

COUNCIL
18 MAY 2023

ANNUAL REPORT OF THE CHIEF EXECUTIVE

1. The following report reviews the work of the Chief Executive over the last year and provides members with an update on key priorities, actions and achievements in that time and also provides members with the opportunity to seek further clarification where required.

2. I would like to start by thanking all staff working for and behalf of Worcestershire County Council, striving to ensure residents, businesses and communities receive the services they deem important within a very tightly defined financial envelope. Containing costs and managing demand remains a significant issue, however I am pleased to report to members that over the last year the new systems and processes introduced have made this more manageable and the Council's finances are in line with the budget and estimates set at the start of the year.

Public Health

3. During 2022, as we emerge from the COVID-19 pandemic, Public Health has been able to refocus on its wide-ranging statutory duties, promoting prevention and reducing health inequalities to address poor health outcomes for the residents of Worcestershire. The Interim Director of Public Health has worked to keep Public Health at the heart of the local authority's agenda in support of its Corporate Plan, contribute to the development of wider Integrated System (ICS) and support the team to recover from the intensity of the COVID-19 response.

4. Following a governance review last year, the Health and Wellbeing Board extended its membership to district councils reflecting its role delivering place-based leadership within the ICS. Collectively members aim to ensure aligned and complementary work programmes across the system, driving improvements in health outcomes through local assets and a community-based approach. The HWB provides oversight of the District Collaboratives which are formed of district councils, Primary Care Networks, the Voluntary and Community Sector and other key local partners, to deliver against shared priorities for their communities. This is ensuring local, neighbourhood-level action and engagement.

5. Public Health has delivered the Joint Local Health and Wellbeing Strategy 2022-2032. With a new approach to Public Health engagement, the Strategy's public consultation and focus groups provided a wealth of evidence that will continue to inform services. The priority for the strategy, 'good mental health and wellbeing', is supported by action on the wider determinants of health and work is beginning to shape action plans to now deliver on these priorities.

6. In support of the strategy, and as the system continues to address its more challenging public health indicators, Public Health has worked closely with children's

services, health care and other partners to focus on children and families, recognising the impact on lifelong health, happiness and productivity. Public Health is coordinating efforts to optimise health and support before conception, during pregnancy and post birth and to reduce the impacts of smoking, obesity and poor mental health which can contribute to infant mortality. The creation of the 'start for life' offer and 'family hubs' seeks to provide a single access point for family services including health, social care, financial support and emotional wellbeing. Public Health is also co-producing a local 'youth offer' to improve access for young people and supporting those most at risk of poorer outcomes.

7. Regarding Health Protection, Worcestershire's COVID-19 pandemic response has tapered in line with national guidance. The Local Outbreak Response Team has significantly reduced in size, only supporting high risk adult social care settings until March 2023 funded via the Contain Outbreak Management Fund. However, systems and processes remain should they need to be reinstated.

8. Public Health incorporates Community Safety, Emergency Planning and Trading Standards and has oversight of strategic housing partnership activity. Following an independent review, Emergency Planning has been strengthened to meet increasing national and local priorities and to oversee the Council's approach to Business Continuity. It continues to manage the Council's response to potential emergency scenarios, such as severe local flooding or operational delivery of plans such as 'London Bridge' and the response to the death of the Monarch.

Financial Management

Worcestershire Pension Fund

9. The Fund has continued to invest and strengthen its administration, with responsibility now for over 60,000 members and over 185 employers. The Worcestershire Pension Fund (the "Fund") was valued at approx. £3.5bn as at end March 2022 and was 100% funded (based on the preliminary results of the 2022 valuation). This represents significant growth on the previous actuarial valuation at the same period in 2019 of £2.8bn, being 90% funded.

10. The Fund's investment strategy has offered a significant degree of shelter from any global economic volatility. Importantly we continue to see the Strategy shape a strong Environmental, Social and Governance (ESG) focus with new investments in low carbon schemes such as £200 million in forestry and social housing. At the same time the Fund has transitioned out of a very carbon intensive passive fund and invested £200m in a climate multi-factor fund which aims to tilt exposure away from companies that are carbon intensive or own fossil fuel reserves, and towards companies that generate green revenues. Our second Climate Risk Strategy Report saw the Fund continue to exceed that of the benchmarks and an improvement on the previous year seeing the Total Equity carbon footprint being 28.05% more carbon efficient than the blended benchmark.

