

AGENDA

Worcestershire Regulatory Services Board

Thursday, 26th June, 2025
4.30 pm

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WORCESTERSHIRE DISTRICT COUNCILS

MEETING OF THE WORCESTERSHIRE REGULATORY SERVICES BOARD

THURSDAY 26TH JUNE 2025

AT 4.30 P.M.

PARKSIDE SUITE, PARKSIDE, MARKET STREET, BROMSGROVE,
WORCESTERSHIRE, B61 8DA,

MEMBERS: Councillor H. J. Jones, Bromsgrove District Council
Councillor K. Taylor, Bromsgrove District Council
Councillor D. Harrison, Malvern Hills District Council
Councillor C. Palmer, Malvern Hills District Council
Councillor M. Dormer, Redditch Borough Council
Councillor J. Spilsbury, Redditch Borough Council
Councillor K. Holmes, Worcester City Council
Councillor A. Scott, Worcester City Council
Councillor R. Deller, Wychavon District Council
Councillor M. Goodge, Wychavon District Council
Councillor T. Onslow Wyre Forest District Council
Councillor I. Hardiman, Wyre Forest District Council

AGENDA

1. Election of Chairman
2. Election of Vice-Chairman
3. Apologies for absence and notification of substitutes
4. Declarations of Interest

To invite Councillors to declare any Disclosable Pecuniary Interests or Other Disclosable Interests they may have in items on the agenda, and to confirm the nature of those interests.

5. To confirm the accuracy of the minutes of the meeting of the Worcestershire Regulatory Services Board held on 20th Feb 2025 (Pages 5 - 20)

6. Worcestershire Regulatory Services Revenue Monitoring April - March 2025 & Annual Return (Pages 21 - 34)
7. Worcestershire Regulatory Services Annual Report 2024/25 (Pages 35 - 78)
8. Activity and Performance Data Quarters 1, 2 3 and 4 2024/5 (Pages 79 - 124)
9. Information Report - Food Safety: Development of WRS new food officer resource (Pages 125 - 128)
10. Progress Report on the Automation Project (Pages 129 - 130)
11. To consider any other business, details of which have been notified to the Head of Legal, Equalities and Democratic Services prior to the commencement of the meeting and which the Chairman considers to be of so urgent a nature that it cannot wait until the next meeting.

J. Leach
Chief Executive

Parkside
Market Street
BROMSGROVE
Worcestershire
B61 8DA

18th June 2025

**If you have any queries on this Agenda please contact
Pauline Ross
Democratic Services Officer**

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**If you have any questions regarding the agenda or attached papers,
please do not hesitate to contact the officer named above.**

Notes:

Although this is a public meeting, there are circumstances when the Board might have to move into closed session to consider exempt or confidential information. For agenda items that are exempt, the public are excluded.



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WORCESTERSHIRE DISTRICT COUNCILS

MEETING OF THE WORCESTERSHIRE REGULATORY SERVICES BOARD

THURSDAY 20TH FEBRUARY 2025, AT 4.30 P.M.

PRESENT: Councillors H. J. Jones (Chairman), K. Taylor, Harrison, Munro, Holmes, Scott, Hardman, Goodge, Onslow (Vice-Chairman) and Hardiman

Officers: Mr. S. Wilkes, Mr P. Carpenter, David Mellors, Patel, Kiran Lahel and Mrs. P. Ross

Partner Officers: Mr. L. Griffiths, Worcester City Council, Mr. I. Edwards, Malvern Hills and Wychavon District Councils and Mr. I. Miller, Wyre Forest District Council (all via Microsoft Teams)

30/24

APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE AND NOTIFICATION OF SUBSTITUTES

Prior to this item, the Chairman took the opportunity to express the Boards sincere thanks to Mr. P. Carpenter, the Deputy Chief Executive and Director of Resources, Bromsgrove District Council (BDC) and Redditch Borough Council (RBC). The Chairman wished him well in his new role and highlighted that he would be sincerely missed.

Apologies for absence were received from Councillor C. Palmer, Malvern Hills District Council, Councillor M. Stringfellow, Redditch Borough Council with Councillor D. Munro in attendance as the substitute Member; and Councillor R. Deller, Wychavon District Council with Councillor B. Hardman in attendance as the substitute Member.

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DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

There were no Declarations of Interest.

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MINUTES

The minutes of the meeting of the Worcestershire Regulatory Services Board held on 21st November 2024 were submitted.

RESOLVED that the minutes of the Worcestershire Regulatory Services Board meeting held on 21st November 2024, be approved as a correct record.

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WORCESTERSHIRE REGULATORY SERVICES REVENUE
MONITORING APRIL - DEC 2024

The Deputy Chief Executive and Director of Resources, Bromsgrove District Council (BDC) and Redditch Borough Council (RBC), introduced the report and in doing so drew Members' attention to the Recommendations as detailed on pages 21 and 22 of the main agenda pack. The report covered the period April to December 2024.

Members were informed that the detailed revenue monitoring report, as attached at Appendix 1 to the report; showed a projected outturn 2024/25 of £8k surplus; and was based on the following assumptions: -

- The agreed pay award for 2024-25 was included in the revenue monitoring reports, the report also reflected the additional funding from partner councils of £21k agreed by the Board at the meeting held on 21st November 2024.
- If April to Dec 24 spend on pest control continued on the same trend for the rest of year, there would be an overspend on this service of £19k. The projected outturn figure to be funded by partners was:-

Redditch Borough Council	£11k
Wychavon District Council	£8k

- The following was the actual bereavements costs Apr – Dec 24 to be funded by partners. These costs were charged on an as and when basis. Due to the nature of the charge, it was not possible to project a final outturn figure:

Bromsgrove District Council	£5k
Malvern Hills District council	£4k
Redditch Borough Council	£7k
Worcester City Council	£1k

This income was included in the income projected outturn.

The Licence for Victoria Forms was £32k.

- Appendix 2 to the report showed the detail of the income achieved by WRS April – Dec 24, the income had increased which was very positive.
- Any grant funded expenditure was shown separate to the core service costs as this was not funded by the participating Councils.

Information on the National Insurance (NI) contributions 2025-26 onwards and the Employer National Insurance Contributions Grant – Explanatory Note, were briefly explained on page 24 of the main agenda pack.

Appendix 3 to the report provided figures on the 2025-26 Unavoidable Salary Pressures – NI Increases, with a cost to WRS at £72k.

Members queried if any pest control issues were of a concern in any particular Ward or if fly-tipping had caused any pest control issues.

The Director of Worcestershire Regulatory Services (WRS) explained that with regard to pest control, each partner authority had specific criteria for charges for pest control services. In all five district areas where it was offered, only residents in receipt of certain qualifying benefits who needed support with pest control could get free or discounted treatments, depending on which pest control service was required and the qualifying benefit they were in receipt of. Redditch, Borough Council used to offer all residents free treatment for rats, but this ceased in 2017.

The Director of WRS agreed to liaise with the Technical Services Manager, WRS to provide Members with information on any Ward areas where there was a concern that possible pest control issues were due to fly-tipping.

The Director of WRS responded to a further question of air pollution and the use of greener fleets for WRS.

In doing so, Members were informed that officers had scoped electric vans for the dog warden service. However, due to the vast area covered by the dog warden service (which included Malvern, Cheltenham, Birmingham City, Gloucester City and Tewkesbury); the mile range of electric vans was not sufficient for the area covered by WRS. Hence, the service chose the best quality diesel vans. However, officers would continue to keep an eye on the potential use of electric vans, as there would come a time when electric vans had a longer mile range. With

regard to using HVO fuel this would be an expensive option, as at the present time it is a significantly higher cost per litre than diesel.

The Deputy Chief Executive and Director of Resources, responded to queries with regards to NI and the local government finance settlement.

In response to a question on the Ukrainian Support Work, the Director of WRS explained that WRS currently delivered this work for Bromsgrove District and Redditch Borough Councils only; with a small number of staff and that currently the Government had agreed to fund this work for into the new financial year.

The Chairman then took the opportunity to draw Members' attention to the Recommendations. On being out to the vote, it was

RESOLVED that the Board

- 1.1 note the final financial position for the period April – Dec 2024
- 1.2 partner councils are informed of their liabilities for Apr – Dec 24 in relation to Bereavements, as follows:-

Council	Apr–Dec Actual Bereavements £000	24 for
Bromsgrove District Council	5	
Malvern Hills District Council	4	
Redditch Borough Council	7	
Worcester City Council	1	
Total	17	

- 1.3 partner councils are informed of their liabilities for 2024-25 in relation to additional Technical Officers, as follows:-

Council	Estimated Projected Outturn 2024/25 Envirocrime & Planning Enforcement £000	Estimated Projected Outturn 2024/25 Tech Officer Animal Activity £000	Estimated Projected Outturn 2024/25 Gull Control £000
Bromsgrove District Council	310	9	
Malvern Hills District Council		7	
Redditch Borough Council	174	2	
Worcester City Council		3	35
Wychavon District Council		15	
Wyre Forest District Council		9	
Total	485	45	35

and

- 1.4 note that following the Government's guidance for reclaiming of National Insurance increases for 25-26 onwards, because these increases were linked to Revenue Outturn data forms, these increases to be funded by partner councils as outlined in the report approved at the meeting of the WRS Board on 21st November 2024, the financial summary of which was included in the spreadsheet attached at Appendix 3, to the report.

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WORCESTERSHIRE REGULATORY SERVICES SERVICE PLAN 2025/6

The Board were asked to consider the Worcestershire Regulatory Services (WRS) Service Plan 2025/2026.

The Director of WRS apologised for a typographical error in the report, which showed 2024/5 and not 2025/6.

The Director of WRS then introduced the report and in doing so drew Members' attention to the Recommendations, as detailed on page 31 of the main agenda pack.

The Board signed off the service plan for WRS each year. The process helped to make Members aware of what the service was proposing for the relevant financial year and provided a sign off that some central government bodies liked to see in relation to service delivery plans e.g., the Food Standards Agency (FSA).

The plan followed very much the pattern of previous years and had an Executive Summary to pick up the main points. Last year's plan was the first in recent years which had no pandemic related activity as part of it. This year's plan continued to consider the long-standing strategic priorities for local authority regulatory services provided by Department for Business and Trade (DBaT), as these provided a framework that allowed WRS to have a golden thread back to the priorities of the six partners and to link to the requirements of the various national bodies that oversaw the work of WRS.

Whilst WRS had retained these for this purpose, the focus of this year's plan remained on the tactical priorities identified in the service's Strategic Assessment that had been refreshed for the coming 3-years. This piece of work reviewed the full data and intelligence picture and looked at emerging threats. The assessment recommended retaining our cross-cutting priorities but rolling more work into these areas:

- Supporting a safe and vibrant night-time economy
- Promoting the responsible sale, breeding, and ownership of dogs
- Promoting safe, clean, and healthy communities

As highlighted in the report, most aspects of business-as-usual fitted into these priorities, particularly the last where things like environmental permitting and food hygiene related to businesses that sat outside of the night-time economy.

Again, a range of high-level activities against the 3 tactical priorities were identified within the plan so that Members would be aware of the general focus

of the workload. Below this would sit several plans, either team based or cross cutting that would be used to drive the actual business activities.

The plan had been devised in the face of on-going financial uncertainty with money being tight across the public sector. Both businesses and households continued to feel the pinch, and this had led in the past to increases in work for regulatory services whereby businesses may take more risks to survive, and as households sought to reduce expenditure on what may be essential products.

The Government's announcement of a devolution model for England involving the removal of two-tier arrangements in favour of unitary local government across England would introduce a further factor to be considered. Whatever the shape this took going forward, WRS stood ready to contribute to the conversation whilst continuing to do its best by the local authority partners.

Working with businesses and other partners was a key theme for both generating income to mitigate financial risk but also to ensure that outcomes were delivered that matched the priorities of partners and stakeholders. Delivery for other local authorities also remained a key income generation strategy, supported by limited work for the private sector and any specific grant monies that we felt were worthwhile pursuing. WRS had managed to build on our client-base post pandemic with new clients for dog-related support, and we hoped that we would be able to identify new ones, although over time this would get harder especially as the devolution/ Unitary agenda gained momentum. Officers however remained hopeful that this strategy would remain fruitful in the immediate future.

WRS would continue to use intelligence to drive the business forward and the embedding of this approach and its associated processes would continue.

As with previous years, Members were being asked to pay particular attention to the provisions for food hygiene delivery in the coming year. This was in order to meet one of the recommendations of the 2017 audit by the FSA who were keen that Members had a better understanding of the demand in this service area when they authorised the plan going forward.

The five new team members who had now been recruited, enjoyed working for WRS, their recruitment was a positive outcome for the Environmental Health & Trading Standards Manager's service area. By

the time this plan was implemented in April, all the new staff recruited, using last year's funding uplift, would be trained to a reasonable level and contributing fully. So, the figures for visits would reflect the additional capacity made available to the service to deliver the increase in lower risk visits and review of new / changed premises or businesses. Members were further asked to note the proposed numbers of inspections and similar activities proposed for the new financial year that would be undertaken to discharge the statutory duties of the 6 partners in relation to food control. WRS would endeavour to keep the Board updated on progress as the year progressed.

The Risk Register had also been updated to reflect the current position in areas like IT provision and development, staffing levels, and our reliance on contractual relationships for income. The threat from cyber-attack had become more real in recent years as the devastating consequences were felt by colleagues in other local authorities elsewhere in the country. WRS would work closely with our ICT host, Wyre Forest District Council, to limit the risk of this. Our teams had for many years been using mobile and flexible work patterns which had yielded efficiencies but our reliance on ICT provision to deliver this did increase our vulnerability to disruption.

Given the FSA intervention, although this potential issue had always been flagged in the Risk Register as a general risk of not meeting Government or central body expectations, we have added a specific line for them given they were most likely one of the central bodies to intervene with local authorities. We have also added a line for the potential risk from the impact of the devolution process and the move to unitary local government, although it was not expected to create any issues in the period for which the service plan was valid.

Following concerns raised about the possibility of a cyber-attack, as experienced by other local authorities. The Director of WRS reassured Members that their ICT host, Wyre Forest District Council, conducted a lot of testing on systems and that regular training and reminders with regards to Phishing emails were routinely sent out. All of WRS systems sat behind their ICT host's firewall.

Members referred to the plan and the FSA expectations with aligning activities more closely to the Food Law Enforcement Codem of Practice, and WRS delivering their expectations.

The Environmental Health & Trading Standards Manager stated that, pre-pandemic, they had received a lot of encouragement about the work

undertaken by WRS with concentrating on premises with a higher risk and intelligence led inspections to lower risk outlets. However, the FSA now required Local Authorities to inspect all businesses rather than use intelligence led inspections. As highlighted in the service plan, the FSA remained insistent that authorities aligned their activities more closely to the Food Law Enforcement Code of Practice and any future revisions to the Food Hygiene Code. Part of the Agency's role is ensuring that the food law regime operates at a level that gives confidence and reassurance to countries receiving exported UK products, that our food products were safe.

Members further referred to the priority shown below and were somewhat surprised that this was shown as a cross-cutting priority.

- Promoting the responsible sale, breeding and ownership of dogs.

The Director of WRS explained that dogs turned up in so many areas of activity. Dog nuisance had joined music as a prolific source of allegation of potential nuisance, so this was increasingly an area that WRS had to work on.

The Director of WRS also reminded Members that, at the meeting of the Board on 26th September 2024, Members had received a report on 'Operation Lisbon 2 : Dog Breeding'. This report detailed that the primary purpose of the operation was to assess the people, businesses, and locations associated with unlicensed dog breeding. The report further highlighted that the total value of the adverts listed was more than £7 million across Shropshire and Worcestershire, with over £4 million of that in our county. The level of stray dogs was high, which included dogs that were not micro-chipped or micro-chipped dogs where the recorded information was incorrect. The statutory retention period for strays created significant kennelling costs for the partners. So, all these elements were reasons for making this a priority. Members were further informed that the Technical Services Manager, WRS, was currently developing a piece of project work, which he hoped may be reported to the next meeting of the Board.

Members further questioned if more could be done with communications, vets and kennel clubs. Lobby for changes in the law.

The Director of WRS commented that Members had as much influence as WRS for changes in the law. WRS would continue to deal with enforcement and would be developing activities to tackling some of the

micro-chipping issues and continue to focus on dog breeding visits and checks.

The Licensing and Support Services Manager, WRS, further explained that she sat on a number of national animal health and animal licensing/welfare groups, along with vets and other representatives. She would reassure Members that animal welfare was paramount in those conversations with officials. WRS had a very experienced animal licensing officer who conducted the checks on commercial dog breeders and kennels who held local authority licenses or anyone applying for such a licence. These checks were very robust.

The Director of WRS further commented that the work of the Technical Services Manager, WRS, involved a lot of communications on these aspects.

Members further queried Animal Health and rapidly spreading diseases not being included in the Risk Assessment, and questions were raised on the recent outbreak of bird flu and keeping captive birds.

The Director of WRS explained that he was a member of the Worcestershire Tactical Control Group and was part of the county-wide emergency response protocols for partners. However, the lead partner for notifiable diseases in animals would be Worcestershire County Council (WCC) Trading Standards, and for human diseases County Council Public Health and not the district councils. District Councils had very little formal involvement in notifiable animal disease outbreak control. However, WRS would work with and assist WCC Public Health, with any human disease outbreaks as they did during the pandemic, and as part of their normal response to things like food poisoning outbreaks and similar diseases. Members were correct in that you had to register as a keeper with DEFRA even if you only kept one captive bird outside your property in an aviary or similar arrangement. You were not required to register for birds kept permanently in your home.

The Director of WRS further agreed to provide information to Councillor K. Taylor on the Captive Birds new legislation and restrictions.

The Director of WRS responded to further questions on:-

- The work carried out with Muller Dairies and Timpsons, and in doing so also briefly explained about the Primary Authority Partnerships.

- Consultation and Engagement – explaining officers aimed to get out approximately 100 a month, there had been a drastic fall in the return rate. Officers were looking at different ways to engage, sending out paper surveys, electronic surveys. Responses were really difficult, and officers had questioned if maybe people felt bombarded in general with being asked to complete surveys / questionnaires.

The Director of WRS agreed to provide Councillor T. Onslow with information on how many surveys were sent out and what the response rate was for last year.

A comment was made with regard to taxi enforcement and district specific breakdown of information. The Director of WRS agreed to note this for future reference and to look at including a broader outline on taxi enforcement.

Members also briefly questioned the process for producing the service plan and if WRS staff had been involved and if senior officers in the partner authorities had been consulted with.

The Director of WRS stated that staff were engaged with further down the line on what needed to be done. The Partner Officers from each partner authority on the Board however were not directly engaged with, but officers from the partner authorities whose assistance was needed for particular activities would be contacted for support.

Members thanked the Director of WRS and officers for a very useful document and looked forward to their comments being noted and included in the future.

RESOLVED that the Board

(i) approve the WRS Service Plan for 2025/6; and

(ii) specifically note the level of work to be undertaken by the service this year in relation to the partners' roles as local food authorities.

35/24

ACTIVITY AND PERFORMANCE DATA QUARTER 3 2024/25

The Environmental Health & Trading Standards Manager presented the Activity and Performance Data, Quarter 3 2024/2025 report, and in doing so the following key points were highlighted: -

Activity Data

The number of Food Safety cases logged in our system in the first three quarters of 2024/5 represented a fall of 11% compared to 2022/23 and a reduction of 2% compared to 2023/24. Most service requests tended to be enquiries, including requests for business advice, rather than complaints. Of the 357 actual food complaints received during the period, 69% were related to issues with food products (such as poor-quality food or food containing a foreign object,) whilst 31% were related to alleged poor hygiene standards or practices at food businesses. In relation to these latter cases, it was seldom that they resulted in action as, even if standards had slipped, they seldom meant a business scored less than 3 on the Food Hygiene Rating System, so were still making safe food.

Quarter 3 saw health and safety work generally following trends, although the actual case number in the quarter fell slightly compared to the previous two. The number of cases received between 1st April and 31st December 2024 represented a fall of 11% compared to 2022/23 but an increase of 4% compared to 2023/24.

Licensing application numbers during Q3 and 4 generally fell compared to Q2 figures and this year had continued this trend. Complaints and enquiries fell during Q3 compared to Q2, but overall, they probably remained on trend. The overall number of cases received between 1st April and 31st December 2024 represents an increase of 4% compared to 2022/23 but this was consistent with 2023/24. In terms of the breakdown between application work and complaint/ enquiry work, around 65% of cases consisted of applications and registrations, with the remainder being the complaints and enquiries. Some 30% of applications related to private hire or hackney carriage vehicles and a further 27% were temporary event notices.

As with other areas of work, the service received a higher number of enquiries, such as queries about regulations, by-laws, and licence conditions compared with what might be described as complaints involving licensed businesses or individuals. Looking at the latter, during this financial year so far, some 41% of complaints related to taxi licensing (such as reports of poor driver behaviour, unauthorised parking, or poor driving standards,) with 17% related to alcohol licensing (business allegedly breaching the four licensing objectives). A further 10% of complaints related to animal licensing with most cases relating to the unlicensed breeding and/or sale of dogs.

Planning enquiries in Quarter 3 continued the upward trend previously described. The number of cases received to the end of quarter 3 represented an increase of 29% compared to 2022/23 and an increase of 18% compared to 2023/24. Around 89% of enquiries were consultations for air quality, contaminated land, or nuisances; and 1 in 4 enquiries were now processed (on a contractual basis) on behalf of other local authorities as part of the service's income generation activities.

Members will see that the fall in nuisance complaints through quarter 3 mirrored previous seasonal patterns reflecting the poor weather in 2024/5. The number of cases received between 1st April and 31st December 2024 represented a reduction of 29% compared to 2022/23 and 22% compared to 2023/24. This was likely driven by poor weather. Approximately 90% of cases were reports of nuisances with around 43% of cases relating to noise from domestic properties (such as noise from barking dogs or noise from loud music). Other prominent nuisances commonly included noise from hospitality businesses, smoke from the burning of domestic or commercial waste, and dust from construction sites.

Performance

Quarter 3 was another more limited reporting period. The non-business customer measure at 58.6% but was slightly lower than at the same point last year (60.7%,) but slightly above the previous one (57.9%.) Whilst we saw reduced demand for nuisance work during the period, it seemed likely that problems in other areas of work like animal licensing may be reflected here. Response numbers also remained low with under 80 replies received from April to December. Having reviewed the data, the speed of addressing the issue and whether the overall outcome met expectations still needed improvement. The latter may need clear conversations at the beginning of the process as to the potential likelihood of being able to achieve the change someone wanted to see. Numbers who felt better equipped to deal with future issues at 54.2 % was slightly below the figures at the same point in the previous 2 years.

Business customer satisfaction had fallen slightly this quarter to 96.8% but was still well above last year's 92% at the same point in the year.

Overall numbers of compliant and non-compliant food businesses were at 98.3% and 1.7% respectively. This remained good and on a par with previous years.

The ratio of compliments to complaints remains good at 58 to 17.

Staff sickness had increased from 1.42 days per FTE to 2.94 days per FTE cumulative for the year. This was higher than last year but close to the level at the same point in the previous 2-years (2.44, 2.94). Whilst the cold and flu viruses appeared to be worse this year than last, over 36% of sickness fell into the long term (i.e., member of staff being off for 28 days plus,) so some of this was down to serious illness being suffered by one or two members of staff. Sickness also remained well below pre-pandemic levels with 2019/20 having 3.82, and 2018/19 having 3.26 days per FTE at the same point in the year.

The Director of WRS, responded to questions from Members with regards to customer satisfaction, and in doing so commented that a lot of customer dissatisfaction related to noise nuisance, some of which were not always a statutory nuisance under legislation. The law did not always meet public expectation, so not everyone was happy with the outcome of noise nuisance complaints. There had also been an increase in service complaints with regards to animal licensing, where businesses were not happy with what they were expected to do to comply.

As highlighted in the report, the increase in staff sickness was in part due to a small number of staff on long term sickness due to serious illness.

Councillor K. Holmes, Worcester City Council asked for it to be noted that Cathedral Ward had now been split into two new wards, named Fort Royal and Cathedral. The Director of WRS noted this and agreed that officers would make this change in future reports.

In response to a question on the Homes for Ukraine team meeting with an external Mental Health team, the Director of WRS explained that WRS officers acted in a liaison role for Bromsgrove District and Redditch Borough Councils working with other colleagues to support guests on the Homes for Ukraine initiative. WRS did not deliver mental health support they acted in a signposting role.

Officers responded to several general questions on: -

- Dogs euthanasia, had this increased or stabilised? WRS general policy on dog euthanasia.
- Noise issues and legislation, whereby the public struggled to understand current legislation with regard to statutory nuisance.
- Taxi Licensing fees in Wyre Forest compared to other partner authorities' fees.

RESOLVED that the Activity and Performance Data Quarter 3 2024/25, be noted and that Members use the contents of the report in their own reporting back to their respective partner authority.

36/24

PROGRESS REPORT ON THE AUTOMATION PROJECT

The Licensing and Support Services Manager, Worcestershire Regulatory Services (WRS) provided Members with an update on the Automation Project.

Members were informed that the Temporary Events Notice (TEN) form went live for all 6 districts in Worcestershire in September 2024 and that the team had continued to monitoring progress closely since its launch. The shift to moving online continued to rise with very few queries or challenges.

The following forms were now complete and were all in the final testing stages ready to launch: -

1. Personal Licence Applications
2. Premises Licence Applications
 - Application to vary a Premises Licence
 - Application to vary a DPS
 - Application form to transfer a Premises Licence

The next set of forms to be created and tested would be: -

3. Animal Licensing Applications
4. Pavement Licensing
5. Taxi Applications

Whilst the animal licensing and pavement licensing forms were being created, the team would look to form a plan of engagement with the taxi trade, as officers would like to do as much testing with the trade and operators to ensure that there were champions in each district. The formulation of the guidance and FAQs on the WRS website would be critical to ensure a smooth transition therefore engaging with this group was crucial.

With regards to the Taxi ID Cards, the three teams involved in this project (MyTAG, IDOX and Wyre Forest IT) were working together to ensure that there was no risk to the service when data was exposed outside of the environment (when enabling remote access to the IDOX

database). Although these cards were used by other public sector services such as the NHS and the police, they had not been used by any other local authority in the country, so there needed to be assurances that this could be delivered with no risk to the Councils services.

The Chairman commented that this was great work and leading in the right direction.

In response to a query as to the public benefits, the Licensing and Support Services Manager, WRS, briefly explained that this enabled forms to be completed online, whereby previously such forms would be submitted via email or in the post and, once received, officers would have to manually input the data (from the received forms) onto the WRS database, which was very time consuming. Whilst the drive would be to have more forms completed on-line, should anyone be unable to complete an online form, officers would still assist them.

Councillor K. Holmes, Worcester City Council commented that she had tried the system during the testing period, and was shocked that prior to online forms, that officers had had to manually input the data. She had welcomed the change.

In response to a query on the Taxi ID Cards and the benefits for the public, Members were informed that; the travelling public using taxis would be able to enter a taxi and scan the driver's Taxi ID Card, to check that the driver's licence was valid (had not been suspended or revoked). Passengers would be able to report any issues found whilst scanning a Taxi ID Card to Licensing WRS, and officers would be able to deal with this as soon as was practicable given the potential seriousness of this.

RESOLVED that the Progress Report on the Automation Project be noted.

37/24

URGENT BUSINESS

There was no Urgent Business on this occasion.

The meeting closed at 5.54 p.m.

Chairman



WRS Board
26th June 2025

WORCESTERSHIRE REGULATORY SERVICES REVENUE MONITORING APRIL – MARCH 2025 & ANNUAL RETURN

Recommendation

It is recommended that the Board:

1.1 Note the final financial position for the period April – March 2025

1.2 Approve that the 2024/5 surplus of £54,227 be added to the WRS reserve, to assist with addressing any upcoming cost pressures. If not approved the surplus balance will be refunded to partners.

Contribution to Priorities

The robust financial management arrangements ensure the priorities of the service can be delivered effectively.

Introduction/Summary

This report presents the final financial position for Worcestershire Regulatory Services for the period April – March 2025. In addition, a number of financial statements are appended to this report.

Background

During the financial year, quarterly financial reports are presented for consideration by the Partners and the Joint Board.

Report

The following reports are included for Board's Attention:

- Revenue Monitoring Statement 2024/25 - Appendix 1
- Annual Statement 2024/25 - Appendix 2
- Annual Statement Analysis 2024/25 – Appendix 3
- WRS Income Analysis 2024/25 – Appendix 4
- Reserve Statement – Appendix 5

Revenue Monitoring

The detailed revenue report is attached at Appendix 1. This shows a final outturn surplus of £54k, this represents 1.3% of the actual budget and is due to:-

- Agency staff costs incurred due to backfilling of staff working on other contractual work e.g., food recovery programme, contaminated land & work for other local authorities, these costs are covered by vacant posts & income generation.
- WRS had another successful year and has over achieved the budgeted income by £512k, a breakdown of all income is shown in Appendix 4
- As requested by the Board Appendix 1 details explanations relating to the variances.
- The pest control 2024/25 outturn figure to be funded by partners is £24,110, as per below:

Redditch Borough Council	£10,267
Wychavon District Council	£13,843

This income is included in the income outturn figure.

- The bereavements 2024/25 outturn figure to be funded by partners is £24,624 as per below:

Bromsgrove District Council	£4,961
Malvern Hills District Council	£9,582
Redditch Borough Council	£6,999
Worcester City Council	£800
Wychavon District Council	£2,282

This income is included in the income outturn figure.

- The Technical Officers to be funded by partners for 2024/25 is shown below:-

Technical Officer for Animal Activity	
Bromsgrove District Council	£8,949

Malvern Hills District Council	£6,960
Redditch Borough Council	£1,989
Worcester City Council	£3,181
Wychavon District Council	£15,511
Wyre Forest District Council	£9,148

Technical Officer for Gull Control	
Worcester City Council	£34,700

This income is included in the income outturn figure.

- It is requested that the final outturn surplus amount of £54,227 be added to the WRS reserves, to assist with any upcoming cost pressures. If this request is rejected the surplus will be refunded to partners.
- Any grant funded expenditure is shown separate to the core service costs as this is not funded by the participating Councils.

All partners have been advised of all recharges and refunds for completion of their statement of accounts.

