

BROMSGROVE DISTRICT COUNCIL

CORPORATE PERFORMANCE REPORT: 'HELP ME TO RUN A SUCCESSFUL BUSINESS' – MAY 2019

1. INTRODUCTION

- 1.1 This bi-monthly report highlights the key areas for the strategic purpose 'Help me to run a successful business'.
- 1.2 The key sickness absence measures are contained in this report.

2. CONTEXT

NWedR are in the process of preparing an Economic Growth Strategy for North Worcestershire, which will include engagement with key stakeholders over the next two-three months. The strategy is expected to be presented to the council for approval in September 2019.

2.1 Create a more vibrant Bromsgrove town centre and flourishing local centres

The Bromsgrove Centres Strategy 2017-2020 details the plans for the seven principal Bromsgrove District centres. It delivers the potential to maintain and grow the economy of the centres by enabling new retail, housing, leisure and commercial opportunities to come forward, attracting new inward investment, continuing and enhancing business support services, maximising marketing opportunities and strengthening our creative offer.

The seven Bromsgrove District centres as covered by the Bromsgrove Centres Strategy 2017-2020 are:

- Bromsgrove Town Centre
- Rubery Village
- Alvechurch Village
- Catshill
- Barnt Green Village
- Wythall
- Hagley Village

The Centres strategy is based upon the seven centres originally agreed by Cabinet in November 2015, when the decision was taken to recruit a Bromsgrove Centres Manager post which is hosted by NWedR on behalf of Bromsgrove District Council. The outcomes in this plan form key thematics under which projects and initiatives will be delivered and how we measure success and impact.

- Accessibility
- Safety and Security
- Marketing and Promotion
- Markets
- Business Support
- Public Realm
- Historic Environment and Heritage
- The Future

The Bromsgrove Centres Manager post has worked closely with Bromsgrove District Parish Councils to develop and deliver projects and initiatives to harness the opportunities available to improve the overall appearance of the centres, introduce events to attract and drive additional visitor numbers and strengthen communication and relationships with local businesses.

In the past three years Catshill, Hagley Village and Alvechurch Village have all introduced Christmas Light Switch On events that have become integral events in the centres and grown year-on-year, bring the number of these events to six in the District. All these events have been developed and grown by establishing working groups co-ordinated and supported by the Bromsgrove Centres Manager function.

Bromsgrove Town Centre has seen the implementation of many initiatives to support the key thematics of the Bromsgrove Centres Plan including:

- Establishment of the Better Bromsgrove branding including a Facebook page
- Promotional space bookings to generate a revenue stream
- Secured over £60k of external funding to support initiatives
- Sign Solutions; a live interpretation service to enable businesses to communicate effectively with profoundly deaf visitors; the first town centre in the UK to launch such an initiative; making Bromsgrove town centre more accessible
- Upgraded radio link scheme
- Introduction of DISC an online reporting portal to share and exchange information to reduce crime and anti-social behaviour
- Launch of Best Bar None, an industry led national scheme to support the licensed sector
- Taxi Marshal Scheme
- Establishment of the Bromsgrove Indie Club; a network of independent businesses
- The Festival of Light event
- BMX and Skateboard Urban Event
- Young Enterprise Market
- Worcester Road Street Party Event
- Bromsgrove Dining Club
- Seasonal social media events; Easter, Valentine Love Bromsgrove; Christmas

In March 2019 an Expression of Interest was submitted to Government on behalf of Bromsgrove Town Centre. A decision as to whether the Expression of Interest has been successful to be taken to Stage 2 is expected in September 2019. If successful a full business case will need to be developed outlining key projects and budget required.

The Expression of Interest focuses on the Council's vision for the town centre, which is to diversify and strengthen its offer to meet changing market conditions and consumer behaviour. This ambitious vision is based on exploring and implementing key structural interventions aimed at improving the town centre's vitality, vibrancy, attractiveness and competitiveness:

- provision of high quality flexible workspaces, including co-working and co-location, building on Bromsgrove's attractiveness for start-ups and micro-enterprises
- introducing and expanding the range of uses that increase 'dwell' time, such as food & beverage and leisure
- provision of multi-functional workspaces with a specific focus on the emerging creative industries sector, bringing arts, culture and tech into one spaces, by building on the existing links with Artrix Arts Centre and the Heart of Worcestershire College
- delivery of public realm & green infrastructure with multi-purpose uses to enable 'meanwhile' / 'pop-up' activities in key town centre locations.