Finance & Accountancy

11. The Council's 2021/22 Statement of Accounts were again praised by our external auditors and have been signed off, unqualified, ahead of the majority of local authorities and we have recently commenced the process for 2022/23.

12. Finance have been leading a Workforce Development and Succession programme that is growing and developing staff from within the Council, including apprenticeships. By the end of 2022/23 all staff had individual development plans linked to career maps and training programmes that aims to ensure we retain and recruit to maintain the stability and excellence of the team. 2022 also saw all of the 2020 apprentices pass their AAT level 3 qualifications and all bar one secure a job in Finance, with one exception securing a role at Wyre Forest DC. The May 2023 cohort of 4 new apprentices have recently commenced their training with our local FE provider.

13. Finance have continued to strengthen its Financial Awareness training to budget managers and officers across the council, with in excess of 300 delegates attending the programme to date. This has promoted the importance of reliable budget monitoring, forecasting and control and raises awareness relating to where the council gets its money from and where it is spent. Feedback on the course has been hugely positive and has not only improved financial awareness across the council and WCF, but it has also raised the profile of the role finance across the organisations.

14. Monthly budget monitoring continues to be produced for senior management teams within the directorates and to the Chief Officer Group and Strategic Leadership Team. Alongside this, the finance business partners have developed a number of activity-based forecasts within our demand related budgets (predominantly adults and children) so that the reader can see the direct correlation between activity, demand, unit costs and forecast.

15. The budget setting process concluded in February 2023 with the setting of a balanced budget for 2023/24 and was completed in conjunction with the budget holders to ensure that they were involved in the development of future budgets at a time when they can influence future decision making.

Financial Transactions

16. The Council has seen an increase in financial operational contacts and the team have dealt with over 30% more transactions during 2022/23. This has been possible due to the excellent foundations laid to manage process through automated routes, such as our social care client portal that has reduced over 60,000 pieces of post.

17. The Income and Debt team have continued to pursue debt and modernise our billing and collection processes with over £20m collected since the team's formation.

18. Finally, teams supporting the most Adult Social Care clients such as Appointees & Deputies, Court of Protection, Financial Assessments and Brokerage have also dealt with significant rises in cases as we continue to support the most financially vulnerable and seek best value for care placements. Court of Protection has again had a successful Government Inspection, whilst Brokerage have helped ensure hospital patient discharges throughout the County have not been delayed as people move into care, with over 30% more placements made this year.

Internal Audit

19. Internal Audit have continued to ensure all recommendations are agreed and acted on. The team have led the Council's improved approach to risk management, and we are hopeful of recruiting a new Chief Internal Auditor soon.

Human Resources, Organisational Development and Engagement

20. We remain committed to delivering our ambitious Worcestershire County Council (WCC) Workforce Strategy 2021 – 2024, which has been developed to ensure we have a workforce with the personal and collective resilience to drive us forward in these challenging times.

21. Our relationships with our recognised Trade Unions continue to be constructive and effective, enabling ongoing dialogue relating to all workforce matters, including change management, pay and reward, employee wellbeing and performance.

22. Our integrated well-being approach focuses on both immediate support for employees and more long term positive and preventative approaches, within a no cost/ low-cost principle. Highlights this year include, two successful wellbeing weeks, each with over 2000 bookings. 97% of employees who fed back, said they would attend a future wellbeing week, and 82% saying it has had a positive impact on their wellbeing, which supports our continued focus on wellbeing as part of our workforce strategy. We have also completed our first ever Big Team Challenge with over 270 participants from across the organisation. This focused on increasing employee activity levels and encouraging team work to reach a million steps per team, over 6 weeks.

