

Worcestershire
Regulatory Services

Supporting and protecting you

ANNUAL REPORT

2021/22

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

	Page
Introduction	3
Key Achievements & Performance	5
Performance Management & Audit	10
Service Delivery Highlights	12
Financial Management	25
Workforce Planning and Human Resources Management	25
Accommodation	26
Business Transformation	27
Risk Management	28
Equality and Diversity	28
Next Steps	29
Appendix 1: Structure (1 st April 2022)	30
Appendix 2: Risk Log	21
Appendix 3: Revenue Out-turn 2017/18	35
Appendix 4: Agreed WRS Budget 2017/18-2020/21	38
Appendix 5: Activity summary by individual partners	41

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 2021 up to the 31st of March 2022 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 was again dominated by Covid 19, although we did move into the final phases of control measures throughout the year. It was yet another of the busiest years that all of our long-standing staff have had to deal with. The service remained directly engaged with the pandemic response, as well as delivering the Covid Advisor and local Contact Tracing workstreams on behalf of Worcestershire County Council's Public Health team, along with other Covid related activities. As well as this, much of what we refer to as "business as usual" activities continued to be delivered. We remain very proud that our staff have continued to support the public with our normal activities, whilst others have been dedicated to pandemic controls. They have absorbed much of the pressure and carried on delivering. There was excellent work undertaken during 2021/22, with very good results across a range of service areas. WRS managers continued to work along the lines identified in the comprehensive 3-year Business Plan for the period 2020-23, adopted in February 2020. Members will receive a revised business plan for approval in February 2023.

Last year offered limited opportunities to develop new income streams, with most of our local government customers dealing with pandemic related issues. However, we have managed to retain the majority of our customers and will continue to look at where we can build on this. The end of the financial year saw us signing up two new customers (Bristol City and Solihull MBC,) for support from our Technical Services team, and at the same time Bath and North-East Somerset, have agreed to become a partner in the work on gull control that we do for Worcester City, so that valuable resource and experience can be shared. These developments make us hopefully that the focus of our income generation strategy, being "a local government solution to local government issues," will continue to bear fruit going forward. We will also continue to look at what other regulatory functions the partners may wish to add to the WRS platform, which will give us wider expertise to offer councils beyond the county border.

As members will see, the service managed a significant underspend last year, much of this being due to the lack of suitable capacity in the pool of agency staff to support regulatory activities. WRS officers had to shoulder a great burden and the underspend reflects this. Also areas like mileage claims were down due to travel being more limited and officers continuing to have more limited duties in work areas like food inspection.

Looking forward, our three strategic priorities, remain relevant for now and into the post-Covid 19 environment. They are:

- Supporting the Local Economy
- Improving Health and Well-being
- Tackling and Preventing Crime and Disorder

As we have done since WRS came into being, we continue to support legitimate businesses and residents, particularly the vulnerable, where we are able and at the same time, we tackle those who break the law, ignore best practice, or adversely impact the environment. Central to this approach was and remains the availability of accurate data and intelligence sharing. Our intelligence unit coordinates, and analyses 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. The revised Strategic Assessment has identified several cross-cutting themes that will require some focus from all the WRS teams, and they will be key priorities for 2022/3 and 2023/4, co-ordinated by our Team Managers:

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

We hope this will help ensure that the service focuses on the things that can deliver the biggest difference to the public and local businesses.

During 2020/21, it has become better recognised that local authority regulation can benefit from the intelligence led approach with DLUHC even paying for local Housing Standards teams to have access to the IDB Intelligence database to which WRS already subscribes. Our intelligence team provided training to district colleagues to enable them to use this and to give them a better understanding of how to integrate the intelligence-led approach into their working. We will continue to support these teams and any others in the districts where managers want to test the use of the intelligence operating model.

Simon Wilkes
Head of Regulatory Services

James Howse
Lead Financial Officer

KEY ACHIEVEMENTS FOR WRS IN 2021/22:

These are covered in the sections below:

PERFORMANCE

Our ability to report performance 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 continue to focus on customer satisfaction and the positive compliance of businesses. Previous year's results appear in brackets in the relevant box providing a comparative view of performance over time. Members will note that some systems underpinning measures are currently slightly different currently, meaning figures for pandemic years are not comparable with earlier years (e.g. food business compliance.)

	Measure	Figure	Commentary
1	% of service requests where resolution is achieved to non-business customers satisfaction	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. 69.5% found their contact with WRS helpful, down from 81% last year. 77.4% found the information and advice provided easy to use, down from 90.4% last year. 54.5% felt that the length of time to resolve their problem was satisfactory, down from 68.3% last year, and 60.6% (16% points less than last year,) felt that the speed of initial response from WRS was satisfactory. This probably reflects the services inability to recruit to fully backfill for gaps created by the pandemic response and public expectation that, as we came out of the pandemic, things would quickly return to normal. This did not happen because the service remained engaged in pandemic response well beyond most other local authority services. Managers will 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.
2	% of service requests where resolution is achieved to business customers satisfaction	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. Over 500 businesses replied to our questionnaires. Of those who responded, 97.7% (98.5% last year,) felt that

			<p>their business had been treated fairly and 98.5% (99.2% last year,) of customers felt staff were polite in their dealings with them and informative. Some 98.7% (99.2% last year,) of customers found the information and advice we provided easy to understand and 98.1% (98.2% last year,) found their interaction with us helpful. 96.7% (96.4% last year,) were happy with the speed of our responses and, of those who made enquiries rather than being visited, 97.3% (97.3% last year,) were satisfied with the response. As you can imagine, as a regulator we cannot always tell businesses what they want to hear.</p>
3	% Food businesses broadly compliant at first assessment/ inspection	<p>Bromsgrove 99.3% (98.4, 97.1, 97.2, 98.7 99.1, 97.1.) Malvern Hills 98.4% (98.6, 98.1, 97.2, 97.0, 97.7, 97.) Redditch 97.5% (97.6, 95.6, 96.0, 96.7, 97.6, 95.1.) Worcester City 98.4% (98.4, 97.5, 98.0, 98.0, 98.6, 98.2.) Wychavon 98.2% (99.2, 98.0, 97.4, 97.8, 98, 99.1.) Wyre Forest 98.6% (98.2, 98.1, 97.7, 97.2, 98.1, 96.6.) Worcestershire 98.5% (98.5, 97.5, 97.3, 97.6, 98.2, 97.4.)</p>	<p>The Service has been following the Food Standards Agency's roadmap to normal processes following the moratorium on the normal food inspection programme. This will end on 31st March 2023, at which point the Agency's revised Code of Practice on Local Authority Food Law enforcement will come into play. Because of the way the roadmap is structured, which was explained to members at one of last year's Board meetings, these figures are not comparable with previous years' work.</p>
4	% of food businesses scoring 0,1 or 2 at 1 st April each year	<p>Bromsgrove 0.7% (1.4, 2.9, 3.6, 1.3, 0.9, 2.9.) Malvern Hills 1.6% (1.6, 1.9, 2.8, 3.0, 2.3, 3, 2.4) Redditch 2.5% (2.4, 4.4, 5.1, 3.3, 2.4, 4.9.) Worcester City 1.6% (1.6, 2.5, 2.2, 2.0, 1.4, 1.8.) Wychavon 1.8% (0.8, 2.0, 3.0, 2.2, 2, 0.8.) Wyre Forest 1.4% (1.8, 1.9, 2.4, 2.8, 1.9, 3.4.)</p>	<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. As mentioned above, because of the roadmap and the suspension of the normal processes, these figures are not comparable with previous years.</p>

		Worcestershire 1.5% (1.5, 2.7, 2.7, 2.4, 2.4, 2.6,)	
5	% of drivers licence renewal applications issued within 5 working days of receipt of a complete application	97.6% (96.9, 75.2, 91.4, 87.7)	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 slightly improved from last year.
6	% of vehicles found to be defective whilst in service	59 = 4% Of 1457 vehicles on the road county-wide	This figure only represents 59 vehicles, but this is significantly higher than previous years and is probably a reflection of the wider impacts of the pandemic. As members will see in the activity data report, one district is particularly impacted whereas others are slightly up but not as significantly. Garages used for testing were closed for some time during the strongest of the pandemic controls and, on re-opening, many garages had to work with reduced capacity, so it took longer for drivers/operators to get their tests done. The result is probably a useful reminder to members that taxis 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.
7	% of service requests where customer indicates they feel better equipped to deal with issues themselves in future	58.5% (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 dropped back to where it was 2 years ago, reflecting the lower performance overall on non-business customer satisfaction.
8	Review of register of complaints and compliments	25 complaints (42, 44, 27, 25, 31, 17, 24, 47, 70) 134 compliments (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. Common areas for complaint were covid advice requirements, nuisance responses and pest control, with small number for other aspects of service delivery.