Financial Implications

None other than those stated in the report

Sustainability

None as a direct result of this report

Contact Points

Bob Watson – bob.watson@bromsgroveandredditch.gov.uk

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WRS - Profit & Loss Report 2024/25
Total WRS Final Outturn 2024-25

Append 1

	Revised Full Year Budget 24-25	Committed Expenditure Apr - Mar 25	Variance	Comments
	£	£	£	
Direct Expenditure				
Employees				
Salary	4,179	3,783	-396	Covered by income generation from Ukrainian work £131k & Planning Enforcement Work
Agency Staff	0	519	519	Covered by vacancy management savings and income generation work, including work for other local authorities
Employee Insurance	21	33	13	
Sub-Total - Employees	4,200	4,335	136	
Premises				
Rent / Hire of Premise	79	78	-1	
Cleaning	1	0	-0	
Utilities	0	0	0	
Sub-Total - Premises	80	79	-1	
Transport				
Vehicle Hire	13	4	-8	
Vehicle Fuel	8	7	-1	
Road Fund Tax	1	1	-0	
Vehicle Insurance	5	7	2	
Vehicle Maintenance	3	2	-1	
Car Allowances	62	49	-14	Changed work patterns and better allocation of activities are helping with downward pressure on costs.
Sub-Total - Transport	92	69	-22	
Supplies and Services				
Furniture & Equipment	44	53	8	
Clothes, uniforms and laundry	2	2	0	
Printing & Photocopying	17	11	-6	
Postage	11	14	3	
ICT	79	143	65	Victoria Forms Maint £46k, Digital Id licences for Taxi's £12k
Telephones	40	31	-9	
Training & Seminars	34	19	-15	The service is large enough to bring in trainers to reduce the cost of maintaining competence. On-going training for the new staff may see spend next year increase.
Insurance	16	12	-4	
Third Party Payments	203	203	-0	£129k BDC hosting / £74k WFDC ICT hosting.
Sub-Total - Supplies & Service	445	488	42	
Contractors				
Dog Warden	121	379	258	Additional contractors due to new contracts, recovered in income
Pest Control	73	82	10	This is overspend within pest control, funded by Redditch & Wychavon and shown in income
Taxi / Alcohol / & Other Licensing	72	56	-16	Less reliance on contracted capacity e.g. vets £10k saving, this saving is reflected in reduced income
Other contractors/consultants	3	32	29	Includes Aqueduct Stables Clearance of £24k, this cost was recovered by BDC & shown in income
Water Safety	5	6	1	
Food Safety	1	0	-1	
Environmental Protection	12	35	23	
Grants / Subscriptions	13	14	2	Bereavements recovered in income
Advertising, Publicity and Promotion	6	2	-3	
Sub-Total	304	606	302	
Income				
Training Courses / Bereavement / Works in Default / Sewer Baiting etc	-1,001	-1,513	-512	See append 4
Sub-Total	-1,001	-1,513	-512	
Net Surplus - 24-25	4,119	4,064	-55	

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Worcestershire Regulatory Services
Annual Return For Year Ended 31st March 2025

Accounting Statement For Worcester Regulatory Services

	31st March 2024	31st March 2025
	£	£
1 Balances brought forward	592,369	344,707
2 (+) Income from local taxation and / or levy	0	0
3 (+) Total other receipts	4,991,150	5,577,781
4 (-) Staff costs	3,834,695	4,403,343
5 (-) Loan interest / capital repayments	0	0
6 (-) All other payments	1,318,041	1,175,731
7 Capital - Dog Vans	86,075	0
8 (=) Balances carried forward	344,707	343,414

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Worcestershire Regulatory Services - Annual Return**Regulatory Services Income received 24-25**

Income from Partners	£
Budget	4,119,030
Refund of Savings / Transfer to Reserves	-54,228
Pension Backfunding	37,100
Bereavement/ Public Burials	24,644
Pest Control Overspend - Wychavon & Redditch	24,110
Employee for Animal Activity	45,738
Additional Gull Work - Worcs City	34,700
Tameside - Subs to Anti Fraud Network - Worcs City	2,000
Agreed Reduction - Worcs City	30,000
Contaminated Land Work - Worcs City	13,000
HSE Report - Redditch	12,930
Idox support - Bromsgrove & Redditch	2,400
Planning Enforcement - Bromsgrove & Redditch	461,147
Aqueduct Stables - Bromsgrove	24,876
Ukrainian Support Work - Bromsgrove & Redditch	130,926
	4,908,374

Grant Income

	£
Severn Trent - Sewer Baiting	7,162
	7,162

Other Income

	£
Stray Dog Income	391,670
County - Mgmt / Admin / Legal etc	76,837
County - Safety at Sport Grounds	22,000
County - Petroleum Work	21,169
Planning Support Work	58,576
Contaminated Land Work	32,834
PPC Work	7,897
Primary Authority work	15,842
Training / Risk Assessments of Water Supplies / Burials etc	6,365
Vet Fee Inspection Costs Recovered	9,528
Food Training Courses / Certificates / Food Hygiene Rating	18,620
Licensing - Pre-App Advice	208
Victorian Fayre	700
	662,246

Total Box 3 Accounting Statement**5,577,781****Regulatory Services Employees 24-25**

Box 4	£
Employees Related Costs	4,403,343
	4,403,343

Regulatory Services Other Costs 24-25

Box 6	
Premise Related Cost	78,656
Transport Related Cost	20,617
Supplies & Service	1,076,458
	1,175,731

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Worcestershire Regulatory Services Income Received 24-25

Income from Partners	£
Budget	4,119,030
Transfer to Reserves / Refund of Savings	-54,228
Pension Backfunding	37,100
Bereavement / Public Burials	24,644
Pest Control - Wychavon & Redditch	24,110
Employee for Animal Activity	45,738
Employee for Additional Gull Work - Worcs City	34,700
Tameside - Subs to Anti Fraud Network - Worcs City	2,000
Technical Pollution Work - Worcs City	30,000
Contaminated Land Work - Worcs City	13,000
HSE Report - Redditch	12,930
Idox support - Bromsgrove & Redditch	2,400
Planning Enforcement - Bromsgrove & Redditch	461,147
Aqueduct Stables - Bromsgrove	24,876
Ukrainian Support Work - Bromsgrove & Redditch	130,926
	4,908,374
Grant Income	
Severn Trent - Sewer Baiting	7,162
	7,162
Other Income	
Stray Dog Income	391,670
Worcester County - Mgmt, Legal, Admin & Uniform Support	76,837
County - Safety at Sport Grounds	22,000
Planning Support Work	79,745
Contaminated Land Work	32,834
PPC Work	7,897
Primary Authority work	15,842
Training / Idox Support / Risk Assessments of Water Supplies / Burials etc	6,365
Vet Fee Inspection Costs Recovered	9,528
Food Training Courses / Certificates / Food Hygiene Rating / Pre-Opening / Victorian Fayre	19,528
	662,246
Total Income Apr - Mar 25	5,577,781
2024/25 Base Budget from Partners	-4,064,802
Total Income Excluding Budget	1,512,979

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Worcestershire Regulatory Services 24-25

Earmarked Reserve	Balance 1st April 2024	Transfers Out 2024/25	Transfers In 2024/25	Balance 31st March 2025
	£	£	£	£
Health & Well being related / Worcs Works Well	59,068			59,068
LEP	9,297			9,297
WRS General Reserve	126,124			126,124
Better Business For All	2,859			2,859
Brexit	40,000			40,000
Licensing	15,000			15,000
Make it Worcestershire	1,808			1,808
IT Enhancement Project	90,554	-1,295		89,259
Total Earmark Reserve	344,710	-1,295	0	343,415

Supporting Air Quality / Behavioural Change

Held for Worcestershire Food & Drink

Held for Region

Digital ID Card Project

OPSS funded project

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WRS Board

Date: 26th June 2025

Title: Worcestershire Regulatory Services Annual Report 2024/5

Recommendation

That the Board notes the Annual Report for 2024/5 and agree that a copy be forwarded to each Chief Executive of the 6 partner authorities and to the wider elected member base in their areas.

Contribution to Priorities

Not applicable

Summary

Under the Worcestershire Shared Services Partnership Service Level Agreement, the Head of Worcestershire Regulatory Services and the Lead Finance Officer for the host authority, Bromsgrove District Council, are required to submit to the Joint Board an annual report that covers the performance of the shared service and provides a summary of the finances. This report covers the period from 1st April 2024 to 31 March 2025. If endorsed by the Joint Board, a copy will be forwarded to each Chief Executive of each member authority, and the authors would request that members use their usual channels within their authorities to distribute the report to the wider elected member cohort.

Report

Under Clause 11 of Part 1 of the Shared Services Partnership Agreement, the Board is required to receive a report at its annual meeting which will be held no later than 30 June each year. The report covers the period from 1 April 2024 to 31 March 2025. The annual report is co-signed by the Head of Worcestershire Regulatory Services and the Lead Financial Officer for the Host Authority as required by the legal agreement.

The report covers the performance of the service for that period, both in terms of KPIs and highlights of activity, a short summary activity report appearing at Appendix 5, which we limit due to the detail that Board members will see in the Activity Data Report. Some detail of the performance indicators has also been covered by the Activity data.

Last year saw the continuation of what we might call the “post-covid normal,” levels of activity post pandemic. Previous years saw the

establishment of what might be regarded by many as the new patterns of behaviour and activity that the service will face for the foreseeable future.

The service continued to utilise some of the staff recruited during the pandemic to support work under contract to discharge the Homes 4 Ukraine support for Redditch and Bromsgrove, with support from experienced WRS managers, while several other former covid staff also feature in the planning enforcement and enviro-crime enforcement team.

Despite these additional commitments, performance has remained good in most areas. Food business compliance rates remain high. Taxi license renewals have been dealt with in a reasonable time in the main. The taxi fleet appears to be generally in good order, although the number of vehicles failing either when submitted to a garage for interim test or, to a lesser extent, whilst in-service remains higher than general rates pre-pandemic. This is almost certainly a result of the financial pressure on members of the trade due to the current cost of living pressures.

As with previous years, complaints against the service are significantly exceeded by compliments. Complaints arose across a number of service areas this year, rather than being focused in one or two. The main issues for complainants related to:

- Turn-around time for some licenses, despite generally good performance,
- Dissatisfaction from businesses with actions taken in relation to enforcement including areas like food hygiene, health and safety, and the control of animal activity licenses,
- Response to nuisance issues, especially where things don't meet the threshold for intervention.
- Occasional issues with the way dog issues were handled and a small number related to planning enforcement.

Non-business customer satisfaction was down on the last 2-year's figures at 56.7% compared to 59.2% and 60.4%. Further detail on this is provided in both the Annual Report itself and Activity Report. The range of areas for complaint was greater this year, with licensing featuring quite strongly, particularly with animal related businesses where inspection visits revealed significant failings with requirements. Whilst numbers of nuisance complaints were lower last summer, other pressures in the Community Environmental Health team meant that resources were still spread very thin.

Managers will continue to work to address this performance measure. The nature of the service is such that we will never be able to make everyone happy because a significant proportion of nuisance complaints will not amount to a statutory nuisance, but we know that we can improve our performance in this area.

Business satisfaction returned to usual levels at 97.1% compared with 94.6% last year, so unless we see otherwise, we are treating this as a blip.

The indicators for licensed premises and noise complaints have been in place long enough now for us to establish good baselines. This year all figures are at average or below, so significantly better than last year. We previously explained to members that, after pandemic lockdowns where hospitality premises were closed for long periods, the general tolerance of noise and similar activities from this type of premise seemed to have reduced, so as these businesses sought other activities and uses of their outside spaces to increase revenue, this made residents living in the vicinity unhappy. This situation appeared to be improving before last year's result; however, this year has shown a fall in issues. Perhaps we can assume for now that last year was a blip in the figures. Only time will tell. The weather last year for most of the summer and autumn was poor, which may help explain the figures too. It should be noted that this only records the level of accusations of breaches. We can confirm that there has not been an increase any kind of formal action, and the figures still show that most premises across the County are well run and controlled by their operators, with issues limited to a small minority.

The rate of noise complaint against population for all districts this year are reporting their lowest figures since the indicator was introduced. We know that last year saw a poor weather for a significant part of the year, which undoubtedly contributed to this. Overall, it still suggests that the environment for Worcestershire residents is good.

The Annual Report also gives a summary of the financial position, the key achievements and covers issues relating to human resources. There are also sections on risk management and equalities. The Report will be published on the WRS website and will be shared with other partners e.g., Worcestershire LEP. Putting the report into the public domain meets the requirement in the Regulators Code, made under the Regulatory Enforcement and Sanctions Act 2008, which requires local authorities to publish summary information about their regulatory activities each year.

Financial Implications

The financial implications are contained within the Annual Report.

Contact Points

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Background Papers

WRS Annual Report 2024/5

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ANNUAL REPORT

2024/25

Making Worcestershire a healthy, safe and a fair place to live where legitimate businesses can thrive

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INTRODUCTION

This Annual Report has been produced for the Joint Board in accordance with clause 11.1 of Part 1 of the Worcestershire Shared Services Partnership Agreement. The report covers the progress and performance of Worcestershire Regulatory Services (WRS) for the period 1st of April 2024 up to the 31st of March 2025 and reports operational activity by the relevant service elements for the financial year. The report summarises key performance data for WRS and provides a summary of the financial position. The report also meets the requirement of the Regulators Code, which requires local authorities to publish a summary of their regulatory activities on an annual basis.

The year 2024/5 continued to show that we are now beyond the pandemic period and a new normal level of activity has been established. Demand remained high, although another indifferent Summer meant that nuisance levels were lower than previous years. However, public expectation around how local authority activity could influence the local environment remains high and often exceeds what the law can deliver. Work continued with the development of work to support air quality action plans which progress through relevant member forums at the partners. The Food Standards Agency continued to take an interest in the service and progress on increasing the volume of food visits being undertaken to our lower risk business cohort.

Our key strategic priorities, which had been in place for 2-years shaped our tactical approach to the key cross cutting issues identified in the strategic assessment, which were:

- Supporting a safe and vibrant night-time economy
- Promoting the responsible sale, breeding, and ownership of dogs
- Promoting safe and clean communities

The team continued to support legitimate businesses and residents, particularly the vulnerable, where we were able and at the same time, we tackled those who broke the law, ignored best practice, or adversely impact the local environment and the ability of others to enjoy it. Central to this approach remained the availability of accurate data and intelligence sharing. Our intelligence and performance unit coordinated, and analysed intelligence obtained by WRS officers and external agencies, helping managers to target WRS resources more effectively and to forge links with other enforcement agencies and partners to share intelligence and target enforcement action. This is becoming more and more embedded at the heart of what we do.

Simon Wilkes
Head of Regulatory Services

Bob Watson
S151 Officer and Deputy CEO Bromsgrove DC/ Redditch BC

1. PERFORMANCE, PERFORMANCE-MANAGEMENT & AUDIT

Performance reporting remains underpinned by the IDOX UNiform management information system, providing Joint Board members with a clear picture of the work being undertaken by WRS. Our key performance measures previously agreed with the Board, continue to focus on a range of outputs and outcomes that should give confidence in the service. Previous year's results appear in brackets in the relevant box, with most recent previous year first, providing a comparative view of performance over time. Members are reminded that the recent past is coloured by the pandemic so figures from 2020/21 to at least 2022/3 are likely to be difficult to compare with earlier years.

	Measure	Figure	Commentary
1	% of service requests where resolution is achieved to non-business customers satisfaction	56.7% , (60.4, 59.2, 61.6, 74, 69.5, 63.0. 75.4, 78.9, 78.2, 77.4)	Based on an average score for 6 questions relating to the interaction of the service with non-business customers. 60.9% found their contact with WRS helpful, up from 63.5% last year but below the previous year's 65.8/ 63.5% respectively. 75.6% found the information and advice provided easy to use, slightly above the 71.7/ 72% from the previous two years. As with last year, 56.3% felt that the length of time to address their problem was satisfactory, slightly down on the last 2-years (57.7%) but better than the 54.5% in the year previous to these. Only 56.3% of responded felt that the speed of first response was good, down on the 66.9% and 65.1% in the last 2-years respectively. However, only in 38.7% of cases were officers able to resolve the issues to the satisfaction of those who responded to the survey, which will always lead to worse figures. Managers will continue to look at how to improve performance in a number of these areas and continue to try to manage public expectations around what is achievable with nuisance issues as many of these will never be resolved to the satisfaction of the complainant. Response rates were worse this year than previous with only 104 responses, compared to 161 and 138 in the previous 2-years, neither of which is good. Literally hundreds of requests for responses (over 700,) a mix of digital and paper questionnaires were sent out, but it is very difficult to get replies.

2	% of service requests where resolution is achieved to business customers satisfaction	97.1% , (94.6, 98.1, 98.2 98.4, 97.4, 97.2, 97.7, 97.1 97.9, 97)	Based on an average score for 9 questions relating to the interaction of the service with business customers. This year saw fewer numbers of returns than previous years, (246 compared to 271 and 352 the previous two years). This is out of 3360 who were asked for a response. Of those who responded, 96.6% (95%/ 98.3%/ 97.7% last 3-years,) felt that their business had been treated fairly and 97.5% (96%/ 98.6%/ 98.5% last 3-years,) of customers felt staff were polite in their dealings with them and informative. Some 98.5% (94.1%, 98.3, 98.7% last 3-years,) of customers found the information and advice we provided easy to understand and 97.7% (93.8%, 97.9/ 98.1% last 3-years,) found their interaction with us helpful. 94.9% (91.2%/ 96%/ 96.7% last 3-years,) were happy with the speed of our responses and, of those who made enquiries rather than being visited, 96.5% (92.5%/ 96.3%/ 97.3% last 3-years,) were satisfied with the response. Last year we were a little puzzled by the results, all of which were slightly lower than in previous years but with no obvious reason behind that such as a change to management practice and approach, or the information provided. On the face of it, this does appear to have been a blip, and results are back to previous levels.
3	% Food businesses broadly compliant at first assessment/ inspection	<p>Bromsgrove 99.2% (99.4, 99.3, 99.3, 98.4, 97.1, 97.2,)</p> <p>Malvern Hills 98% (98.2, 97.8, 98.4, 98.6, 98.1, 97.2,)</p> <p>Redditch 97.7% (98.2, 97.1, 97.5, 97.6, 95.6, 96.0,)</p> <p>Worcester City 99.2% (99.2, 99.0, 98.4, 98.4, 97.5, 98.0,)</p> <p>Wychavon 98.3% (98.2, 97.6, 98.2, 99.2, 98.0, 97.4,)</p> <p>Wyre Forest 97.6% (97.8, 98.5, 98.6, 98.2, 98.1, 97.7,)</p> <p>Worcestershire 98.4% (98.5, 98.3, 98.5, 98.5, 97.5, 97.3,)</p>	<p>The figures demonstrate the high levels of compliance generally of our food businesses. They are mainly well-run and responsive to any issues in relation to hygiene and protecting the health of customers.</p> <p>The wider interaction with lower risk businesses allowed for by the additional resource allocated by the partners has had no appreciable impact on the figures, suggesting that these premises too show good compliance levels.</p>

4	% of food businesses scoring 0,1 or 2 at 1 st April each year	<p>Bromsgrove 0.8% (0.6, 0.7, 0.7, 1.4, 2.9, 3.6, 1.3,) Malvern Hills 2.0% (1.8, 2.2, 1.6, 1.6, 1.9, 2.8, 3.0,) Redditch 2.3% (1.8, 2.9, 2.5, 2.4, 4.4, 5.1, 3.3,) Worcester City 0.8% (0.8, 1.0, 1.6, 1.6, 2.5, 2.2, 2.0,) Wychavon 1.7% (1.2, 2.4, 1.8, 0.8, 2.0, 3.0, 2.2,) Wyre Forest 2.4% (2.2, 1.5, 1.4, 1.8, 1.9, 2.4, 2.8,) Worcestershire 1.6% (1.5, 1.7, 1.5, 1.5, 2.7, 2.7, 2.4,)</p>	Food premises scoring 2 or below on the Food Hygiene Rating System are deemed to be at risk of not producing safe food and are subject to further intervention until such time as they meet requirements or face formal action. There are only small numbers of these in each district.
5	% of drivers licence renewal applications issued within 5 working days of receipt of a complete application	<p>97.5% (96.8, 97.5, 97.6, 96.9, 75.2, 91.4,)</p>	This measure was introduced in 2017/18 and looks at how quickly driver licenses are renewed. This is one of the licensing processes where generally no additional paperwork is required before someone is re-licensed so generally this is one where the WRS team is in most control over timescales. This measure is like that achieved in previous years.
6	% of vehicles found to be defective whilst in service	<p>54 vehicles, 3.3% Of 1647 vehicles on the road county-wide</p> <p>(4.2%, 5.4, 4%, 0.39%, 3.6%, 2.8%, 2.2%, 2.4%)</p> <p>NB: Figure in bold is from 2020/21 when council garages and others used for testing vehicles were closed for much of the year and no proactive enforcement monitoring took place.</p>	This figure is lower than the last 3 year's (70, 84 and 59 respectively,) so a welcome improvement. Focusing on the percentage is probably better as total number of vehicles can vary slightly year to year. Previous to this year, rates appeared to be slightly higher than in previous years and is probably a reflection of the wider impacts of the cost-of-living on members of the trade. The overall result is probably a useful reminder to members that taxi vehicles travel a great deal further each year than domestic vehicles and therefore require significantly more upkeep to keep them in a good and safe condition. This will create financial pressures within the trade, but the safety of the travelling public must remain paramount for the local licensing authority.

7	% of service requests where customer indicates they feel better equipped to deal with issues themselves in future	53.4% (56.6, 57.0, 58.5, 58.8, 68.2, 58.1, 59, 72.5, 73.8, 76.8, 74.2)	This focuses on non-business customers. It is a specific question asked to members of the public in the questionnaire to test if the information and support provided to them by WRS is likely to help them deal with their own problems in the future. The measure has been lowered for a number of years, reflecting the lower performance overall on non-business customer satisfaction.
8	Review of register of complaints and compliments	22 complaints (26, 28, 25, 42, 44, 27, 25, 31, 17, 24, 47, 70) 69 compliments (121, 116, 134, 161, 163, 128, 138, 103, 51, 57, 36, 24)	This is our longest running performance indicator in this format, hence the long list of previous year's figures. This year's figures are like previous years. Complaints related to issues with responses to nuisance problems and some in relation to turnaround of licenses, with one related to a change in policy. This is also the first year where the work on planning and enviro-crime for Redditch and Bromsgrove features in the figures.
9	Staff sickness absence at public sector average or better	4.31 days per FTE (3.07, 2.93, 5.2, 1.9, 4.4, 4.12, 12.45, 5.95, 2.3, 3.9, 7.7, 9.5)	Sickness in the team was slightly above last year and several previous years, still well below the recent peak year at 5.2, although above the average for the last 6 years (3.60 days/FTE.) 53.7% of this year's sickness was classed as long-term (absence for a period exceeding 28 days,) and driven by a small number of people dealing with serious health conditions. Short term sickness accounts for just under 2-days per FTE.
10	% of staff who are satisfied with working for WRS	90.5% 94, 92, 97.5%, 93.5%, 98%, 88%, (NB: Annual figures for 2017/18 and before, 80%, 85%, 77%, 82%)	63 responses were received from the staff cohort, which currently numbers around 85. As ever, some did not respond to all the questions. This score for this measure is based on those who scored 5/10 or better for the question in the staff survey which asked, are you satisfied with working with WRS (score is from 0 to 10.) Some 74.6% (47/63,) scored this question at 8/10 or higher. Due to current time constraints, we have yet to do more detailed analysis of broader staff comments, but it is good to know that many are happy working for the service.
11	% of licensed businesses subject to allegations of not upholding the 4 licensing objectives	Bromsgrove 6.8% (9.9, 7.2, 5.9, 5.4, 6.8, 8.7, 6.73,) Malvern Hills 5.1%	Linked to the Crime & Disorder agenda and introduced following discussions with elected members, this measure is now in its tenth year, although only eight years results

		<p>(5.8, 4.1, 5.1, 3.5, 5.7, 4.8, 4.94,) Redditch 5.2% (8.7 8.1, 9.5, 8.3, 8.5, 7.1 8.65,) Worcester City 6.7% (13.8, 8.5, 10.0, 5.7, 8.8, 8.1, 8.19,) Wychavon 4.3% (6.2, 8.2, 6.3, 3.7, 4.2, 4.0, 4.97,) Wyre Forest 8.3% (9.1, 9.4, 9.1, 5.1, 8.5, 7.0, 8.29,) Worcestershire 6.0% (8.8, 7.6, 7.5, 5.0, 6.8, 6.4, 6.78,)</p>	<p>appear in the table. This year all figures are at average or below, so significantly better than last year. We previously explained to members that, after pandemic lockdowns where hospitality premises were closed for long periods, the general tolerance of noise and similar activities from this type of premise seemed to have reduced, so as these businesses sought other activities and uses of their outside spaces to increase revenue, this made residents living in the vicinity unhappy. This situation appeared to be improving before last year's results, however perhaps we can assume that last year was a blip in the figures. Only time will tell. The weather last year for most of the summer and autumn was relatively poor, which may help explain the figures too. It should be noted that this only records the level of accusations of breaches, and we can confirm that there has not been an increase any kind of formal action. It still shows that 90% plus of premises across the County are well run and controlled by their operators, and we know from interactions with Police and Trading Standards colleagues that concerns tend to be limited to smaller numbers of premises.</p>
12	Rate of noise complaint per 1000 head of population	<p>Bromsgrove 1.93 (2.19, 2.26, 2.25, 2.56, 1.96, 2.7, 2.82, 3.0, 2.7, 3.1) Malvern Hills 1.62 (1.91, 1.93, 2.29, 2.45, 2.07, 2.2, 2.39, 3.0, 2.3, 3.9) Redditch 1.89 (2.45, 3.09, 3.61, 3.67, 2.97, 3.2, 3.61, 4.1, 3.7, 3.5) Worcester City 2.03 (2.86, 3.40, 3.47, 3.1, 2.78, 3.2, 3.13, 4.2, 4.0, 2.9) Wychavon 1.75 (2.04, 2.07, 2.45, 2.08, 2.01, 2.1, 2.46, 2.7, 2.6, 2.5) Wyre Forest 2.04</p>	<p>The rate for all districts this year are reporting their lowest figures since the indicator was introduced. We know that last year saw a poor weather for a significant part of the year, which undoubtedly contributed to this. These figures are probably the best example so far of external impacts for the work of the service.</p> <p>Domestic noise represents more than half of complaints and, as we have illuded to in Activity Data Reports, noise from dogs and from audio devices remain key drivers of this. With commercial premises it tends to be a small number of these that certain residents have concerns about, and things like a change of DPS in a pub and the business looking at more diverse ways of bringing in revenue can lead to friction with the local community.</p>

		(2.29, 2.75, 2.65, 2.71, 2.37, 2.6, 3.23, 3.4, 3.0, 3.0) Worcestershire 1.89 (2.33, 2.57, 2.9, 2.74, 2.35, 2.7, 2.93, 3.4, 3.1, 3.8)	1,128 noise cases were received during 2024/25 (315 fewer than the previous year), with 702 cases (or 62%) relating to noise from domestic properties.
13	Total Income	£668,806, which is 22.17% as a proportion of the 2016/17 revenue budget figure (£3,017,000) and 16.23% of the current net revenue budget of £4,119,000	This figure does not include the income for work derived from partners like the Homes 4 Ukraine work or other work for the six partners. This is purely money raised from outside of the partnership.
14	Cost of regulatory services per head of population.	Based on outrun cost of £4,064.802 against the County's most recent population estimate of 613680 in 2023, the service cost is: £6.62 per head	This is the amount spent by the partners following the off-setting of cost with income, then divided by the most recent mid-year estimate the County Council provides on the population estimates pages of its website. It is difficult to benchmark this figure with other authorities as WRS functions are not all of those reported in the relevant part of the RO return to DLUHC.

The WRS management team is committed to driving performance forward so that a high standard of service delivery can be maintained. As can be seen from the figures above, the continuing challenge for the service is to improve the perception of non-business customers have of our performance, so this will be an on-going key task going forward. Management team meetings are used to review performance against the service plan and to highlight any issues of concern. Principal Officers (first line managers) attend these wider management meetings to ensure a two-way flow of information between management and staff. Separately, the Head of Service and Team Managers meet weekly to ensure everything is kept under review. Teams have their own detailed plans that sit below the service plan signed off by Joint Board. Progress against this is monitored by Team Managers and Principal Officers. The Management team also looks to the strategic direction of the service and ensures that the operational and financial resources available to partners are used in the most efficient manner to achieve both their individual strategic aims together with WRS priorities.

Whilst our Uniform IT platform is a little old and clunky, it operates reasonably well across functions and continued refinement ensures our ability to report to Joint Board on our performance measures in an accurate way. Consideration was given to replacement of the system some time ago but, in the current financial climate, this is cost-prohibitive when we have a system in place that does the job, albeit has its limitations. The process of Local Government Reorganisation probably reinforces this decision. The service also subscribes to the national IDB intelligence database, enabling it to share intelligence with other local authorities in the region and nationally so that common issues and individual entities active across local authority borders can be identified and work to deal with them co-ordinated. MHCLG has been looking to encourage the broader use of the system, especially at district council level, and has been funding access for district council Housing Standards teams

to help them better engage with colleagues in Trading Standards services where enforcement responsibility for estate agency, tenant fees and energy efficiency of buildings sits.

There are a wide range of bodies to which the service must report data (e.g., Food Standards Agency, Department of the Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, Health and Safety Executive, Department for Business, Innovation and Skills, Gambling Commission etc.). All statutory reports are submitted to ensure that WRS continues to meet its partner's statutory obligations. It was hoped that the central bodies would accept a single data return for all partners, but it now appears that all Departments except for the Health and Safety Executive continue to require individual returns for each partner. WRS provides these as necessary.

A short summary of activity data is included at Appendix 4 to avoid duplication with the wider and more detailed set of activity data that is provided in the final Activity Data Report for 2023/4, which members will receive at the same meeting where this Annual Report is presented.

There was no engagement with Internal Audit beyond support for the implementation of the automation project that utilises the Victoria Forms product to allow the submission of on-line service requests and license applications that are automatically put into the back-office Uniform database to reduce inputting.

2.0 SERVICE DELIVERY HIGHLIGHTS

COMMUNITY ENVIRONMENTAL HEALTH

Food Safety: The routine food hygiene intervention programme commenced with support from contractors while the recruitment process for the 5 new food safety officers agreed by the Board commenced to support this work. This was a key priority as we not only have our 2024-2025 businesses to inspect but also some 600 existing and new premises outstanding from 2023-2024. The latter have been risk assessed to ensure that we focus resources on the highest risk businesses.

Interviews for the recruitment of five new officers were successful. Three additional Regulatory Support Officers (RSO) joined us in September. They come from diverse backgrounds, including travel, retail and teaching. One is also a fluent Chinese speaker. As WRS continue to lead the way in developing this RSO role our Principal Officer (Food) developed a specific training programme to ensure they were 'competent' to deal with low-risk premises as required by the Food Law Code of Practice. Job offers were also made for two Technical Officer posts in food safety, and another to fill the vacancy in noise/pollution work.

We continued as ever to undertake routine inspections completing 3513 interventions during the year, of which 1978 were inspection and 1235 information and intelligence gathering activities. The inspection programme resulted in only 3 appeals against the Food Hygiene Rating System score given by officers and 55 premises requires a paid-for re-rating visit once any remedial work had been done. Compliance continued to be very high, with over 90% of premises achieving Food Hygiene Rating System (FHRS) scores for of Level 4-5. Level 3 is considered to demonstrate that premises are broadly compliant with the law, so these premises exceed the statutory requirements. As always officers continued to find poor premises where more formal action is required. Whilst numbers have remained small, there did appear to be a slightly upwards trend in premises dropping in their FHRS rating slightly, although few dropped below the Level 3, where they were making safe food.

Failure to have a documented system, poor cleaning, lack of training and inadequate pest control were the main reasons where conditions were sufficiently poor to give a low rating.

On food cases, Worcestershire has several growers who supply the major sandwich producers who were identified as a possible source in relation to the Food Standards Agency's continuing national E Coli investigation. All the Worcestershire businesses involved co-operated fully in providing the information requested.

Officers investigated complaints that chocolate Easter eggs at a major retailer that were found to have been nibbled by mice. This resulted a file being submitted to Wyre Forest and the case is currently going through the Court process as this is not the first time this retail chain has had this issue in one of its outlets.

We were also involved in several national initiatives including a traceability exercise on imported meat products led by the National Food Crime Unit. We worked closely with Trading Standards colleagues at the County Council on the latter as it often involved poor labelling. It is a legal requirement that food is labelled in English. In one case officers had to use an interpreter as none of the items found could be identified. The operation led to food being removed from the market.

One persistently non-compliant premises (a bakery in Malvern) where the food business operator has shown reluctance over an extended period to make the serious improvements needed is currently going through the formal legal process. A prosecution file was submitted for consideration by Malvern Hills District Council Legal team.

Outside of our own work, the aggregator businesses like Just Eat, Deliveroo etc, are now removing businesses with very poor scores from their platforms.

Consequently, those poor performers wishing to partner with them tend to improve quickly and often pay for a re-rating. Getting a good FHRS score is a key driver to compliance. Anecdotally, officers feel they are seeing early signs that numbers of new premises may be on an upward trend, particularly with more mobile and home-based traders registering with us. Many members will no doubt have seen the apparently never-ending number of coffee shop openings, although we may now be at saturation point as several have also closed. Feedback suggests that the business closures reported appear to be mostly down to increased costs of staff, food, and energy.

The final quarter of the year was mainly focussed on completing food inspections, where the level of compliance continued to be high. The service also had a flurry of over 100 food related complaints, although none were particularly serious.