There are two key strategic studies being undertaken to ensure decisions regarding Bromsgrove town centre are co-ordinated and support a coherent approach to development and improvements:

- Car Park, Servicing and Access full business case commission
- Former Market Hall site

In addition, a survey was sent to Bromsgrove Community Panel and was made available to the general public in September 2018; the survey was open for 4 weeks. One section of the survey concentrated on Bromsgrove Town Centre. A selection of results follows:

How often do you visit Bromsgrove Town Centre? (Please select the response which most closely reflects your visiting habits)	At least once a week	43.4%
	Every other week	16.3%
	Monthly	14.7%
	Less often	16.7%
	Never	8.8%

How much do you think Bromsgrove town centre has improved over the past year?

Number and quality of shops and businesses	Extremely	1.8%
	Very much	9.6%
	Moderately	21.9%
	Slightly	18.4%
	Not at all	41.7%
	Don't know/no opinion	6.6%
Number and range of new shops and restaurants opening	Extremely	3.1%
	Very much	12.3%
	Moderately	24.6%
	Slightly	25.4%
	Not at all	28.9%
	Don't know/no opinion	5.7%
Positive feel	Extremely	2.6%
	Very much	13.5%
	Moderately	28.8%
	Slightly	19.2%
	Not at all	27.5%
	Don't know/no opinion	8.3%

There have been fundamental improvements made to the infrastructure in Bromsgrove Town Centre to ensure there is robust platform to launch projects and developments. A key priority has been the support and improvement of the night-time economy which had suffered from a poor reputation, negative press and a fragmented approach to addressing issues.

The formation of the Bromsgrove Town Centre Management Group, established by the Bromsgrove Centres Manager, has seen a far more co-ordinated partnership approach to pro-actively identifying emerging issues and agreeing solutions, strengthening communication and partnership working. An integral part of this work has been to support the Bromsgrove Pub Watch Scheme, which has now adopted its own terms of reference and opened a bank account. These interventions and support has enabled schemes such as Best Bar None and the Taxi Marshal Scheme to secure funding from the Police and Crime Commissioner and the Safer Bromsgrove Partnership.

In respect of the community panel results NWedR will continue to ensure we effectively communicate and celebrate the successes of Bromsgrove Town Centre. Through opportunities linked to key developments sites, such as the former Market Hall; the emergence of the Bromsgrove Indie Club; and an exciting and diverse cultural and events offer, we can improve the perception of the town centre.

2.2 Encourage local business and inward investment

Over the past 12 months the NWedR team has given business support to 38 businesses, awarding 17 match funded grants worth over £280,000 in the Bromsgrove District.

These grants have come through multiple funding streams such as the Worcestershire Business Accelerator and Investing in Growth grants to encourage local businesses to expand, as well as the Business Energy Efficiency Programme and Be Cyber Secure Grants, to help companies in the area prepare for the future.