9	Staff sickness absence at public sector average or better	5.2 days per FTE (1.9, 4.4, 4.12, 12.45, 5.95, 2.3, 3.9, 7.7, 9.5)	Quarter 4 proved somewhat difficult with several members of staff having planned hospital admissions for surgery and a member of staff having serious long-Covid issues, which has pushed up our sickness figure at the end of the year. This was to be expected, given both the pressure of work over the past 2 years and the fact that many necessary procedures had been delayed whilst hospitals dealt with the pandemic. This figure is slightly above out average, but we can see the reasons why, so have no excessive concerns about this.
10	% of staff who are satisfied with working for WRS	97.5% 93.5%, 98%, 88%, (NB: Annual figures for 2017/18 and before, 80%, 85%, 77%, 82%)	79 of our increased staff cohort of just over 100 responded to the survey. Obviously, a lot of those people were undertaking new or different roles, but we felt it reasonable to include them. It probably means this year should be viewed slightly differently, although the same questions were asked as previous years. As ever, some did not respond to all the questions. This 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.) 77% (61/79,) 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 5.9% (5.4, 6.8, 8.7, 6.73, 3.8, 7.9) Malvern Hills 5.1% (3.5, 5.7, 4.8, 4.94, 3.6, 3,) Redditch 9.5% (8.3, 8.5, 7.1 8.65, 2.7, 8.1,) Worcester City 10.0% (5.7, 8.8, 8.1, 8.19, 5.8, 9.4,) Wychavon 6.3% (3.7, 4.2, 4.0, 4.97, 4.0, 5.5,) Wyre Forest 9.1% (5.1, 8.5, 7.0, 8.29, 5.8, 9.4,) Worcestershire 7.5%	Linked to the Crime & Disorder agenda and introduced following discussions with elected members, this measure is now in its seventh year. As we have explained to members previously, post pandemic lockdowns where hospitality premises were closed for long periods, the general tolerance of noise and similar activities from this type of premise has reduced, combined with businesses seeking other activities and use of their outside spaces to increase revenue. It is therefore not surprising to see an increase for all districts in this measure. It still shows that 90% plus of premises across the County are still well run and controlled by their operators, and this increase has not led to an increase in licensing revues either by

		(5.0, 6.8, 6.4, 6.78, 4.4, 6.9,)	residents or the police, suggesting that, in general complaints tend to be about relatively minor issues, although we know there are one or two premises where residents have strong concerns.
12	Rate of noise complaint per 1000 head of population	<p>Bromsgrove 2.25 (2.56, 1.96, 2.7, 2.82, 3.0, 2.7, 3.1)</p> <p>Malvern Hills 2.29 (2.45, 2.07, 2.2, 2.39, 3.0, 2.3, 3.9)</p> <p>Redditch 3.61 (3.67, 2.97, 3.2, 3.61, 4.1, 3.7, 3.5)</p> <p>Worcester City 3.47 (3.1, 2.78, 3.2, 3.13, 4.2, 4.0, 2.9)</p> <p>Wychavon 2.45 (2.08, 2.01, 2.1, 2.46, 2.7, 2.6, 2.5)</p> <p>Wyre Forest 2.65 (2.71, 2.37, 2.6, 3.23, 3.4, 3.0, 3.0)</p> <p>Worcestershire 2.9 (2.74, 2.35, 2.7, 2.93, 3.4, 3.1, 3.8)</p>	<p>Last year saw variations in impacts, with Bromsgrove and Malvern being slightly below average numbers and Wychavon and Worcester slightly above. As we mentioned above, although there are one or two premises that certain residents have concerns about, there is little evidence of a deterioration in standards at hospitality premises although many have had to look at more diverse ways of bringing in revenue. It should also be remembered that a significant proportion of noise complaints related to domestic issues.</p> <p>1,801 noise cases were received during 2021/22 (166 more than the previous year), with 1077 (or 60%) relating to noise from domestic properties, a slightly smaller proportion than last year, possibly reflecting the increased opening of businesses.</p>
13	Total Income	<p>14.89% Note: £449,356 as a % of previous budget of £3.017M</p> <p>Using the current budget figure (3.257M,) the figure yielded is 13.8%</p>	This includes some income for managing the Covid workstreams, but the vast majority is relating to our normal workload. Hopefully, this is a positive sign of the system returning to something nearer to normality.
14	Cost of regulatory services per head of population.	<p>Based on overrun cost of £2.860M against the current population estimate of 595,786 the service cost is:</p> <p>£4.80 per head</p>	This is the amount spent by the partners following the off-setting of cost with income, then divided by the mid-year estimate we currently use for other work. 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 the MHCLG.

PERFORMANCE MANAGEMENT

Strong management of performance is vital for the success of this service, ensuring that customers are satisfied, and partners are reassured by the cost-effective delivery of the service on their behalf. Whilst everyone must accept responsibility for managing performance, 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 main challenge for the service is to improve the perception of non-business customers have of our performance, so this will be a key task for managers in 2022/3 and beyond.

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. This has been supplemented throughout the pandemic with a weekly informal meeting of the Head of Service and Team Managers 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.

Continued refinement of our IT platform ensures our ability to report to Joint Board on our performance measures and that this remains accurate. The Uniform system operates well across all functions, but it is somewhat antiquated, and consideration has been given to replacement. However, in the current financial climate this may not be affordable, and Uniform does continue to deliver on what is necessary. 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 individuals can be identified and work to deal with them co-ordinated. DLUHC is looking to encourage the broader use of the system, especially at district council level, and has agreed to fund access for district council Housing Standards teams to help them better engage with colleagues and also 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 5 to avoid duplication with the wider and more detailed set of activity data that is provided in the final Activity Data Report for 2020/21, which members will receive at the same meeting where this Annual Report is presented.

Internal Audits

There was one audit for Licensing that was carried out in accordance with the Worcestershire Internal Audit Shared Service Audit Plan for Bromsgrove District Council for 2020/21 and 2021/22 as approved at the Audit, Standards and Governance Committee on 5th March 2020 and 15th July 2021. The audit was a risk-based systems audit of Licensing as operated by Bromsgrove District Council.

The audit was to provide assurance on the processes surrounding the management of licenses issued by Worcestershire Regulatory Services, including the recovery of expired, revoked, or suspended licenses, The assurance was predominantly regarding Taxi Driver and Vehicle Licensing, but other licensing was considered as part of the review to provide assurance on consistency of approach and embedded practice.

Scope: The audit covered

- Processes in place to capture decisions from licensing committees regarding all changes to licensing requirements for businesses and individuals
- Comprehensive notes are held against records to ensure full case history is available and can be reported at any point in time
- Physical recovery of expired, revoked, or suspended licenses along with reconciliation
- Recording of licenses and embedded system abilities to manage licenses and actions
- Review process for licensing applicants (to identify if licenses have previously been issued)
- Reporting of position to each Authority regarding cases is clear, concise and timely.

The review covered the period from 1st April 2020 to the date of the audit and ran across two municipal years. The review was performed from April to June 2021. The review found the following areas of the system were working well:

- Attendance and provision of information for Committees and Sub-Committees
- Record keeping of license holders via a uniformed system
- Existing and additional controls for the recovery of licenses and the development of processes to improve controls.
- System abilities to manage license variations and produce reports for management purposes
- Identification of applicants who have previously had a license suspended or revoked and the introduction of the National Register of Taxi and Private Hire Licence Revocations and Refusals (NR3)

The review made one recommendation where controls could be strengthened and that was to use Authority Enforcement officers exception reporting. The licensing team have continued to engage with district officers to improve these relationships.

SERVICE DELIVERY HIGHLIGHTS

There have been many highlights throughout the year that showcase the work of our teams and illustrate the breadth of their responsibilities. We also feature the other work-streams taken on, including elements of pandemic control work.

