committee.

27. We will continue to Strengthen our Internal Audit function further, building on peer reviews and adopting new ways of working, again monitored by the Audit and Governance Committee.

28. We are investing in our Pensions Administration function to ensure that it is robust to meet the changing and complex regulations, that will include growing our own with more apprentice opportunities for internal staff and external candidates.

Human Resources, Organisational Development and Engagement

29. Stronger communication, clearer decision making, and joined-up working are real benefits from our new design for the top three tiers of the organisation which are already being seen. We have introduced our new Chief Officer Group which is responsible for operationally delivering the plans of the Strategic Leadership Team and our Corporate Plan. This group, made up of all our Assistant Directors, has already started to make a difference, setting specific service plans (2021-22) for every functional area and setting out success measures and objectives which can be used in our annual performance plans creating a golden thread throughout the organisation.

30. We have developed our new and ambitious Workforce Strategy for 2021 – 2024 to ensure we have a workforce with the personal and collective resilience to drive us forward in these challenging times. Following extensive engagement with our recognised Trade Unions and workforce, our Workforce Strategy focuses on building a high performance and productive culture, with the right conditions, where employees are valued and supported to perform at their best. Our workforce strategy sets out clear pillars of success focusing on wellbeing, leadership, recruitment, workforce transformation and culture and an employee's promise, ensuring we have the capacity and capability to meet the needs of our communities and to benefit local people and our economy. Over the last 12 months we have made significant workforce improvements, all of which support the implementation of our Workforce Strategy.

31. We have introduced a Mandatory Learning Programme supporting the organisational cultural aims by improving the productivity, efficiency and performance of the organisation across the whole workforce. The programme is also designed to manage organisational risks around statutory areas including cyber security, safeguarding and health and safety amongst others. In our first two quarters in 2021 we have seen over 90% completion of the learning modules.

32. We have adopted a new Equality, Diversity and Inclusion strategy and policy which will ensure statutory compliance in all service areas to meet the duty placed on us under the public sector equality duty. This has seen the creation of the infrastructure (i.e. governance, equality champions, Directorate Equality and Strategic Equality Groups) which will ensure we have a future proof proposition which encourages inclusivity for all

as part of our recruitment and retention offer.

33. We have a newly agreed Apprenticeships Strategy which focusses on utilising the levy by creating opportunities for people to develop, and by providing a framework for the workforce, of all ages, to undertake relevant qualifications, helping to raise skills, performance and aspirations. In 2021 we have made significant progress with us currently having over 150 apprentices within the Council in addition to funding over 100 apprentices within wider Worcestershire businesses.

34. We have continued to focus on social media, as a key channel to share council communications during an unprecedented 12 months. Content shared on the Council's social media channels has been viewed 31.8 million times with videos produced to help tell the council's story viewed 430,000 times.

35. We have developed our integrated wellbeing approach focusing on both immediate support for employees and more long term positive and preventative approaches, within a no cost/ low-cost principle. It will benefit employees and encourage heightened levels of employee engagement, to support the development of a workplace where employees are committed to achieving organisational success.

36. We have invested in the development and training of a network of internal mental health first aiders which is designed to support all of our employees across the Council and Worcestershire Children First. Covid-19 has had and is still having a huge impact on all aspects of our lives, especially our mental health.

37. We have continued to carry out performance reviews maintaining 100% compliance. We have also introduced a career and wellbeing form focused on supporting line manager and employee conversations.

38. We are working across the organisation to develop comprehensive Workforce Plans linked to the annual Service Plans. This is essential to future succession and talent pipelines and in support of our Workforce Strategy. As a function HR have also adopted a new operating model, seeing the introduction of HR Operations Partners, who provide direct support to our service leads.

Transformation and Change

39. Following the centralisation of the Programme Management Resources in December last year, we have been focused on delivering a number of key programmes of work both at a pan-corporate level, as well as for People, Public Health and WCF. In addition to the extensive COVID activities that the team have been instrumental in leading, examples of key initiatives have included the development and ongoing work under the Here2Help Programme, Direct Payments Review, Development of the COMF programme, Smarter Ways of Working (including the return to office), SEND Reinspection, and Insourcing of Property Services.