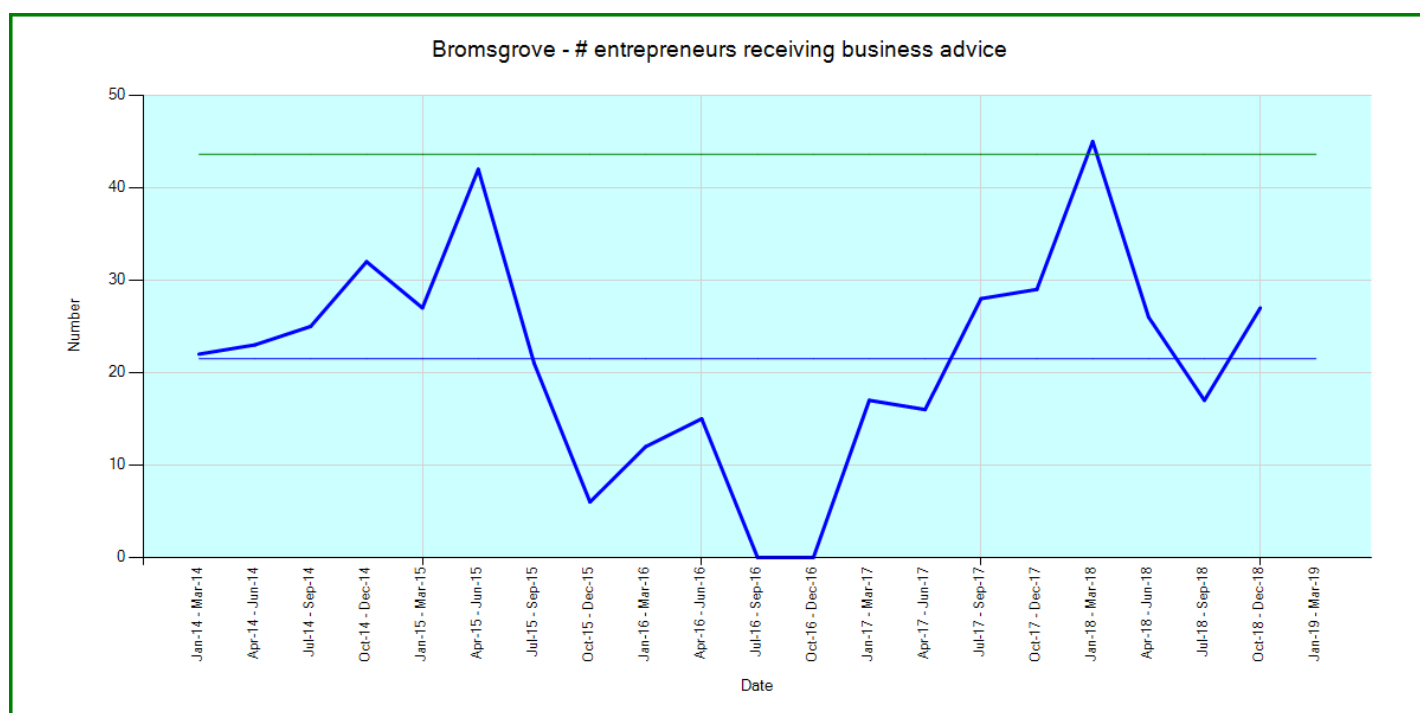
To attract inward investment the NWedR promotes and offers support through the Business Development Programme, offering Small to Medium sized companies up to £20,000 in match funding for capital equipment, relocation, market development and expansion.

The programmes of support focus on helping the entrepreneur to acquire the skills required to run a successful, sustainable business. Topics covered include core competencies such as

business planning, marketing, and financial & legal requirements. In addition topic specific workshops are available giving a more in depth study and these will often be provided in response to demand from would-be entrepreneurs. The programmes are delivered by Blue Orchid, who were procured by Worcestershire County Council and Solihull MBC, and who deliver multiple such programmes across the country. Participants in the programmes frequently have little experience running a business, are unlikely to know other entrepreneurs and usually do not have access to finance. As such, they are higher risk and are less likely to survive or to grow beyond self-employment or micro-businesses.

The sample size for this period is too small to be statistically relevant; however, survival rates of those businesses that have accessed support over several years are, on average, better than the general population. This would indicate that the schemes are having a positive impact on the businesses.