23. Our Equality, Diversity and Inclusion strategy and policy maintains statutory compliance in all service areas to meet the duty placed on us under the public sector equality duty. The infrastructure (i.e. governance, equality champions, Directorate Equality and Strategic Equality Groups) ensures we have a future proof proposition which encourages inclusivity for all as part of our workforce strategy.

24. Our Mandatory Learning Programme supports the organisational cultural aims by improving the skills, efficiency, and performance across 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 April 2022, Mandatory Learning entered its second year with an updated suite of courses. At the end of Q2 2022, the compliance rate had reached 83% (WCC) and 73% (WCF).

25. We have continued to carry out performance reviews maintaining 100% compliance and have developed a refreshed approach to managing performance including reintroduction of our calibration process, quality checks and reporting to our Strategic Leadership Team and Chief Officers. We have also introduced a new executive performance appraisal process for our Strategic Leadership Team and other statutory Chief Officers including publication of the performance accountabilities to be delivered.

26. We have continued to promote and grow our apprenticeship offer across the Council, Worcestershire Children First and Maintained Schools. As of November 2022, we had 164 apprentices, and in the last year we have started over 110 new apprentices across WCC and seen over 85 employees complete their apprenticeships. The levy transfer option has allowed us to continue our support to local businesses in 2022. 53 Worcestershire-based businesses have been funded to employ an apprentice via levy transfer since 2020, with a total levy transfer of £713,000. In addition, this year has seen a zero return on Levy to central government for a sustained period.

27. In April 2022, we launched the new myLearning system, providing a new platform for WCC/WCF staff to access mandatory learning, e-learning content, and training events. This has significantly improved employee experience, increased mandatory learning compliance, and managers visibility of their teams learning journey.

28. We continue to proactively and effectively, communicate and engage with our residents and partners through a wide range of platforms, both digitally and via traditional mediums. Over the last 12 months, the social posts on our channels and been viewed over 25 million times and we have shared over 650 stories with the local media to help keep residents and businesses updated on progress on our priorities.

29. In addition to communicating with residents and businesses, engaging with our diverse workforce is also a priority for the Council, ensuring organisational success and is key to realising our Workforce Strategy. Our Your Voice 2022 Annual Staff Survey saw a record breaking 71.5% of our workforce respond, and we have developed a structure and way of action planning which will mean we can really make a difference this year and in the future. We will continue to build on this approach for Your Voice 2023.

Transformation and Change

30. The last 12 months has seen our focus on delivering major initiatives around core service transformation, including the Customer Experience Programme; Transformation and ensuring Statutory Compliance in Adults Social Care and Communities; Schools Build Programme, Redditch Library, Property Services Redesign etc. Of particular note has been the successful centralisation of many of our back-office functions into our County Hall HQ, allowing closer working between teams and providing welcome income from the leasing of vacated space. In addition, we have successfully completed phase one of the transformation of the Adults Front Door which is supporting improvements for our customers and social work teams.

31. The next 12 months will see us deliver against the agreed priorities for change, including the continuation of the Customer Experience Programme, and expansion across E&I, the home to school transport review programme , and the development of a reform programme, leveraging our Lean6sigma, transformation, commercial and digital capabilities, to help services improve efficiency and effectiveness, and to deliver agreed savings targets.

32. A new commercial strategy has been developed and approved which sets out our aspirations as a council from now until 2026 in respect of commercial and procurement outcomes. We are continuing with the transformation of the services, and will be relaunching revised procurement governance arrangements shortly, allowing engagement at the right levels across our strategic commercial activities. As an organisation, we spend in excess of £0.5bn per annum with third party suppliers, and the newly formed category teams are working in close partnership with the directorate leads to support them in getting get commercial and qualitative outcomes possible from these agreements.

33. During the course of the next 12 months, we will develop new commercial strategies across all core areas of spend that reflect the volatile markets and economic climate in

which we now operate. We will also be reviewing our standing orders, procurement policy, and thresholds to ensure they are fit for purpose and relevant.