Community Environmental Health Team

Food Safety

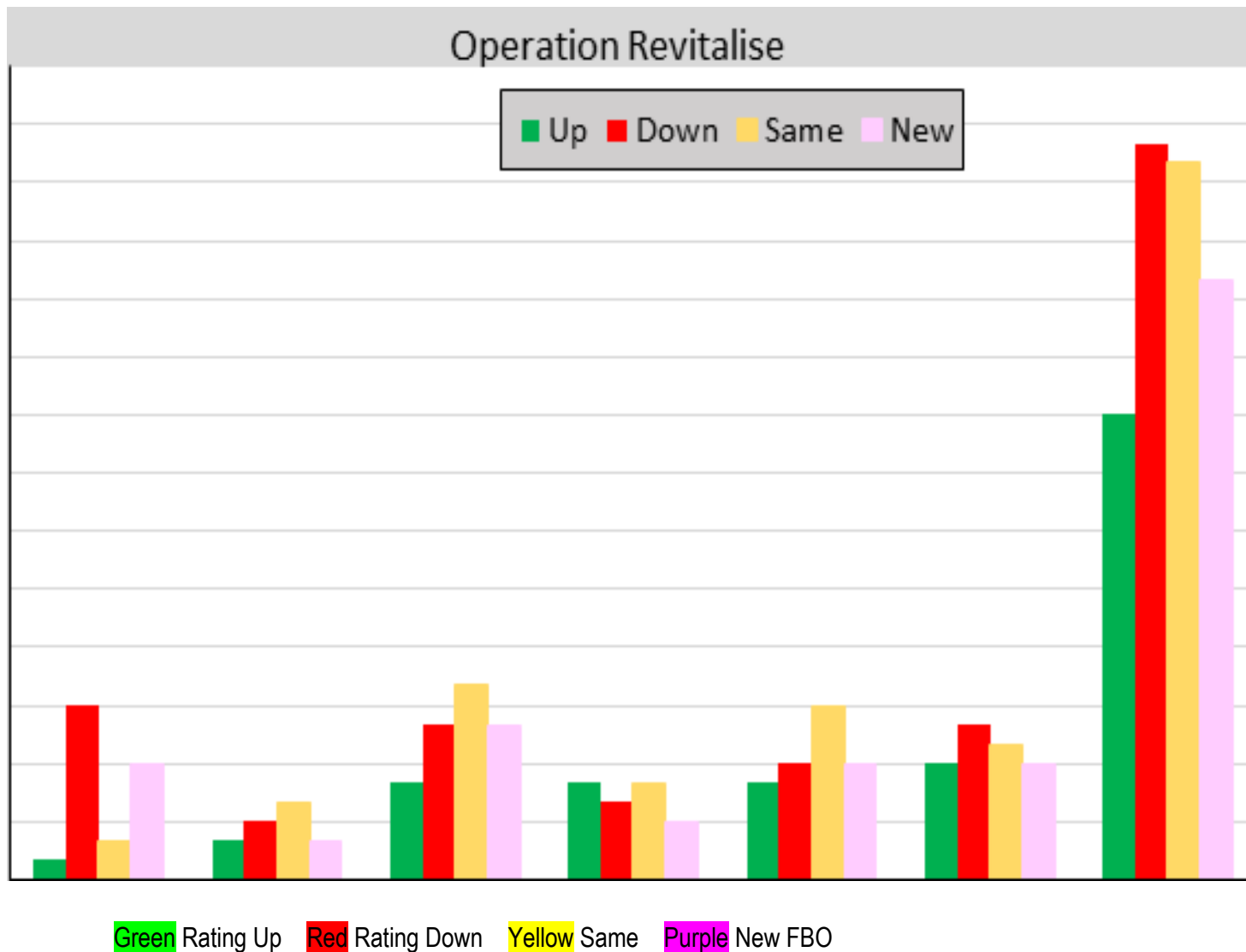
During the year we moved from food businesses operating under Covid restrictions to a fully open sector and a national FSA Recovery Programme to catch up on inspections missed during lockdowns. This programme runs to end of March 2023 with a series of milestones being monitored by the FSA. At the end of the year, we had carried out over 3,000 interventions across all Districts.

In summary:

2021/22	Interventions on existing FHRs rated premises	Interventions on new / unrated premises	Total Interventions
BDC	425	153	578
MHDC	315	184	499
RBC	244	145	389
WCC	418	210	628
WDC	360	240	600
WFDC	347	189	536
Total	2109	1121	3230

To enable us to meet FSA milestones in a period of high demand for qualified Environmental Health Officers (EHOs) we were able to recruit five consultant EHOs (four part time making 2.5 FTE) to assist with food work, enabling full time WRS officers to remain engaged in pandemic related activities.

As part of the above interventions programme between October and March, EHOs also conducted Operation Revitalise focussing on our poorly rated FHRs Level 0- Level 2 premises operating in the night-time economy. 130 inspections were carried out and 4 Hygiene Improvement Notices served.



In the autumn we also appointed a fixed term contract Regulatory Support Officer (a former Covid Adviser) and trained up eight Covid Advisers as short-term RSOs to assist with four food projects:

Sampling – one of the tools available to check whether food safety management practices are working. Between October and March officers took over 200 samples from 57 premises. The number of unsatisfactory samples was higher than we expected. The focus of the samples was

- Environmental swabs from chopping boards and equipment handles i.e. fridges; cloths, sponges and scourers
- Food samples – salad items and cooked meats

Results are outlined in the table below:

FHRS	Borderline	Not Satisfactory	Satisfactory	Not Recorded	Total
1	1	5	6		12
2		2	2	1	5
3	1	28	37	3	69
4		8	18	1	27
5	3	26	56		85
NPR		4	7	2	13
Total	5	76	128	7	211

The majority of unsatisfactory results were due to Enterobacteriaceae and Escherichia coli counts, both hygiene with cloths/sponges/scourers remaining the main source of risk of contamination. Advice and revisits followed to ensure improvement in standards.

New Premises - with support funding from the FSA we prioritised for inspection some 800 new premises registered during the pandemic. Some 30% (pre Covid 15-20%) of businesses had ceased trading. This is in line with other LA data.

FHRS Sticker - the green and black stickers with which we are all familiar are updated at every inspection. For the first time an RS0 carried out a project to see if businesses which had dropped their rating in the previous 6 months had replaced the old sticker, amended websites/leaflets. We found that some 25% were not compliant and have worked with them to ensure they do not continue to mislead consumers. This is an offence prosecutable under the Trading Standards enforced Consumer Protection Act.

In total 193 premises were visited across Worcestershire. In summary the following was evidenced by officers:

Correct Sticker Displayed	No Sticker Displayed	Incorrect Sticker Displayed	Misc
15	101	60	17

Misc = Includes premises that may have changed ownership, ceased to operate, or paid for a re-rating inspection

Low Risk Premises – during Feb-March RSO focussed on wet bars, garage forecourt outlets and small retailers. 64 smaller premises due an intervention every three years received a visit. No major issues were found.

Districts	Number of Inspections completed	Number of premises ceased trading	Full EH Inspection Required	Total Number of Visits made
Bromsgrove	9	1	Nil	10
Malvern Hills	12	4	Nil	16
Redditch	4	Nil	Nil	4
Worcester City	17	1	1	19
Wychavon DC	8	2	1	11
Wyre Forest	4	Nil	Nil	4
				64

Role of Regulatory Support Officers

We believe that WRS is the only enforcing authority to have followed the RSO route which included providing an appropriate level of training approved by our Food Safety Lead Officer to meet the FSA Food Law Code of Practice requirements about competency. Led by one of our Principal Officers this team were able to carry out the projects leaving our highly qualified Environmental Health Officers (EHOs) to focus on making site visits to our high-risk premises.

A highlight of the year was briefing the Commonwealth Games safety team on how we had developed these roles along with the use of hygiene swabs as a spot check safety tool.

We also split the outstanding high risk inspection work into two key areas (FHRS Level 0-Level 3 and FHRS Level 4-Level 5) with priority being given to lower rated premises and those operating in the night-time economy. Statistics show that many premises' standards had slipped, primarily with cleaning and paperwork. This is a trend repeated nationally. Businesses had adapted remarkably quickly to normal operational procedures, although all reported staffing issues.

Our outstanding interventions list was significant, totalling over 3,000 premises, many of which had missed at least one routine intervention. In general compliance remains high at 98.5% but many businesses have dropped an FHRS level. We also found more non-compliant premises (i.e. those getting a Level 0-Level 2 FHRS) but, whilst taking up much officer time, they remain low in number. Most of the failures in compliance related to inadequate cleaning practices and lapses in documented food safety management systems.

We also continued to maintain contact with our low-risk businesses through questionnaires and, where necessary, verification visits using one of our consultants.