Food officers dealt with 3 FSA Alerts on various imported foods which had missed customs checks and a written warning was issued regarding future conduct to a pub in Wyre Forest in relation to a clostridium perfringens food poisoning outbreak. Officers also continued to work with the hospital facilities in Redditch and Kidderminster to improve their Food Safety Management Systems.

Finally, the service signed up "The Beefy Boys" burger restaurant chain as a Primary Authority.

Officers also dealt with over 500 food service requests, complaints and enquiries about food premises, and issued 112 Export Certificates.

CEH: Nuisance: Although this year was relatively quiet for numbers of nuisance complaints due to the poor weather, there are still some good stories outlined in the district sections below.

In statutory nuisance case work, an Abatement Notice was served on a Droitwich public house in May under the Environmental Protection Act for noise from outdoor music events, and a noisy cockerel was put before the courts! The pub agreed to stop holding out-door music events following their pre-trial review hearing for their appeal of Abatement Notice.

Since 2012 and changes to the law on who is responsible for controls on sewers, the local authority role has focused on private sewers. One such case required “works in default” action following the failure to comply with a notice issued by the service to resolve an ongoing drainage issue. Following quotations, budgetary approval was given for major works in Barnt Green. An old septic tank system and soakaway at a residential property had failed and was giving rise to discharges of sewage across the property and into the road. A specification was drawn up and quotes obtained to carry out remedial works including the installation of a modern packaged sewage treatment plant with consented discharge into the highway drainage system, avoiding the need for a new soakaway which would have been costly and disruptive and prone to future failure.

Major investigations in Quarter 2 last year included noise from the refurbishment of a Sainsburys supermarket in Worcester with numerous complaints of nighttime disturbance whilst floors were being dug up. Site meetings were held with the local Councillor and members of Sainsburys senior management and compromise reached on permissible activities at specific hours

Evidence of breaches of a noise abatement notice was established during an ongoing investigation into loud music from a residential address in Worcester. A prosecution file was subsequently prepared for submission to the City Council’s legal team.

An appeal in respect of a Noise Abatement Notice served on a public house in Droitwich for excessively loud music impacting on an elderly neighbour was received and the court date awaited.

A licence review was instigated in relation to a public house in Worcester following ongoing noise complaints concerning loud music and late-night noise from customers on the premises. Members found our Environmental Health Officer’s arguments persuasive and agreed that the controls recommended be applied to the license to reduce the impact of noise to those living next to the pub.

Following the investigation of alleged breaches of a noise abatement notice served on an occupier of a housing association house in Worcester, officers provided evidence and witness statements to the association who used the evidence to seek eviction of the tenant through the County Court process.

An investigation was carried out into alleged smoke nuisance from solid fuel heating appliances emanating from moored narrow boats in a marina in Worcester. Whilst no statutory nuisance was witnessed, the type of appliances and fuel being used were checked and verified to meet Smoke Control Area requirements, and the marina management company were considering a voluntary grant to support owners switching to alternative heating sources where viable.

Work was done in relation to another alleged smoke nuisance, this time emanating from a farm in a Wychavon village, where it appeared that waste was being imported to the site and burned. Whilst no smoke nuisance has been witnessed to date, officers have been in liaison with colleagues from the Environment Agency and Planning Enforcement colleagues to consider other potential means of regulating activities on the site.

Several cases of bed bug infestations, which were proving difficult to eradicate, were identified by officers this quarter. The service has identified an increasing trend of infestations where it appears that limited household cleaning combined with potential resistance to currently permitted pesticides can lead to long term infestations persisting despite multiple costly pest control visits and treatments.

CEH: Health and Safety: Complex health and safety investigations continued through the year, with Officers attending the inquest into the death of a participant in a charity boxing event in Worcester, and a dog sledging accident in Wychavon with investigations being concluded. Officers continued to assist the Worcestershire Coroner regarding another workplace death.

A considerable amount of officer time during the summer was spent working with the UK Health Security Agency (UKHSA) in an investigation into a Cryptosporidium outbreak at a farm in Wychavon, which received extensive media coverage. The number of reported cases ran into the hundreds and is said to be the largest known outbreak of its type. As this is also a working farm, officers had to work closely with the Health & Safety Executive on enforcement issues as it is not a council-enforced business. Later in the year, preparations began for the new year when farms open to the public and UKHSA provided advice for distribution to businesses.

Other cases this year included issues with safety at a soft-play centre and the risks created by stray golf balls from a course or range.

The Ministry of Justice and the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government (formerly the Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities) wrote to local authorities last May, asking them to visit funeral directors trading in their areas. This was in response to the situation in Hull, concerning Legacy Independent Funeral Directors. The purpose of this initiative was to restore public confidence in the funeral sector. WRS agreed to participate in this initiative on behalf of the Partner authorities, and our Funeral Directors Project began in Q3 with a visit to the premises of a local representative of a national trade body for officers to familiarise themselves with best practice in the funeral industry. A programme of visits across the county was then planned and implemented. No adverse findings were identified, and this has been fed back to the MoJ.

Safety Advisory Group working continued, including Safety at Sportsgrounds work for Worcestershire County Council, with ongoing engagement with Bromsgrove Sporting, Sixways stadium and Kidderminster Harriers Football club. Worcester Racecourse also has a regulated stand, and the end of season Safety Group meeting was chaired by WRS Lead Officer. As we moved towards the Spring, preparations began for the festival season that generally kicks off the first Bank Holiday weekend in May.

LICENSING

Licensing General:

The workload over the year has shown its usual established pattern, but the team remained busy shaping policy matters that have required significant input before putting the documents before members. A spike in work over the summer driven by applications and queries relating to both Taxi Licensing and the Licensing Act meant the team was stretched due to summer leave, making July to September a challenging quarter for officers.

The team worked with Technical Services colleagues in the duty team and the Intelligence team on introducing a new triage process for calls and queries. By prioritising interventions, this should enable the more serious matters to be picked up first and, where something doesn't lend itself to a direct intervention, the resident can be thanked for the information and how it will be used going forward can be explained.

Licensing remains the service with the highest volume of calls and queries to the Duty Officer desk. Part of this work will also involve improving the knowledge and skills of the Duty Officers so the number of enquiries passed to licensing specialists can be reduced. Both teams continue working together to establish a set of processes that the Duty Officers can use to enable them to efficiently navigate through the questions/queries they receive daily. To aid prioritisation, the intelligence team have highlighted which areas of licensing create the largest numbers of queries.

Policy reviews made up a significant amount of work this year as the statutory periods came up on the calendar. Gambling Policy and the Statement of Licensing Policy were just two areas, and as with many policies, consultations had to be posted on each individual district website to facilitate replies, and hard copies were also offered, kindly collected for collation by our district colleagues before passing them back to the team for review.

Member Training is always a big feature for officers in early June, and this took place across all districts, with officers providing training to new and established members of the six Licensing committees. A new interactive format was welcomed by members and this allowed different scenarios to be played out through role play and videos, which allowed a multitude of different questions to be raised by councillors, to get themselves ready for the role at hearings.

Alongside operational and day to day work the team continued to strive for efficiencies, with work continuing to implement Victoria forms for the automation of licensing applications. Several procurement projects commenced including making the DBS process for taxi drivers more efficient and, the procurement of veterinary services for animal licensing inspections both of which will be implemented in 25/26.

Taxis: A review of the Taxi Standards that were implemented by all district councils in 2022 highlighted the need to make safeguarding training for all taxi drivers mandatory. As part of the initial changes to policy, a mandatory requirement for all new drivers to undertake a competency certificate was introduced. This is provided via a thorough training session looking at all aspects that are required for a taxi driver to do their role in a way that ensures the relevant protections for customers including equalities, safeguarding, communication, driver conduct and various other responsibilities. The feedback from drivers who have done the training so far has remained positive and valuable, but it will take time to put the whole driver cohort through this process.

Following these positive outcomes, officers have moved to presenting reports to all district councils recommending that all existing drivers now undertake safeguarding training and that refresher training every three years also be included in policies. After the consultation process, officers moved to take the revisions through to adoption. Worcester City and Wyre Forest Licensing Committees were the first to approve the new revisions and training for their drivers was scheduled to commence early in 2025. Other council policies continue to move forward, and an implementation date has been agreed for all districts.

Enforcement work continued across the team including evening work on taxi ranks. The team are now working on Operation Rome looking at taxi matters in several districts, particularly issues with ranks. If successful, the team will look to deploy it across all the districts where over ranking and out of area vehicles have given rise to concerns.

Alcohol/ Entertainment and Gambling: Enforcement work continued across the team including officers investigating suspended premises licences. Intelligence suggests that premises that have not paid their annual fee may also be liable to be non-compliance in other areas of regulatory control, so they are generally worthy of an intervention. And a sharp reminder that unlicensed activity is a crime can result in prompt payment!

The introduction of on-line applications/ notifications and payment for Temporary Event Notices (TENs) via Victoria forms seems to have reduced the number of queries being received regarding these matters as the more detailed FAQs linked to the on-line application process are answering a lot of the questions that applicants have. We hope we will see similar once other forms of application are automated in this way. Queries on TENS invariably focus on periods or events where people look to do things away from standard licensed premises such as at Halloween, Bonfire Night and Christmas.

Preliminary meetings were held for events including summer music festivals, and officers worked with event organisers for a previously controversial bank holiday event in Wychavon. A farm in Bromsgrove was one of several venues which held music events under temporary event notices which were monitored over the summer using both noise monitoring equipment and personal visits by members of the CEH and Licensing teams.

Officers provided evidence at a Licence application hearing, having made representations concerning premises in Wyre Forest which included proposals for outdoor music events until 0100 hours. As a result, the applicant amended their application for outdoor music to end by 2200 hours and agreed to several additional noise control conditions.

As they do every year, several of the WRS teams supported the City Council with colleagues from across the city with the annual Victorian Christmas Fayre. This is an event that several of the teams get involved in and enjoy working with partners to ensure the event goes off safely for all concerned.

Animal-related Activity: During the pandemic, it was clear that dog ownership had increased significantly, so an operation commenced to look at how much illegal dog breeding across Worcestershire was being done to service this expanded market. The results brought to light the significant numbers of people who were operating unlicensed and illegally selling dogs across the County. This led to teams across WRS including Licensing, the Intelligence unit and the Dog Warden service working together to educate those involved and monitor complaints, to reduce this number in the long term. Earlier this year a second operation commenced through the Intelligence team. They confirmed the scale of the market for dogs across Worcestershire, identifying over £4M of advertising in a 6-month period, as well as finding a number of potential illegal dog breeders across the County. Although overall numbers had reduced since the first operation, probably reflected by the fall in dog ownership post-pandemic, the numbers were still a problem. Follow-up work has been on-going with a view to regularising activity if possible and reasonable, warning letters to lesser operators, or enforcement action being taken.

The number of Animal licensing inspections increased over the year as officers achieved their competencies. A programme of interim inspections went ahead, which did identify that some of our license holders were not managing to maintain the high standards identified at the initial point of licensing. This was quite surprising as people in these businesses tend to be very proactive about the welfare of animals they have.

It is important to note how this area of licensing has developed since the introduction of the new regime in 2018. Whilst the proactive work involved has resulted in positive outcomes for businesses and the service, when officers first looked at the regime and assessed the likely resourcing implications, no one was able to anticipate either the training that would latterly be expected for officers to be deemed competent, or the amount of time that interventions would take up, or that the

regime itself would require significant resources to get right. This is an area where, in better times, partners might consider increasing resourcing commitments and fees in line with this.

Honeybourne visitor attraction All Things Wild had an interim licensing visit for its Zoo license where no concerns were raised by the team or the vet present for the visit. The Zoo was pleased with the outcome, and they continue to follow and adhere to policies and guidance as required.

Other Licensing: At the beginning of April, Government announced that the Pavement Licencing Scheme that was originally introduced during the covid pandemic under the Business and Planning Act 2020 was to be made permanent as of the 31st of March 2024 using provisions made in the Levelling Up and Regeneration Act 2023. The team had to respond to this, putting together new pavement licensing policies based on the revised legislation for each district council and presenting the new policies to all licensing committees. These meetings were followed by a consultation process for each district on its revisions ahead of implementation. All of these are now in place and approved by the six councils.

TECHNICAL SERVICES

General Air Quality Work: This continued at pace, with officers submitting the 6 Annual Status Reports for all Districts required by the Ministry. Various forms of engagement took place with member forums in a number of the partner councils.

Steering group meetings with key stakeholders were held through the year for Bromsgrove District Council and Wyre Forest District Council to produce their Air Quality Action Plans. This work was followed by detailed source apportionment, modelling, quantification and feasibility study assessment of the measures together which came together in a final report. Consultation of the draft Action plans led to minor amendments before being adopted by the respective Councils.

Likewise in Worcester City, the Air Quality Action Plan was successfully taken through Worcester City Council's Committee processes, where several of the council committees take an interest. This continued the air quality work that was previously undertaken. The final version of the Worcester Air Quality Action Plan was approved by Environment Committee in November 2024.

The Contaminated Land Inspection Strategy for Redditch Borough Council was finalised this year. This updated strategy both reviewed and replaced the document from 2001, taking account of changes in the Contaminated Land Statutory Guidance, national policy, council policy, and set out the Council's strategic approach to review and assessment of contaminated land. It was approved in November 2024. This Strategy was the first in a refresh programme for all the District Council's strategies, with the one for Malvern Hills commenced in mid-2024 with adoption in January 2025. Work then commenced on the revision of the Bromsgrove's Inspection Strategy.

Through the year Officers were often asked to comment on the whole range of planning applications, large and small, including residential developments, commercial, infrastructure projects, solar farms, industrial processes, extensions, change of use, conversion of buildings and any other development where contamination may be a relevant consideration. These work areas often involve officers reviewing complex reports provided in support of planning applications and the discharge of planning condition requests.

A number of interesting planning cases were of note for the team during the year including:

- The demolition and redevelopment of Bromsgrove Fire Station, due to historic land contamination and the future use included residential development.
- The demolition and redevelopment of an old farm near Pinvin in Wychavon for various uses including residential development. The team also provided support to planning officers on several solar farms and battery storage facilities with scoping consultations and/or Environmental Information Requests across the Districts.
- a complex planning application at the Roxel Group site, near Stourport.

Routine Industrial Permitting work including inspection of large industrial processes, foundries and casting through to cement processing and petrol stations continued through the year. The focus of this regime is on activities which, by their very nature are likely to cause pollution unless they are controlled and monitored correctly. Generally, there is good compliance in these areas, but the service has in recent years taken several cases to court following pollution incidents or near misses. This year, a significant amount of time was spent dealing with a packaging firm in Pershore to upgrade their existing abatement technology, as well as dealing with a foundry in Droitwich Spa to improve their solvent management plan.

Behaviour Change Project: This initiative began this year with a behaviour change survey jointly developed with Worcestershire CC Public Health. Once the results were assessed, work began to pick up pace, starting with lots of contact with schools, some of which led to visits by the officer delivering the project. Over the year, some 126 schools were either contacted or visited either to ask for responses to our surveys on behaviour change to influence Air Quality, or to introduce them to our wider work including our general AQ work as well as the Real Time Air Quality Portal. Some 338 responses were received from schools and their staff, and a survey with HoW college reached 741 students and staff.

More recently, our officer took the AQ behaviour change project to four school assemblies at Waseley Hills High School in Rubery, which is near to the Gunne Line air quality monitor. There was a great turnout, with participation from students in Years 7 to 12, more than 100 students per session!

Dog related work: It has been a very busy year for this area of the service. During September, with the commencement of new contracts with Birmingham, North Somerset and a temporary contract with Solihull, and following the departure of one Dog Warden, officers went out to recruitment to bring in replacement capacity to address the work.

Unfortunately, the new contracts brought a significant number of dogs where euthanasia was the only option as the number of dogs exhibiting aggressive behaviour went up dramatically. This was partly due to higher numbers of Pitbull and XL Bully type dogs, both banned breeds, coming into our care. In quarter 3 alone, some 34 of this type of dog were seized on behalf of the authorities we support, although only 10 of these were from Worcestershire. The heightened levels of aggression in some of the stray dogs led to an increased number being euthanised using a dart gun to minimise the risk to wardens, staff at kennels, the vets and the public.

As well as the larger bull breeds, we also saw an increase in the number of puppies and dogs with significant welfare support needs. This included dogs that are underweight, and those that suffer with sores, injuries and fur loss. Officers attempted to meet the identified best method of caring for each dog, which sometimes meant looking to alternative forms of boarding outside of our contracted kennels, such as fostering.

Overall, stray numbers were at the highest for some years, mainly driven by the new contracts. Whilst we recognise the requirement to euthanise banned breed dogs if unclaimed or not covered by relevant exemption certificates, it is distressing for both the wardens and the staff at our kennelling partners. Our officers have been provided with counselling support to help with this.

ICT team: The team took part in various cyber security awareness activities designed to increase the security and resilience of the computer system we use. As part of this they facilitated the introduction of the new Mimecast e-mail security system with Wyre Forest DC ICT colleagues.

They also worked to enhance service delivery, with these activities including regular updates and patches to our main back-office system, record retention and deletions. PAT testing was organised for all electrical equipment located in our offices and for remote working equipment, which we are obliged to complete every 2 years. The team also contributed to service-wide projects including the Automation Project and introduction of Taxi digital Identity records.

At the beginning of the financial year the team was pivotal in delivering the statutory returns required for the six partners in several areas including the food law returns for the Food Standards Agency.

Later in the year, the team continued its work with the Host's IT service and back-office support company to completely refresh our Database address gazetteer to include regular updates going forward and increased the time our back-office database system is available.

The team have continued to contribute to the service budget with income generation activity in supporting the County Council's Trading Standards team; Bromsgrove and Redditch Planning team; and Tewkesbury Borough Council's Environmental Health and Licensing teams with their respective databases and associated digital documents.

BDC/ RBC SPECIFIC ACTIVITIES

Homes for Ukraine: In April, Government announced a continuation of the scheme, so the two-remaining former COVID Advisors are continuing to assist with the scheme, along with a Principal Officer managing the scheme in Bromsgrove and Redditch. Throughout Q1 significant effort was dedicated to school and college registrations, the support officers working with education officers to take Ukrainian guest through the registration process, applications, references, and have even accompanied several students to college open evenings. They have also supported parents with worries about school documentation, attended school meetings and helped rectify any issues that arose.

In April the team had a meeting with an external Mental Health team to discuss some complex issues and best ways to deal with them, and in May they with met with the wider Redditch Council Housing Team to build relationships and discuss the best approach to support our guests on the scheme. As usual team have continued to support guests move from their hosts to independent living, either in Social Housing or Private Rented Accommodation. This support consists of financial advice, help setting up utilities, sourcing furniture and household goods, and help getting children into schools / colleges mentioned above. There were 2 new arrivals in Bromsgrove and 10 new arrivals in Redditch.

In July we successfully recruited another part time Homes for Ukraine support worker into the team. As well as the usual routine support given to existing guests, hosts, and new arrivals, significant time and effort was dedicated to school and college registrations. Specifically on-going support was provided to three Students trying to get

into college and university, with liaison between them and the education authorities. Other support was provided to Ukrainian guests who wanted to improve their job prospects, liaising with the job centre to access available free courses, and getting employment advice for two young Male guests, plus helping with CVs. Two new young mothers have arrived in recent months, needing help and advice such on childcare, medical support, healthy starts scheme, visas and passports. Officers attended Bromsgrove and Redditch welcome refugees support groups, and the Ukrainian Pop-up café hosted in the Bromsgrove Methodist church.

September saw an increase in demand for hosts with three new arrivals in Redditch, with a further 4 arriving during the next few months due to the ongoing war in Ukraine and the onset of the colder months and the continuation of blackouts in Ukrainian towns and cities. Significant time and effort continued to be dedicated to school registrations with the closing date for secondary school places being 31st October 2024 for September 2025. Officers continued to explore different ways to try and attract new hosts to the scheme. During November the team contacted all previous hosts, parish councils, women's institute, church groups and the refugee support group charities to raise awareness. With the support of Bromsgrove and Redditch Comms team, officers started the "What it means to me" campaign to raise awareness of the need for more hosts and to encourage people to apply. Both the RBC and BDC websites were updated with information and other media was used to promote the cause, including an interview with Free Radio and a news article written by Support Worker Tetiana Ponomar appeared in the Redditch Standard. Social media posts were put on Redditch Matters Instagram page.

Important updates regarding immigration status card replacements, the Ukraine Permission Extension scheme, changes for those sponsoring/hosting close family members and changes to sponsor monthly thank you payments meant the team has been inundated with questions from both hosts and guests during the Autumn. Older forms of immigration status cards needed to be replaced by 31st December 2024, and several Ministerial announcements indicating reductions in support to those sponsoring/hosting close family members under the scheme created some concerns.

In December a Breakfast with Santa event was held which 14 children attended.

Enviro-crime/ Planning enforcement: Information gathered on fly tips for the past 6 months in the Bromsgrove and Redditch areas, has enabled the identification of specific hot spot areas for such activity. Overt cameras with associated signage are specifically targeting these areas and have been successful in capturing offenders. These incidents remain under investigation. The continued focus on these specific areas using our intelligence-led approach is being reviewed every month to ensure continued best use of resources to try and slow down the prolific tipping in these areas. The team have been busy preparing enforcement files since delivering these service areas commenced. Once the required supporting mechanisms were put in place by early December 2024, we have been able to commence the service of Fixed Penalty Notices (FPNs) as an alternative to prosecution, with the majority of the 7 served in 2024/25 being paid. Where FPNs have not been paid or are not appropriate, prosecution files are being prepared, and seven Community Protection Notices (CPNs) were served prior to 2024/25. With the natural lag of time from commencement of investigation to service a FPNs, CPNs or prosecutions, we are anticipating a significant increase in 2025/26.

OUT OF AREA WORK AND INCOME GENERATION

Although contract work on contaminated land for Solihull Metropolitan Borough Council (SMBC) came to an end during April 2024, we continued to offer contracted support to Gloucester City Council, East Staffordshire Borough Council and North Warwickshire Borough Council, as well as the six Worcestershire districts. This has included sites as far away as Uttoxeter and Burton upon Trent.

We have continued income generation work with Bromsgrove and Redditch Planning, supporting Worcestershire CC Trading Standards, and Tewkesbury Borough Council's Environmental Health and Licensing.

As with Worcestershire, this contracted work has led to our involvement in several interesting planning cases, some of which required technical sign-off of conditions, including:

- the demolition and redevelopment of a fuel depot in Gloucester City for various uses including residential development,
- a large new housing development at Hill Farm, Hempsted Lane, Gloucester,
- a site at Bakers Quay, Gloucester where planning consent was granted back in 2014 when the site was still being investigated/assessed and a remedial strategy agreed.

On contracted permitting work, there were no significant issues in 2024/5 apart from continuing complaints against a large manufacturing facility in the Gloucester area. Also, as part of our contract work, we assisted in dealing with minor issues involving Permal in Gloucester, in liaison with Gloucester City representatives.

3.0 FINANCIAL MANAGEMENT

Quarterly financial monitoring reports are provided to managers and finances are regularly considered by officers from the partners ahead of each Joint Board meeting. Bromsgrove DC operates a robust ordering and authorisation process to ensure the transparency and accuracy of costing. This year saw an underspend at year end of just under £60,000. This was wholly down to excellent work on income generation across the service but particularly in the Technical Services division and with dog related activity where our expertise is recognised in the region. The draft outrun budget for 2024/5 is included as Appendix 3. The outrun position is subject to final audit, although the budget is at a level that does not require a specific audit of the WRS accounts. Hence, this will be done as part of the overall audit of Bromsgrove District Council's accounts.

From 2016/17 until 2020/21, the main financial operating assumption was a cash standstill budget, with increasing income targets set to balance the budget each year. The pandemic period saw WRS reshape itself and take on further work funded by partners or by the County Council. Post-pandemic, partners have recognised that the service's ability to increase income is more limited and have agreed to fund the recent pay increases and necessary uplifts in pension and national insurance contributions. Members recognised that the income generation progress could not deliver the level of increases expected, especially in the current climate. This situation is unlikely to change in the immediate future with pay increases likely to be at similar levels to recent year's level and prices continuing to increase. Should it be necessary, the service's reserve may help partners to buffer some financial impacts were the financial model for the service to become difficult to maintain, allowing partners time to determine the way forward for the delivery of these functions. 2023/4 was the first year that officers have had to ask members to exercise this ability.

4.0 WORKFORCE PLANNING AND HUMAN RESOURCES MANAGEMENT

4.1 Structures, Turnover and Training

The WRS structure has now been in place since October 2015 with Simon Wilkes as the Head of Service with a team of four Manager posts looking after different areas of the service. David Mellors as Community Environmental Health and Trading Standards Manager covering all the responsibilities of his Community

Environmental Health team, (Food Safety, Health and Safety and Statutory Nuisance, with some other minor areas,) and the Trading Standards remit (Weights and Measures, Food and Agricultural Standards, Product Safety, Fair Trading, Animal Health) on a contractual basis since the County's departure from the partnership in 2016. Mark Cox continues to head up the Technical Services Team covering Technical Pollution (managing Planning, IPPC, Contaminated Land, Air Quality), Dog Wardens, Pest Control, Information Management & Database administration and more recently the first contact team of Duty Officers. Technical Services also includes the new Planning enforcement and Enviro-crime enforcement added by Bromsgrove and Redditch. Kiran Lahel heads up the Licensing and Support Services Team, with the Licensing team servicing all six district council Licensing committees as those decisions around policy remain with to the six partners, either for practical reasons or because the law (Licensing Act 2003, Gambling Act 2005,) requires it.

Staff turnover remains low, although we are starting to see older members of staff taking flexible retirement and several reducing their hours to allow them to commit to other activities away from the workplace. We have not seen any further losses to better paid roles with national public bodies, but as we have said in previous years, the fact is that WRS continues to provide a solid platform for professional development shows that we retain our reputation for excellence. Previous new recruits have settled in, and their diverse backgrounds have brought a new dynamic to some of our income generation, whilst the new cohort of food officers recruited last year are now making a meaningful contribution to the work programme. We do need to recognise the risks that our aging workforce presents and to start to look at how we bring new blood into the service. The absence of apprentice type training routes has hampered this for Environmental Health, but we are now seeing the development of such courses which would allow the service to access levy funding for the training if we can establish dedicated training posts on the establishment. This is something we need to actively address in the coming years.

Maintaining competence remains central to our ability to deliver income and, helpfully more training is now being delivered in bite-sized chunks via Teams, making it easier and cheaper to hold onto relevance competencies. However, there will always be a need to undertake some face-to-face training, particularly where a course has to run over an extended period to embed new knowledge within the officer's understanding. As ever, we will look to use our usual PDR approach this year with a main one and a 6-month review to help identify what individuals need.

4.2 Staff Survey

63 of our staff cohort responded to the survey. As ever, some did not respond to all the questions. The satisfaction score is based on those who scored 5/10 or better for the question in the staff survey which asked, are you satisfied with working with WRS (score is from 0 to 10.) The figure obtained, of 90.5% is slightly lower than last year and remains good. Some 74.6% of staff who responded scored working for WRS at 8 or better out of 10, which again is good news. Due to current time constraints, we have yet to do more detailed analysis of broader staff comments, but it is good to know that many are happy working for the service.

4.3 Staff Sickness

During 2024/5 staff sickness reached 4.31 days per FTE, above last year's 3.07 but still well below the recent peak year at 5.2, although above the average for the last 6 years (3.60 days/FTE.) Some 53.7% of this year's sickness was classed as long-term (absence for a period exceeding 28 days,) and driven by a small number of

people dealing with serious health conditions. Short term sickness accounts for just under 2-days per FTE, which may be regarded as good for an aging workforce likely to be susceptible to a range of health conditions seen in older adults.

5.0 ACCOMMODATION

WRS remains located at Wyre Forest House, Finepoint Way, Kidderminster. The use of flexible and mobile working is generally now the norm, with staff frequently using home as their start and finish point for work in the field. Office based activity will remain important for team performance, identity, and morale so officers will continue to operate to a flexible pattern that facilitates this and provides face to face liaison with managers and colleagues or for meetings. The touch down points retained in each of the councils have provided an excellent venue for licensing appointments and these will be maintained on an appointment only basis, providing a useful balance between availability for the trade and efficiency of service delivery. Taxi drivers/ operators can be told what they will need over the telephone, ensuring that officer face-to-face time can be used more effectively to ensure complete applications are made and that paperwork has been completed correctly.

These work patterns enable staff to strike a better work/life balance which is essential for good morale, whilst maintaining the team ethos, having an organisation with which the staff identify and belong to, and giving the opportunity to share ideas and issues with other team members. Despite what those who evangelise about the benefits of virtual contact say, it does not build the kinds of trusting, working relationships necessary for the work that we do, so whilst we will be making more use of systems like Teams, it will not wholly replace face to face interaction between staff members.

6.0 BUSINESS TRANSFORMATION (SERVICE DELIVERY OPERATING MODEL)

The Intelligence Operating Model is now the way we deliver our activities. The model of a Strategic Assessment for longer term priorities and Tactical Assessments for adjusting resource allocation to address emergent threats has long been the operating model in core policing and other law enforcement organisations, not only nationally but internationally too. WRS continues to lead in the wider regulatory environment, using what we learnt with our Trading Standards colleagues on how this model can support our activities.

The revised Strategic Assessment that will help inform delivery until 2028 now, recommended that the focus of activity should be around the following tactical priorities:

- Supporting a safe and vibrant night-time economy
- Promoting the responsible breeding, sale and ownership of dogs.
- Supporting safe, clean and healthy communities

Historically the two other priorities, supporting commercial businesses to operate safely and responsibly and supporting industry to operate safely and responsibly have really only captured business-as-usual activities, like food inspection, environmental permitting work and similar activities, so as this work will continue anyway, it won't be highlighted and project related work will focus on the three priorities above.

Other intelligence products review our data and intelligence to support Team Managers and Principal Officers in determining activities to respond to the intelligence picture current at that time. Subject and problem profiles will provide a more in-depth look at issues or the entities creating them to support managers in their decision making. The top three priorities are cross cutting aspects of our work, and a Team Manager will take responsibility for each one, ensuring that work is done across the three teams that can contribute to related outcomes.

7.0 RISK MANAGEMENT

WRS continues to develop its approach to risk and business continuity. The development of policy, delivery of service priorities and the management of its services for six partners attract risk. In reviewing its service risks and the effects of management strategies and policies WRS seeks to:

- Identify, assess, and manage risk,
- Safeguard the services assets and equipment,

Risk Management becomes must be considered as part of our management process so that, where appropriate; risks are avoided, reduced, transferred, or retained and managed. The WRS risk register was developed so it could be integrated with the partners' individual risk registers. It is maintained and reviewed periodically, with the current version attached at Appendix 2. This was reviewed ahead of the creation of the 2024/5 service plan. Many of the generic risks and mitigation served us well during the pandemic and remain relevant. Flexible work patterns can create their own risks around feelings of isolation, lack of team identity and loss of belonging to the organisation and basic things like risk of muscular-skeletal injury because people spend long hours working at desks that are not ideal. So, whilst the service will continue to make more use of virtual meetings, they will never fully replace face to face interaction, nor will they lead to the abandonment of a physical location for the service.

Cyber-attack is seen as a growing risk and the service continues to work with our ICT host, Wyre Forest DC and Bromsgrove DC to limit this and help to ensure we have good business continuity measures in place. Team Managers continue to work on tailoring business continuity plans to meet the needs of their diverse service areas. Understanding what functions or activities need to be restored quickly is key to this, followed by exercising plans to ensure everyone understands what needs to be done and where to find what is necessary to continue with activity.

The return to a more traditional approach to food law enforcement and the inspection at low-risk premises currently favoured by the Food Standards Agency has led to the service including a specific line in the register to highlight the Agency's demand for "to the letter" compliance with the Local Authority Code of Practice on Food Law Enforcement. Whilst we will continue to shape what we do with intelligence, options around food to vary activity are somewhat more limited. The introduction of the revised version of the Local Authority Code has been delayed until at least 2027, so there are unlikely to be changes to their position in the intervening period. It should be noted that there has always been a line in the register relating to the behaviour of government departments and arms-length bodies and policy change but give the Agency's approach, they now merit separate mention.