34. Property Services continues its transformation, with a number of the legacy service challenges having been identified and addressed during the last 12 months. Work continues to support the schools build programme, as well as the management of our Shrub Hill Industrial Estate. Significant facilities remediation works have been completed, including UPS upgrade and Boiler refurbishments. This year also saw us completed comprehensive energy and sustainability management audits across our entire corporate estate, as well as a majority of schools.

35. In respect of capital assets, the disposals programme has delivered approximately £5.75m in capital receipts during 22/23 across our estate. We continue to look at further opportunities in respect of our non-strategic rural assets, with disposals being progressed where appropriate and in a managed way. 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.

36. The Business Intelligence (BI) Team completed its restructure in Summer 2022, having previously been called the Management, Information, Analytics and Research (MIAR) team. All BI activity has been reorganised under three sub-teams and new capacity has been created for BI transformation. Scrutiny and Performance reporting is in the process of moving to Power BI, and a new performance and risk monitoring framework is in development for use from 2023/24. In 2023, we will share the Council's first Business Intelligence Strategy, which will set out how we propose to deliver our vision to provide the right information at the right time, to drive data-driven decisions, facilitate effective commissioning, help deliver services and achieve improved outcomes.

ICT and Digital

37. Over the last 12 months our systems and structures have proved highly resilient, and we have continued to invest to support that resilience and our capability to operate flexibly. Excellent progress has been made with the implementation of the IT Strategy, with the delivery of several key IT & Digital projects.

38. Cyber threats continue to develop in size and sophistication and the fast-paced digital transformation and organisational change within local authorities throughout the COVID-19 pandemic has created and exposed new vulnerabilities in technology, processes, skills and training. We have continued to improve and develop our cyber security which is now supported by a Managed Security Operations Centre monitored 24x7x365.

39. IT Business Continuity and Disaster Recovery has progressed significantly. We have gone from effectively a single data centre with no resilience and limited backup capability, to a position where we have performed a full disaster recovery test, failing all services across to a secondary data centre, supported by immutable and offsite backups.

40. Good progress has been made with customer-facing service improvement activities, including chatbot development, customer surveys and a telephony IVR review to ensure a one council approach to customer contact.

41. Integrated Care Systems (ICSs) are new partnerships between the organisations that meet health and care needs across an area, to coordinate services. Strong and positive relationships have been developed with the Integrated Care System, with whom we have implemented the provision of data into the Shared Care Record.

42. We are continuing to deliver against the digital strategy, and have implemented several new systems some that replace manual existing processes and some to support brand new initiatives e.g. Here to host. The Council's new website was launched in February, providing our residents with a much-improved digital experience. The launch follows a three-month trial launch giving residents the opportunity to have their say. In its first revamp in almost a decade, the County Council's website now has a brand-new look and feel, making it easier to navigate and more mobile-friendly as over 70% of people visiting the website now do so via a mobile device.

43. The corporate information governance Team provides 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.

44. 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.

45. 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 (Digital Transformation Category, Innovation in Building Diversity and Inclusion Category, and Workforce Transformation Category), LGC (Diversity and Inclusion), the iESE Public Sector Transformation Awards 2022 and finalists in the UK National Contact Centre Awards 2023 - Small Contact Centre of the Year category.

Worcestershire Children First

46. 2022 was a positive year in the journey of our Children's Services delivered by Worcestershire Children First, our wholly owned company. Our partnership goes well beyond the contractual arrangements and the model is regarded as good practice by the Department for Education (DfE).

47. Our collective sustained improvement was recognised by the DfE by the lifting of the statutory direction in November 2021 and the early removal of the "Support and Supervision" phase in June 2022. This is a result of significant hard work and improvement since Ofsted's 2016 inspection, evidenced throughout the monitoring and focused visits by Ofsted and our reporting to the DfE.

48. WCF's Chief Executive provides continued stability in leadership in a volatile and demanding sector and is part of my Strategic Leadership Team ensuring the Council's Corporate Governance arrangements are transparent and effective. The company's

Director of Resources is also part of the Council's Chief Officer Group to ensure there is a joined up and consistent approach and that services provide value for money for residents of Worcestershire which is extremely important in these challenging times for local government.