Entrepreneurs receiving business advice

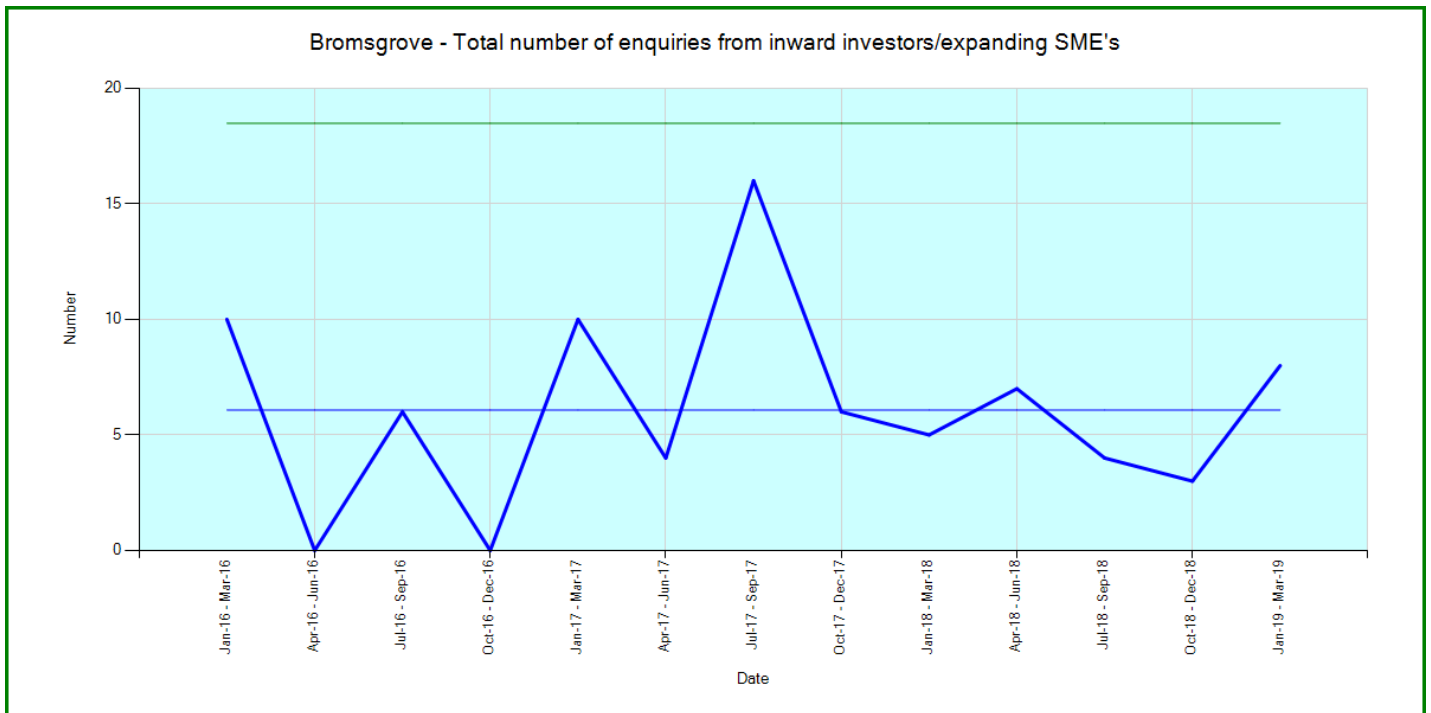


Oct 18 - Dec 18 – The majority of businesses receiving support are sole traders (56%). Businesses are predominantly in the business services, personal services and retail sectors.

Supporting business start-ups is a numbers game and the aim is to get as many participants as possible. This is due to the low conversion rate. Typically 50% of enquirers will book on to the scheme. Of these, around 50% will attend the workshop. Less than 10% of participants go on to start a business and survival rates are about 60%. Therefore, to create 1 successful business you need to generate a lot of enquiries.

The scheme is promoted via many organisations – the national business helpline; the 2 growth hubs that serve Bromsgrove; the County Council; NWedR; the support provider (Blue Orchid); and Solihull MBC. Each organisation has a range of channels including websites, social media, attendance at events; and marketing collateral.

Total number of enquiries from inward investors/expanding SME's



The recent increase in enquiries is predominantly from local companies looking to expand.

The number of enquiries reflects the fact that other organisations lead on these areas, i.e. the LEPs for Inward Investment and the Growth Hubs for general business support. All government funded programmes must be promoted via a growth hub and so resources are put in to encourage business to contact them. Individual programmes are promoted by their managing organisations too. Therefore the local authority is not necessarily who businesses choose to contact when seeking assistance. Fortunately, we operate a “no wrong front door” policy and services are well integrated. Partnerships between the various providers are strong and businesses who seek help should be well served. This is evident by the number of businesses who re-engage after receiving support. The challenge is to reach the businesses that don’t, for whatever reason, engage with public sector support.