Concerns remain around public expectation of what is deliverable in law, particularly in relation to nuisance issues. The law is old and effectively what is a statutory nuisance is a matter of opinion rather than being based on any specific statutory levels of, for example noise. This is difficult for members of the public to accept but the service will look to improve its performance in the eyes of our non-business customers.

Finally, a line has been added relating to local government re-organisation. Whilst this is not relevant looking backwards, it is to the service's and the partner's future.

8.0 EQUALITY & DIVERSITY

The news in recent years has featured stories about public bodies being accused of not addressing equality and diversity. The Metropolitan Police and Greater London Fire and Rescue Service have been subject to damning headlines that many of us in the public sector would want to avoid. WRS operates in line with the host Authority's adopted Equality Standard for Local Government as a framework to help embed equality and diversity into everyday aspects of its work. The professional bodies for regulators like the Association of Chief Trading Standards Officers are trying support the leaders of our regulatory services to encourage diversity. This is something that we will take on board at WRS and do our best to move forward in an inclusive way.

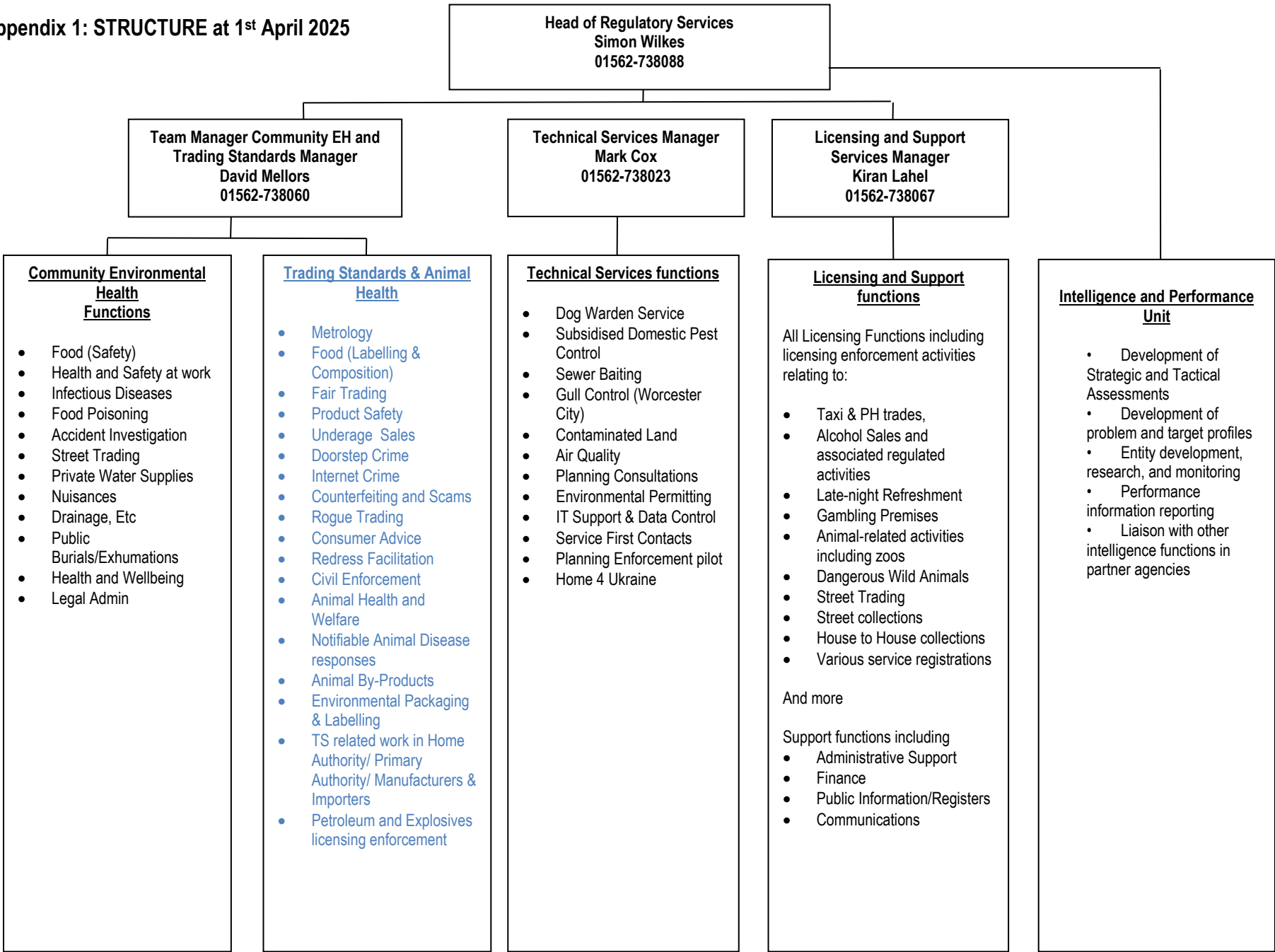
9.0 THE NEXT STEPS

The pandemic is behind us, and we are now back onto a business-as-usual footing. Local government re-organisation creates a question mark in the medium term for all local authority functions in Worcestershire and other 2-tier areas going forward. This may create threats to our income generation activities if new authorities create economies of scale like our own but these are unlikely to emerge before the process of re-organisation is completed in 2028. In the meantime, our work needs to continue so we will:

- Continue to deliver the WRS Business Plan and our annual operational service plans,
- Maintain existing income streams,
- Following our philosophy of continuous improvement, continue to review operations to improve marginal efficiencies,
- Continue the process of channel shift by increasing the customer's ability to use self-help, do transactions on-line and monitor progress of work.
- Continue to work closely with County Council Trading Standards colleagues and other partner agencies by maintaining links that support both WRS and other services to the benefit of local people.
- Continue to engage with partners to see if any other services could sit well on the WRS platform.
- Support partners with the preparation of business cases for LGR.

There are likely to be further proposed changes to the legislative framework in the coming year as Government continues to modernise some aspects of regulation. We will respond to consultations on behalf of the partners in relation to any proposed changes and, where we can, work with other colleagues in the region to help amplify the thinking of local authority officers across our area.

Appendix 1: STRUCTURE at 1st April 2025



Appendix 2 – WRS Risk Register 2025/6

Risk Description	Consequences	When is this likely to happen	Current Position			Control measures
			Likelihood	Impact	Matrix RAG Status	
Loss of Data through IT failures or Cyber Incident	Disruption to Service Provision. Inability to produce records and data.	On-going	Low	High	Amber	Cyber-attacks are a growing threat. Wyre Forest ICT has effective processes and business continuity plans in place. WFDC upgraded relevant systems including Windows. The service moved to Office 365 during 2021/22, which provides better access to a range of provisions including Microsoft Teams and Power BI. Cyber security training is delivered regularly and risks identified are tackled.
Issues with the WRS database system	Impact on work planning. Self-help may not enable savings required	On-going	Low	High	Amber	New contract in place. The system provides the necessary functionality and will allow the enablement of data transfer from electronic forms which is currently in development. Complexities might arise with potential new service areas not currently catered for within the database or where existing partner databases have to be maintained in addition.
Effective and efficient Business Continuity arrangements in place	Disruption to service if e.g., Major Power failures or other reasons that access to Wyre Forest House is not possible.	On-going	Very Low	Medium	Amber/Red	The pandemic has shown that we were well prepared for the need to maximise working from home and now all staff, including some previously regarded as office based can do this. Touchdown stations remain available in partner council locations. WRS Managers do need to redraft contingency plans in the event of a prolonged IT failure or cyber-attack that will allow services to be maintained. This is the greatest risk facing local authorities currently and is one we all need to move forward with.
Maintain our capacity to achieve service delivery	Disruption to service e.g., Major staff sickness (e.g., flu pandemic) or Unable to recruit or retain suitably qualified staff.	On-going	Low	Medium	Amber	The pandemic response has shown that the service was well-placed to respond to what was required. Consultants are available to provide short term cover and, whilst this worked well in peacetime to cover peak demand periods, the pandemic has revealed the

						<p>limits to this type of capacity. These pressures will only be resolved in the longer term by local and central government investing in additional capacity and additional training to bring more people into the regulatory professions.</p> <p>Having taken on contracts with additional authorities the demand has increased, and neighbouring authorities have lost the ability to assist with some technical specialisms. This is the double-edged sword of effectively operating as a centre of excellence. Whilst we have good resource of our own, in event of an issue, there are limits to who we can ask for help but it does mean that we are better resourced and qualified than would be possible if we didn't provide such services for income.</p> <p>Regional and sub-regional groups are in place so can provide shared resources for local authorities if required.</p> <p>Effective training and development processes are in place to ensure recruitment and retention of staff. There is increased training budget pressure, reduced technical knowledge in neighbouring authorities and increased importance in maintaining heightened skills for contractual obligations and commercial edge.</p> <p>Regular inventory and maintenance of equipment is undertaken. In the future, budget for replace may be an issue but would be a relatively small amount for partners to share.</p>
Pest contractors cease operations.	Disruption to service. Negative media coverage. Increased public health risks	On-going	Low	High	Green	The Pest control framework contract has multiple pest control suppliers so the loss of one allows work to be moved to the others. This should limit or eliminate risk, although the unlikely loss of multiple companies might create capacity issues.
Effective and efficient contract arrangement for dog control	Disruption to service if no kennels available. Negative media coverage.	On-going	Low	High	Amber	There have been significant increases in numbers of stray dogs, dog disease, breed and behavioural complexities and supplier contracts are restricted by distance. Retendering for conventional contracts in

	Increased public health risks					kennelling and support services remains difficult and consideration may be given to creating our own capacity. Contractual obligations provide additional pressure. The current kennelling contracts are to be extended until April 2025.
Hosting support does not deliver necessary financial and HR support to ensure efficient management	Efficiency of management reduced; staffing issues remain unaddressed, and performance suffers	On-going	Low	High	Amber	Issues with the new BDC finance system have mainly been resolved, however some workarounds remain in place due to some unforeseen issues. We need to improve communication with our hosts to ensure the needs of the shared service do not get missed during any significant changes to systems or processes.
One or more partners continue to be under great financial pressure and may consider alternatives to the partnership to deliver their service	Creates reputational issues for remaining partners and increases the need to manage overheads. Difficulties in delivering highly varied levels of service	On-going	Medium	High	Amber	New legal agreement limits variations in contribution before partners must move to contractual relationship but this is quite high before it kicks in (20%.) Leanness of organisation minimises overheads and focuses resource at the front line. Growth strategy should generate income to support partners in the future but there are limits to this without additional capacity being added to the system. Invest to save capacity has been committed by partners to see if this achieves the necessary outcomes but even this is now fully occupied.
Robust arrangements in place in relation to obtaining legal advice and monitoring legislative changes.	Loss of cases is costly and damages reputation.	On-going	Low	Medium	Green	Continued close working with BDC legal team and other partners who don't use BDC for advocacy. Technical and legal training days for staff. Difficulty in keeping informed of Case Law developments. Membership and attendance of Officer Technical Groups outside the County does assist.
Service provision complies with Government requirements, New performance regimes are introduced that the service is not staffed to address	Intervention by Government bodies Other national bodies seek to introduce similar frameworks to the FSA Code to get what they regard as suitable minimum levels of service.	On-going	Low	High	Amber	Limited detail of what is required for statutory minima can make decision making difficult around what is required in law as a minimum. The LGA is clearly aware of impact of budget reductions on regulation and has made it clear

	<p>We understand that Government is asking its central competent bodies to ensure that regulatory regimes are fit for purpose and do not pose a risk to UK exports post BREXIT as the UK no longer has the cover of the EU taking on this role. This may make new codes or performance frameworks in areas outside of food law more likely.</p> <p>NB: Food Standards Agency is addressed below.</p>					<p>Government cannot expect what it had previously. Fewer interventions/ audits by government.</p> <p>The Service has developed systems that follow the principles of the requirements of bodies like FSA so can show some level of compliance, but service isn't operating to the letter of the current Code. This has been noted by the Agency and they are now seeking to drive all authorities back into line with the Code, with the threat of ministerial direction if required. The major changes envisaged for the Code have been delayed until 2027. And whilst this change is likely to move closer to the WRS model of operation, it is unlikely to wholly embrace the intelligence-led approach. See below for specific risk.</p> <p>Environmental reporting for Local Air Quality Management, Pollution Prevention and Control and Private Water Supply Inspection reports to Defra and DWI have received positive responses with no issues of concern raised by these bodies*.</p>
Compliance with Food Code of Practice	Adverse comments following audits. FSA, can seek ministerial direction to make LAs comply with its Code of Practice	On-going	High	High	Amber/ Red	<p>This is a subset of the section above line as FSA is the only body currently with a statutory code that LAs must have significant regard to, plus it has the power to apply for Ministerial Orders to force LAs to comply with the letter of the Code.</p> <p>Until recently the Agency appears to have been happy to allow LAs to experiment as long as they abide by the spirit of the code and resource the function at a reasonable level. It has now changed tack and is seeking to push local authorities to operate much more closely to the letter of the code in an effort to create additional resource. A paper went to the FSA Boar at the end of 2023, expressing concern about resourcing levels in both Env Health and Trading Standards resulting in a public call for local and central government to work together to remedy this.</p>

						The partners are looking to make a significant investment in resources to address most of the Agency's concerns, but it will not allow full compliance with the Code. Having said this, there is limited risk in the variations that will remain in place and full compliance with the code would require a full redesign of operations within Community EH and further financial investment.
Failure to deliver external contract work at the level expected by the business or local authority with whom we have the contract	Damage to reputation, loss of future income streams, financial impact of paying damages	On-going	Low	High	Green	Ensure contract negotiations are clear on performance criteria and these are clearly recorded in the final documentation. Monthly reviews against performance criteria. Select staff to ensure competence of those undertaking work outside Worcestershire. Maintain strong links with the customer's monitoring staff. Intervene early with corrective action
Local government Re-organisation	Ensuring the statutory regulatory functions are accommodated in any new unitary arrangements to meet the requirements of the new structure	On-going	High	Medium/ Low	Green/ Amber	There is little for officers to do before any decisions on structures and timetable are made. The structuring of the shared service means that integration of these elements into one authority would be relatively straight-forward should a decision be taken on a unitary county model and, in the eventuality of multiple unitary authorities being the chosen model, the option to retain shared arrangement would remain, although it seems unlikely given previous re-organisations elsewhere.

Appendix 3: Detailed out-turn for Regulatory Services 2024/25

	Full Year Budget 24-25	Committed Expenditure Apr - Mar 25	Variance
	£'000	£'000	£'000
Direct Expenditure			
Employees			
Salary	4,179	3,783	-396
Agency Staff	0	519	519
Employee Insurance	21	33	13
Sub-Total - Employees	4,200	4,335	136
Premises			
Rent / Hire of Premise	79	78	-1
Cleaning	1	0	-0
Utilities	0	0	0
Sub-Total - Premises	80	79	-1
Transport			
Vehicle Hire	13	4	-8
Vehicle Fuel	8	7	-1
Road Fund Tax	1	1	-0
Vehicle Insurance	5	7	2
Vehicle Maintenance	3	2	-1
Car Allowances	62	49	-14

Sub-Total - Transport	92	69	-22
Supplies and Services			
Furniture & Equipment	44	53	8
Clothes, uniforms and laundry	2	2	0
Printing & Photocopying	17	11	-6
Postage	11	14	1
ICT	79	143	3
Telephones	40	31	-9
Training & Seminars	34	19	-15
Insurance	16	12	-4
Third Party Payments	203	203	0
Sub-Total - Supplies & Service	445	488	42
Contractors			
Dog Warden	121	379	258
Pest Control	73	82	10
Taxi / Alcohol / & Other Licensing	72	56	-16
Other contractors/consultants	3	32	29
Water Safety	5	6	1
Food Safety	1	0	-1
Environmental Protection	12	35	23
Grants / Subscriptions	13	14	2
Advertising, Publicity and Promotion	6	2	-3
Sub-Total	304	606	302

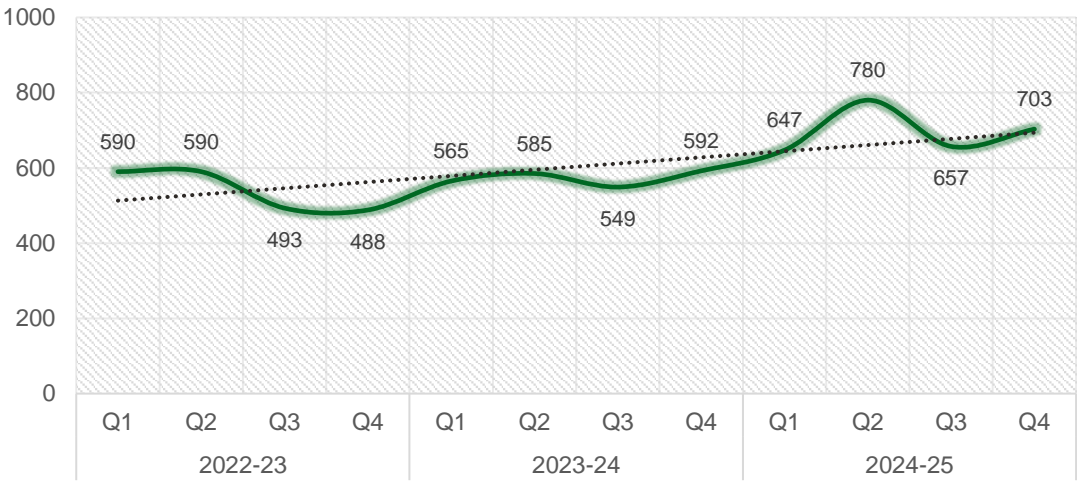
Income			
Training Courses / Bereavement / Works in Default / Sewer Baiting etc	-1001	-1,513	-512
Sub-Total	-1001	-1,513	-512
Net Position	4,119	4,064	-55

Appendix 5: District Council Summaries

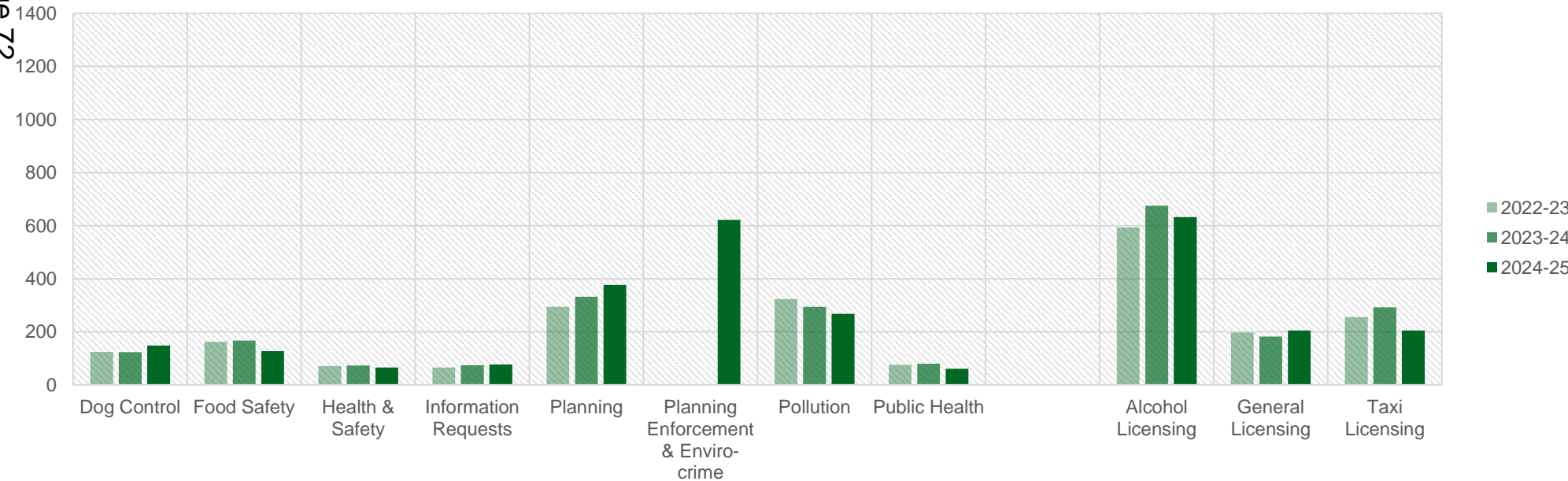
The data on this page outlines the number of Environmental Health and Licensing cases (complaints, enquiries, applications, and notifications) received by WRS where the subject or enquirer were in the Bromsgrove district.

Note: The chart below provides a breakdown of cases by the primary functions undertaken by the service. The recent increase in cases can be attributed to the additional functions (enviro-crime and planning enforcement) now being delivered by the service. The figures for the current year are cumulative and will continue to increase until the end of year report is published in April 2025. The Y axis on this chart has also been standardised so the level of demand received against each function can be broadly compared to other districts.

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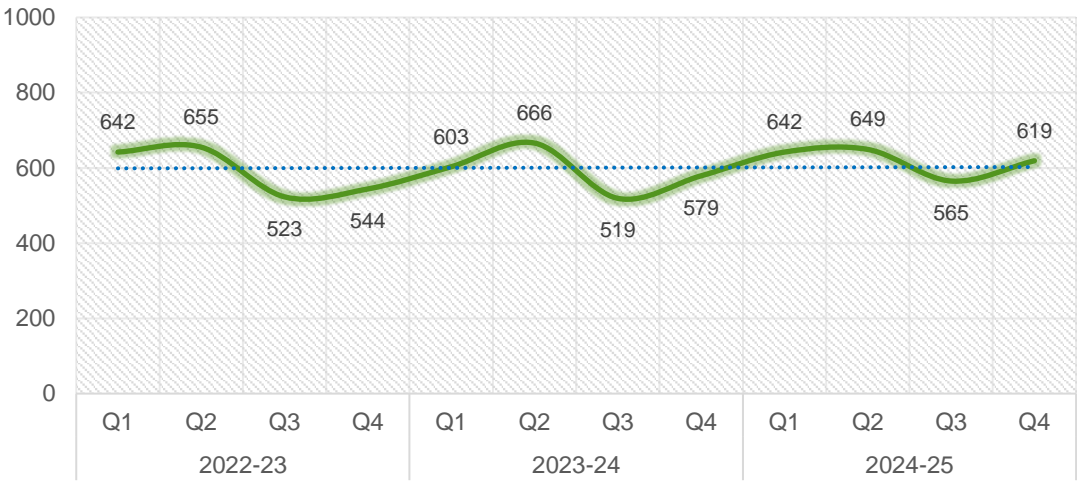
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Appendix 5: District Council Summaries

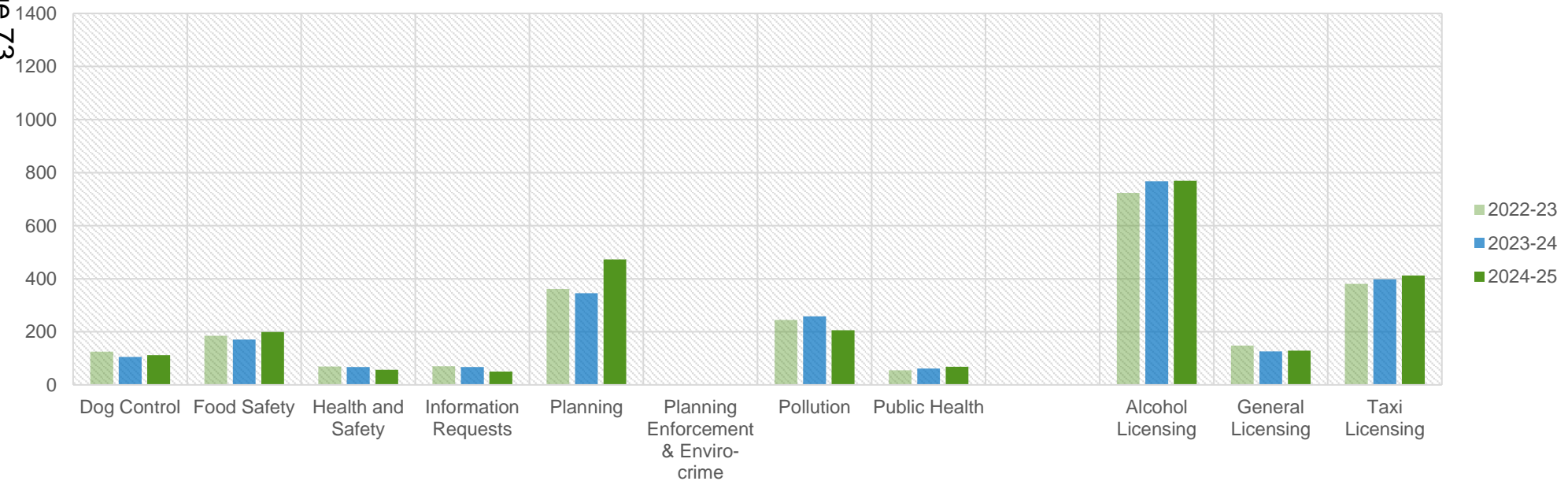
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Malvern Hills District Council



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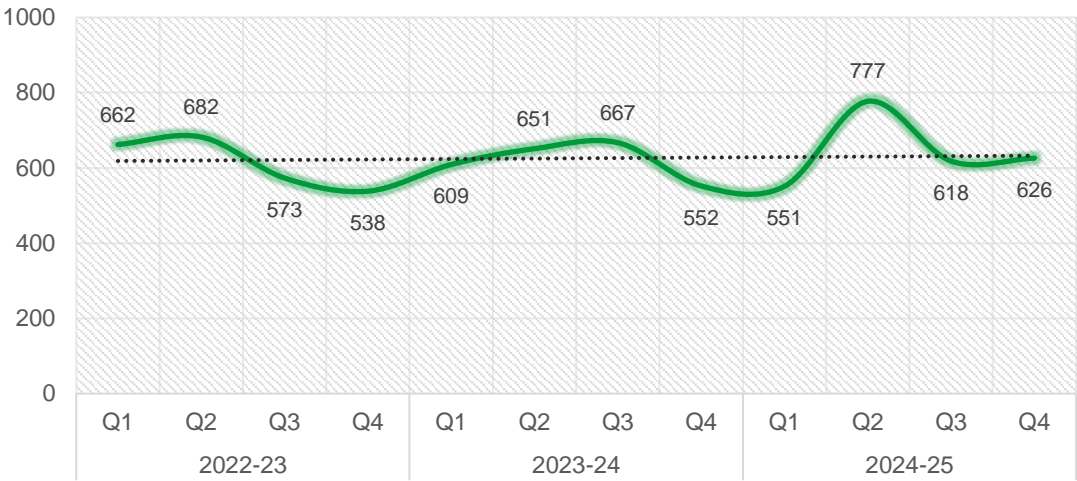


Appendix 5: District Council Summaries

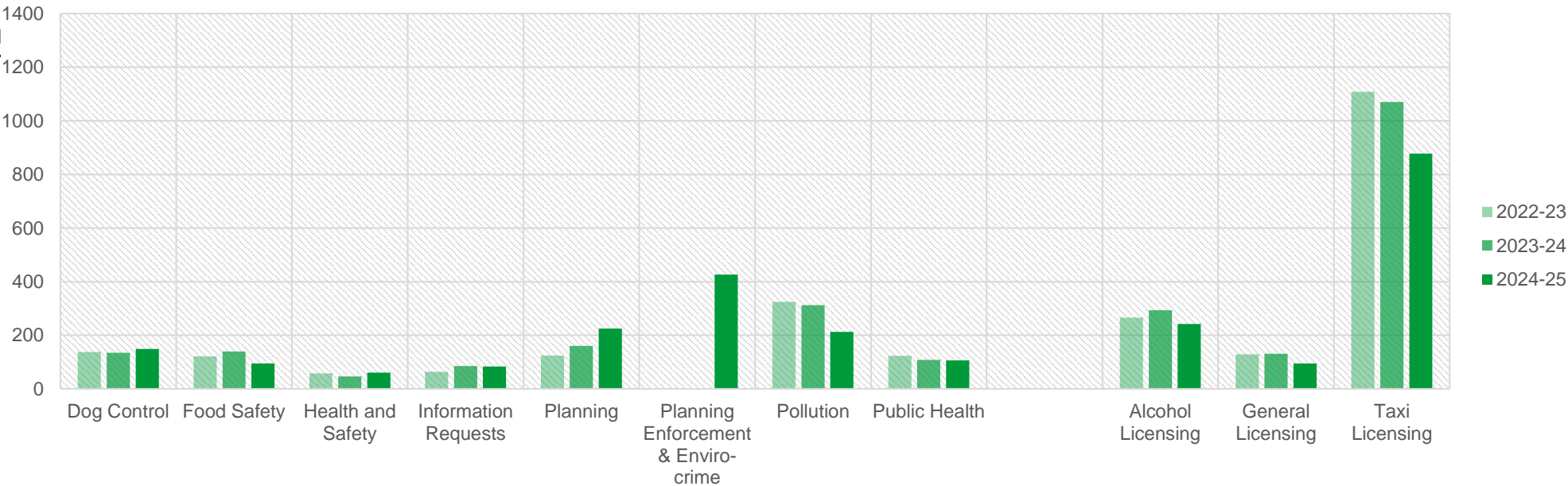
The data on this page outlines the number of Environmental Health and Licensing cases (complaints, enquiries, applications, and notifications) received by WRS where the subject or enquirer were located in the Redditch district.

Note: The chart below provides a breakdown of cases by the primary functions undertaken by the service. The recent increase in cases can be attributed to the additional functions (enviro-crime and planning enforcement) now being delivered by the service. The figures for the current year are cumulative and will continue to increase until the end of year report is published in April 2025. The Y axis on this chart has also been standardised so the level of demand received against each function can be broadly compared to other districts.

Redditch Borough Council



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Appendix 5: District Council Summaries

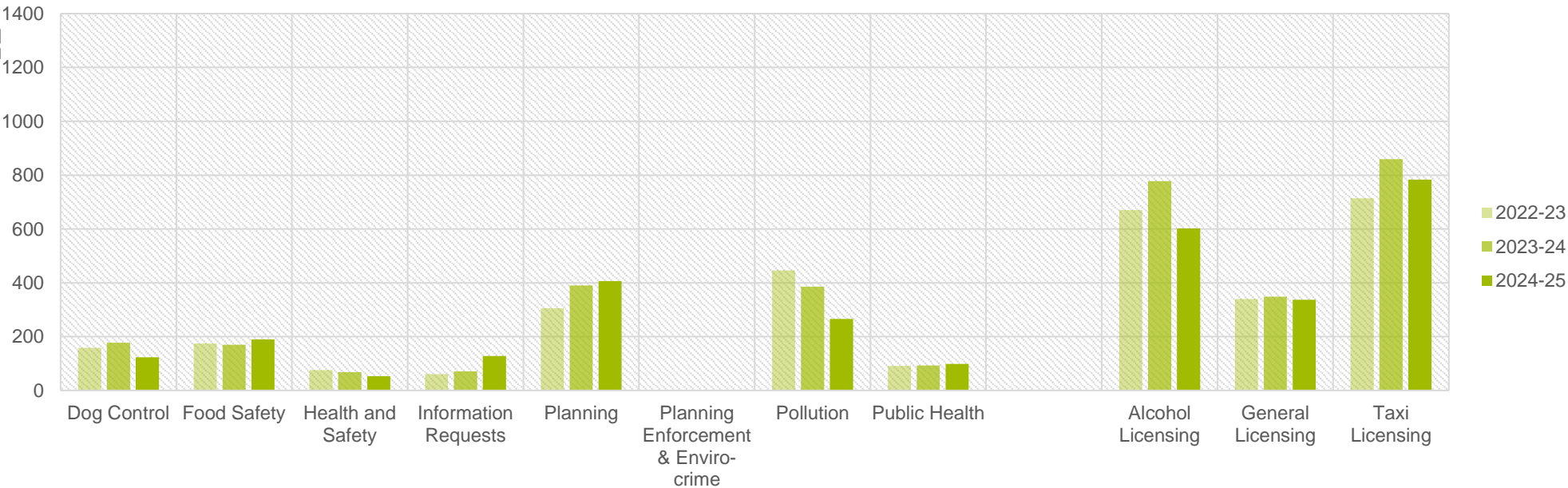
The data on this page outlines the number of Environmental Health and Licensing cases (complaints, enquiries, applications, and notifications) received by WRS where the subject or enquirer were located in the Worcester City district.