Operation Corona Fries

This project commenced during the first week of March 2021 and continued throughout quarter one and quarter two of 2021/22.

A team of Officers were tasked with inspecting targeted premises for food hygiene, health and safety, COVID control measures and Licensing compliance. The premises targeted were those food businesses with a food hygiene rating score of 2 and below, namely those not compliant under the Food Standard Agency's Food Hygiene Rating System. WRS Intelligence had identified a direct correlation between those poor performing food businesses and poor COVID control measures. There were approximately 35 premises at start of project, with additional premises being added as further intelligence was received.

Following the inspections various types of enforcement action have been taken, namely two red files opened for potential prosecutions, 21 Food Hygiene Improvement Notices served, and 4 Health & Safety Improvement notices served. Premises which were scored at Level zero to Level two (non-compliant businesses) were added to the Intelligence Database (IDB) for other Agencies including Trading Standards, Fire Service, and Immigration to action as they deem appropriate. The work to bring premises scoring less than Level 3 FHRS up to the standard of broadly compliant continues as a priority.

The understanding of allergen law continues to be an issue across all sectors. We also had an increase in demand for re-rating, perhaps showing the value that our food businesses now place on having a good FHRs score. This is a charge for service and the return visit can be delayed for up to three months if it is deemed necessary to provide sufficient evidence of improved compliance and confidence in management controls.

Another highlight was provided when a Malvern food business owner appeared on Gordon Ramsey's "Future Food Stars" show on BBC TV. WRS Officers were able to provide food hygiene assistance in the production of the ready meals and sauces featured, which Gordon was very enthusiastic about.

Exports

We continued to provide an export certificate service throughout the year. Eight officers have now undergone training and been re-certified by APHA to sign certificates for fish and egg related exports. In early 2022 we were involved with the FSA, DEFRA and the Chinese food authorities in a complex online inspection process for one of our cold stores to export fish products to China. The process was dominated by the Chinese requirement for Covid precautions; their belief being that Covid originated on food packaging. The business awaits the final outcome.

Local Outbreak Response Team

Three of our Environmental Health Officers continued to deliver Covid support services during further restrictions, particularly providing advice to businesses, reviewing risk assessments and event management plans. Unlike the first year of the pandemic when officers were involved in numerous outbreaks and ensuring compliance through a range of interventions, our role became more limited as we moved through 2021, with businesses better understanding what they needed to do to comply. Even so, officers dealt with over 1040 public health notifications and nationally generated local venue alerts. We gradually moved out of ensuring legal compliance to an advisory role, continuing to provide support for sporadic outbreaks and infection control planning in care settings. A positive outcome has been the further strengthening of links with the Public Health Team, on which we continue to build.

Your Officers also continued to attend Incident Management Team meetings for the Partners.

Nuisance

A large number of complaints concerning noise from licensed premises were received following the relaxation of covid-19 restrictions on them towards the end of Q1, as many premises took the opportunity to trade utilising their outdoor areas. Many residents appear to have become accustomed to the quiet of closed premises and took exception to noise from their reopening, even where in some cases it was no worse than pre-lockdown.

The surge in nuisance demand continued throughout the summer, with high numbers of complaints about noise from licensed premises remaining a notable feature. This was particularly challenging for CEH with several team members being re-assigned to cover Covid related work, leaving fewer than usual to deal with the summer peak of nuisance cases. This resulted in an unprecedented backlog of cases, peaking at over 200 nuisance cases pending allocation plus around 800 cases under

investigation. Abatement Notices were served for issues including noise nuisances from amplified music on licensed premises, barking dogs, accumulations, and insufficient drainage arrangements.

The Team have started to receive a number of complaints in relation to noise from recently installed air-source heat pumps, which is a concern given how few have currently been installed and the national push for their wider adoption.

An appeal case lodged by a licensed premises against a noise abatement notice served on them in relation to amplified music in their garden was heard in July, the outcome of which fully vindicated formal action by WRS. The District Judge dismissed the appeal on all counts, finding that the noise did amount to a statutory nuisance, and that the best practicable means had not been taken to minimise the noise. Full costs of £6,715 were awarded to the council by the court.

Officers liaised with the site manager of a construction site in Redditch to achieve a reduction in noise for residents, issued a simple caution to a resident in Worcester in respect of a long running and complex dog barking case, brought closure to a noise problem arising from a fan at a local hospital and an investigation into a noisy cockerel made the national news with coverage in The Sun newspaper. Injunction conditions at Grimley Raceway were checked for the coming season on behalf of Malvern Hills District Council and Officers ensured the implementation of an undertaking given as an alternative to prosecution for a breach of a noise abatement notice for Wychavon District Council.

Health and Safety at Work

The Community Environmental Health team undertook fatal accident investigations at retail premises in both Worcester and Kidderminster, and there is an ongoing complex health and safety investigation following an event in Worcester. Other investigations include a near miss where a six axle forty-four tonne tipper lorry overturned at a golf club and a serious accident at a tool hire/sales/repair company.

An investigation into the fatal accident of a volunteer at a fishery concluded at a hearing in April 2021 at Worcester Magistrates' Court. Birmingham Anglers Association admitted breaching the Management of Health and Safety at Work Regulations and the Health and Safety at Work Act 1974, Section 3(1). The organisation was fined £66,000 and ordered to pay costs of £17,500 together with a victim surcharge of £181.

Events and Safety at Sports Grounds

The team continue to monitor events, working with organisers to ensure that they are properly managed, meet legal requirements and run smoothly, safely and without causing unnecessary disturbance. These have included the Three Shires Car Rally, Light Night, Mello and Upton Folk Festivals, a Passion Play in Worcester which included checking the risk assessment for a mock crucifixion and events planned for the Three Counties Showground. Your Officers also provide the Safety at Sports Grounds function for Worcestershire County Council which has included working with Worcester Warriors Rugby Club, Bromsgrove Sporting and Kidderminster Harriers Football clubs (the latter during their FA Cup run and televised match at home to a Premier League club) and Worcester Racecourse.

Worcestershire Works Well

This County Council Public Health led scheme, supporting workplaces to improve workforce health and wellbeing, gradually returned to operation as the pandemic subsided and is now fully active again. The administration of the scheme continues to be contracted to Herefordshire and Worcestershire Chamber of Commerce. WRS remains part of the Steering Group with a separate contract to deliver support. We have a team of four EHOs trained as 'Reps' supporting businesses to obtain their accreditation. It is predictably proving difficult to re-engage with businesses who have had so many challenges to face during the year. How this scheme is delivered is now under review.

Primary Authority

We continue with our successful Primary Authority Partnerships (PAPs) in the food sector. Existing PAPs were Alimenti, Aspens, My EChef, Servest and Venture Events Catering, all of whom we worked closely with during the pandemic months. During the year we added Mindful Chef (online healthy meals), Kelsius (international company offering temperature control equipment) and NeoKare (processing of baby milk). Some of these are multiple site operators, others are SME with less than 10 employees, demonstrating the range of businesses to which WRS can offer support. It is worth noting that NeoKare is currently the only business of its type operating in England and the supply of commercially sold processing baby milk has generated increasing FSA interest in its operational methods. Our Principal Officer (Food) is also part of a national network of PA authorities and will be chairing this panel going forward.

After forming a Primary Authority Partnership with Halfords, officers visited numerous Halfords sites across the region and further afield to fully understand the scope of assured advice that WRS will be providing to the company in helping them to comply with health and safety requirements at a national level.

In May 2021 Oakland International Limited pleaded guilty to charges brought by Worcestershire Regulatory Services (WRS) acting on behalf of Bromsgrove District Council under the Health and Safety at Work Act 1974. The case, heard at Kidderminster Magistrates Court in front of District Judge Strongman, resulted in the company being fined £300,000. Costs were awarded in the sum of £40,300 and a victim surcharge of £120 was imposed. The case related to an accident involving staff members, one of whom was feared dead at the time after his neck was pinned between the two conveyor belts and rollers of a dual pick line. Thankfully, the victim has made a good recovery.

Working in partnership with the business community

Throughout the pandemic and into the recovery phase, WRS have been instrumental in working with businesses and partners to provide information and advice to assist them in compliance during the restrictions, and in getting them back on to a business-as-usual footing once the constraints had been lifted. This included signposting to the various financial aid packages available and providing legal advice and guidance in a fast-changing environment. The constant changes to legislation as the pandemic progressed presented significant challenges both to officers and business, and your officers were both sympathetic and supportive in ensuring that Worcestershire businesses could respond quickly as economic opportunities presented themselves through a relaxing of the rules and re-opening.