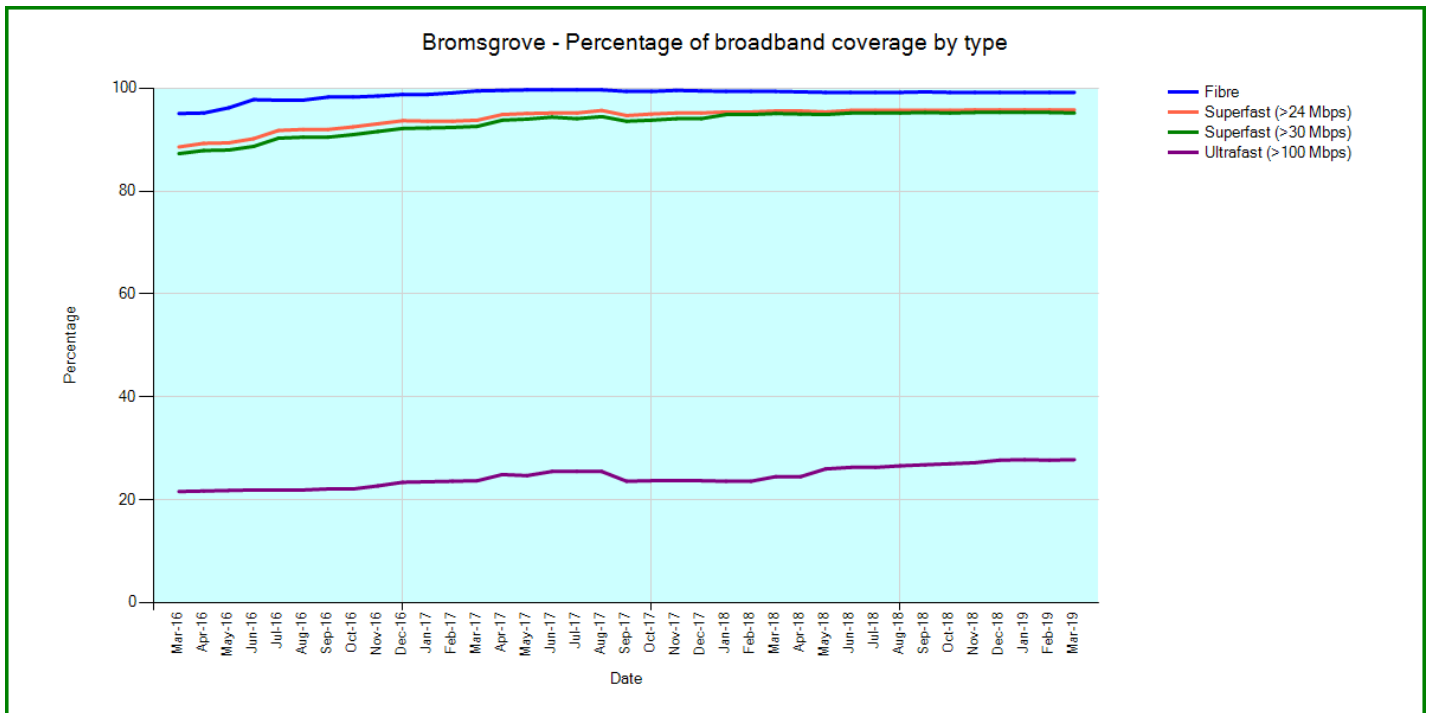
2.3 Improve connectivity within Bromsgrove (Digital and Transport)

Transport and Transport infrastructure remains a key issue. Feedback from the Issues and Options consultation of the Bromsgrove District Plan review reinforces the need for future transport infrastructure planning to play a key role in decisions on the scale and location of new developments.

NWEDR and BDC are key stakeholders in the construction of improvements to the A38, through the A38 Bromsgrove Corridor Major Scheme. The scheme aims to reduce traffic congestion along the route through junction enhancement at ten key places along the road. With a projected project cost of £38 million, funds have been committed by WLEP, Highways England, GBSLEP, Section 106 funding and there is a further bid through the Housing Infrastructure Fund. The first package of this scheme is already under construction, and work is progressing on the detailed designs of the other elements of the scheme.

Work is also ongoing preparing a Strategic Transport Assessment, at the moment the initial evidence base element is being put together. This will provide a baseline position on transport across Bromsgrove District by all modes. As the evidence base work nears completion, the focus then turns to understanding this evidence, and the procuring of the right tool and expertise to carry out assessment of development options for employment and housing development in the future. This is a key piece of work which will influence a range of different strategies including the review of the current Bromsgrove District Plan.

% of broadband coverage by type



The percentage coverage (business & residential premises) for fibre (>24Mbps and >30Mbps) compares favourably with the County average, but the availability of ultrafast (27.7%) is lower than the County average (29.8%). The ultrafast coverage is half that of the average coverage in England (59.5%).

Connectivity within the district has been improved, with average download speeds increasing from just 23.9 Mbps in Q1 2018, up to 30.6 Mbps in Q1 2019. Furthermore, the amount of people with the ability to access Superfast Broadband speeds, greater than 30 Mbps, has surpassed the Worcestershire average, now standing at 95.18%. Although slightly behind the UK average of 95.7%, this figure represents a great achievement, especially for an area classed as ‘Significant Rural’ by the ONS, where broadband speeds are normally much slower. The NWEDR has continued to promote the Gigabit Broadband Voucher scheme which offers up to £2,500 for businesses and £500 for residential premises to improve internet connections. So far in Worcestershire, 214 vouchers have been issued, totalling an investment of £470,000.