Note: The chart below provides a breakdown of cases by the primary functions undertaken by the service. The figures for the current year are cumulative and will continue to increase until the end of year report is published in April 2025. The Y axis on this chart has also been standardised so the level of demand received against each function can be broadly compared to other districts.

Worcester City Council



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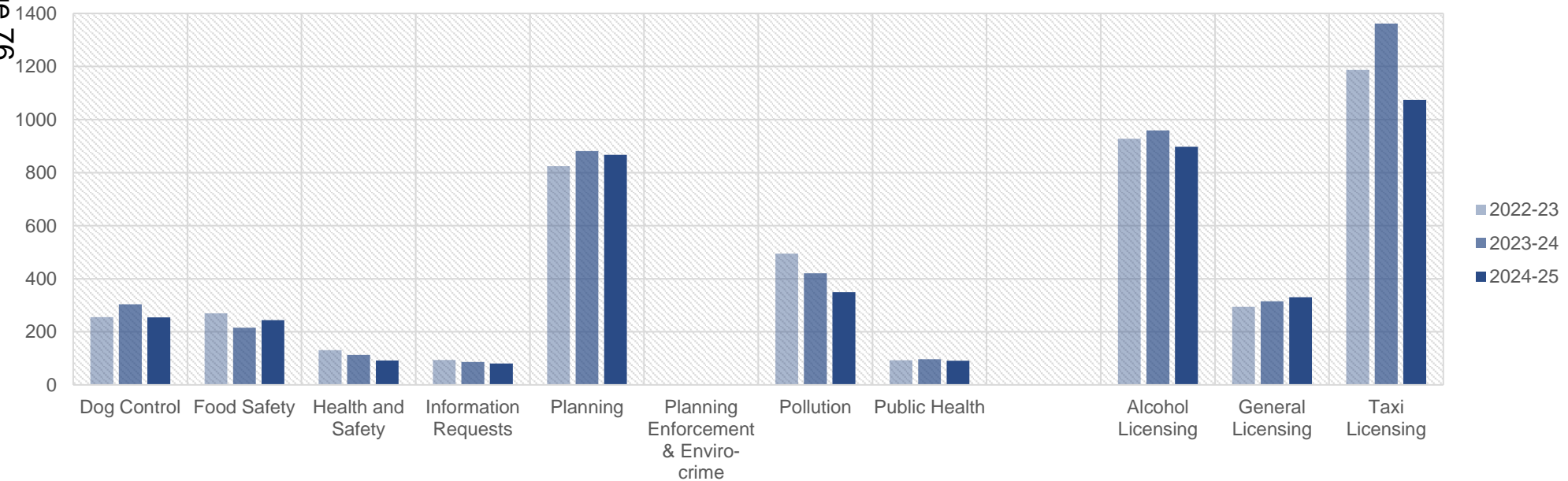
The data on this page outlines the number of Environmental Health and Licensing cases (complaints, enquiries, applications, and notifications) received by WRS where the subject or enquirer were located in the Wychavon district.

Note: The chart below provides a breakdown of cases by the primary functions undertaken by the service. The figures for the current year are cumulative and will continue to increase until the end of year report is published in April 2025. The Y axis on this chart has also been standardised so the level of demand received against each function can be broadly compared to other districts.

Wychavon District Council



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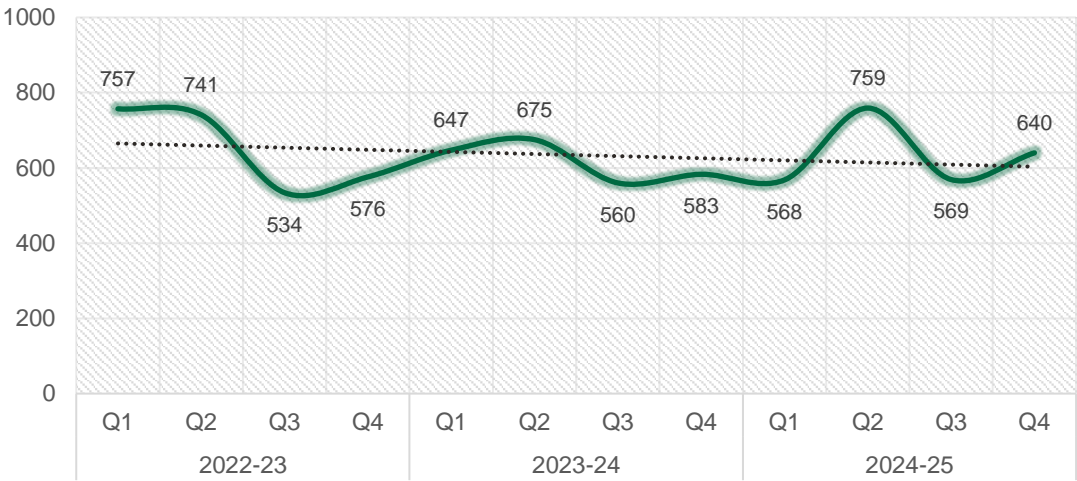
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Appendix 5: District Council Summaries

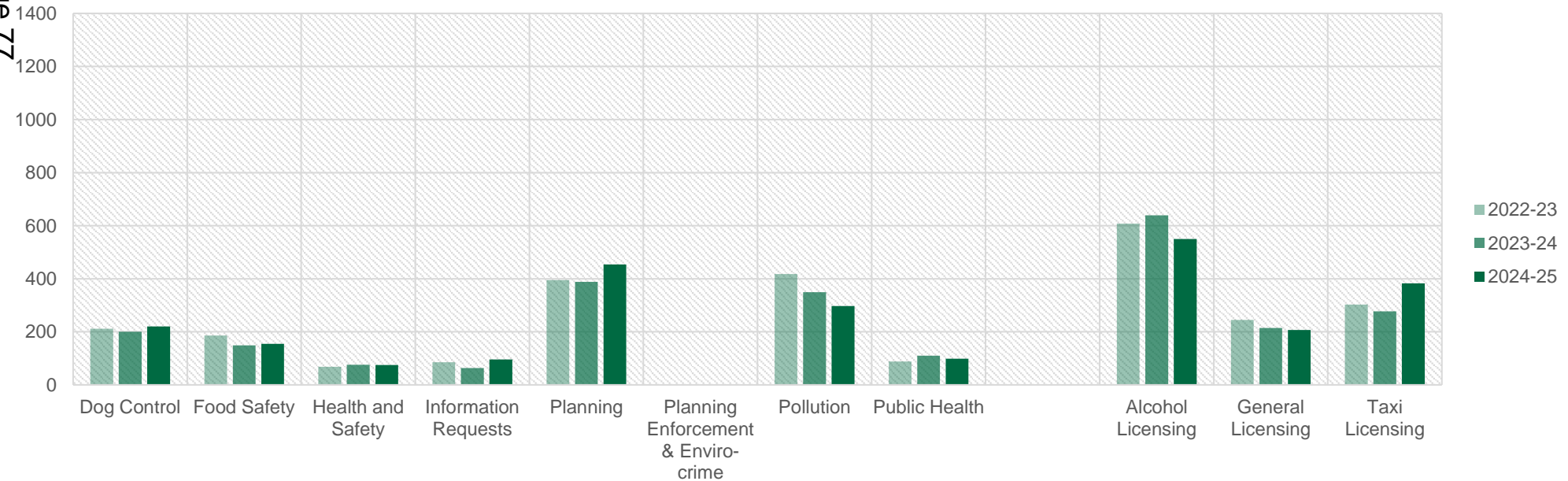
The data on this page outlines the number of Environmental Health and Licensing cases (complaints, enquiries, applications, and notifications) received by WRS where the subject or enquirer were located in the Wyre Forest district.

Note: The chart below provides a breakdown of cases by the primary functions undertaken by the service. The figures for the current year are cumulative and will continue to increase until the end of year report is published in April 2025. The Y axis on this chart has also been standardised so the level of demand received against each function can be broadly compared to other districts.

Wyre Forest District Council



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Agenda Item 7

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WRS Board

Date: 26th June 2025

Title: Activity and Performance Data Quarters 1, 2 3 and 4 2024/5

Recommendation

That the Board notes the Report and that members use the contents of the activity data in their own reporting back to fellow members of the partner authorities.

Background

The detail of the report focuses on the final quarter of 2024/5, but the actual data allows comparison with previous quarters and previous years.

Contribution to Priorities

Board members have asked the service to provide data on activity levels to help reassure local members that WRS continues to address a range of issues in each partner area and more broadly across the county.

Report

Activity Data

The number dog of cases received during the year was 18% higher than 2022/23 and 7% higher compared to 2023/24. This is a far cry from the pre-pandemic period when we were routinely reporting falls in numbers of dog cases. We can only assume that it is due to the huge increase in dog ownership that occurred during the pandemic. Hopefully the fact that last year's increase was lower than the previous year means we will soon see a peak in activity.

Approximately 88% of cases in the system were reports of lost or stray dogs, with most cases categorised as "contained strays" (i.e., dogs found and held by members of the public). During the year officers noted an increase in the number of dogs picked up with welfare concerns that subsequently required veterinary treatment or examination. Approximately 44% of dogs were successfully reunited with their owners although this figure varies significantly between local authorities.

Complaints regarding dog control are relatively few in number each quarter. Only 92 were received during the year, with 40 cases relating to dogs that were persistently straying from residential properties and 35 of dog fouling.

The number of food cases received during the year is broadly comparable to 2022/23 but a 7% lower than last year. Most cases tend to be enquiries, including requests for business advice. Of the actual complaints received during the year, some 70% related to issues with food products such as poor-quality food or food containing a foreign body, and 30% related to poor hygiene standards or practices at food businesses. We know from previous experience that these latter complaints seldom lead to a down-rating of premises below 3, so these are reviewed before that are actioned to see if there are other reasons to believe that action may be required.

Based on the 1,722 interventions undertaken during the year, as has been the case for some years now, only a small proportion of businesses were rated as "non-compliant" (issued a rating of 0, 1, or 2 FHRS score). A significant proportion of non-compliant ratings were issued to the hospitality sector (such as takeaways and pubs) or small retailers. To find out more about food hygiene ratings, please visit <https://ratings.food.gov.uk>.

The number of health and safety at work cases received last year fell by 9% compared to 2022/23 but was 3% higher than last year. Just over 40% of cases were reports of accidents in workplaces, with most cases relating to injuries where a worker was incapacitated for more than seven days or injuries to members of the public. The most common cause of accidents continues to be slips, trips and falls (whether on the same level or from height). Sadly, the service began investigating a fatality during quarter two after a contractor working at a retail outlet was crushed by a piece of mechanical equipment, and several others were still in process. However, since year-end, a number of these long-standing cases have been closed with either warnings or no further action in one case.

The number of licensing cases received during the year is 3% higher than 2022/23 but 4% lower than last year. Licensing demand has appeared relatively predictable looking back at levels in recent years. Around 65% of cases recorded are applications and registrations, with private hire or hackney carriage vehicles representing 31% of demand and 24% from temporary events notices served on the six councils under the Licensing Act 2003.

The Licensing team receives a significant number of enquiries each year, such as queries about regulations, by-laws, and licence condition. Actual complaints about conduct of license holders and businesses are fewer in number, with approximately 49% relating to taxi licensing (i.e., poor driver behaviour, unauthorised parking, or poor driving standards, etc,) and 22% related to alcohol licensing, and allegations of business failing to uphold the licensing objectives. A further 13% of complaints have related to animal licensing with most cases relating to the unlicensed breeding and/or sale of dogs.

Planning enquiries have continued to grow in number with this year's total being 35% higher than 2022/23 and 21% higher than last year. Approximately 90% of logged enquiries related to consultations for air quality, contaminated land, or nuisances. This area of work remains one that is in demand from clients beyond the Worcestershire border with around 1 in 4 enquiries being processed on a contractual basis for other

local authorities.

After the peak in Q4 2023/4 and Q1 2024/5, numbers of information requests (EIR/FOI) dipped in Q2 and increased across Q3 and 4 but did not quite return to that earlier peak level. We often see these requests, EIRs in particular, linked to planning work, but this is not always the case.

There is currently no comparable temporal data available for the planning enforcement and enviro-crime functions that are now being discharged for Bromsgrove and Redditch, with the work only formally coming into the Board's remit in June last year. Based on the 762 cases investigated from then to the end of the financial year, some 65% have related to fly-tipping whilst 16% have related to planning breaches at residential properties.

As this is a new service area for WRS, processes and priorities continue to be developed and adapted to tackle issues, however there are a number of priority work areas which include: enforcement at fly-tipping hotspots, clearing a backlog of legacy planning enforcement cases, and streamlining/standardising the approach to tackling cases relating to untidy land. As can be seen from the graph, during much of Q1 WRS was working mainly on Bromsgrove and Redditch Planning Enforcement enquiries under the then contractual arrangement. From 1st June, when Enviro-crime was formally added to this and matters moved under the Board, complaint numbers rose significantly. Most of the fall in numbers shown in the graph relates to a seasonal reduction in the number of fly tipping incidents (and therefore investigations) but is also partly due to the number of 'legacy' cases that were passed over in June being reviewed and either resolved or closed.

The overall number of nuisance-type cases received during 2024/5 tells a tale of poor weather, with the figures showing a 29% fall compared to 2022/23 and 20% compared to 2023/24. As ever, 90% of cases were reports of alleged statutory nuisances with around 44% of cases relating to noise from domestic properties such as noise from barking dogs or noise from audio-visual equipment. Other prominent nuisances commonly included noise from hospitality businesses, smoke from the burning of domestic or commercial waste, and dust from construction sites.

The number of what we call public health cases, which are often tied into nuisance from a legislative perspective, was broadly comparable to 2022/23 but 5% lower than 2023/24. Almost 60% of these cases related to pest control such as enquiries about domestic treatments, enquiries about sewer baiting, or complaints about pest activity caused by the actions of neighbouring residents or businesses. A further 24% related to accumulations of various types at residential properties, sometimes but not exclusively of waste materials of various kinds. Such complaints also commonly reference the presence of rodents or other pests; however, it is not always the case and officers do find that sometimes this is more of a fear for neighbours than a reality.

Based on the 792 domestic treatments undertaken by pest control contractors during the year to date, 51% were due to issues with rats whilst 66% have taken place at properties in the Redditch or Wychavon district.

Homes for Ukraine

Support has continued to be provided to Bromsgrove and Redditch Councils with the provision of the Homes for Ukraine scheme. This has involved host and guest checks, support and guidance as well as facilitating

appropriate payments. This has been completed utilising staff formerly employed as COVID Advisors. More details are provided in the Annual Report.

Performance

The year was mixed again from a customer satisfaction perspective with the level for business customers returning to its usual 97/ 98% from last year's 94.6% low, but the non-business customer measure closed at 56.7% compared with 60.4% and 59.2% respectively in the last 2 years.

More detail on these is contained in the Annual Report. With non-business customers, resources to address nuisance complaints continue to be stretched during the Summer, although last year was quieter than some due to the relatively poor weather. Managers will continue to look at how to improve performance in several areas and continue to try to manage public expectations around what is achievable with nuisance issues as many of these will never be resolved to the satisfaction of the complainant. Response rates were worse this year than previously with only 104 responses, compared to 161 and 138 in the previous 2 years, neither of which is good. Literally hundreds of requests for responses (712 to non-business and 3360 to business,) a mix of digital and paper questionnaires were sent out, but it is very difficult to get replies. For the business measure, only 246 customers responded. In better scoring years we would expect 200-250 responses from non-business customers and perhaps beyond 300 in a good year from businesses. Clearer communication and officers maintaining agreed contact intervals with complainants may improve this situation. Whilst we will never achieve total satisfaction because of the nature of our work, we know we can do better than this.

People who felt better equipped to deal with issues ended the year at 53.4% below the figures in the previous 3 years (56.6%, 57%, and 58.5%,) but it should be noted that a low score here invariably accompanies a low overall satisfaction score.

The figures for licensing processing are slightly better than last year's 96.8%, with 97.5% of taxi driver renewals completed within 5 working days of having a full application. This is the same as in 2022/23. The number of vehicles suspended is lower than in the last 3 years at 54, compared to 70, 84 and 59 respectively. As members will see from the details in the appendix, much of this is driven by a single fleet. Members should also note that the testing regime does vary to some extent between partners. Failure rates may reflect the current economic climate, with cost-of-living pressures continuing to impact on members of the trade. However, members should remember that the safety of the travelling public is paramount in their role as the licensing authority.

Numbers of compliments are down on the previous 2 years, but the ratio to complaints remains good at over 3:1.

Staff sickness is up again at 4.31 days per FTE, compared with 3.07 and

2.93 days in the last 2 years. A significant proportion of this year's sickness is long-term (more than 28 days,) and relates to a very small number of officers who have had to deal with life-threatening illness. It is still a significant improvement on 5.2 days from 2021/22, although slightly above the 6-year average including 22/3 (3.6 days.)

Staff satisfaction was at 90.5%, slightly lower than last year and still a good result given the pressures. 63 of our staff cohort responded, which was better than previous years, and over 74% of staff who responded scored the service as 8/10 or better to work for, which shows most staff do like working in the environment we provide. Further work will be done during the year to look at more detailed feedback for the staff.

The proportion of businesses licensed under the 2003 Act (alcohol and entertainment) being alleged to not uphold the 4 licensing objectives is lower in all districts this year compared to last, with the figures at the lower end of what has been reported in previous years. This measure looks at allegations regarding breaches of the objectives, so this is not a proportion undermining the objectives. Although residents may not like what a pub is doing, it is not always the case that their activities contravene what is required. We have previously explained to members that, after pandemic lockdowns where hospitality premises were closed for long periods, the general tolerance of noise and similar activities from this type of premise seemed to have reduced. Hence, as these businesses sought other activities and uses of their outside spaces to increase revenue, residents living in the vicinity became unhappy with the changes. The data still shows that most premises across the County are well controlled by their operators, with issues arising from a minority.

The figures for the rate of noise complaints per 1000 heads of the population matched the overall low level of nuisance complaints. Wet and cold weather, of which we had plenty last year, leads to closed windows, which generally leads to fewer noise issues being raised. The figures for this measure are the lowest for each district that we have recorded. It continues to suggest that the environment for Worcestershire residents is good.

Overall income was excellent with income from non-partner sources at over £650,000, which represents over 22% of the budget from 2016/17, which we have used for comparison over the years, and over 16% of current net revenue.

Various pressures from salaries and inflation have driven up costs in recent years. Therefore, the cost per head of population is up this year at £6.62 per head of population. As we have said previously, it is difficult to compare our costs with others because of the way the service is delivered, however we are sure spending is comparable or modest compared to similar local authorities that are discharging these functions.

Contact Points

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Background Papers

Appendix A: Activity Report (separate document)
Appendix B: Performance Indicators Table

Appendix B: Performance indicator table**Table of Pls 2024/5**

Indicator	Reporting period	Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4/ Outrun
1. % of service requests where resolution is achieved to customers satisfaction	Quarterly NB: fig is cumulative	60	58.5	58.6	56.7
2. % of service requests where resolution is achieved to business satisfaction	Quarterly NB: fig is cumulative	98.3	97.7	96.7	97.1
3. % businesses broadly compliant at first assessment/ inspection	Annually	98.7	Bromsgrove 99.5 Malvern Hills 97.7 Redditch 98.0 Worcester City 99.3 Wychavon 98.1 Wyre Forest 97.4 Worcestershire 98.4	98.3	Bromsgrove 99.2 Malvern Hills 98.0 Redditch 97.7 Worcester City 99.2 Wychavon 98.3 Wyre Forest 97.6 Worcestershire 98.4
4. % of food businesses scoring 0,1 or 2 at 1 st April each year	Annually	1.3	Bromsgrove 0.5 Malvern Hills 2.3 Redditch 2.0 Worcester City 0.7 Wychavon 1.9 Wyre Forest 2.1 Worcestershire 1.6	1.7	Bromsgrove 0.8 Malvern Hills 2.0 Redditch 2.3 Worcester City 0.8 Wychavon 1.7 Wyre Forest 2.4 Worcestershire 1.6
5 % of drivers licence renewal applications issued within 5 working days of receipt of a complete application	6-monthly	NA	97.6%	NA	97.5%
6 % of vehicles found to be defective whilst in service Number of vehicles found to be defective by district and the percentage this represents of the fleet county-wide	6-monthly	NA	27= 1.6% of 1684 vehicles on the road county-wide BDC 1 MHDC 2 RBC 18 WC 6 WDC 1 WFDC 0	NA	54 = 3.3% of 1647 vehicles on the road county-wide BDC 1 MHDC 3 RBC 34 WC 11 WDC 4 WFDC 1

7	% of service requests where customer indicates they feel better equipped to deal with issues themselves in future	Quarterly NB: fig is cumulative	50	51.9	54.2	53.4
8	Review of register of complaints/compliments	Quarterly NB: fig is cumulative	5/11	12/26	17/58	22/69
9	Annual staff sickness absence at public sector average or better	Quarterly NB: figure is cumulative	1.13 days per FTE	1.55 days per FTE	2.94 days per FTE	4.31 days per FTE
10	% of staff who enjoy working for WRS	Annually	NA	NA	NA	90.5
11	% of licensed businesses subject to allegations of not upholding the 4 licensing objectives	6-monthly	NA	Bromsgrove 4.2 Malvern Hills 3.5 Redditch 3.0 Worcester City 5.5 Wychavon 2.2 Wyre Forest 5.9 Worcestershire 4.0	NA	Bromsgrove 6.8 Malvern Hills 5.1 Redditch 5.2 Worcester City 6.7 Wychavon 4.3 Wyre Forest 8.3 Worcestershire 6.0
12	Rate of noise complaint per 1000 head of population	6-monthly	NA	Bromsgrove 0.55 Malvern Hills 0.68 Redditch 0.69 Worcester City 0.74 Wychavon 0.60 Wyre Forest 0.79 Worcestershire 0.67	NA	Bromsgrove 1.93 Malvern Hills 1.62 Redditch 1.89 Worcester City 2.03 Wychavon 1.75 Wyre Forest 2.04 Worcestershire 1.89
13	Total income expressed as a % of district base revenue budget (16/17)	6-monthly	NA	£258,989 which is 8.6% as a proportion of the 2016/17 revenue budget figure (£3,017,000)	NA	£668,806, which is 22.17% as a proportion of the 2016/17 revenue budget figure (£3,017,000) and 16.23% of the current revenue budget of £4,119,000
14	Cost of	Annually	NA	NA	NA	Based on outrun cost of

regulatory services per head of population (Calculation will offset income against revenue budget)					<p>£4,064.802 against the County's most recent population estimate of 613680 in 2023, the service cost is:</p> <p>£6.62 per head</p>
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Worcestershire Regulatory Services

Supporting and protecting you

Activity Report | 2024-25



Bromsgrove
District Council
www.bromsgrove.gov.uk



Malvern Hills
District Council
www.malvernhills.gov.uk



REDDITCH BOROUGH COUNCIL
making a difference
www.redditchbc.gov.uk



Worcester
CITY COUNCIL



WYCHAVON
DISTRICT COUNCIL
good services, good value



Wyre Forest
District Council

Foreword

Written by Simon Wilkes (Director of Regulatory Services)

Welcome to the final activity report for 2024/25. It follows the familiar format that Board members will have seen many times and, whilst the detail covers the period 1st January to 31st December 2025, effectively you'll see a summary of the full year with the graphs and tables allowing comparison with the data in previous periods.

Stray dog numbers continued to be high due to new contracts with other authorities, and managing the space with kennelling partners has been taxing at times. Numbers are slightly higher than last year and well above the one previous to that.

Food cases (complaints and enquiries,) appear to have settled on a relatively steady trend of roughly 250 per quarter, although the trend line is still slightly downward due to higher historic figures. Just over 1700 food interventions under FHRS have taken place this year and still they paint a picture of high levels of compliance. In Quarter 4, we began to see the new staff capacity being to influence overall numbers of visits. Health and safety work also generally following trends during this period.

After falling between Q1 and 2, numbers of information requests increased slightly again during Q4. Requests for support in the planning system continued to increase in line with the upward trend line. It looks like 2024/5 was clearly the busiest year of the last three.

Overall, Licensing work involving both applications and complaints/ enquiries remained around the trend all year.

Pollution and nuisance complaint numbers are lower this year because of the relatively poor summer weather, which continued into the Autumn. Looking at the figures, Q4 showed an uptick, perhaps because it was quite dry if cold for some of the period, possibly tempting people to be out more, or to have windows open. This continues to demonstrate what I have always said about nuisance complaint levels appearing inextricably linked to the weather. Public Health related complaints (accumulations, vermin, public burials, etc,) appear to have been more or less on trend for the year.

We hope the report demonstrates the volume of work staff are undertaking and that some of the stories behind the numbers highlight the difficulties staff sometimes face. If you have further queries, please feel free to contact myself and the Team Managers.

Many thanks,



Simon

Community Environmental Health

Written by David Mellors (Environmental Health And Trading Standards Manager)

Quarter One

The routine food hygiene intervention programme continued with support from our contractors. The recruitment process for the 5 new food safety officers agreed by the Board commenced to support this work. This is a key priority as we not only have our 2024-2025 businesses to inspect but also some 600 existing and new premises outstanding from 2023-2024. The latter have been risk assessed to ensure that we focus resources on the highest risk businesses.

Compliance continues to be very high with over 90% of premises achieving Food Hygiene Rating System (FHRS) scores for of Level 4-5. Level 3 is considered to demonstrate that premises are broadly compliant with the law, so these premises exceed the statutory requirements.

As always officers continue to find poor premises where more formal action is required. One persistently non-compliant premises (a bakery in Malvern) where the food business operator has shown reluctance over an extended period to make the serious improvements needed is currently going through the formal legal process. Officers also investigated chocolate Easter eggs at a major retailer that were found to have been nibbled by mice. Work is ongoing to bring these premises into compliance.

The aggregators (Just Eat, Deliveroo etc) now remove businesses with very poor scores from their platforms. Consequently, those poor performers wishing to partner with them tend to improve quickly and often pay for a re-rating. Getting a good FHRS score is a key driver to compliance. There are also early signs that numbers of new premises may be on an upward trend with more mobile and home-based traders registering with us. Indeed, the seemingly never-ending coffee shop openings continue, although we may now be at saturation point as several have also closed. The business closures reported appear to be mostly down to increased costs of staff, food, and energy.

We were also involved in two national initiatives in Quarter one.

- The Food Standards Agency's continuing national E Coli investigation. Worcestershire has several growers who supply the major sandwich producers and have been identified as the possible source. All the Worcestershire businesses involved have co-operated fully in providing the information requested.
- A traceability exercise on imported meat products led by the National Food Crime Unit. We worked closely with Trading Standards colleagues at the County Council on the latter as it often involved poor labelling. It is a legal requirement that food is labelled in English. In one case officers had to use an interpreter as none of the items found could be identified. The operation led to food being removed from the market.

A considerable amount of officer time was spent working with UKHSA (UK Health Security Agency) in an investigation into a Cryptosporidium outbreak at a farm in Worcestershire which received extensive media coverage. The number of reported cases ran into the hundreds and is said to be the largest known outbreak of its type. As this is also a working farm your officers had to work closely with the Health & Safety Executive on enforcement issues.

Officers also dealt with over 200 food complaints and enquiries about food premises and issued 23 Export Certificates.

In statutory nuisance work, an Abatement Notice was served on a public house in May under the Environmental Protection Act for noise from outdoor music events, and a noisy cockerel was put before the courts! Preliminary meetings were held for events including summer music festivals, and officers worked with event organisers for a previously controversial bank holiday event as well as preparation for the Christmas light switch on in Worcester.

Complex health and safety investigations continued, with your Officers attending the inquest into the death of a participant in a charity boxing event, and a dog sledging accident investigation was concluded.

Quarter Two

Interviews for the recruitment of five new officers into the Community Environmental Health Team as agreed by the Board to meet the requirements of the Food Standards Agency food safety recovery programme were concluded in Q2. The outcome was successful in that three additional Regulatory Support Officers (RSO) joined us in September. They come from diverse backgrounds, namely travel, retail and teaching. One is also a fluent Chinese speaker. As WRS continue to lead the way in developing the RSO role our Principal Officer (Food) has developed a specific training programme to ensure they are 'competent' to deal with low-risk premises as required by the Food Law Code of Practice. Job offers were also made for two Technical Officer posts in food safety, and another to fill the vacancy in noise/pollution work. They will commence employment next quarter.

Major investigations in Q2 included noise from the refurbishment of a Sainsburys supermarket in Worcester with numerous complaints of night time disturbance whilst floors were being dug up. Site meetings were held with the local Councillor and members of Sainsburys senior management and compromise reached on permissible activities at specific hours. We also received an appeal in respect of a Noise Abatement Notice served on a public house in Droitwich for excessively loud music impacting on an elderly neighbour. We await a court date.

A prosecution file for a local bakery which is consistently non-compliant was submitted to Malvern Hills District Council. We continued as ever to undertake routine inspections completing 450 high risk visits during the quarter. Most premises continue with good levels of compliance although there does appear to be an upwards trend in premises dropping in their FHRS rating. Failure to have a documented system, poor cleaning, lack of training and inadequate pest control were the main reasons.

A farm in Bromsgrove was one of several venues which held music events under temporary event notices which were monitored over the summer using both noise monitoring equipment and personal visits by members of the team.

Evidence of breaches of a noise abatement notice was established during an ongoing investigation into loud music from a residential address in Worcester. A prosecution file has subsequently been prepared ready for submission to the legal team.

Quotations have been obtained for a major works in default project to replace a failed sewage treatment system in Barnt Green, Bromsgrove.

A licence review has been instigated in relation to a public house in Worcester following ongoing noise complaints concerning loud music and late-night noise from customers on the premises.

In addition, your officers provided evidence at a Licence application hearing, having made representations concerning premises in Wyre Forest which included proposals for outdoor music events until 0100 hours. As a result, the applicant amended their application for outdoor music to end by 2200 hours and agreed to a number of additional noise control conditions.

Quarter Tree

The Ministry of Justice and the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government (formerly the Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities) wrote to local authorities last May, asking them to visit funeral directors trading in their areas. This was in response to the situation in Hull, concerning Legacy Independent Funeral Directors. The purpose of this initiative was to restore public confidence in the funeral sector.

WRS agreed to participate in this initiative on behalf of the Partner authorities, and our Funeral Directors Project began in Q3 with a visit to the premises of a local representative of a national trade body for officers to familiarise themselves with best practice in the funeral industry. A programme of visits across the county was planned and is now being implemented.

Budgetary approval has been given for major works in default to resolve an ongoing drainage issue in Barnt Green. An old septic tank system and soakaway at a residential property has failed and is giving rise to discharges of sewage across the property and into the road. A specification has been drawn up and quotes obtained to carry out remedial works including the installation of a modern packaged sewage treatment plant with consented discharge into the highway drainage system, avoiding the need for a new soakaway which would have been costly and disruptive and prone to future failure.

Following the investigation of alleged breaches of a noise abatement notice served on an occupier of a housing association house in Worcester, officers provided evidence and witness statements to the association who are using the evidence to seek eviction of the tenant through the County Court process.

An investigation was carried out into alleged smoke nuisance from solid fuel heating appliances emanating from moored narrow boats in a marina in Worcester. Whilst no statutory nuisance was witnessed, the type of appliances and fuel being used were checked and verified to meet Smoke Control Area requirements, and the marina management company are considering a voluntary grant to support owners switching to alternative heating sources where viable.

Alleged smoke nuisance emanating from a farm in a village in Wychavon was investigated by the team, where it appeared that waste was being imported to the site and burned. Whilst no smoke nuisance has been witnessed to date, officers have been in liaison with colleagues from the Environment Agency and Planning Enforcement officers to consider other potential means of regulating waste disposal activities on the site.