Technical Services Team

Environmental Permitting

The technical services team successfully completed our inspection programme for 2021-22 in late February and all subsistence instructions were supplied to the partners by the agreed dates of mid-March. DEFRA have also determined that there would be no increase in subsistence fees again for 2022-23.

Officers are continuing their investigation into the alloy wheel refurbishment industry. As an emerging business sector, it is largely unaware of the regulation around the chemicals they use. WRS are currently undertaking work to identify operators in this sector and to advise them on the environmental control and compliance requirements for the substances they use and where necessary recommend alternative use chemicals and processing methods. Two companies have already made changes to their processes on our recommendations and are using less harmful substances as a consequence in the Wychavon district.

Alongside the environmental permitting for petrol stations the petroleum licensing function of the County Council was delivered to maximise efficiency, minimise enforcement costs and deliver improved customer service.

Local Air Quality Management

February saw the installation of the first multi gas air monitoring station in Wyre Forest District using new electrochemical measuring technologies which is a first for the County. The system is manufactured and supplied by Northamptonshire based company Earthsense and has gained critical acclaim through the air monitoring industry for its design. The system's purchase has been facilitated by S.106 funding as part of the wider Churchfields regeneration Project. The data harvested to date is proving to be a valuable source of not only Nitrogen Dioxide data but also PM10 and PM2.5. The information will inform us over time as to whether the roadworks has made the necessary improvements to reduce air quality exceedances of the government objective in the area.

Officers drafted and finalised the Contract to install a permanent air quality monitoring station in Wychbold following borderline air quality levels being identified over successive years. This system will provide important information on PM10 pollution and greatly enhance our understanding of air quality impact around the village. It will also provide us with real-time information when poor air quality episodes take place allowing us to provide the public with local air quality information in real-time. It is anticipated that the contract will go out to bidders in Q1.

Following the City-wide declaration as an air quality management area the return to normal traffic volumes post Covid-19 has enabled officers to resume work on the City's source apportionment assessment which given the number of locations of concern in the city was a significant piece of work. This is a study that identifies the reduction level of vehicles required to bring air quality within acceptable concentrations within key hot spots across the city. The Source apportionment will also pave way for the next stage of work which is the action planning process.

Planning support on technical issues

Work to support the development control process has continued throughout the year with a three year high in requests for consultation at the beginning of 2021-22 which tailed off towards the end of the financial year. Alongside the reactive work, the team have been working on production of a supplementary planning document on Air Quality for South Worcestershire and provided updates to guidance available to consultants supporting developers when tackling environmental health issues with development.

Dog Warden Service

It has been a very unusual time for dog wardens. Whilst overall numbers of stray dogs continued to decline, a significant proportion of those that are seized as strays were not microchipped and often had welfare concerns, which made the process of reunification more complex due to proof of ownership issues and potential enforcement situations. Issues have been made worse by the national issues around dog rehoming which has stalled following the end of the pandemic with demand for 'rescue' dogs falling significantly. This has caused difficulties with kennel space particularly when some have faced infection outbreaks. Fortunately the service's kennelling contract is a framework agreement which utilises a number of kennels rather than relying on one to mitigate the risk.

Subsidised Pest Control & Worcester City Gull Control

Subsidised pest control treatments were up on last year's figures but the service operated smoothly without significant issue. Some local authorities as reported required additional funds to cover the cost of treatment in their areas. As well as the domestic service, sewer baiting was undertaken in areas where issues had been reported by residents, pest controllers or Severn Trent Water.

Additional funding was approved by the City Council to enhance the gull control management this year which allowed an extensive programme of nest, egg and chick removal in the city centre, supported by deterrent hawking, disturbance tactics and gull proofing measures. All work was carried out in accordance with any conditions of the licences provided by Natural England where appropriate. The work was successful in bringing about significant local change such that some locations were gull free for the first time in a while.

Contact Tracing & COVID Advisors

Alongside the county delivery of COVID Advisor support, because WRS was recognised as an organisation able to successfully contact trace (for other infectious disease) and provide support to the public, we were asked to deliver the contact tracing service for the county. At our peak we employed 36 in the team contact tracing. They made sure that anyone failing to engage with the national service provided contact details. Across the County we are successfully tracing around 80% of cases. For 10% of cases we have been able to reach them but for varying reasons have not been able to fully complete the tracing call, examples of why this may be is the individual refusing to engage or inability to successfully identify all contacts, this is particularly relevant in school aged children. Where contact could not be made or if isolation breaches were suspected, support with door knocking was provided by COVID Advisors to promote regulation compliance.

During the pandemic the COVID Advisors were heavily involved in supporting local businesses and protecting the public. Assistance was welcomed by most as the changes to guidance made it difficult for businesses and the public to do the right thing. The presence of the Advisors on the street and at popular locations provided confidence that rules were being followed and safety being considered. As restrictions were eased, as well as continuing to support business and the public with wider environmental health matters, assistance was provided to the vulnerable (to COVID-19) through welfare checks and providing access to support services and supported the engagement with the contact tracing process by chasing up those who failed to provide contact details or were believed to be breaching isolation rules when positive for COVID-19.

Licensing

This year saw an increase in licensing applications and queries, with the volume similar to pre-covid levels and noticeably higher than this time last year. The team have continued to take applications electronically therefore the level of complete applications being received continues to increase. There has been more of a focus on proactive enforcement and the Licensing team have continued to keep the emphasis on engaging with partners, businesses, licence holders and external agencies including West Mercia and Worcester Bid to tackle issues in the Night Time Economy, taxi enforcement and street trading.

Hackney Carriage and Private Hire

The long-awaited introduction of the Statutory Taxi and Private Hire Vehicles Standards has been one of the main priorities with all six districts completing the cycle of working through policy development and committee stages. All six districts have agreed an implementation date of September 2022 which should now allow the standardisation of Taxi Standards across the County. The Statutory Standards published on 21st July 2020 set-out a range of robust measures to protect taxi and private hire vehicle passengers, particularly those most vulnerable. Government advice is that licensing authorities must work together to ensure that, above all else, the taxi and private hire vehicle services the public use are safe. The Licensing team will continue to work on the implementation of these standards and ensure training and communication across all districts is planned and administered consistently.

This year also saw the review of the Hackney Carriage Fares across the County with all districts agreeing to increase fares as a result of both the current economic climate and adverse effects of the pandemic on the trade. As a result of the delay in reviewing these districts have agreed that going forward there will be a regular timed review placed on the rolling forward plan for this piece of work in future.

Electric Vehicles

District Councils continue to approach us to look at ways of implementing methods for the introduction of electric vehicles as part of their wider council carbon neutral agenda and we will continue to look at the best approach for their fleet of vehicles taking into account the make-up of their current fleet and the age criteria policy of each council.

The government has confirmed its ambition to see at least half of new cars to be ultra-low emission by 2030. The proposals are outlined in their 'Road to zero' Strategy. The desire is to reduce emissions from the vehicles already on the UK's roads, and drive the uptake of zero emission cars, vans and trucks to deliver cleaner air, a better environment and a strong clean economy.

As set out in the government's 'Air Quality Plan' the UK will end the sale of new conventional petrol and diesel cars and vans by 2040 so we will continue to work with each district and members to incorporate a plan that meets these objectives but not foregoing the challenges that this will involve including the trade and the infrastructure that is required to make this viable both financially and economically.

Pavement Licenses

In response to the coronavirus pandemic, the Business and Planning Act 2020 ("the 2020 Act") made temporary provision for a fast-track process to allow businesses selling food or drink to obtain authorisation from the local authority for the placement of furniture such as tables and chairs on highway adjacent to their premises also known as a pavement licence. This was a new temporary licensing regime that the team constructed together working collaboratively with all six districts to ensure a new end to end process was in place with all payment engines integrated before the implementation date of July 2020. There have been developments in this area of work with a bill passed through to make this a permanent piece of legislation but at the present time they have been extended again until September 2023 so officers continue to work with West Mercia police and Highways to ensure that where licences are granted they are safe to do so.

Alcohol, Entertainment and Gambling

The relaxation of Covid 19 restrictions has seen the increase in applications in this area of work and more resources have been directed towards working in the Night Time Economy. Officers have worked closely across the service and in collaboration with partners to proactively deal with issues, complaints and concerns using a wide range of intelligence products.