49. WCC provide a range of support services to WCF through service agreements, and we have established some key areas of joint developments such as the All-Age Disability Service to improve the experience for young people and their parents and carers.

50. The Council requires WCF to develop and publish an annual Business Plan. The 2023/24 Business Plan was approved by Cabinet on 30 March 2023. The Plan sets out WCF's vision and strategic goals and outlines how they will deliver services for children, young people and families, on behalf of the Council. The plan describes WCF's staffing and governance structure as well as future forecasts in relation to finances.

51. SEND and High Needs funding and the impact of the deficit is a local and national issue and to address the future sustainability the DfE has invested a one off £85m in the Delivering Better Value in SEND (DBV) programme. WCF are leading this for the County Council and this programme will support the 55 local authorities with deficits to reform their high needs systems and will try to address the underlying issues that lead to increased pressure. The outcomes from the all the participating authorities will also influence future national policy and funding arrangements for this complex area. The programme is being supported by Newton Europe and CIPFA who we have previously worked alongside in Social Care and through the Society of County Treasurers. For information, authorities with the highest deficits participate in the safety valve intervention programme. We will keep elected members informed of our progress through our usual formal governance arrangements.

52. 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

53. 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.

54. Adult Social Care have set up a Mental Health Partnership Board, with commitment from a wide range of stakeholders, experts by experience, providers, and partner agencies to focus on effective ways of developing future services collaboratively. We have set up the Pathway Planning Team, creating a team of skilled workers to proactively review people's needs to step down their care from residential settings to lower-level supported living environments where they can live more independent lives. The Approved Mental Health Professional (AMHP) Service has had a service re-design and we are moving to 24/7 service with a clear development pathway for WCC staff to ensure we deliver our statutory duties in an effective, sustainable way. A further success is that in bringing Mental Health Social Work back to the Council, we have significantly improved over review performance in the last 12 months, completing 95% in a 12-month timeframe. We continue to work closely with Worcestershire Children First to provide a

joined-up offer for children, young people and young adults with disabilities following the transfer of the young adults' team to a newly developed All Age Disability Service in the summer of 2022.

55. During winter 2022/3, an extra-care step facility was piloted with good success, this pilot now extended for a one-year period, providing short term accommodation with support for those who may not be able to return home from hospital immediately but who do not require residential or nursing care.

56. Nationally and locally, workforce pressures remain challenging in both social work and social care roles, and we continue to implement actions to improve recruitment and retention within these critical roles, with a string emphasis on wellbeing and staff engagement.

57. 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.

58. There are significant market challenges, further impacted by "post-covid" requirements and industrial action across NHS staff groups, the sustained rise in the rising cost of living impact and staff shortages nationally and locally.

59. There was a significant increase in social care contacts during 2021-22 impacted on demand, during 2022-23 so far, this has been followed by a further increase of 4%, suggesting the demand for support from adult social care will continue to rise post Covid.

60. The number of active safeguarding cases has increased by 74% between March 2022 and September 2022, requiring significant resources to manage safely and ensure some of our most vulnerable residents are safeguarded.

61. Overall social work activity remains high in 2022-23, with our Area Social Work Teams alone, completing nearly 4,000 conversations with people who may require care and support per month, on average 10,200 case-note recording and 10,700 telephone conversations with people.

62. In 2021, the Government launched its programme of reform for Adult Social Care, and in particular, how social care is funded and of assessment of care quality. The first phase of this change impacts care services for general residential and nursing residential care for residents aged 65 and older, and for home care services for the 18+ age group. Within the autumn statement, the use of funds for the provision of services was addressed, councils required to use the grants "to make tangible improvements to Adult Social Care and in particular address discharge delays, social care waiting times, low fee rates, workforce pressures and promote technological innovation within the sector". It is widely recognised that the increasing demand and complexity of care needs for an ageing population plus the inflationary challenges seen across all industries presents a significant financial challenge to the County and as a result, the County Council will seek to better match care needs against care provision through the development of services delivered in both home and residential settings. We continue to see 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. Throughout 2022, we have worked with system partners to maximise

opportunities to actively work with our citizens to avoid hospital admission and promote access to reablement, and we are working closely with the NHS as the threat of strike action draws closer to enable our citizens to be supported through the coming months. This vital work will continue throughout 2023.