2.4 Invest in our local workforce by supporting training and apprenticeships

In 2017/18, 580 apprenticeships were started in Bromsgrove District, across all age groups. In order to help supply a workforce equipped with the correct skills for the needs of the future, the NWEDR promotes funding support of up to £1,500 to companies to help them take on and train apprentices. The Apprentice Support Scheme prioritises key sectors such as manufacturing, digital/creative, IT and logistics, and has helped the District train 790 apprentices over the last year. Of these, 200 were aged 16-18 and 240 were aged 19-24.

In addition, the NWEDR has been a sponsor of the Young Enterprise Finals. The annual Skills show also gave school leavers and sixth formers in Bromsgrove and the surrounding area the opportunity to engage with the world of work. Through interactive stands students could gain knowledge on career pathways and employability, with the NWEDR team volunteering at the event, which was organised by Worcestershire County Council. With approximately 5,000 pupils from 43 schools and colleges taking part, the event proved a great way to inspire the next cohort of workers for the employment needs of the future.

3. KEY SICKNESS ABSENCE MEASURES

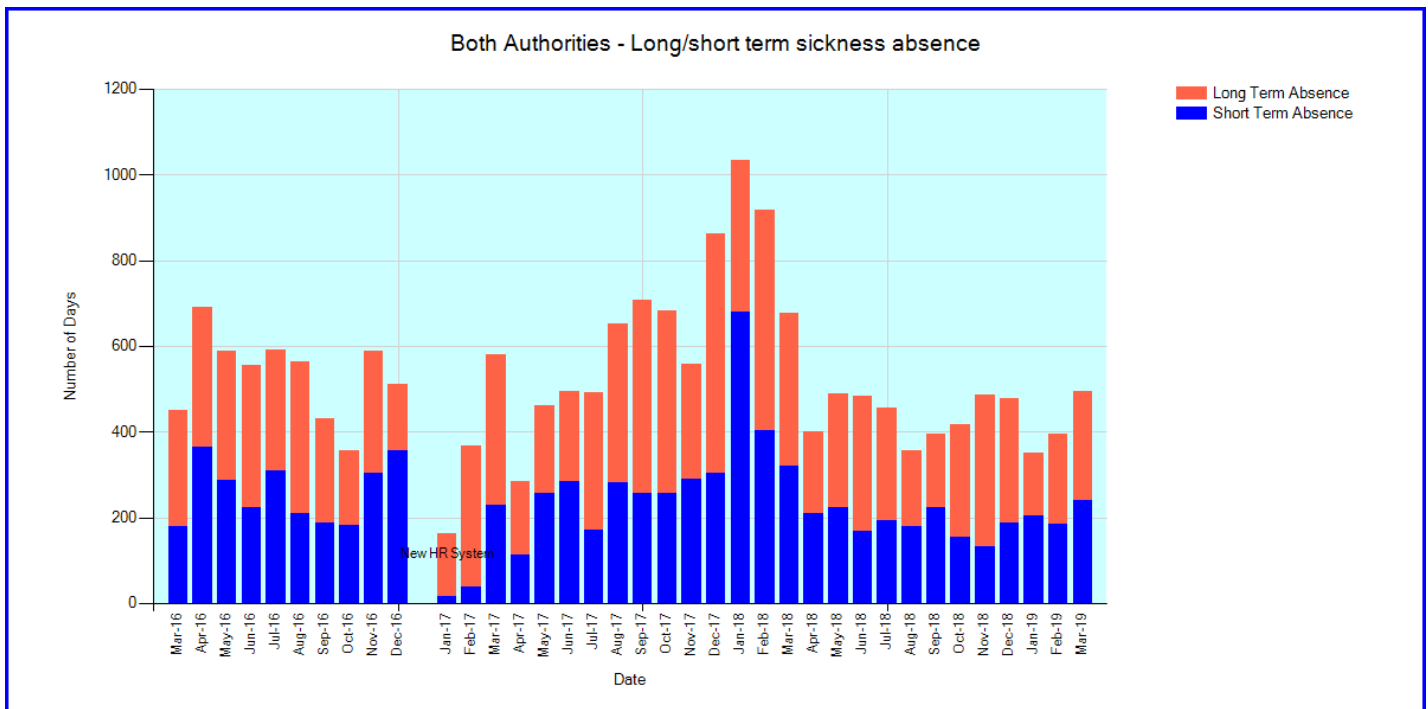
3.1 Sickness Data

Sickness outturn for 2018/19 was considerably lower than previous years at 6.75 days per FTE. There has been an investment in further one to one training on the HR21 system with Managers. The system has also been developed to include the recording of return to work data, based upon research that proves holding return to work interviews significantly reduces sickness absence.