The team have continued to be proactive in looking at suspended licenses to ensure sales have not taken place where licenses have been suspended and at the same time have carried out further checks on basic food hygiene and ventilation of premises as part of the health and safety requirements during the phasing out of covid regulations. Some of this work has been carried out in partnership with trading standards colleagues and CEH colleagues and as the funding reduces the team are working together to see how this can be effectively achieved with the same effectiveness going forward.

Under the terms of the Gambling Act 2005, each licensing authority is required before each successive three-year period, to prepare and publish a statement of the principles that they propose to apply in exercising their functions under the Act during that period. Each Council's Statement of Principles were under review and all have been approved for consultation by each district and now approved for publication.

Animal Licenses

WRS continue to be well represented in this area of work as we sit on both the Licensing and Animal Welfare Group and the Canine, Feline Sector Group. Both of which have strong links with DEFRA and policy change. Unfortunately, this sector was hard hit during the pandemic with more people working from home and choosing not to go away many businesses struggled. As WRS moved into the second half of the year with more and more people returning to work and going away on holiday officers have been inundated with requests for new business applications and visits alongside re-inspections. In light of this demand the team have invested in training more officers as it is now a requirement to have a Level 3 qualification in this field of work before you can go out and inspect.

The team are now looking at streamlining some of the processes that are in place to save time for both officers and the licence holder for some elements of the application process.

Last year we reported on the increase in illegal puppy breeding, nuisance issues and the high prices that were being charged for the sale of puppies throughout various points during lockdown. In response to this the team started an intelligence operation to capture this information and act where appropriate. The operation was extended to the end of May 2021 and the team found that it had more information to target illegal breeding, but limited resources and expertise to effectively investigate recorded incidents. In addition, any actions undertaken in connection with illegal breeding risk being uncoordinated, as information was being received and assessed by several organisations and operational teams

An intelligence product was disseminated to the Licensing Team in July, The product identified two districts where illegal breeding was assessed to be most problematic, and eleven prominent targets (each connected to several different entities) who were assessed to be operating without the required licences. The product also contained several intelligence gaps which would need to be considered during formal investigations or addressed to improve the effectiveness of future analytical products. To date, Licensing have adopted several prevention, intelligence, and enforcement recommendations. Formal investigations have commenced into five targets that were 'likely' to be committing offences, whilst an additional target has been tasked back to the intelligence function for further profiling. A communications strategy is also being implemented to provide advice and guidance to consumers, and potential breeders, in problematic districts.

Caravans

The Mobile Homes (Requirement for Manager of a site to be a fit and proper person) Regulations 2020 guidance was published this year so officers have been busy putting together an application process and fee structure so applicants can now submit applications for determination to WRS. Alongside this work WRS officers have commenced a three phase inspection programme to inspect caravan sites in both Wychavon and Worcester as per the partner officer requirements.

FINANCIAL MANAGEMENT

Budget 2020/21

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 a significant surplus at year end of £397,000. This resulted from good income results but also because a proportion of this income could not be re-invested in capacity to backfill officers committed to pandemic response work. Teams had to carry the burden and were very stretched because of this. There was also a significant underspend of stray dogs for the year, likely to be related to a mix of people being at home or working from home thus limiting the risk of pet dogs straying, but also the use of social media platforms like Facebook used in localities to get pets back to owners. We have previously highlighted the risks associated with the latter, which on the face of it appears positive.

The draft outrun budget for 2020/21 is included as Appendix 3, along with the proposed budget for 2022/23 onwards at Appendix 4. The outrun position is subject to final audit, although the budget has now reduced so far that this is no longer a statutory requirement for specific audit of the WRS accounts. Hence, this will be done as part of the overall audit of Bromsgrove District Council's accounts.

Until 2020/21, the operating assumption was a cash standstill budget, with increasing income targets set to balance the budget each year. For that year and beyond, partners have recognised that the service's ability to increase income is limited and have agreed to fund the pay increases and the uplifts in pension contributions. Members recognised that the income generation progress could not deliver the increases expected, especially in the current climate with financial uncertainty and the Covid pandemic. With much talk of pay rises being comparable with current increased rates of inflation, this situation is unlikely to change in the immediate future. Should it be necessary, the service's reserve may help partners to buffer some financial impacts should the financial model for the service become difficult to achieve, whilst determining the way forward for the delivery of these functions should the local authority financial situation become significantly worse in the future.

WORKFORCE PLANNING AND HUMAN RESOURCES MANAGEMENT

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. Kiran Lahel heads up the Licensing and Support Services Team, leaving her previous post of Business and Relationship Manager vacant. We are currently looking at how best to re-deploy this funding to new roles to better support the service's work, particularly better support for the Team Managers and enhancing some of our functions.

Staff turnover remains low, although occasionally a member of staff will decide to move onto pastures new. This has allowed us to recruit new but experienced staff either from other backgrounds to suit our income generation work or from other local authorities. All the newcomers have added value to what is being delivered. At the 1st April 2022, the core permanent staff establishment was around 68 FTE, although some of this capacity is on fixed term contract and it remains supplemented with additional staff continuing with Covid roles or redeployed into roles supporting recovery from pandemic impacts.

Last year the pandemic made it more difficult to look at training needs. Face to face training was not an option but a lot of training provision did move on-line with webinar style approaches being used with shorter durations. This helped to maintain relevant competencies and we will look to return to our usual PDR approach this year with a main one and a 6-month review.

Staff Survey

79 of our increased staff cohort of just over 100 responded to the survey. Obviously, a lot of those people were undertaking new or different roles, but we felt it reasonable to include them. It probably means this year should be viewed slightly differently, although the same questions were asked as previous years. 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 97.5% is excellent. 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.

One area that sprang out was our WRS teams working together. Whilst the majority still felt it was ok, with 71 scoring 5 or higher, only 35 scored it 8 or above. We hope that the themed, cross-team priorities will help bring people together and improve understanding across our diverse teams. Despite the impacts of the pandemic, it was good to see that 73/79 respondents scored 5 or more in relation to receiving sufficient support from their line managers and 75/79 felt they received sufficient support from their colleagues. Hopefully, this will leave us well placed as we move fully to business-as-usual activity.

Staff Sickness

During 2021/22 staff sickness reached 5.2 days per FTE. This is at the higher end of our average and was pushed up during Q4 by planned hospital admissions and by one incident of long Covid. It was reasonable to expect to see an increase, with people finally able to get necessary operations and with the pressures that the service has been under for 2 years. Managers will monitor this over the coming months but at this stage there is limited concern. Whilst an aging service is likely to have a slightly higher rate of sickness due to natural causes, managers will continue to work to maintain the figures in the normal range of 3-6 days.

ACCOMMODATION

WRS remains located at Wyre Forest House, Finepoint Way, Kidderminster with a new 3-year deal being struck with Wyre Forest last year. The use of flexible and mobile working is generally now the norm, and has been expanded further during the pandemic, 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.

BUSINESS TRANSFORMATION (SERVICE DELIVERY)

During the pandemic we have continued our journey on the road to becoming intelligence led and embedding the Intelligence Operating Model into the way we deliver our activities. During the pandemic, weekly reviews of the full intelligence picture using WRS data, Public Health and Public Health England data, intelligence from the Police and other sources was used to direct and task our operational capacity to the parts of the county where it had the potential to have the most impact. That's whether it related to helping businesses with queues, persuading parents to keep apart whilst waiting at the school gates or our enforcement of business restrictions. The pandemic response has helped us to see how we can better deploy the intelligence model as a business tool with our normal work and during the year we will return to our periodic tasking model based on the tactical assessments delivered by the Intelligence Officer.

The year's Strategic Assessment, the document that is created every other year to look at priorities, has recommended that the focus of activity should be around:

- Supporting a safe and vibrant night-time economy
- Promoting the responsible sale, breeding, and ownership of dogs.
- Promoting safe and clean communities
- Supporting commercial businesses to operate safely and responsibly
- Supporting industry to operate safely and responsibly

Tactical assessments will review our data and intelligence against these, to support Team Managers and Principal Officers in determining activities to respond to the intelligence picture current at that time. The top three 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 the priority.

RISK MANAGEMENT

WRS recognises that 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
- Focus on the delivery of its service to its customers

The Service aims to ensure that Risk Management becomes a natural component of its management process and that when and where appropriate; risks are avoided, reduced, transferred, or retained. As part of these arrangements, a WRS risk register has been developed that can be integrated with the partners' individual risk registers. This register will be maintained and reviewed periodically to assess current risks and identify forthcoming priorities. The service's Business Continuity Plan is going to be reviewed over the coming 12 months with the support of colleagues in North Worcestershire Emergency Planning. The restructured document should bring the service in line with the approach taken across other partner areas.