Several cases of bed bug infestations, which were proving difficult to eradicate, were identified by officers this quarter. The service has identified an increasing trend of infestations where it appears that limited household cleaning combined with potential resistance to currently permitted pesticides can lead to long term infestations persisting despite multiple costly pest control visits and treatments. Work continues in gathering intelligence in this area so that a suitable control strategy may be developed. In partnership working, the Safety Advisory Group chaired by WRS met for Worcester Racecourse's end of season meeting, the team continued their work in multi-agency partnership groups and your officers continue to assist the Worcestershire Coroner regarding a workplace death.

Quarter Four

The final quarter of the year was mainly focussed on completing food inspections, where the level of compliance continued to be high. The service also had a flurry of over 100 food related complaints, although none were particularly serious.

Food officers dealt with 3 FSA Alerts on various imported foods which had missed customs checks and a written warning was issued regarding future conduct to a pub in Wyre Forest in relation to a clostridium perfringens food poisoning outbreak. Officers also continued to work with the hospital facilities in Redditch and Kidderminster to improve their Food Safety Management Systems whilst the service signed a Primary Authority agreement with "The Beefy Boys" burger restaurant.

In health and safety, officers complete a project in connection with funeral directors with no adverse results found from the visits completed. The service has also been involved in the Safety Advisory Groups for several upcoming festivals and has been working with the UKHSA to complete guidance to farms offering animal encounter sessions.

In terms of nuisance work, a pub in Droitwich agreed to stop holding out-door music events. This followed a pre-trial review hearing for their appeal of an Abatement Notice served for loud outdoor live music in May 2024.

Quarter One

On the whole there was a slight downward trajectory in licensing enquiries at the start of the quarter which is not dissimilar to other years at Q1 where this tends to be the calmer period between Christmas and summer queries. The team however have continued to remain busy due to other priorities which have namely taken the shape of policy matters that have required significant input from the teams.

At the beginning of April, it was announced that the Pavement Licensing Scheme that was originally introduced during the covid pandemic under the Business and Planning Act 2020 were to be made permanent as of the 31st March 2024 by provisions made in the Levelling Up and Regeneration Act 2023. This has therefore involved the team putting together a new pavement licensing policy based on the new legislation for each district council and presenting the new policy to all licensing committees or similar with a recommendation to consult on each policy for implementation. In the meantime the team are continuing with the temporary scheme until such decisions are made.

A review of the Taxi Standards that were implemented by all district councils in 2022 highlighted the need to make safeguarding training for all taxi drivers mandatory. As part of the initial changes a mandatory requirement for all NEW drivers to undertake the competency certificate was introduced. This is a thorough training session looking at all aspects that are required for a taxi driver to do their role including equalities, safeguarding, communication, driver conduct and responsibilities. The feedback from drivers has remained positive and valuable but showed a uneven playing field with half of drivers now trained and others not. As a result, officers have presented reports to all district councils recommending that all drivers undertake safeguarding training and undertake refresher training every three years.

Members Training commenced across all districts in June with officers providing training to new and established members of the committee. A new interactive format has been welcomed by members and has allowed different scenarios to be played out through role play and videos which has allowed a multitude of different questions asked by councillors to get themselves ready for the role.

During the pandemic, an operation commenced to look at illegal dog breeding across Worcestershire and the results clearly brought to light the amount of people that were unlicensed and illegally selling dogs across the County. As a result, various teams across WRS including Licensing, the intelligence unit and the Dog Warden service have worked together to educate, communicate and monitor complaints in order to reduce this number in the long term. Earlier this year a second operation commenced through the intelligence team and again they identified there still to be a large number of potential illegal dog breeding cases across the County. Although it had reduced since the first operation the numbers still signified a problem and as a result licensing officers are now investigating a number of cases that will either result in licence applications being submitted, warning letters distributed, or enforcement action being taken.

Finally, the team have been working with Technical Services and the Intelligence team on introducing a new triage process for calls and queries. Licensing remains the service with the highest volume of call and queries to the duty desk. As a result, some of these queries are referred to a licensing technical officer but could be answered by the duty officer team. Both teams have been working together to establish a set of processes that the duty officers can use to enable them to efficiently navigate through the questions/queries they receive daily. The intelligence team have highlighted from information and data collected which areas of licensing form the largest numbers of queries in order to aid prioritisation.

Quarter Two

The summer spike tends to show impact in this quarter with evidence of applications and queries higher than the last quarter. Most of these relate to both Taxi Licensing and the Licensing Act and due to summer leave in the team this can be a challenging quarter for officers with fewer staff members in over the summer period.

Offices have been busy working on a number of policies for consultation this quarter ranging from new policies including the 'Pavement licensing policy' that has started to make its way back from consultation in some districts and the 'Mandatory Safeguarding for Taxi Drivers' that has also started to make its way back from consultation in some districts. But also, policies that require review based on statutory requirements such as the Gambling Policy. All consultations are posted on each individual district website to reply to and hard copies can be collected from the districts if required.

The number of new Animal licensing inspections have been slowly increasing and there has been a programme of interim inspections scheduled which has required more officers to get involved than usual. The team have also been working on Operation Lisbon where investigations remain ongoing.

Enforcement work continues across the team including evening work on taxi ranks, officers investigating suspended premises licences and interim animal inspections scheduled whereby there has been intelligence received regarding a licensed or unlicensed premises.

Alongside operational and day to day work the team continues to strive for efficiencies and have been continuing their work on implementing Victoria forms for the automation of licensing forms and a number of procurement projects including making the DBS process for taxi drivers more efficient and last but not least the procurement of veterinary services for animal licensing inspections.

Quarter Three

It has been a combination of queries, enforcement, consultations, and inspections this quarter. The introduction of the TENs form via Victoria forms seems to have reduced the number of queries being received regarding TENs as the more detailed FAQs are answering a lot of the questions that applicants have. Many of the queries around this quarter tend to be for Halloween, Bonfire and Christmas events.

The team continue to work closely with the intelligence team and have made good progress on Operation Lisbon and are now working on Operation Rome looking at taxi matters in several districts. If successful, the team will look to deploy it across all of the districts where over ranking and out of area vehicles have given rise for concern.

The Safeguarding and Pavement licensing policies are still making their way through the various Licensing Committees and are all at different stages of either consultation or waiting to be presented at Committee. Both Worcester City and Wyre Forest Licensing Committees have already approved the safeguarding training proposals and drivers are already undertaking Safeguarding training in Wyre Forest with Worcester City drivers starting in January.

Animal Licensing inspections continue, and the team now have four qualified officers with a fifth officer nearly completing their qualification. It is important to note that this area of licensing has developed since the introduction of the Animal Licensing Regulations in 2018 and the proactive work involved has resulted in positive outcomes for the service.

All things Wild had an interim visit scheduled this quarter and there were no concerns raised by the team or the Zoo itself. They continue to follow and adhere to the policies and guidance as required.

And finally, an event that a number of the team get involved in and enjoy working with partners to ensure compliance was the involvement with colleagues across the city at the Victorian Fayre. Again, the team worked collaboratively with other services across the City to ensure the annual event went to plan.

Quarter Four

Committee work ended this quarter as the year started with a number of policy change recommendations going through the March and April Committee cycles. All districts now have the Mandatory Safeguarding for Taxi drivers and Pavement Licensing policies through and approved. The commencement dates are slightly different across the districts but the training remains the same.

Operation Lisbon has seen some positive results and the team continue investigating the remainder of those cases to ensure learning outcomes across the team in readiness for similar projects in the future. Animal licensing itself has taken a number of the team out of normal day to day work to spend time on a programme of interim inspections focused on 5* Rated premises. The team have found a number of issues and these have been either addressed by the business or if not a variation of the star rating has been issued.

Operation Rome was an operation that commenced in Worcester City looking at the enforcement of Taxi's including the districts on fleet but also those coming into the City including Uber drivers. The team have issued warnings, penalty points and engaged with other local authorities to ensure the correct sanction has been enforced. Wyre Forest District Council members have requested that this be rolled out into the Wyre Forest district area and the intelligence team have been notified.

The team are again focussing resource and activity on compliance and enforcement and have commenced the planning of a series of enforcement activity across various licensing activity over the next six months.

Quarter One

Our Air Quality work continued to work at pace. As well as drafting and submission of 6 Annual Status Reports by the team for all 6 Districts, a draft Air Quality Action Plan for Worcester City successfully navigated through Worcester City Council Committees. A behaviour change survey, jointly developed with Public Health also closed and the results stated to be analysed. Initial steering group meetings with key stakeholders were held for Bromsgrove and Wyre Forest District Council's in order to produce a draft Air Quality Action Plan for both by November 2024. Our AQ Behaviour Change work also has begun to pick up pace starting with lots of contact with schools some of which have led to visits.

During this period the draft Contaminated Land Inspection Strategy for Redditch Borough Council was finalised. This updated strategy reviews and replaces the 2001 document taking account of changes in the Contaminated Land Statutory Guidance 2012, national policy, council policy, and sets out the Council's strategic approach to review and assessment of contaminated land. The document is due to go to RBC committee in October 2024. The strategies for the other districts will follow on the back of this draft.

Although contract work for Solihull Metropolitan Borough Council (SMBC) came to an end during April 2024 we continued to offer contracted support to Gloucester City Council (GCC), East Staffordshire (ESBC) and North Warwickshire Borough Council's (NWBC) as well as the six Worcestershire districts. This often involves reviewing complex reports provided in support of planning applications and discharge of planning condition requests. We are asked to comment on the whole range of planning applications, large and small, including residential developments, commercial, infrastructure projects, solar farms, industrial processes, extensions, change of use, conversion of buildings and any other development where contamination may be a relevant consideration.

Interesting cases to note include the demolition and redevelopment of Bromsgrove Fire Station, a fuel depot in Gloucester City and an old farm near Pinvin all for various uses including residential development.

Routine Industrial Permitting work including inspection of large industrial processes, foundries and casting through to cement processing and petrol stations all continued. No significant issues arisen apart from continuing complaints against a large manufacturing facility in the Gloucester area.

As of April 2024, the current 2 remaining COVID Advisors are continuing to assist with the Homes for Ukraine scheme along with a principal officer managing the scheme in Bromsgrove and Redditch. Throughout Q1 significant effort have been dedicated to school and college registrations, the support workers have been working with education officers and Ukrainian guest with the registration process, applications, references and have accompanied several students to college open evenings; also supported parent with worries about school documentation, attended school meeting and helped rectify any issues that arose.

In April the Homes for Ukraine team had a meeting with an external Mental Health team to discuss some complex issues and best ways to deal with them, and in May we met with the wider Redditch Council Housing Team to build a relationship and discuss the best approach on how we can work together to support our guests on the scheme. As usual team have continued to support guests move from their hosts to independent living in either Social Housing or Private Rented Accommodation, this consists of financial advice, help setting up utilities, sourcing furniture and household goods and help getting children into schools / colleges. There were 2 new arrivals in Bromsgrove and 10 new arrivals in Redditch.

This first quarter of the new financial year is always busy from an IT development perspective as we prepare and submit most of our government returns. Over the quarter we have also taken part in various cyber security awareness activities designed to increase the security and resilience of the computer system we use. We have also worked to enhance service delivery, with these activities including regular updates and patches to our main back office system, record retention and deletions. We also offered PAT testing for all electrical equipment located in our offices and for remote working equipment. We are obliged to complete this every 2 years. Work on Service-wide projects has also continued including the Automation Project and introduction of Taxi digital Identity records. We have continued income generation work with Bromsgrove and Redditch Planning, Worcestershire Trading Standards, and Tewkesbury Borough Council's Environmental Health and Licensing.

Quarter Two

For the Technical Pollution team, work on the 2 new draft Air Quality Action Plans commenced at pace for both Bromsgrove and Wyre Forest District Councils. This work involved continuation of the steering group meetings following from Q1 and into Q2 followed by detailed source apportionment, modelling, quantification and feasibility study and assessment of the measures together with report writing. Additionally, our behaviour change work began to accelerate with contact with 49 schools to introduce our AQ work and Real Time Air Quality Portal.

A new draft Contaminated Land Strategy for Redditch Council was produced and submitted to the portfolio holder for consideration prior to Committee stages leading to sign off by Full Council later in 2024. Redditch's Strategy is the first in a refresh programme for all of the District Council's strategies, with the one for Malvern Hills proposed to follow in early 2025. We continue our contract work for North Warwickshire, Gloucester City and East Staffordshire District - including sites within Uttoxeter and Burton-on-Trent. The team have dealt with a couple of interesting cases in Gloucester requesting sign off of technical conditions, a standout being large new housing development at Hill Farm, Hempsted Lane, Gloucester. At Bakers Quay, Gloucester we also dealt with some sign off validation for areas of the site where planning consent was granted back in 2014 when the site was still being investigated/assessed and a remedial strategy agreed. We also provided support to our planning officers on a complex planning application at the Roxel Group site, near Stourport as well as several solar farms and battery storage facilities with scoping consultations and/or Environmental Information Requests across the Districts.

In terms of Environmental Permitting, a significant amount of time has been spent dealing with Modern Packaging in Pershore to upgrade their existing abatement technology as well as dealing with Roger Dyson (Foundry) in Droitwich Spa to improve their solvent management plan. As part of our contract work, minor issues involving Pernal in Gloucester are ongoing and we are in liaison with Gloucester City representatives.

For our Database administration and information technology support team, over this second quarter we took part in various cyber security awareness activities designed to increase the security and resilience of the computer system we use. This quarter we facilitated the introduction of the new Mimecast e-mail security system. At the beginning of the quarter the 2 remaining COVID Advisor continued to assist with the Homes for Ukraine scheme along with a principal officer managing the scheme in Bromsgrove and Redditch. Also, in July we successfully recruited another part time Homes for Ukraine support worker into the team.

As well as the usual routine support given to existing guests, hosts, and new arrivals, significant time and effort was dedicated to school and college registrations. Specifically on-going support was provided to three Students trying to get into college and university, with liaison between them and the education authorities. Other support is provided such as that provided to support Ukrainian guests who wanted to improve their job prospects, liaising with the job centre to access available free courses. Offering Employment advice to two young Male guests and helping with CVs. There have been 2 new young mothers in recent months, who have received help and advice from the support workers such as childcare, medical support, healthy starts scheme, visas and passports. Between the team there has been attendance at Bromsgrove and Redditch welcome refugees support groups and the Ukrainian Pop-up café hosted in the Bromsgrove Methodist church.

During September we saw an increase in demand for more hosts with three new arrivals in Redditch, due to the ongoing war in Ukraine and with the colder months approaching and the continuation of blackouts. We are continuing to explore different ways to try and attract new hosts to the scheme. Again, during September following the loss of one Dog Warden and with the commencement of new contracts with Birmingham, Solihull and North Somerset, we increased the number of dog wardens from two full time to now having three full time and a part-time warden.

Unfortunately, due to the new contracts we have had to put to sleep increasing numbers of stray dogs because of aggression primarily, but also because we have received higher numbers of pitbulls and XL Bully dogs (both banned breeds). The heightened levels of aggression in some of the stray dogs has caused a significant percentage which are not rehomeable to be put to sleep using a dart gun at the kennels, minimising risk to wardens, the public and the vet by not having to move the dog unnecessarily. As well as the larger bull breeds, we have also seen an increase in the number of puppies and dogs with significant welfare support needs. We attempt to meet the identified best method of caring for each dog which may mean alternative forms of boarding outside of our contracted kennels, such as fostering.

Quarter Three

Continuing the air quality work that was undertaken, Worcester City's final version of their Air Quality Action Plan was approved by the necessary Committees and submitted to Defra, followed by consultation drafts approved for Bromsgrove and Wyre Forest District Councils. Alongside the action planning work, our Behavioural Change Officer has been visiting a number of schools across the County and rolled out air quality behaviour change surveys to 126 schools with 338 respondents and a survey with HoW college reaching 741 students and staff.

The revised Redditch Contaminated Land Inspection Strategy was approved in November which updated the strategy to take into account recent legislative changes and work undertaken recently. Work commenced on updating the Malvern Hills Strategy document for approval.

For the officers supporting guests from Ukraine, significant time and effort continues to be dedicated to school registrations with the closing date for secondary schools being 31st October for September 2025.

There were several important updates regarding BRP [immigration status card] replacements, Ukraine Permission Extension [UPE] scheme, changes for those sponsoring/hosting close family members and changes to sponsor monthly thank you payments which meant the team has been inundated with questions from both hosts and guests: The 'BRP' has replaced eVisa with all BRP cards expiring on 31st December 2024. HCLG updated the guidance in October for councils on the Homes for Ukraine scheme. These changes meant that those sponsoring/hosting close family members under the scheme will no longer be eligible for thank you payments. Similarly in December, the Government announced future reductions in the sponsor monthly thank you payments.

There is still a demand for more hosts for Ukrainians wanting to flee the war in Ukraine and the continuous blackouts during the colder months, during November the team have been busy trying to attract more hosts by contacting all previous hosts, parish councils, women's institute, church groups and the refugee support group charities to raise awareness. With the support of Bromsgrove and Redditch comms team we started the "What it means to me" campaign to raise awareness of the need for more hosts and to encourage people to apply. There was an interview with Free Radio on 26th November, both RBC and BDC websites were updated on 27th November, Support Worker Tetiana Ponomar had a large news article in the Redditch Standard in early December and there was a social media post on Redditch Matters Instagram page on 26th December. In December a Breakfast with Santa event was held which 14 children attended. There were 7 new arrivals in Q3 in Redditch.

As the team have been gathering information on fly tips for the past 6 months (in the Bromsgrove and Redditch areas), we are able to identify specific areas that are hot spots for such activity. Cameras are specifically targeting these areas and have been successful in capturing offenders, these are currently being investigated. As we continue to focus on these specific areas our intel led approach is being reviewed every month to make sure we have the most up to date information to best utilise the resource we have to try and slow down the prolific tipping in these areas. The Environmental Enforcement Team have been busy preparing their enforcement files since the delivering the service with the first of many fixed penalty notices being served as an alternative to prosecution, with all paid to date.

As you will see from the figures on page 11, the number of stray dog reports has significantly increased to the highest level in the last three years. In this quarter the trend of stray dogs that are seized being in poor condition continues. This has included dogs that are underweight, and those that suffer with sores, injuries and fur loss. Even though it has been a year since the XL Bully ban, we seized 34 this quarter although only 10 within Worcestershire. Whilst we recognise the requirement to euthanise banned breed dogs if unclaimed, it is distressing for wardens and kennel staff. There have also been a number of puppies coming in which need extra care and attention, often having to go into foster rather than kennels.

This quarter we continued our work with our Host IT and back-office support company to completely refresh our Database address gazetteer to include regular updates going forward. We have worked with our Host IT to help them to introduce a new e-mail security system, and increase the time our back office database system is available.

As the Environmental Crime team continue to gather information (in the Bromsgrove and Redditch areas) a targeted approach was taken using an intelligence led approach to focus resources on the areas where fly tipping is a proven persistent issue. By focusing on these we targeted persistent offenders. Fixed Penalty Notices continue to be issued, with other tools such as Community Protection Warnings and letter drops to educate the public in correct waste disposal methods. The Planning Enforcement Team continue to tackle long standing cases to bring resolutions as well as commencing investigations on the new cases on a daily basis. The team has served its first community Protection Notice in relation to health and safety issues associated with commercial advertising.

In January, the Homes for Ukraine team were all informed that their contracts had been extended for an additional 12 months, through to March 2026. However, it was apparent that host numbers in both Bromsgrove and Redditch were continuing to decline. To raise awareness of the ongoing need for hosts, the team, alongside local hosts and Ukrainian guests, participated in media outreach efforts. These included appearances on Midlands Today (8th January) and ITV News (24th January). The scheme was also featured in the Bromsgrove Advertiser, and our Support Worker Tetiana gave an interview on Free Radio. In addition, we distributed postcards to previous hosts, encouraging them to consider hosting again. Thanks to these efforts, Bromsgrove welcomed three new host families and Redditch gained two. The campaign also positively impacted other districts across Worcestershire, resulting in new hosts in Worcester City (5), Wychavon (3), Wyre Forest (2), and Malvern Hills (3).

Following the award of a grant in November 2024 to support events for Ukrainian families, the team organised two successful activities: a bowling event in February with 51 attendees and a trip to Cadbury World in March with 73 attendees from both districts. These events were well received, providing families with much needed moments of joy and connection amidst ongoing uncertainty. We are especially mindful of the emotional toll the war continues to take on our guests, many of whom experience isolation due to cultural and language barriers. By bringing the districts together, we've helped strengthen community ties and offer respite during a difficult time.

We've received heartfelt feedback from participants:

"I would like to express my gratitude for the bowling night arranged for the families. I heard from many who attended, and they all highlighted the therapeutic effect it had on both children and adults. It allowed everyone to take a break from negative thoughts, gather together, and build new positive memories. I only heard positive feedback. Having your entire team present also gave people a chance to speak with H4U support specialists in a relaxed environment."

"Just wanted to send a big thank you for the Cadbury World trip. The boys had a great time, and we even met a few lovely families who live just 15 minutes away! It was such a fun and refreshing experience. Your kindness and support truly means a lot."

In addition to routine support for existing guests, hosts, and new arrivals, the team has provided intensive support to guests facing serious health issues this quarter to ensure they are receiving the help they need from the appropriate health and charity services.

On 24th February, we marked the third anniversary of the war in Ukraine. As many of our guests approach the end of their three-year Homes for Ukraine visas, the team has been actively supporting the transition to the new Ukraine Permission Extension (UPE) scheme, which offers an additional 18 months stay in the UK. We've been reminding guests of the need to apply, since there will be no official government notifications and we have assisted many in completing the necessary forms.

During the last quarter of 2024/25, officers have undertaken a wide range of air quality related activities aimed at improving monitoring, supporting strategic planning, and ensuring regulatory compliance across Worcestershire. This included the review and maintenance of the low-cost air quality sensors that are located across the county following the initial six month deployment. As a result a number of the monitors have been relocated to provide greater clarity on potential sources of particulate matter and has enhanced the granularity of local air quality data and strengthened community engagement through more accessible monitoring results.

The team also played a key role in shaping broader environmental policy. More than 25 hours were spent contributing to the Worcestershire Sustainability Strategy Review and the Energy Strategy Refresh, ensuring that air quality considerations were fully integrated into these countywide frameworks. In addition, officers have begun development of a Worcestershire Air Quality Strategy, aligning local objectives with national guidance and emerging priorities. The team also continued to support planning policy through contributions to the Air Quality Supplementary Planning Document (SPD) for South Worcestershire and the Local Nature Recovery Strategy, helping embed air quality into land use and biodiversity planning.

Operationally, the team continued to deliver on its core responsibilities, including ongoing work on the Air Quality Action Plan and updates to Smoke Control Areas, both of which are essential for maintaining compliance and improving local air quality outcomes.

We continue to see an increase in the number of stray dogs that require veterinary treatment. Many are collected in a poor condition, many with ear and eye infections or skin complaints such sarcoptic mange and fleas. Similarly we have seen a continue in the increased trend of stray dogs been found with complex needs such as young puppies under 4-5months old, elderly dogs, dogs with broken legs, open wounds and dogs with mammary tumours/burst mammary and heavy under carriage (the latter symptoms of excessive or poor breeding practices).

Despite the XL ban coming into force in 2024, we are still seeing many of these dogs coming in as strays. We seized 20 as stray dogs during this quarter.

Dog Control

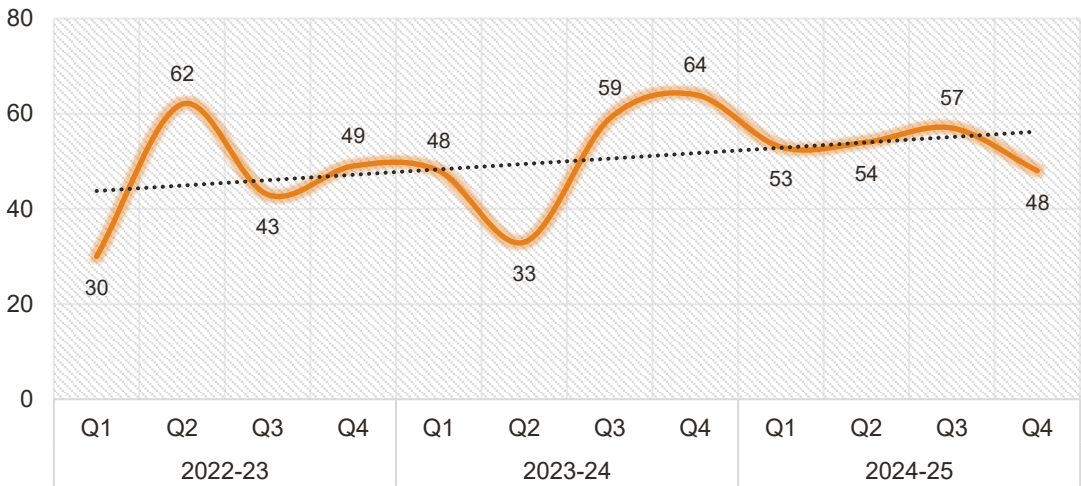
The data on this page outlines the number of dog control cases (complaints, enquiries, and reports of lost or stray dogs) handled by the service. Complaints received by WRS include reports of dangerous dogs, reports of dog fouling, and reports of dogs persistently straying. Complaints relating to the welfare of dogs, however, are investigated by the RSPCA and West Mercia Police unless the dog is found to be straying.

Comments

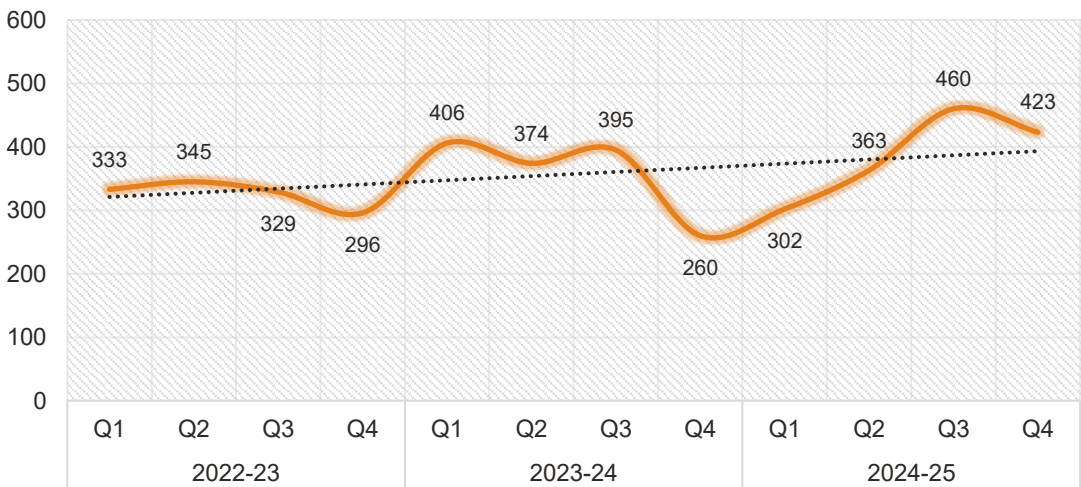
The number of cases received during the year is an increase of 18% compared to 2022/23 but an increase of 7% compared to 2023/24. Approximately 88% of cases were reports of lost or stray dogs with most cases categorised as "contained strays" (meaning dogs were found and held by members of the public). There has, however, been a notable increase in the number of dogs picked up with welfare concerns and subsequently requiring veterinary treatment or examination. Approximately 44% of dogs were successfully reunited with their owners although this figure varies significantly between local authorities.

In general terms, the service receives a low number of dog control complaints and enquiries each quarter. Based on the 92 complaints received during the year, 40 cases related to dogs which were persistently straying from residential properties whilst 35 cases related to dog fouling.

Complaints and Enquiries



Reports of Lost or Stray Dogs



Food Safety

The data on this page outlines the number of food safety cases (complaints, enquiries, and notifications) received by the service and the number of food safety interventions undertaken at premises included in the Food Hygiene Rating Scheme. Complaints handled by WRS relate to food products and premises, however, complaints regarding the composition and labelling of food (including allergen labelling) are primarily investigated by Trading Standards. Enquiries handled by the WRS include requests for business advice, requests for hygiene ratings, and requests for export health certificates which are required by businesses seeking to export food to Northern Ireland, the European Union, and non-EU countries.

Comments

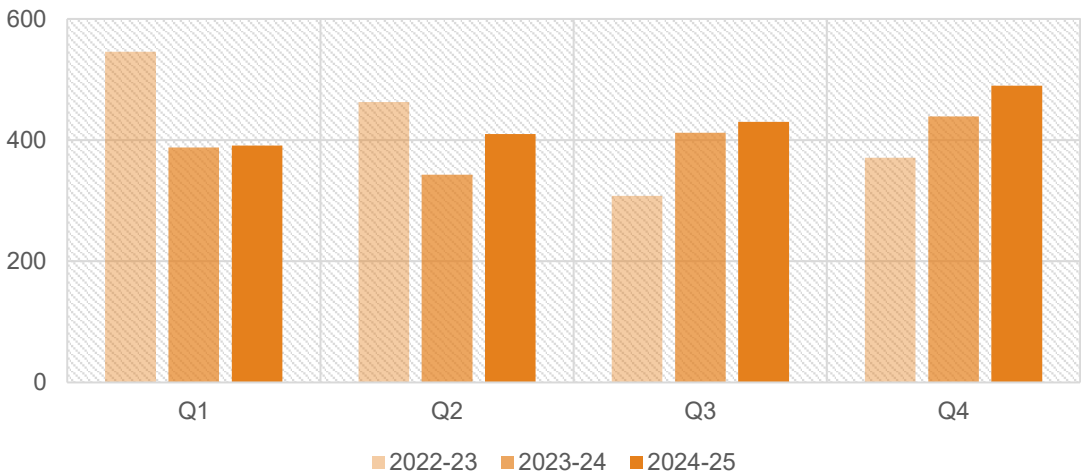
The number of cases received during the year is broadly comparable to 2022/23 but a reduction of 7% compared to 2023/24. The service tends to receive a greater number of enquiries (including requests for business advice) than complaints. Based on the complaints received during the year, however, 70% related to issues with food products (such as poor quality food or food containing a foreign object) whilst 30% related to poor hygiene standards or practices at food businesses.

Based on the 1,722 interventions undertaken during the year, 4% resulted in a business being rated as "non-compliant" (issued a rating of 0, 1, or 2). A higher proportion of non-compliant ratings were issued to the hospitality sector (such as takeaways and pubs) or small retailers. To find out more about food hygiene ratings, please visit <https://ratings.food.gov.uk>.

Complaints and Enquiries



FHRS Interventions



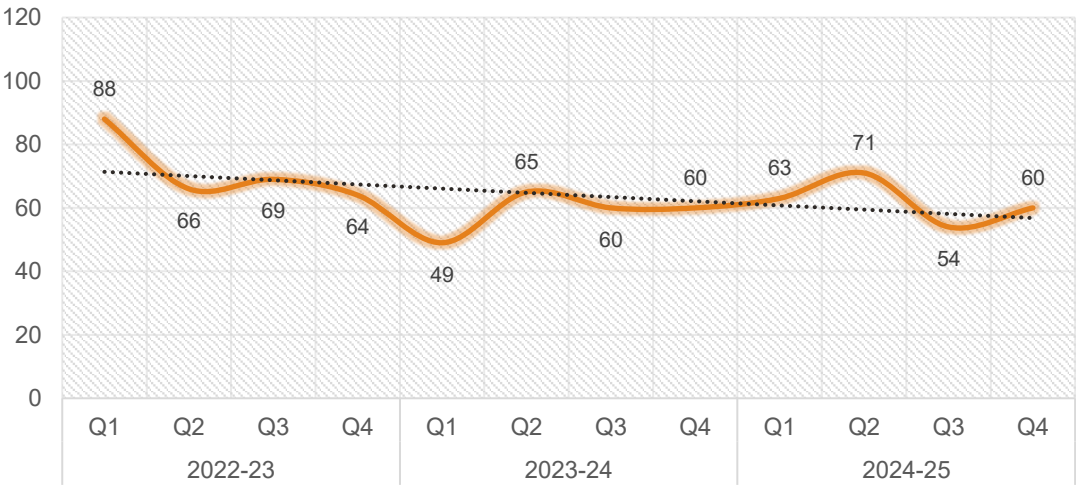
Health & Safety

The data on this page outlines the number of health and safety cases (complaints, enquiries, and reports of accidents in the workplace) received by the service. Investigations are only undertaken by WRS where they relate to premises such as retail outlets, offices, leisure services, hospitality premises, and cosmetology premises. Other premises, such as factories and medical premises, fall with the remit of the Health and Safety Executive.