63. From April 2023 the Care Quality Commission (CQC) will review, assess and report on how effectively Local Authorities carry out their regulated care functions under Part I of the Care Act 2014. We have developed a robust assurance self-assessment tool and a comprehensive self-assessment programme in preparation, and as a council, we are nationally recognised as a leader in preparing for CQC assessment and review. To date over 70% of our adult social care workforce have engaged in a least one CQC self-assessment activity, and workshops and focus groups with carers and providers have also been conducted. Nearly 700 service users, carers, Worcestershire residents and partner agencies responded to our Building Together Survey, with 390 of these respondents indicating they would like to be involved in the development of the Building Together Coproduction Charter and strategy, as well the ongoing review and development of services. These events have not only provided a wealth of information regarding the areas in which adult social care shines, but also the areas in which more development is necessary.

64. Integrated care systems (ICSs) are partnerships of organisations that come together to plan and deliver joined up health and care services, and to improve the lives of people who live and work in their area. There are 42 ICSs across England, covering populations of around 500,000 to 3 million people.

65. Within each ICS, place-based partnerships will lead the detailed design and delivery of integrated services across their localities and neighbourhoods. The partnerships will involve the NHS, local councils, community and voluntary organisations, local residents, people who use services, their carers and representatives and other community partners with a role in supporting the health and wellbeing of the population. The County Council is represented on the Integrated Care Board by its Chief Executive Officer.

66. Here2Help has been absorbed into the Adult Front Door or wider community development work. The Adult Front Door is responsible for managing demand into adult social care and is proactively focusing on providing more preventative activity to help more people to help themselves, live independently for longer and improve wellbeing. Ultimately the aim is to prevent, reduce or delay the need for adult social care.

Economy and Infrastructure

67. In December 2021, Cabinet authorised officers to negotiate and enter into a Variation with Mercia Waste Management Service to put into effect their proposals for extending the duration of the Waste Management Service Contract for a period of five years until January 2029. Actions to finalise the variation progressed with Herefordshire Council and Mercia Waste Management Services and with the support of technical, financial and legal advisors. The contract extension was successfully completed at the end of 2022.

68. The Sustainability Team are co-ordinating work aimed at achieving this goal, a Sustainability Board is in place and operating. The Council's GHG emissions reduced by

47% between 2009/10 to 2021/22. The Net Zero Carbon Plan is currently being reviewed.

69. The refreshed Member Portal went live on 17th October 2022 and, like all change it will take a while to embed and adapt to a new way of working, but already we are seeing the benefits. Member enquiries are now being logged and tracked on one system and dashboards ensure that these are regularly monitored. The portal will integrate with Highways systems and leading the way was the Highways Report-it System for all highways operational enquiries. The next development phase is underway, and this will integrate with the system for Street Lighting.

70. This year we have seen the introduction of the Customer Experience Programme and development of new technology and systems to transform the way our customers access our services. E&I have worked with the Commercial and Change Directorate to review the way in which customers and stakeholders interact with our services. Our focus has been on improving the end-to-end customer journey and customer experience.

71. Our new Report-it function went live on 8th August 2022 and since then we have received circa 5000 reports, which equates to about 16,000 enquiries each year. That average is down on previous years, but this was in advance of the usual winter season and the severe weather that that brings! 89% of the reports/enquiries since August have been completed. The top four enquiry types are still Roads/footpaths, grass cutting, drainage and potholes.

72. In late September, we introduced our new Call Centre technology within the Highways and Transport Control Centre. This sophisticated dashboard assists in managing calls in line with Service Level Agreements and enables us to prepare reports on what our residents are contacting us about so that we can do further engagement/training exercises.

73. It has been a busy and productive year and the above are only a small fraction of the services and outputs the County Council has achieved. I would like to conclude this report as I started by expressing my thanks to all the staff, managers and Councillors and partners who have made this possible.

Paul Robinson
Chief Executive
May 2023