During 2018 HR launched a suite of HR Management Information; this was launched via the Managers Forum where instruction on how to use the information was discussed. The data is delivered on a monthly basis to the 4th tier managers and includes sickness and return to work interviews amongst other HR data; this may have assisted Heads of Service and 4th tier managers in seeing the ‘bigger picture’ of sickness across the area, rather than just the sickness for their direct reports. HR have started trialling ‘Managers toolkit training’ which involves training for managers on workplace issues/ policies etc. This has included training on sickness absence and setting targets, this was well received and will continue to be developed and rolled out over 2019/20.

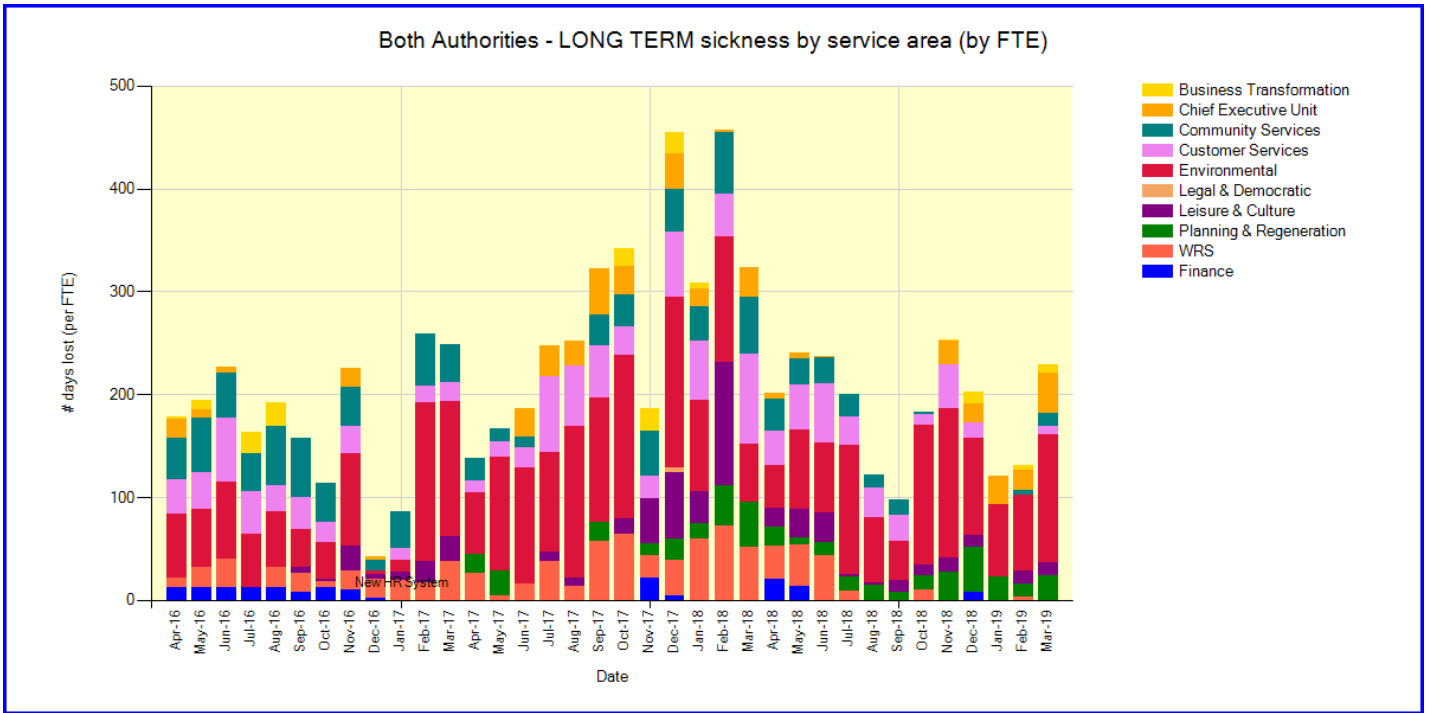
Further work has continued with the development of the sickness absence policy, this has included further policy working groups engaging management, employees, HR and trade unions, collectively this work has helped further inform the sickness policy and brought to the forefront the issue of sickness. Sickness absence closely correlates with the use of agency staff in some areas such as frontline services. The agency spend last year has probably attributed to more scrutiny and better management of sickness in front line services. The council has reduced sickness throughout 2018/19, but will continue to work to further reduce sickness in the future. This will include the implementation of the sickness absence policy, the implementation of a new enterprise system covering HR and Payroll and further Managers toolkit training.