The risk register at Appendix 2 has been reviewed as we come out of the pandemic. Many of the generic risks remain as was, as they were developed for responding to pandemic influenza, which helped to inform some of the risks identified during Covid. We have seen that many of the elements of our response have served us well during the pandemic. 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 make more use of virtual meetings, they will not fully replace face to face interaction, nor will they lead to the abandonment of a physical location for the service.

This year will require us to meet the final period of the Food Standards Agency's road-map to the point where they introduced the revised versions of their Local Authority Code of Practice for Food Law Enforcement. The service will look to achieve these aims in the most flexible way possible. There remain concerns around public expectation around what is deliverable in law, particularly in relation to nuisance issues but the service will look to improve its performance in the eyes of our non-business customers.

EQUALITY & DIVERSITY

WRS is committed to equality of opportunity and respect for diversity. The service links in 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. Equality issues have come to the fore in recent years with the Black Lives Matter movement highlighting racial inequalities but clearly there is a wider agenda for public services to address. The professional bodies for regulators are looking at how to respond and how to help make services be more reflective of communities they serve. I'm sure this is something that we will take on board at WRS and do our best to move forward in an inclusive way.

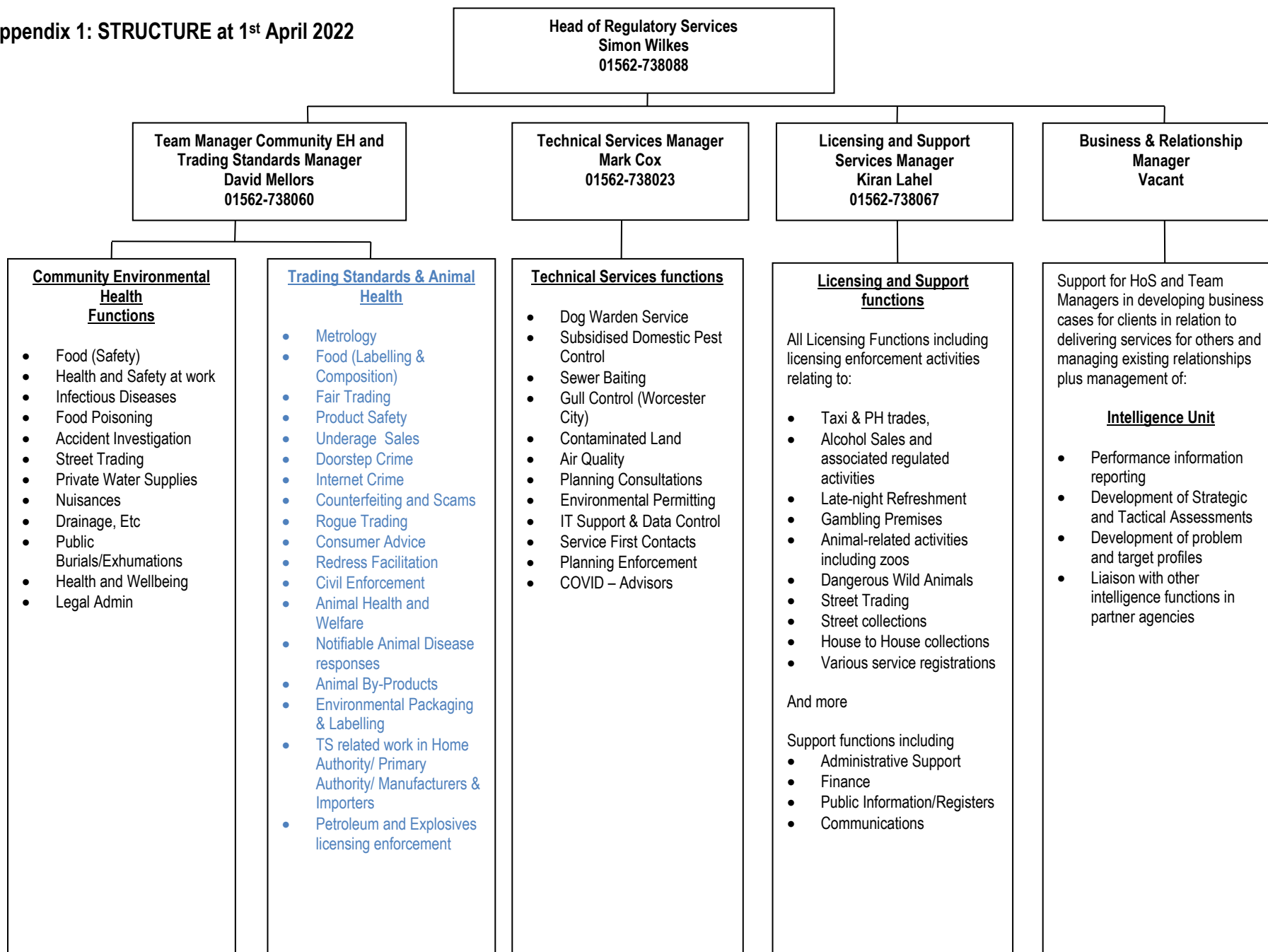
THE NEXT STEPS

As we come out of pandemic response, we will look to move back onto a business-as-usual footing, restoring our approach to engaging with issues where these had to change due to covid risks or resourcing issues due to pandemic response. We will:

- Continue to deliver the WRS Business Plan and our annual operational service plans
- Maintain existing income streams and looking at other ways of generating income for the service,
- 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 help to 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.

On this last point, our pilot work with some of the districts in north Worcestershire will hopefully lead to developments during 2022/3. Having secured both petroleum licensing and safety at sportsgrounds work from the County Council, we will look at what other functions we might discharge for them too. There are likely to be further proposed changes to the legislative framework in the coming year as Government continues to assess the need to move away from the current post-EU-Exit framework. We will respond to consultations on behalf of the partners 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 2022



Appendix 2 – WRS Risk Register

Risk Description	Consequences	When is this likely to happen	Current Position			Control measures
			Likelihood	Impact	Matrix RAG Status	
Loss of Data through IT failures	Disruption to Service Provision. Inability to produce records and data.	On-going	Low	High	Green	Wyre Forest ICT has effective processes and business continuity plans in place. WFDC upgraded relevant systems including Windows. The service is in the process of moving to Office 365 during 2021/22, which will provide better access to a range of provisions including Microsoft Teams and Power BI.
Issues with the WRS database system	Impact on work planning. Self-help may not enable savings required	On-going	Low	High	Amber	Current contract due to expire February 2023. Work has commenced on negotiating new contract.
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	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 now 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.
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 and less than a handful of officers have themselves suffered the illness. Consultants are available to provide short term cover and, whilst this worked well in peace-time to cover peak demand periods, the pandemic has revealed the 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

						<p>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.</p> <p>Whilst we have good resource of our own, in event of an issue, there are limits to who we can ask for help. 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.</p> <p>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. Increased public health risks	On-going	Low	High	Amber	The Out of Hours and Kennelling contracts were re-tendered to enhance the existing arrangements and provide resilience however there are increases in numbers of stray dogs, dog disease and contracts are restricted by geographical location. Retendering for additional kennels has been fruitless.