40. The next 12 months will see a continued focus on Here2Help, concluding the People service reviews and expanding to cover E&I and Corporate. We will also reprioritise our resources to focus on driving operational enhancements through Smarter Ways of Working, which will capture reviews of performance, property and assets, digital and workforce.

41. We have made extensive improvements over the last 12 months to become more commercial and ensure contracts achieve maximum value for money. Expenditure as an Authority during the past 12 months has been in excess of £630m, and we continue to give focus to how we best ensure value for money from our suppliers at the both the point of contract and throughout the life. The Commercial function has been redesigned and the new service went live from March this year with the objective of ensuring a more effective whole life management of our commercial activity. A new three-year Procurement Strategy is being drafted and will be published for the 2022 financial year onwards.

42. Property Services was successfully insourced on 1 April 2021 with the new service designed around a Corporate Landlord Model and FM Service Delivery. Whilst feedback has been incredibly positive on service performance since that time, a number of historic challenges have been identified (particular in respect of contract performance) which we are working to address under the Property Transformation Programme.

43. In respect of our estate and assets, the accelerated disposals programme has delivered in excess of £9m in capital receipts during 21/22, and ambitious programme is being developed for 22/23 and beyond. Work is also continuing with the One Public Estate programme to optimise utilisation across all public sector partners, and identified opportunities to rationalise our portfolio.

ICT and Digital

44. Over the last year we have completed the implementation of Microsoft Teams aligned to the Council's Collaboration Strategy. This has enabled teams within the Council to have their own Microsoft Team, mailbox, and SharePoint site supporting chat, video / audio conference, and document storage / collaboration both inside the council and with external partners.

45. Throughout 2021, there has been a significant and concerning increase in cyber-attacks, including ransomware attacks, on the public sector and education organisations. The council continues to invest in a range of measures to protect our systems and the data they hold from potential attacks, with recent improvements with adopting an Enterprise Architecture approach to Cyber Security, introducing a Security Incident and Event Management System, together with offline backup arrangements.

46. Work has been undertaken to develop the strategic direction of the service, and this is articulated in several new key documents. The IT Strategy defines the technology and digital services that we will implement to enable the delivery of Council priorities and digital agenda. The Information Governance strategy describes the development and implementation of a robust Information Governance (IG) framework needed for the effective management and protection of organisational and personal information. The Data Management and Insight Strategy will help everyone in the organisation understand the value of data and their part in making the Council data driven. The Digital Strategy focused on outcomes and customer experience, providing a blueprint for how we will use technology and digital resources to achieve our business challenges and goals.

47. The service continues to deliver a range of innovative and transformational digital

solutions to support new ways of working and efficiencies, while also improving our digital offering to customers, with more services available online 24/7 through end-to-end applications and information available via the web. Through the use of our low code development platform, GIS systems, Web and Data services we have now delivered over 150 new improvement projects for the business, for our businesses, residents and communities. In recognition of the progress that we have achieved in this area, WCC were finalists for a number of awards this year, including MJ Awards – Delivering better Outcomes, Women in IT – IT Team of the year, UK IT Industry Award – Operational response to the pandemic, and Tech4Good Awards – Accessibility.

48. An independent external review on the IT service, during the 2020/2021 financial year, has been undertaken by Socitm Ltd to critically examine the current ICT environment and ICT service provision to provide insight into the size, cost, and performance of the ICT service as well as user satisfaction. The results from the benchmark identified what is working well and what needs investment and attention. It was pleasing that our scores in the IT User Satisfaction Survey were above average for all organisations recently surveyed, and above average of similar-sized authorities. In recognition of this, the council has been awarded the Socitm user satisfaction award 2021.

49. The Customer Services Contact Centre provides a first point of contact for Worcestershire resident's enquiries, offering a channel of choice - telephony, webchat, email, and online applications. The aim is to make things simple, clear, easy to use and accessible for our residents whilst supporting them. Over the last year the team has continued to deliver excellent performance against the KPI targets and has taken on several new services including, Payments & Client Charging, Care Contributions and Demand Responsive Transport Service. The team has also been an essential front-line team in supporting the delivery of our Here2Help service during the Covid19 pandemic.