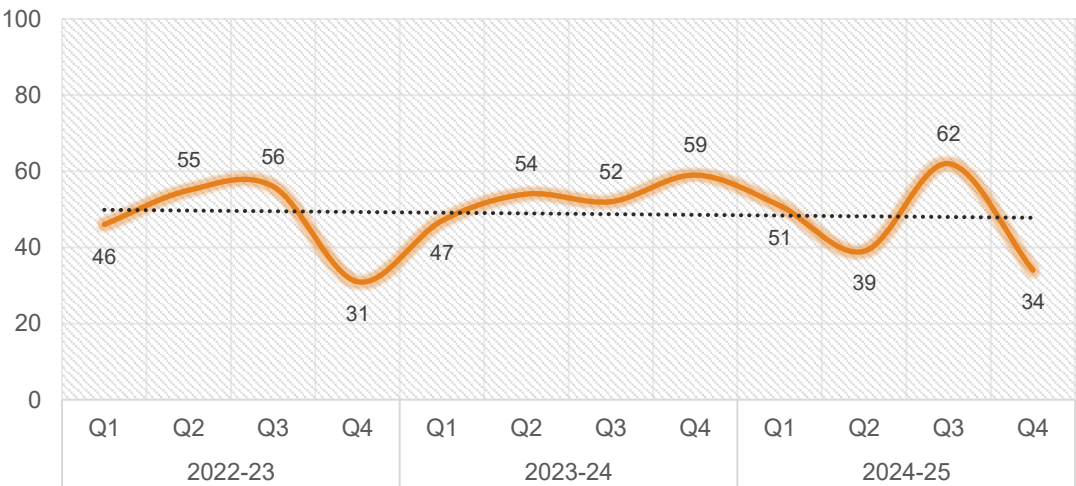
Comments

The number of cases received between 1st April 2024 and 31st December 2024 is a reduction of 9% compared to 2022/23 and an increase of 3% compared to 2023/24. Approximately 43% of cases were reports of accidents in workplaces with most cases relating to injuries where a worker was incapacitated for more than seven days or injuries to members of the public. The most common cause of accidents continues to be slips, trips and falls (whether on the same level or from height). Sadly, the service investigated a fatality during quarter two after a contractor working at a retail outlet was crushed by a piece of mechanical equipment.

Complaints and Enquiries



Accident Reports



Information Requests

The data on this page outlines the number of information requests received by the service. Requests for information are generally received from the public, or private sector companies, and are made under the Environmental Information Regulations, Freedom of Information Act, or General Data Protection Regulations (commonly known as Subject Access Requests). Requests for information are also received from other local authorities or law enforcement agencies and are made under the Data Protection Act (for the prevention and detection of crime or in connection with legal proceedings).

Information Requests



Licensing

The data on this page outlines the number of licensing cases (complaints, enquiries, applications, and registrations) received by the service. Complaints handled by WRS can relate to licenced and unlicensed activitiy, however, cases generally relate to the following areas:

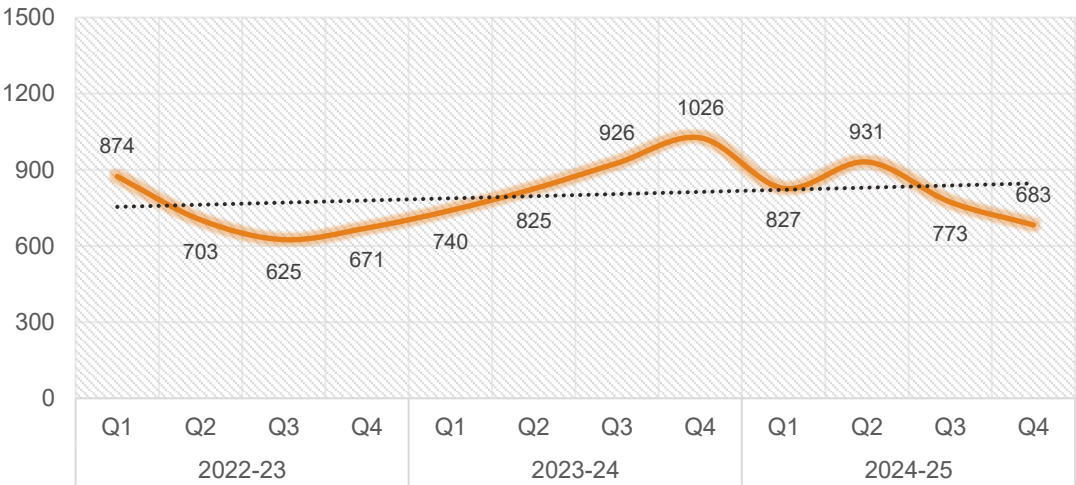
- Alcohol and Entertainment
- Animals
- Caravans
- Gambling
- Scrap Metal
- Sex Establishments
- Skin Piercing
- Street Trading, Amenities, and Collections
- Taxis

Comments

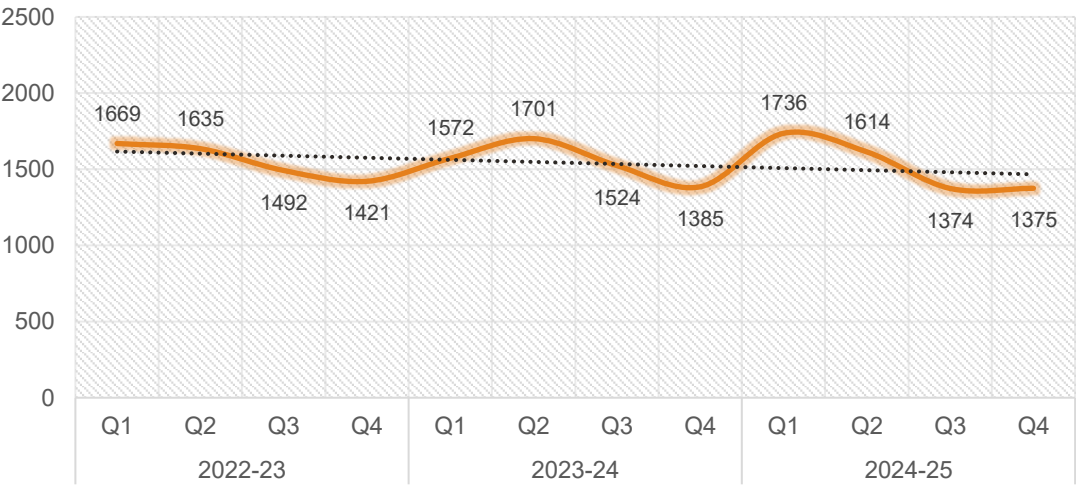
The number of cases received during the year is an increase of 3% compared to 2022/23 but a reduction of 4% compared to 2023/24. Approximately 65% of cases have been applications and registrations with 31% relating to private hire or hackney carriage vehicles and 24% relating to temporary events.

In general terms, the service receives a higher number of enquiries (such as queries about regulations, by-laws, and licence conditions) compared to complaints. Based on the complaints received during the year, however, approximately 49% related to taxi licensing (such as reports of poor driver behaviour, unauthorised parking, or poor driving standards) and 22% related to alcohol licensing (businesss breaching the lciensing objectives). A further 13% of complaints have related to animal licensing with most cases relating to the unlicensed breeding and/or sale of dogs.

Complaints and Enquiries



Applications and Registrations



Planning

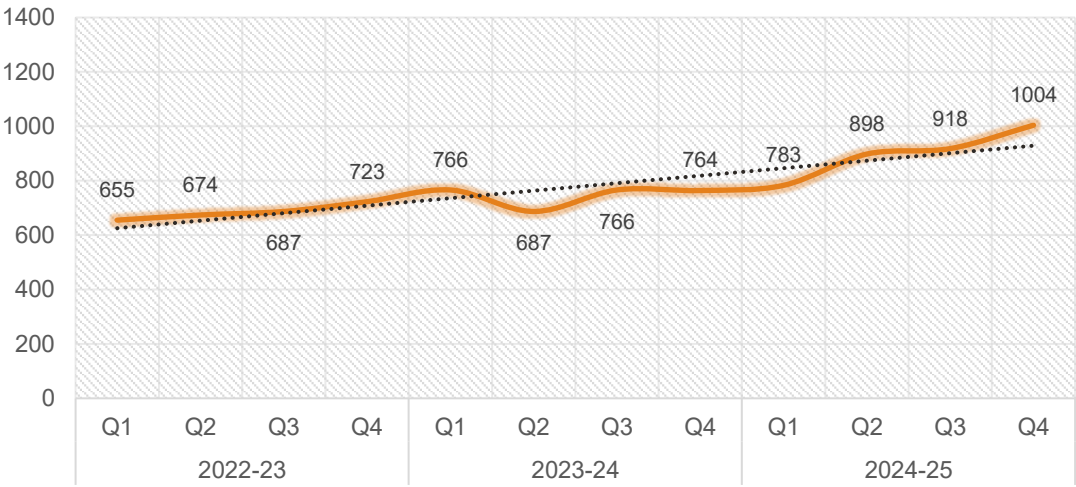
The data on this page outlines the number of planning enquiries received by the service. Planning enquiries processed by WRS are either consultations or requests to discharge planning conditions, however, enquiries only relate to the following areas:

- Air Quality
- Contaminated Land
- Environmnetal Permitting
- Food
- Health and Safety
- Nuisance
- Private Water Supplies

Comments

The number of enquiries received during the year is an increase of 35% compared to 2022/23 and an increase of 21% compared to 2023/24. Approximately 90% of enquiries were consultations for air quality, contaminated land, or nuisances; whilst approximately 1 in 4 enquiries were processed (on a contractual basis) on behalf of other local authorities.

Planning Enquiries



Planning Enforcement & Enviro-Crime

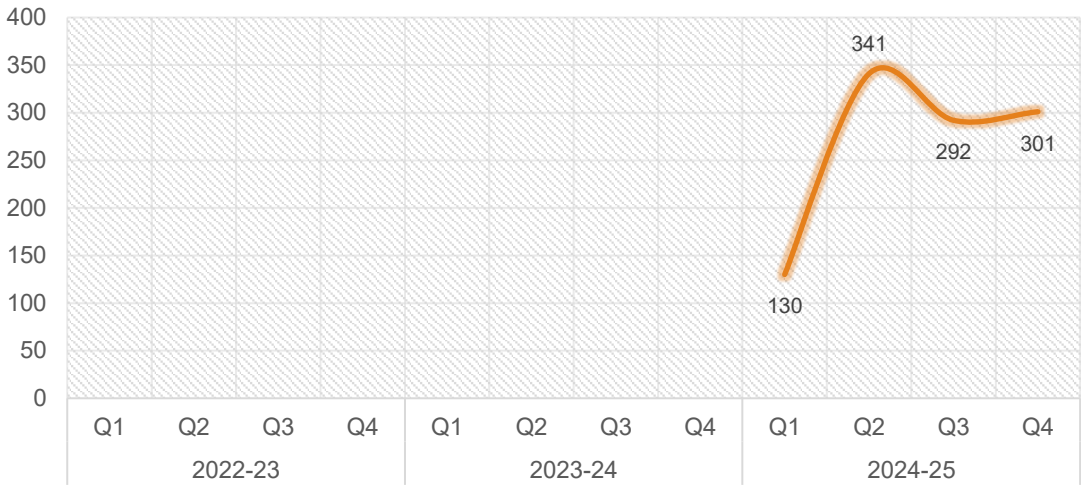
The data on this page shows the number of planning enforcement and environmental crime cases (complaints and enquiries) received by the service. Complaints handled by WRS include reports of fly-tipping, littering, and planning breaches at residential or commercial premises. The planning enforcement and environmental crime functions are only delivered on behalf of Bromsgrove and Redditch Councils and have only been within the remit of the service since June 2024.

Comments

There is currently no comparable temporal data available for the planning enforcement and enviro-crime functions. Based on the 762 cases investigated during the year to date, 65% have related to fly-tipping whilst 16% have related to planning breaches at residential properties.

In quarter four, process and practices have been enhanced and imbedded within the teams to assist with day to day investigation work. In the enviro crime team, the data collected is being used to target specific problem locations and entities with resource and cameras deployed. We currently have 195 active enviro-crime investigations, with many coming to fruition with fixed penalty notices being served. The backlog of Planning Enforcement cases is being cleared by the enhanced resource provided by the partner authorities for this purpose. The rate of cases being closed has increased as a result.

Complaints and Enquiries



Pollution

The data on this page outlines the number of pollution cases (complaints and enquiries) received by the service. Complaints handled by WRS include reports of nuisances (noise, light, odour, smoke) originating from domestic, commerical, or agricultural activity and notifications of contamination incidents.

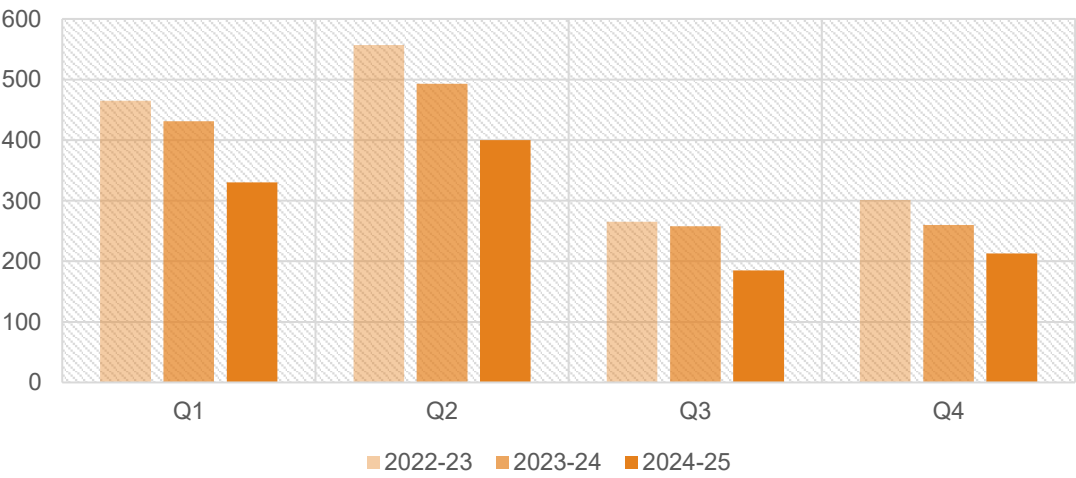
Comments

The number of cases received during the year is a reduction of 29% compared to 2022/23 and a reduction of 20% compared to 2023/24. Approximately 90% of cases were reports of nuisances with around 44% of cases relating to noise from domestic properties (such as noise from barking dogs or noise from audi-visual equipment). Other prominent nuisances commonly include nosie from hospitality businesses, smoke from the burning of domestic or commercial waste, and dust from construction sites.

Complaints and Enquiries



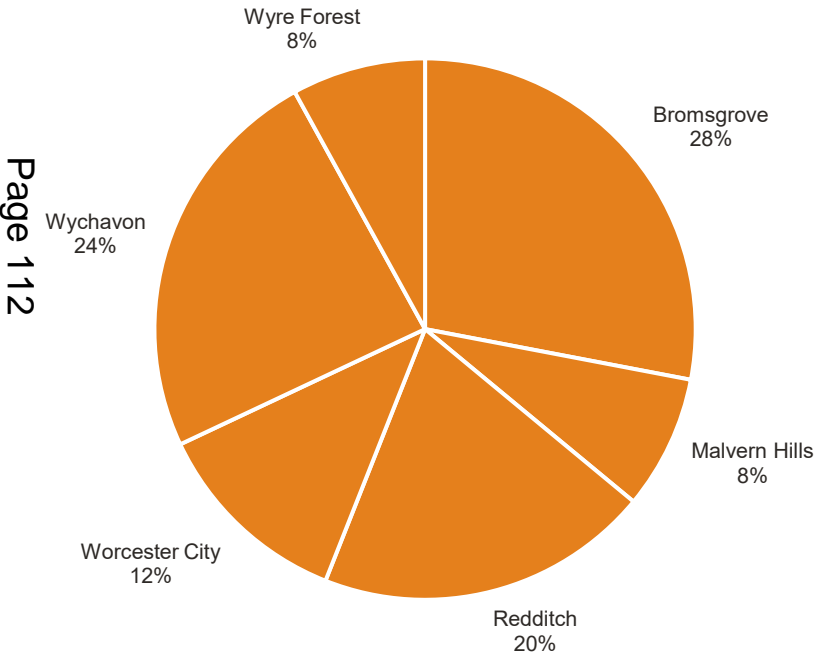
Complaints and Enquiries (Noise Only)



Noise

The data on this page outlines the wards in Worcestershire which have the highest case rate in terms of noise pollution. It also shows the districts in which these wards are located.

Note: The figures in the table are cumulative and will continue to increase until the end of year report is published in April 2025. Where a ward is highlighted, it was also one of the top 10 wards featured in the 2023/24 Activity Report.



Ward	Total	Population	Rate
Barnt Green And Hopwood	20	2,951	6.78
Avoncroft	15	3,451	4.35
Lowes Hill	11	2,854	3.85
Perryfields	6	1,557	3.85
Cathedral	42	11,760	3.57
Warndon	20	5,661	3.53
Honeybourne And Pebworth	9	2,844	3.16
Droitwich Central	8	2,621	3.05
Dodderhill	8	2,809	2.85
Hallow	5	1,941	2.58
Batchley And Brockhill	23	8,930	2.58
Rock Hill	7	2,970	2.36
Aggborough And Spennells	20	8,774	2.28
Winyates	18	8,139	2.21
Central (Redditch)	15	6,841	2.19
Charford	8	3,677	2.18
Harvington And Norton	6	2,788	2.15
Lodge Park	12	5,619	2.14
Priory	9	4,384	2.05
Greenlands	19	9,462	2.01
Arboretum	12	6,130	1.96
Alvechurch South	6	3,105	1.93
Blakebrook And Habberley South	18	9,350	1.93
Droitwich West	10	5,217	1.92
Great Hampton	7	3,677	1.90

Public Health

The data on this page outlines the number of public health cases (complaints and enquiries) received by the service and the number of subsidised treatments carried out by contractors. Complaints handled by WRS include reports of accumulations and reports of pest due to the activities of local residents or businesses. Pest control treatments are offered by five of the districts, however, Wyre Forest District Council does not offer a subsidised pest control service.

Comments

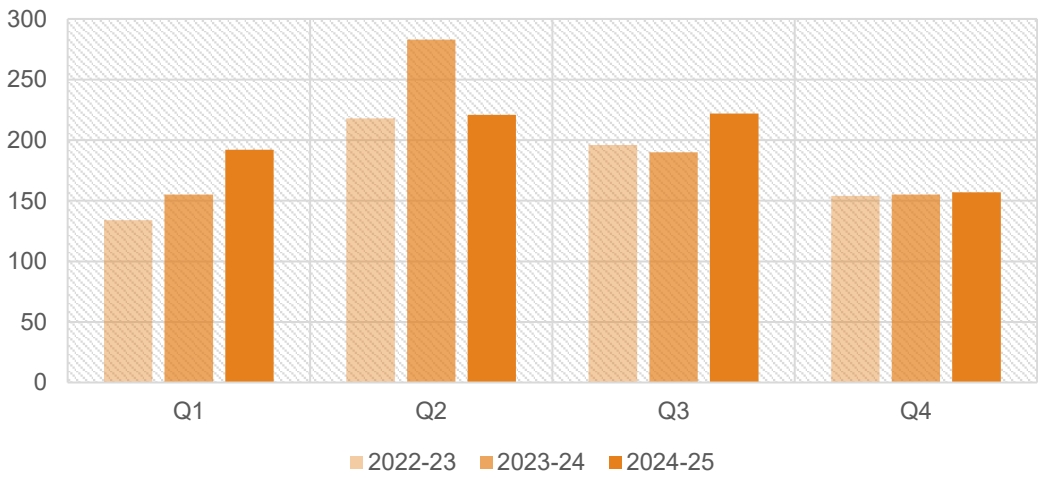
The number of cases received during the year is broadly comparable to 2022/23 but a reduction of 5% compared to 2023/24. Approximately 59% of cases related to pest control such as enquiries about domestic treatments, enquiries about sewer baiting, or complaints about pest activity caused by the actions of neighbouring residents or businesses. A further 24% of cases related to accumulations at residential properties, however, such complaints commonly reference the presence of rodents or other pests.

Based on the 792 domestic treatments undertaken by pest control contractors during the year, 51% were due to issues with rats whilst 66% have taken place at properties in the Redditch or Wychavon district.

Complaints and Enquiries



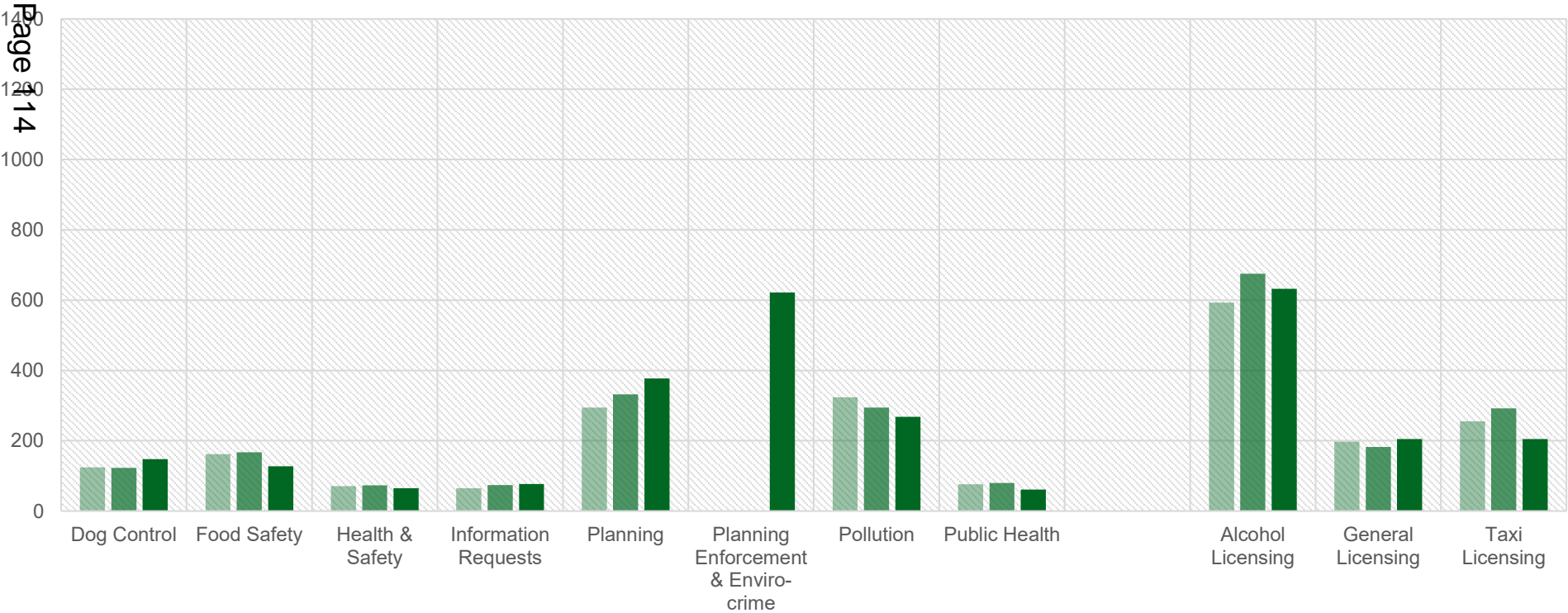
Domestic Subsidised Treatments



The data on this page outlines the number of Environmental Health and Licensing cases (complaints, enquiries, applications, and notificatons) received by WRS where the subject or enquirer were located in the Bromsgrove district.

Note: The chart below provides a breakdown of cases by the primary functions undertaken by the service. The recent increase in cases can be attributed to the additional functions (enviro-crime and planning enforcement) now being delivered by the service. The figures for the current year are cumulative and will continue to increase until the end of year report is published in April 2025. The Y axis on this chart has also been standardised so the level of demand received against each function can be broadly compared to other districts.

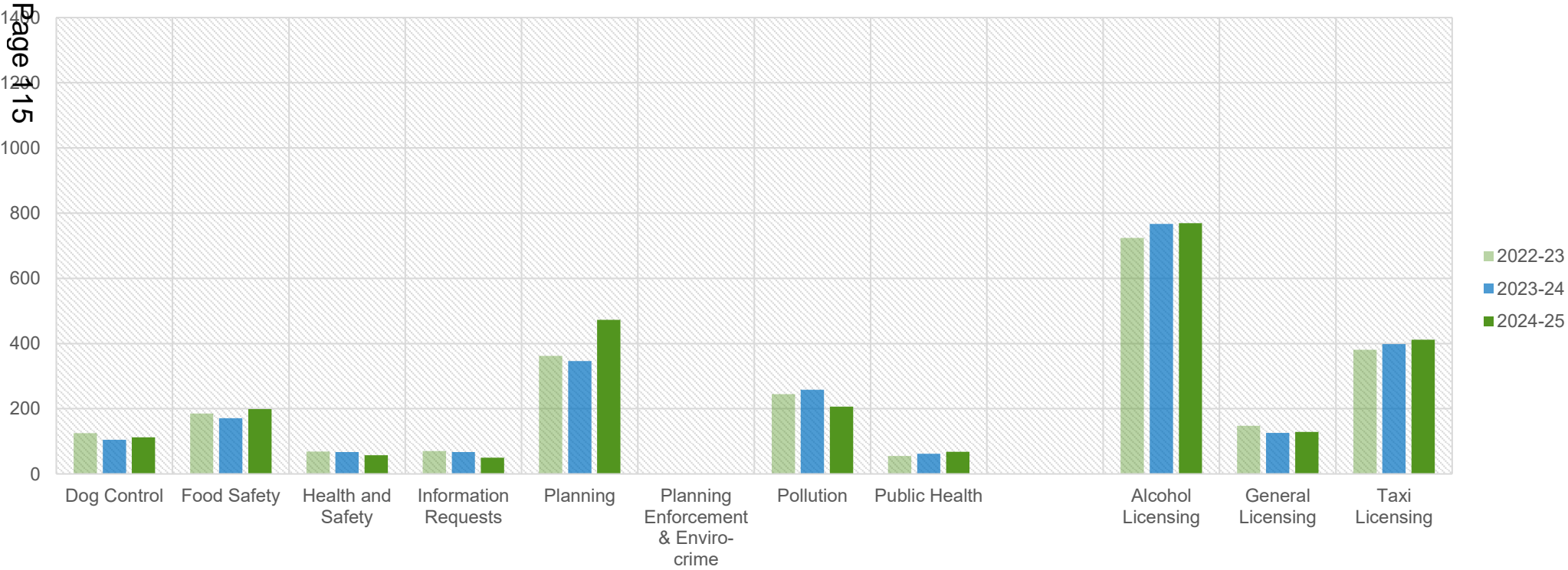
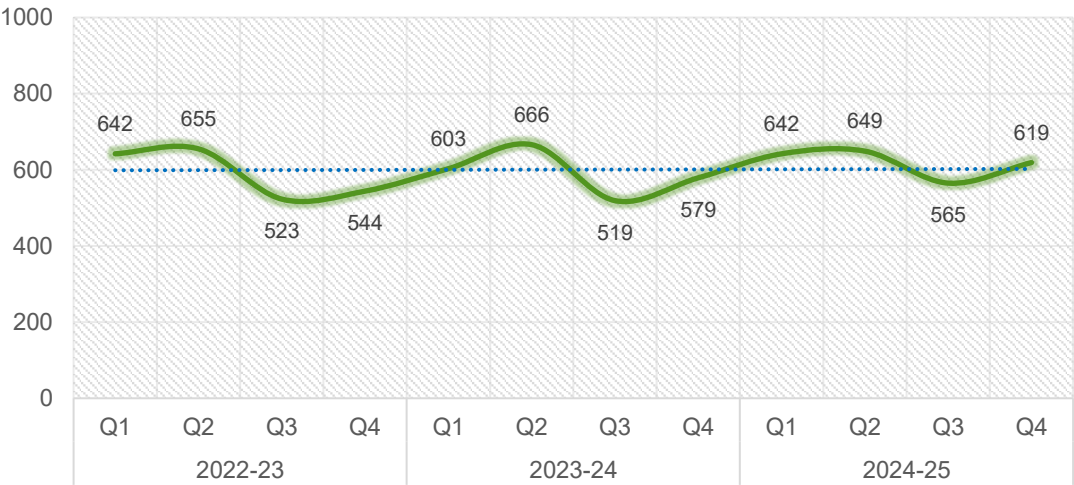
Bromsgrove District Council



The data on this page outlines the number of Environmental Health and Licensing cases (complaints, enquiries, applications, and notifications) received by WRS where the subject or enquirer were located in the Malvern Hills district.

Note: The chart below provides a breakdown of cases by the primary functions undertaken by the service. The figures for the current year are cumulative and will continue to increase until the end of year report is published in April 2025. The Y axis on this chart has also been standardised so the level of demand received against each function can be broadly compared to other districts.

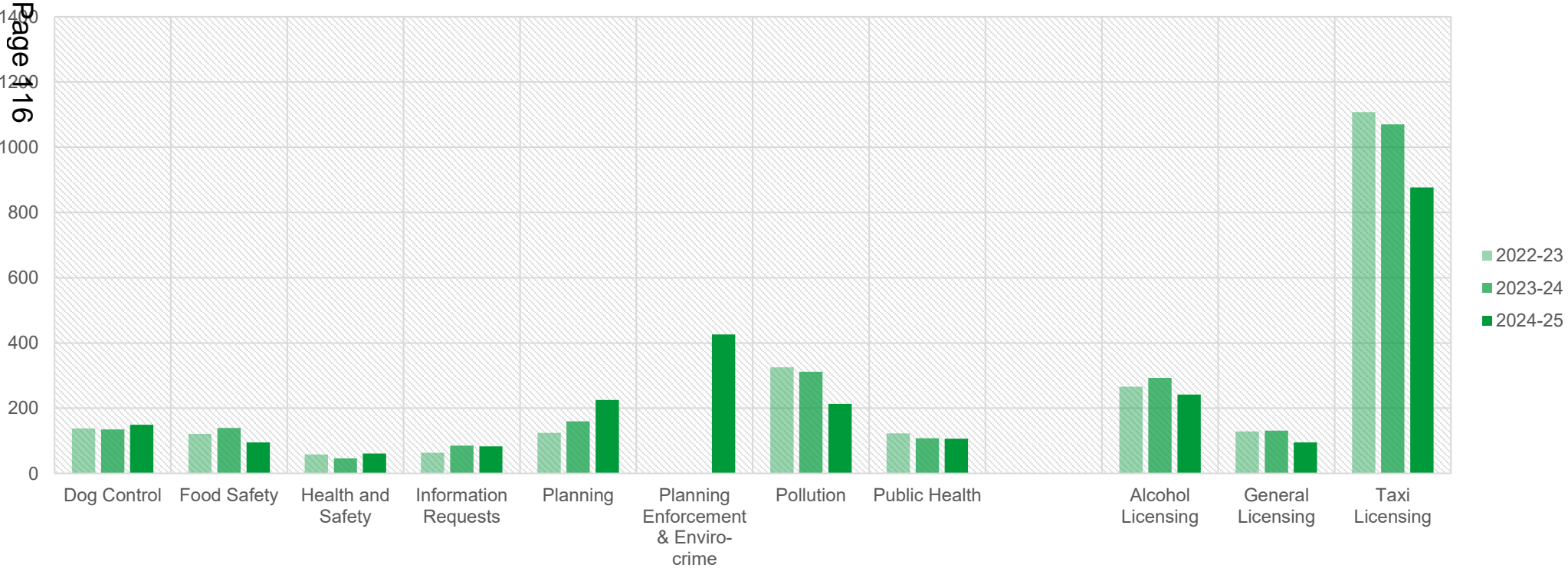
Malvern Hills District Council



The data on this page outlines the number of Environmental Health and Licensing cases (complaints, enquiries, applications, and notifications) received by WRS where the subject or enquirer were located in the Redditch district.