Long/Short Term Sickness Absence
Contact: Nicola Wright, Assistant HR & OD Advisor



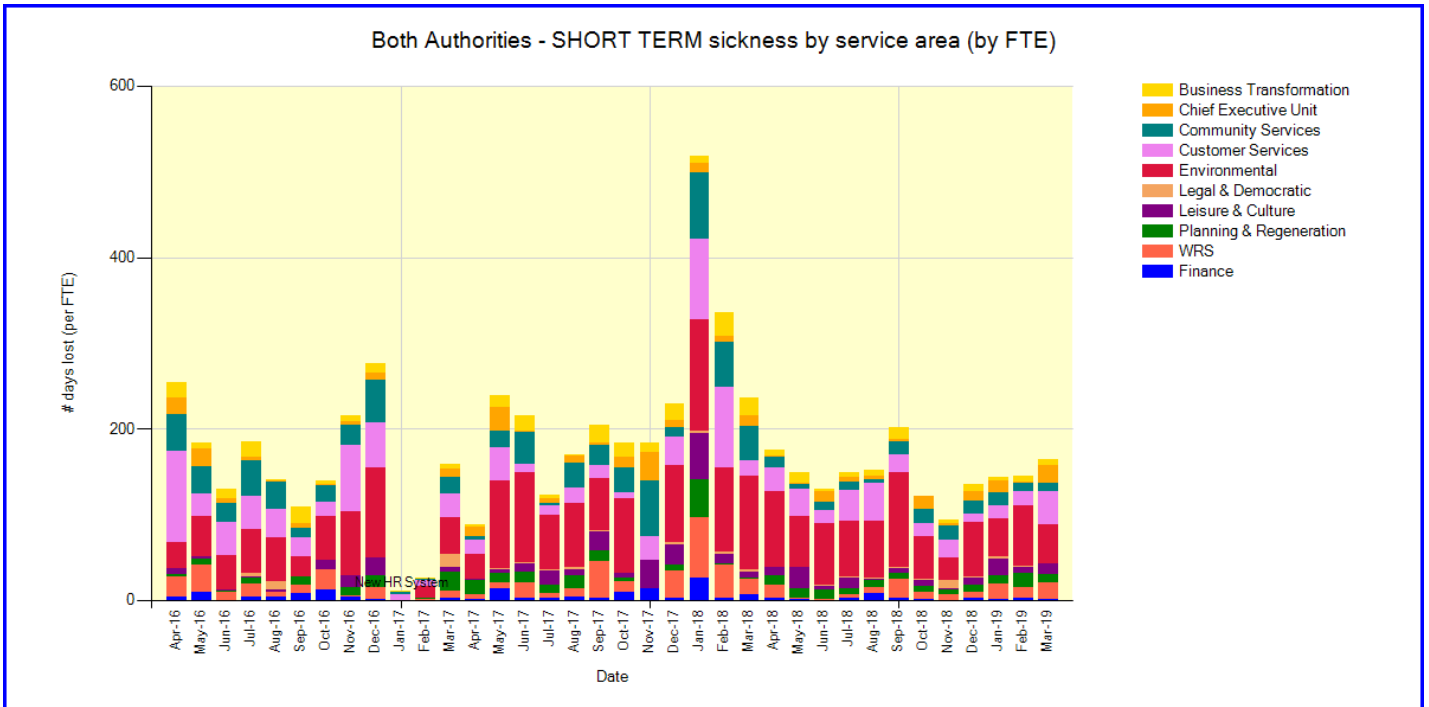
Although there have been minor peaks, in the main, sickness absence has remained fairly static since April 2018. The HR team continue to monitor and assist managers in tackling both types of sickness, as well as using the data to make informed interventions where required, such as review of sickness absence policy, occupational health services and the employee assistance programme.

Long Term Sickness Absence by service area (by FTE)
Contact: Nicola Wright, Assistant HR & OD Advisor



Long term absence has seen a steady increase during the first quarter of 2019; increases have been experienced in Environmental Services, Customer Services, Community Services and Chief Executive Unit.

Short Term Sickness Absence by service area (by FTE)
Contact: Nicola Wright, Assistant HR & OD Advisor



Short term absence has steadily increased since November 2018; Customer Services saw the highest increase of all service areas during March 2019.