50. The corporate information governance Team continues to provide assurance that the Council's arrangements ensure personal data is held securely, information is disseminated effectively and that the Council is compliant with the legal framework - notably the UK General Data Protection Regulation (UK GDPR) and Data Protection Act 2018.

Legal and Democratic Services

51. The Democratic services team have continued to provide support to members, Scrutiny bodies and other formal meetings throughout another year of the pandemic. In addition the team has worked closely with district colleagues to ensure efficient local elections in May.

52. Our legal teams have been busy supporting colleagues across the Council. In relation to our commercial law work, our commercial law model is being modified and is taking a far more structured approach to supporting contract preparation, advice and management. This is largely due to demands from more complex and high value instructions being generated by the organisation.

53. Our team of specialist debt collection lawyers are now bedded down and are making strong inroads in the organisation's ability to collect and realise unpaid debts and receivables.

54. The childcare team has had an enormously busy quarter. If completing cases are maintained at the current rate we will have completed nearly 150 cases by the end of the financial year. The last six months has evidenced a 100% increase in cases since the start of the pandemic.

55. In addition the team achieved 'Commended' in the In House Legal Operations Team of the Year category at The Lawyer awards ceremony.

Worcestershire Children's First

56. We are delighted with the progress made by Worcestershire Children First, our wholly owned company, in delivering Children's Services across Worcestershire. WCF has been in operation for nearly 3 years and there continues to be strong working relationships and collective ownership in improving outcomes for children and young people. The joint appointment of WCF's Chief Executive and Council's DCS in June 2021, provides continued stability in leadership and maintains the direct line to the Council's Chief Executive and the Corporate Governance arrangements e.g., Strategic Leadership Team, Council and Cabinet which has worked well since formation of the company, where others have followed this model.

57. WCC and WCF is a true partnership ensuring services are in the right place to add the most value and delivered efficiently to deliver our shared outcomes for our 'customers'. WCC provide a range of services to WCF through service agreements that promote consistency and efficiency where this is appropriate and in business planning WCF and WCC have key areas of joint developments in Early Help and Services to children and young adults with a disability and additional needs

58. Through the regular DfE reporting this year and Ofsted inspections along with the routine performance monitoring at WCF's Board, through Council Overview and Scrutiny and commissioning arrangements the journey WCF has made in improving the quality of services to children and families is evident.

59. WCF has proved itself to be a financially efficient company. Therefore, the council remains committed to this service delivery model although the statutory direction was lifted on the 5 November 2021. Further details of the service achievements and outcomes are contained in the Leader's report on this agenda and are therefore not repeated here.

People and Communities

60. Our vision and strategy for Worcestershire's People and Communities is to modernise council services to best meet peoples' needs; to shape the care market so that services and support maximise the way in which people live their lives; all underpinned with an ethos of a person-centred approach – focused on enabling and improving people's health, wellbeing and independence.

61. We've made significant progress against these priorities during the past year. This is important in strengthening relationships across Adult Social Care, Worcestershire Children First, Community Services, Public Health and wider partners, including the NHS

and voluntary and community sector organisations. The establishment of Integrated Care Systems will further embed collaborative working and governance models for joint-partnership approaches to service delivery.

62. We also provided significant support to the Covid-19 response, including supporting and protecting those most vulnerable in society. Adult Social Care ensured that all customers were risk assessed and regularly contacted during periods of isolation. Whilst some authorities in the region were required to relax their duties under the Care Act, Worcestershire managed to sustain all of its duties. Social work and social care staff worked tirelessly and effectively to ensure Worcestershire's most vulnerable residents remained supported and protected.

63. We re-integrated the adult's mental health social work practitioners and undertook a review on how best to deliver this service in a joined-up way – resulting in this being embedded within our wider adult's social care offer. We're also working closely with Worcestershire Children's First to provide a joined-up offer for children, young people and young adults with disabilities during 2022/23.