Note: The chart below provides a breakdown of cases by the primary functions undertaken by the service. The recent increase in cases can be attributed to the additional functions (enviro-crime and planning enforcement) now being delivered by the service. The figures for the current year are cumulative and will continue to increase until the end of year report is published in April 2025. The Y axis on this chart has also been standardised so the level of demand received against each function can be broadly compared to other districts.

Redditch Borough Council

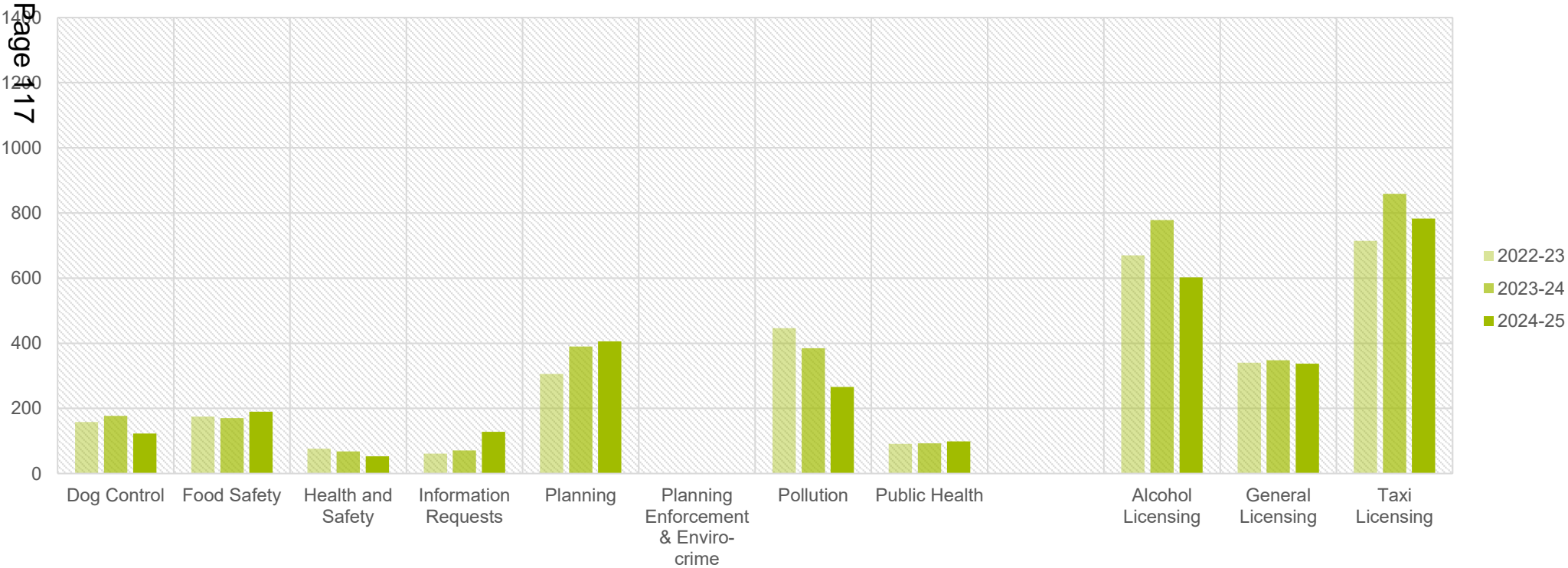


Worcester City

The data on this page outlines the number of Environmental Health and Licensing cases (complaints, enquiries, applications, and notifications) received by WRS where the subject or enquirer were located in the Worcester City district.

Note: The chart below provides a breakdown of cases by the primary functions undertaken by the service. The figures for the current year are cumulative and will continue to increase until the end of year report is published in April 2025. The Y axis on this chart has also been standardised so the level of demand received against each function can be broadly compared to other districts.

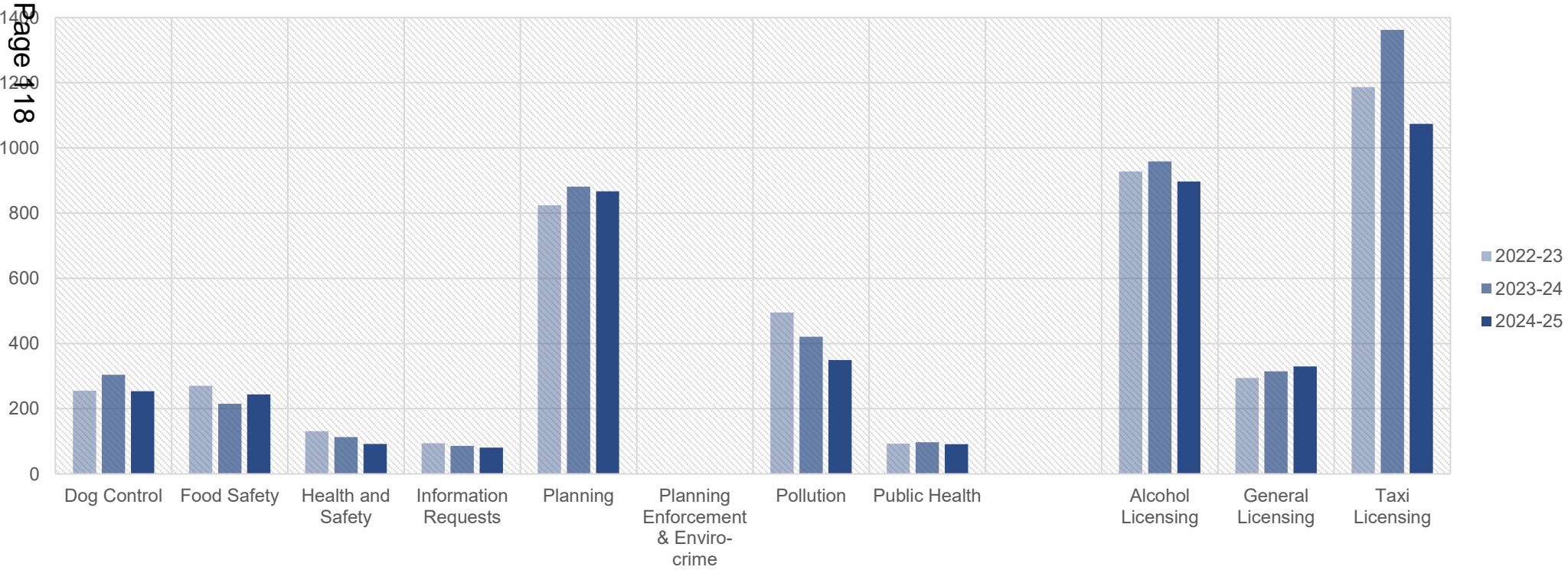
Worcester City Council



The data on this page outlines the number of Environmental Health and Licensing cases (complaints, enquiries, applications, and notifications) received by WRS where the subject or enquirer were located in the Wychavon district.

Note: The chart below provides a breakdown of cases by the primary functions undertaken by the service. The figures for the current year are cumulative and will continue to increase until the end of year report is published in April 2025. The Y axis on this chart has also been standardised so the level of demand received against each function can be broadly compared to other districts.

Wychavon District Council

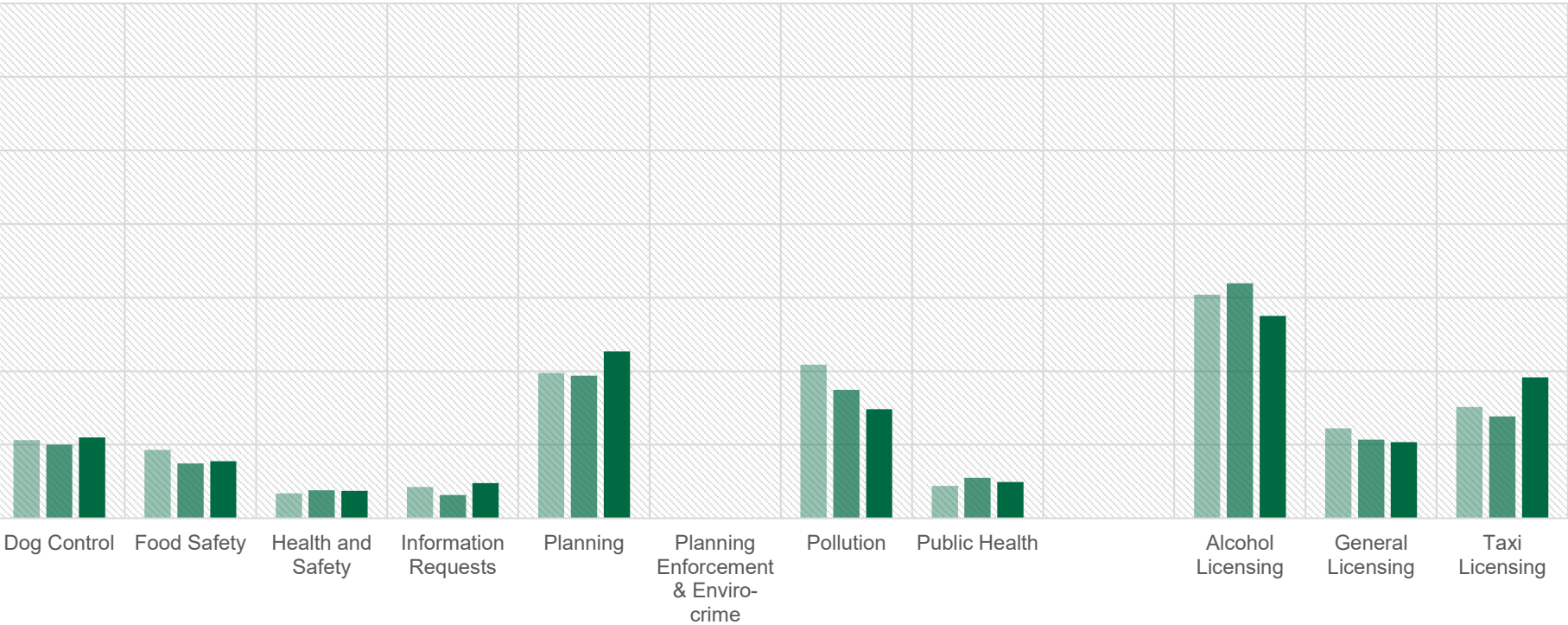


Wyre Forest

The data on this page outlines the number of Environmental Health and Licensing cases (complaints, enquiries, applications, and notifications) received by WRS where the subject or enquirer were located in the Wyre Forest district.

Note: The chart below provides a breakdown of cases by the primary functions undertaken by the service. The figures for the current year are cumulative and will continue to increase until the end of year report is published in April 2025. The Y axis on this chart has also been standardised so the level of demand received against each function can be broadly compared to other districts.

Wyre Forest District Council

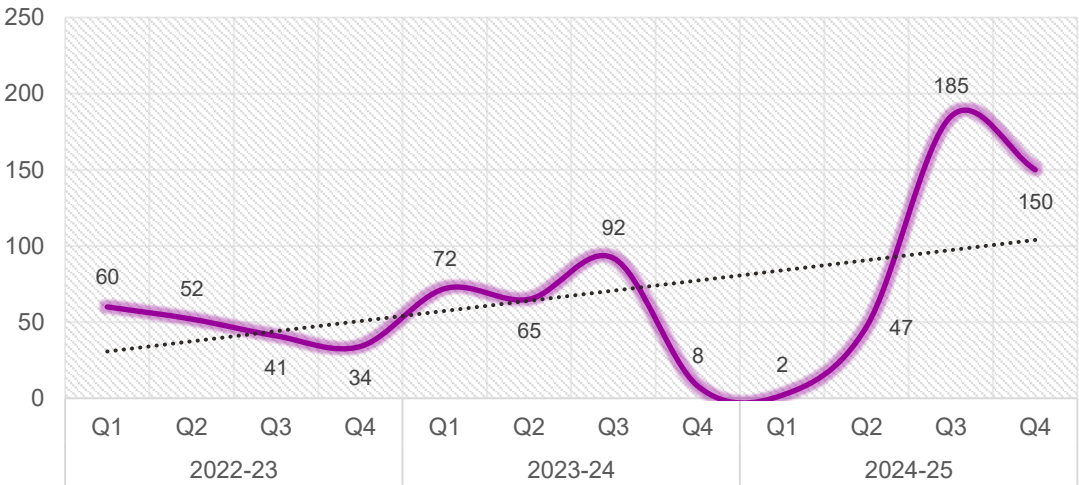


The data on this page outlines the number of planning enquiries processed by the service on behalf of Birmingham City Council.

We currently, and historically, have only ever provided services in relation to dog control. We commenced provision of an out of hours stray dog kennelling, reuniting with owners and rehoming of unwanted stray dog service which continued until Q1 2022-23 with finders dropping off dogs out of hours which they had found. Unfortunately we lost the use of the kennels we were primarily using to service this contract and, as a result, changed the contract delivery to include collection of stray dogs. This increased the number of dogs received, kennelled and rehomed, reducing the number of dogs Birmingham City might see as strays in the future. In Q4 2023-24, the out of hours contract arrangements with Birmingham ceased with assistance being provided on an ad hoc basis only until a new contract for kennelling of all Birmingham stray dogs commenced.

The new contract arrangement, which started on 1st September 2024, includes the receipt of stray dogs (deposited by Birmingham City Dog Gardens) to our kennelling facilities, where we facilitate reunification, rehoming or where a banned or dangerous dog, arrange euthanasia. We envisage there to be in excess of 1200 stray dogs a year received through this contract. Our experience since the new contract is that 50% of the XL Bully dogs we receive as strays are from Birmingham City Council area. Of the other dogs seized as strays, a significant proportion are larger bull or status breeds.

Birmingham City Council



Cheltenham

The data on this page outlines the number of dog control cases (reports of lost or stray dogs) handled by the service on behalf of Cheltenham Borough Council.

The dog control work undertaken for the authority is part of a contract with two other Gloucestershire authorities to deliver the collection, kennelling, returning of dogs to owners, and rehoming of stray dog functions. The contract was recently renewed and has been highly successful in reducing stray dog numbers for Cheltenham Borough Council as well as utilising existing WRS resource and expertise. Having said that, post-pandemic stray dog numbers have been increasing year on year following the issues widely reported about dog socialisation and anxiety since as well as the current cost of living crisis.

Cheltenham Borough Council

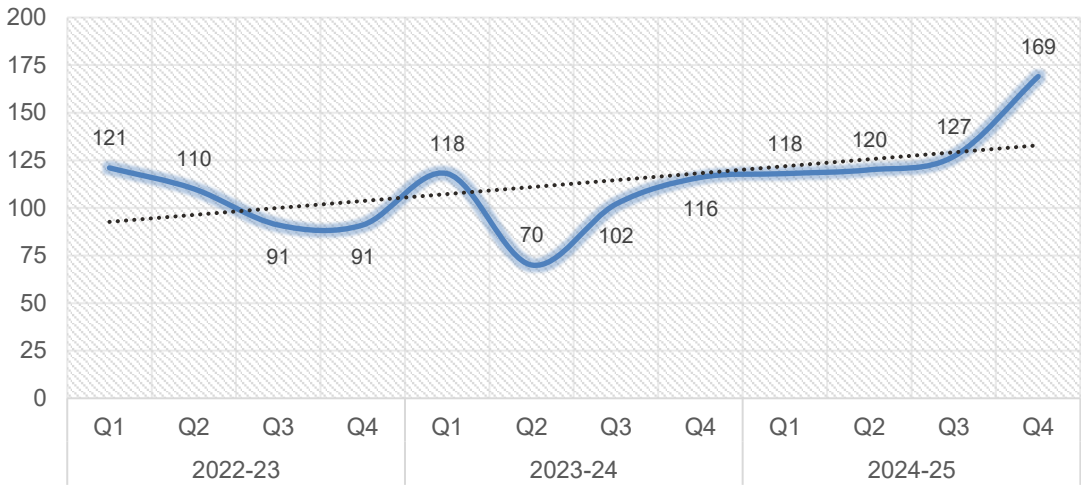


The data on this page outlines the number of dog control cases (reports of lost or stray dogs), environmental information requests, and planning enquiries handled by the service on behalf of Gloucester City Council.

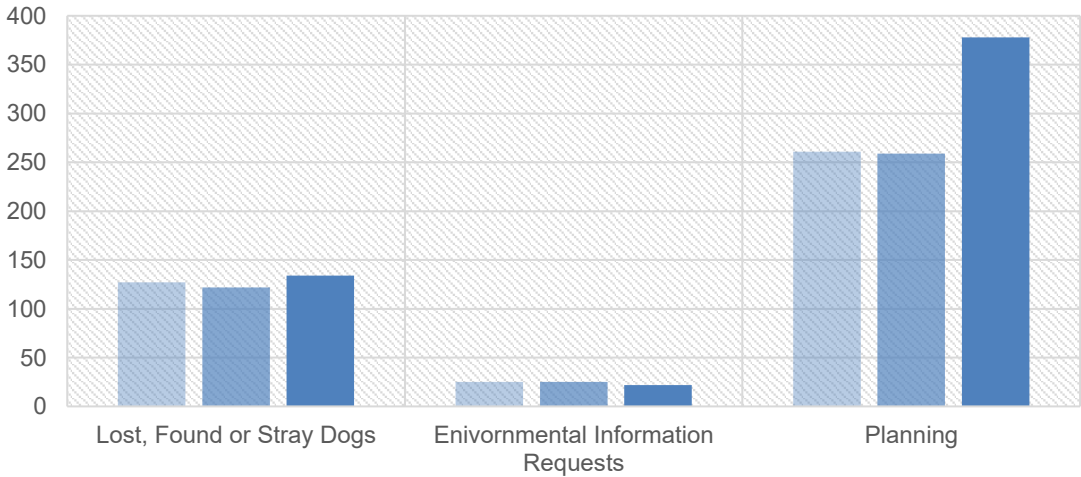
The dog control work undertaken for the authority is part of a contract with two other Gloucestershire authorities to deliver the collection, kennelling, returning of dogs to owners, and rehoming of stray dog functions. The contract was recently renewed and has been highly successful in reducing stray dog numbers for Gloucester City Council as well as utilising existing WRS resource and expertise. Such arrangements enable economies of scale to be realised and the continued retention of valuable assets to the benefit of Partner Authorities. The numbers of stray dogs are reducing annually, however, this is being closely monitored as the numbers are plateauing and there have been recent increases in the number of abandoned strays in other areas due to the cost of living crisis and post-COVID behaviour changes.

In addition to dog control activity, the service continues to deal with environmental information requests and planning enquiries.

Gloucester City Council



2022-23 2023-24 2024-25

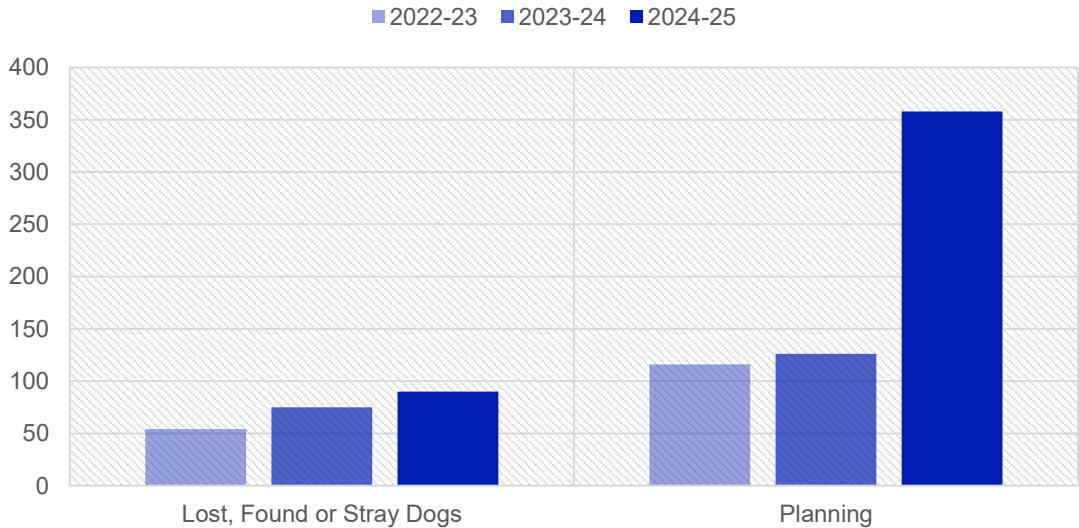
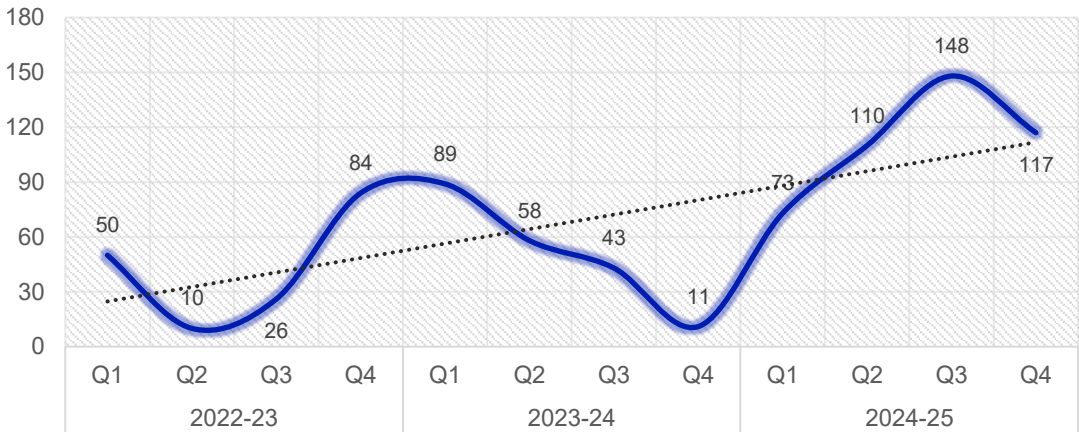


The data on this page outlines the number of dog control cases (reports of lost or stray dogs), and planning enquiries handled by the service on behalf of Tewkesbury Borough Council.

The dog control work undertaken for the authority is part of a contract with two other Gloucestershire authorities to deliver the collection, kennelling, returning of dogs to owners, and rehoming of stray dog functions. The contract was recently renewed and has been highly successful in reducing stray dog numbers for Tewkesbury Borough Council as well as utilising existing WRS resource and expertise. Such arrangements enable economies of scale to be realised and the continued retention of valuable assets to the benefit of Partner Authorities. As with other Gloucestershire and Worcestershire authorities, the numbers of stray dogs are reducing annually, however, this is being closely monitored as there have been recent increases in the number of abandoned strays in other areas due to the cost of living crisis and post-COVID behaviour changes.

In addition to dog control activity, the service has recommenced the provision of advice to Planning Officers on nuisance and air quality matters, following cessation of the service in Q4 2023-24 following a successful recruitment campaign.

Tewkesbury Borough Council



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WRS Board

Date: 26th June 2025

Food Safety: Development of WRS new food officer resource

Recommendation	That the Board notes the Report.
Background	<p>All local food authorities, as defined in legislative provisions, must report their activities twice a year to the Food Standards Agency (FSA,) as the national level competent authority. Reports cover inspections done, new premises registered, complaints handling and sampling activity plus details of the number of food officers available. The Agency's reporting systems are driven by inspection numbers and similar figures, not outcomes.</p> <p>The data provided is used by the FSA to monitor and compare local authority performance for consistency of approach in line with the Food Law Code of Practice [FLCoP]. A food premise's risk is rated from A (High) to E (Very Low). "A" rated premises receive visits most often, whereas "E" rated may only receive contact every 3-5 years.</p>
Report	<p><u>FSA Intervention</u></p> <p>The resource reductions of recent years have led to most local authorities finding it difficult to operate in full compliance with the FLCoP, including the WRS partnership. As many Board members will be aware, the Covid pandemic led to the cessation of routine food safety work on order of the Agency, which when lifted left a significant backlog of work that many local authorities are struggling to catch up with.</p> <p>Where the FSA has concerns regarding the performance of local authorities, it operates an escalation process through its own organisation, with the end point being its ability to request that the Minister make an order under the provisions in the Food Safety Act 1990 to require a local authority to comply. The partnership found itself part of this escalation process at the end of 2023. We were asked by FSA how we were going to get back on track with</p>

inspecting our New Premises (some 800 per year) and our D-E rated businesses, i.e. those managing their food safety risks to a very high standard or very low risk businesses such as cakemakers, small retail shops, wet bars. These three categories form the bulk of our database, estimated in the region of 75 to 80% of premises. Some of D rated premises and the whole E category can be subject to Alternative Enforcement Strategies [AES], which means a range of interventions including inspection with alternative phone contact, trading status letters, questionnaires, and newsletters.

Recruiting Additional Officers

Data provided by the FSA indicated that the Partnership was towards the bottom of a list of local food authorities in terms of the number of full-time equivalent officers available for food safety work compared to the number of premises in the area. The Agency decided to commence its formal escalation process. Officers worked on what levels of capacity may be needed to build on the existing officer complement. In February 2024 the Board and Partners supported a request for additional funding to increase the establishment of the food competent officers within the Community Environmental Health team.

There is a national shortage of Environmental Health Officers, so the service opted to recruit three additional Regulatory Support Officers [RSO] and two Technical Officers (Food). Whilst it is difficult to recruit fully competent staff, three qualified candidates (an EHO, a graduate EHO and an individual with the National Certificate in Food Control) were found. The RSO recruitment process resulted in an initial short list of some 20 quality applicants. It was completed in the Summer of 2024 and all successful candidates started work during October-November of that year.

The two new Technical Officers have relevant food safety qualifications as required in the FLCoP and, after competency review, are now able to inspect all categories of food premises. Their initial work has been focussed on reducing the backlog of interventions at D-rated premises. The rest of this report focuses on the difference the four RSOs are making to completing the food programme, not just the E-rated interventions but wider activities supporting our EHOs in the work they do.

RSOs are a new addition to food staffing options, and WRS led the way in developing this role when it employed its first RSO in January 2022. The Agency has now recognised the role of RSO as:

“..... officers who do not hold a ‘suitable qualification’ as defined in the FLCoP, but have been assessed as competent, to carry out the activities set out in Chapter 3 of the FLCoP. These officers may locally be referred to as ‘technical officers’ or similar.”

The Code allows local authorities to authorise regulatory support officers to perform any of the following activities under appropriate

supervision:

- Alternative interventions education, advice, and coaching information gathering, excluding the sub-activity gathering, processing, and sharing intelligence

This is how our new capacity is being deployed.

Competency of Officers

The FSA requires the Food Lead-Officer to ensure all officers are 'competent' to undertake the local food safety programme. There are specific qualifications approved by FSA and listed in the FLCoP for those undertaking food work. Currently there is no specific qualification for RSO.

Our Food Lead developed an internal training programme combined with attendance at external courses offered by the Chartered Institute of Environmental Health (CIEH,) and the UK Health Security Agency (UKHSA,) Having completed their six-month probation satisfactorily all officers are now undertaking the CIEH Level 3 Food Safety Course to supplement the initial work done with them. This is on-line and candidates must achieve an 83% pass rate. No RSO is currently authorised to undertake formal enforcement activity such as serve Notices although this may be possible after relevant training as it is the local authority that determines if they are competent to do so.

None of the officers had previously worked in local government. All have brought different experiences to the role, from retail to sales and the travel sector. One is a fluent Chinese speaker, and one has exceptional IT skills. Despite the lack of experience, they all settled into their new role very quickly and have really started to deliver results.

The first six months were focussed on providing relevant skills and data cleansing, which soon established that many of the previously registered low-risk businesses had ceased trading. A range of activities have been used to develop the new officer cohorts' skills including:

- Physical inspections to develop officer confidence.
- A project to check that premises were displaying the correct FHRS rating.

All new officers have had to learn how to deal with non-compliant premises as they have frequently encountered problems like unrecorded changes of ownership, lack of paperwork, insufficient cleaning and even selling food past its use-by date.

The programme of work for the new officers in 2025/6 will again be project focussed starting with wet bars, after some further training on the sector. Their other priority is to increase sampling in food premises according to national and regional priorities identified by the FSA and UKHSA. The RSO with IT skills is also working with the Food lead on a review of food-work process flows to support this

service area with some of the documentation that is required.

These officers have genuinely made a difference to the service's ability to tackle lower risk food premises. The appendix below outlines some of the work undertaken from October 2024 to March 2025

CONTACT

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Principal Environmental Health Officer (Food Safety Lead)
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APPENDIX

ACTIVITY BY NEW OFFICERS

1. Total number of premises with interventions

VISIT TYPE	Total
Inspection	308
Revisits	3
Information Gathering	551
Total Interventions	862

This compares with 123 interventions by our previously employed RSO in 2023/4.

2. Premises on E-rated lists closed by new TO/RSO: 311

This is compared with the total no of premises closed between Oct and March at **669**.

3. Total Food Officer Interventions October-March for all food staff (1 October 2024 to 31 March 2025):

Inspections & Audits	1129
Verification & Surveillance	48
Sampling Visits	1
Advice & Education	19
Information/Intelligence Gathering	803

Of these 2000 interventions, 863 were undertaken by new officers.

4. New Premises registrations (Oct-Mar).

Hazard Status	Count
Not recorded	1
HIGH	277
LOW	94
AES	38
Total	410

So, almost 1/3rd of new registrations can be tackled initially by the new officers.



WRS Board

Date: 26 June 2025

Progress Report on the Automation Project

Recommendation | **Members are asked to note the report.**

Background

Officers continue to work on the Automation Project since the agreement by Board members in 2023 to create a reserve of £150,000 from the previous year's underspend to fund the implementation of automation of data entry for customers. This would enable a range of services across WRS to be addressed by the customer entering data onto forms on the WRS website, which would then upload directly into the IDOX Uniform back-office system used across the service. Subsequently this will also include the automation of payments for Licensing, so our host authority Bromsgrove District Council will collect fees for the 6 partners and pass money back to the other 5. Officers agreed to provide a short progress report at each Board meeting prior to implementation.

Report

Forms

Where forms are now live these are continuing to be used as a preference to paper forms or sending forms via email. Feedback has been positive, and the team continues to monitor progress closely. The shift to moving online has continued to rise with very few queries or challenges.

Form Timeline

The next set of forms to be created and tested are as follows:

1. Animal Licensing Applications
2. Pavement Licensing
3. Taxi Applications

As previously explained, while the animal licensing and pavement licensing forms are being created the team will look to form a plan of engagement with the taxi trade as we would like to do as much testing with the trade and operators to ensure there are champions in each district. The formulation of the guidance and faq's on the website will be critical to ensure a smooth transition therefore engaging with this group will be critical.

Significant progress has been made on the 'service request' form where the task and finish group are comfortable now to move onto testing. It has been a challenge for the team involved to create the specifications required to meet the needs of all service areas and the need to address a very wide range of potential requests relating to the work of all three WRS service divisions. It has also required members across WRS teams to get together at various points of the scoping exercise.

Finance

A new bank account at BDC has been set up for WRS income so it will be easier to divide out to partners moving forward. Partners will have received monies from Bromsgrove at the end of Q4 which will now allow partners to see real licensing income coming out of the system. Until now it would have been amalgamated with other council income.

Taxi ID Cards

The three teams involved in the project (MyTAG, IDOX and Wyre Forest IT) are working together to ensure there is no risk to the service when data is exposed outside of the environment when enabling remote access to the IDOX database. Many of you may have seen that Wolverhampton council went live with this project in recent days so the team have been asked to speak to Wolverhampton to alleviate some of their concerns.

Contact Point

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