64. Following a significant investment from the Better Care Fund, the Council was able to significantly increase its front-line social care workforce which is supporting the reablement and rehabilitation of residents – focused on enabling them to maintain or regain their independence at home, following a stay in hospital.

65. It remains the priority of Adult Social Care that the most vulnerable individuals are protected and supported. The full implementation of the 3 Conversation model has seen significant benefits in relation to promoting self-reliance and demand management.

66. Nationally, budget pressures remain a concern as demand continues to escalate at pace for care services, and increased levels of additional care needs (complexity) are identified. There are significant market challenges, further impacted by "post-covid" requirements for mandatory vaccinations and staff shortages nationally and locally. Adult Social Care has seen a significant increase in demand for social care support and this is forecasted to increase further with service demand and unit costs increasing leading to budget pressures. This includes:

- People receiving care has increased by 5% since March 2021 and there is an estimated further 4% increase in funded services over the next 12 months.
- There has been a steady increase in placements for those with Mental Health concerns, over the last five years.
- Social work contacts for existing clients have increased by 25% and 17% for new clients. This demonstrates that people are requiring increased professional input and support, including advice and information during the pandemic and that we now have a significant number of new clients placing increased demand on adult social care.
- 27% increase in safeguarding concerns, which is expected to continue to rise - resulting in additional staffing requirements. Analysis of this demand showed that these concerns were not specifically covid related but an overall increase in all areas.
- 10% increase in conversations and people needing adult social care support in Q1 compared to Q4, requiring further analysis. Baselineing has now been agreed

to develop a greater understanding of the impact of the conversations in diverting demand on services.

67. We have seen an Acute Hospital System under increasing pressure which has had an impact on the level and type of services we provide to support people following a hospital admission. A key objective in 2022 will be to maximise opportunities to actively work with our citizens to avoid hospital admission and promote access to reablement.

68. The focus of our work with communities over the past year has been on implementing our response to Covid-19, with staff moving from their permanent roles to work in new areas responding to the needs of the community and the organisation. A clear example of this was the creation of the new Here2Help service which continues to offer support, through the use of volunteers and re-deployed staff to Worcestershire's residents throughout the pandemic. We are continuing our journey of libraries transformation and have increased the on-line offer and access to on-line resources is at a record high, with 10,650 new digital members joining since April 2021.

69. Following a pause, due to Covid-19 restrictions, in marriages, our registrars service is now on track to marry an unprecedented number of couples, with over 1200 marriages and civil ceremonies already performed since April and many more booked for the remainder of the year and next year.

70. 160 new businesses are now engaged employers to work with education providers to support young people in getting job experience and over £3.3m additional grant funding has been secured to support Worcestershire's Skills agenda.

Economy and Infrastructure

71. The E&I Directorate has continued to be heavily involved in respect of the Council's emergency response to Covid-19 including supporting businesses impacted by the pandemic. During 2021 we transitioned from immediate Covid-19 response to supporting the re-opening up of our economy, playing a key role in signposting businesses to Government schemes and initiatives. This has continued to be delivered within existing resources and is work in addition to the normal day job and under circumstances where the use of remote working and digital technology were the only solutions available

72. Staff have continued to go above and beyond in supporting emergency responses from Covid-19 to flooding, to continuing to deliver progress against our key strategic projects and investment sites. We've demonstrated clear ambition for Worcestershire, both in its recovery from Covid-19, to investing in its long-term future on key employment and transport sites.

73. We know the next year will likely be just as challenging as this one, but we've proven we have the structures, relationships and leadership necessary to manage it and support Worcestershire to thrive. Next year will see a refreshed Corporate Plan – ensuring we continue to focus on delivering against Worcestershire's key priorities.

74. Covid-19 challenges will continue, alongside increased demand for our services. We will continue to review our operating model, to ensure it can meet these challenges whilst ensuring it is as efficient and effective as possible – maximising the resources we have.

75. Finally, we know One Worcestershire will be more important than ever. We will continue to build on the already strong relations we have with our partners, and fundamentally understand how we can best work together to provide services and support to Worcestershire's residents, communities and businesses.

Paul Robinson
Chief Executive
January 2022