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 around access to the financial system from Wyre Forest House should have been relieved with new BDC finance system procurement, however workarounds remain in place due to some unforeseen issues.
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.
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	Adverse comments following audits e.g. FSA Intervention by Government bodies i.e. FSA, whilst highly unlikely, is damaging to reputation.	On-going	Low	High	Amber	Limited detail of what statutory minima are 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 Government cannot expect what it had previously. Fewer interventions/ audits by government. 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. The Code is however currently going through major changes and

						likely to move to a point where it is closer to the WRS model of operation. 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.
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

Appendix 3: Detailed out-turn for Regulatory Services 2021/22

	Full Year Budget 21-22	Committed Expenditure Apr - Mar 22	Variance
	£'000	£'000	£'000
Direct Expenditure			
Employees			
Salary	2,968	2,442	-526
Agency Staff	0	249	249
Employee Insurance	25	4	-20
Sub-Total - Employees	2,993	2,695	-298
Premises			
Rent / Hire of Premise	54	52	-2
Cleaning	1	1	-0
Utilities	0	-0	-0
Sub-Total - Premises	55	52	-2
Transport			
Vehicle Hire	13	1	-12
Vehicle Fuel	8	5	-3
Road Fund Tax	1	0	-1
Vehicle Insurance	5	3	-2
Vehicle Maintenance	3	2	-1
Car Allowances	75	30	-45
Sub-Total - Transport	105	41	-64

Supplies and Services

Furniture & Equipment	32	106	75
Clothes, uniforms and laundry	2	1	-1
Printing & Photocopying	17	16	-1
Postage	11	18	7
ICT	40	54	14
Telephones	21	13	-8
Training & Seminars	22	29	7
Insurance	20	9	-11
Third Party Payments	144	144	0
Sub-Total - Supplies & Service	309	390	82

Contractors

Dog Warden	140	71	-69
Pest Control	52	119	67
Taxi / Alcohol / & Other Licensing	65	56	-9
Other contractors/consultants	3	1	-1
Water Safety	5	7	2
Food Safety	1	0	-1
Environmental Protection	12	47	35
Grants / Subscriptions	13	16	3
Advertising, Publicity and Promotion	6	3	-2

Sub-Total	295	321	26
Income			
Training Courses / Bereavement / Works in Default / Sewer Baiting etc	-498	-659	-161
Sub-Total	-498	-659	-161
Service Total	3,257	2,840	-417
Refunded to Partners	0		
Stray Dog Van Reserve	0	20	20
IT Enhancement Reserve	0		
Sub-Total	0	20	20
Net Position	3,257	2,860	-397

Appendix 4: 3-year budgets 2022/23 to 2024/25

Account description

	Budget	Budget	Budget
	2022 / 2023	2023 / 2024	2024 / 2025
	£000's	£000's	£000's
Employees			
Monthly salaries	3,015	3,093	3,166
Training for professional qualifications	0	0	0
Medical fees (employees')	2	2	2
Employers' liability insurance	25	25	25
Employees' professional subscriptions	2	2	2
Sub-Total - Employees	3,044	3,122	3,195
Premises			
Rents	59	59	59
Room hire	2	2	2
Trade Waste	1	1	1
Sub-Total - Premises	62	62	62
Transport			
Vehicle repairs/maint'ce	3	3	3
Diesel fuel	8	8	8
Licences	1	1	1
Contract hire of vehicles	4	4	4
Vehicle insurances	5	5	5
Van Lease	9	9	9
Fares & Car Parking	5	5	5
Car allowances	70	70	70
Sub-Total - Transport	105	105	105

Supplies & Service

Equipment - purchase/maintenance/rental	22	22	22
Materials	9	9	9
Clothing, uniforms & laundry	2	2	2
Training fees	23	23	23
General insurances	19	19	19
Printing and stationery	17	17	17
Books and publications	2	2	2
Postage/packaging	11	11	11
ICT	55	55	55
Telephones	21	21	21
Taxi Tests	22	22	22
CRB Checks (taxi)	26	26	26
Support service recharges	110	110	110
Support service recharges - ICT	60	60	60
Sub-Total - Supplies & Service	397	397	397

Budget
2022 / 2023
£000's

Budget
2023 / 2024
£000's

Budget
2024 / 2025
£000's

Contractors

Consultants / Contractors' fees/charges/SLA's	266	229	229
Advertising (general)	5	5	5
Grants and subscriptions	13	13	13
Sub-Total - Contractors	284	247	247

Income

Grants / Primary Authority / Food Training / Contaminated Land / Stray Dogs / Ad Hoc	-372	-372	-372
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Sub-Total - Income	-372	-372	-372
Income			
From partners for Technical Officers	-141	-104	-106
Funding from MHDC for pest control	-8	-8	-8
Funding from partners for Increase in Rent	-7	-7	-7
Funding from partners for Increase in ICT	-16	-16	-16
Funding from partners for Increase in Hosting Charges	-10	-10	-10
Sub-Total - Income	-181	-144	-146
Additional Income			
Income to be found due to unavoidable salary pressures	-81	-159	-230
Sub-Total - Income	-81	-159	-230

DISTRICT PARTNERSHIP BUDGET

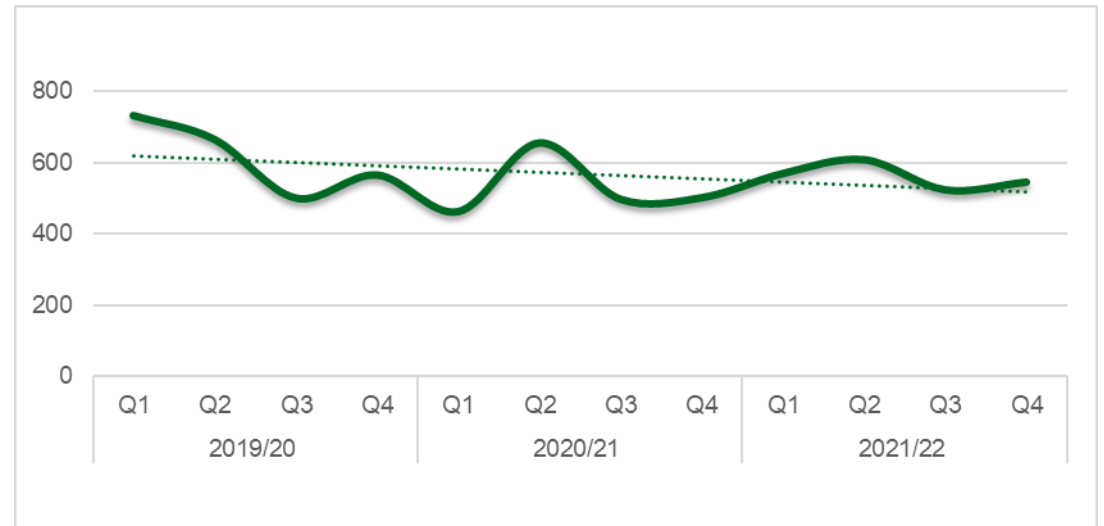
Current Partner Percentages

Bromsgrove	14.55%
Redditch	13.03%
Wyre Forest	17.53%
Wychavon	16.54%
Malvern	23.24%
Worcs City	15.11%
Total	100.00%

Appendix 5: District Council Summaries

Bromsgrove District Council

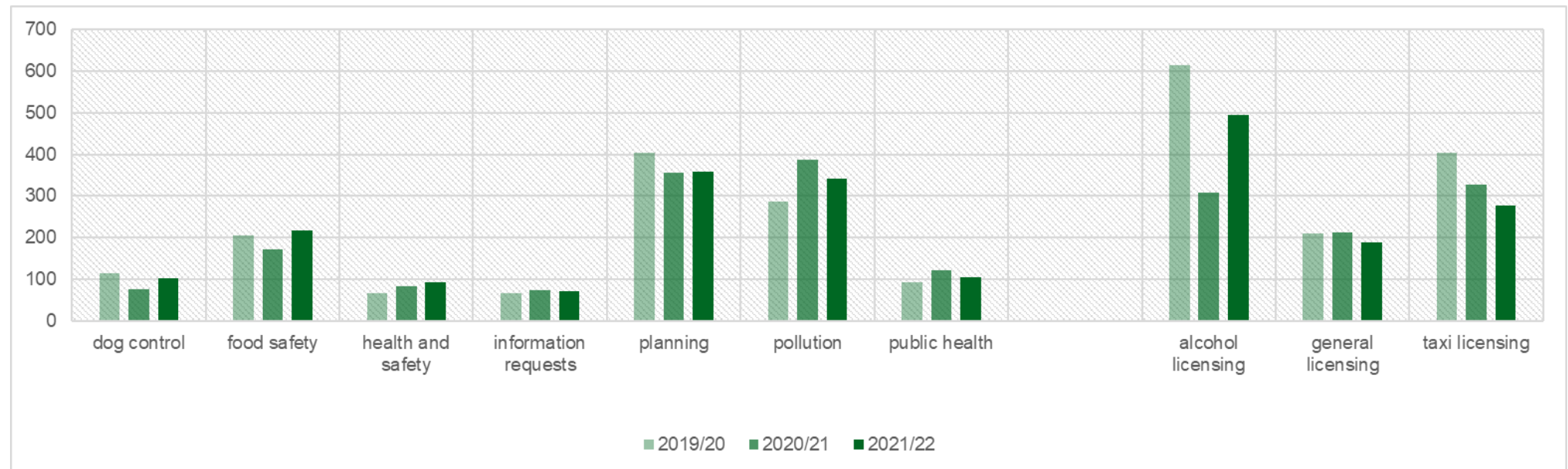
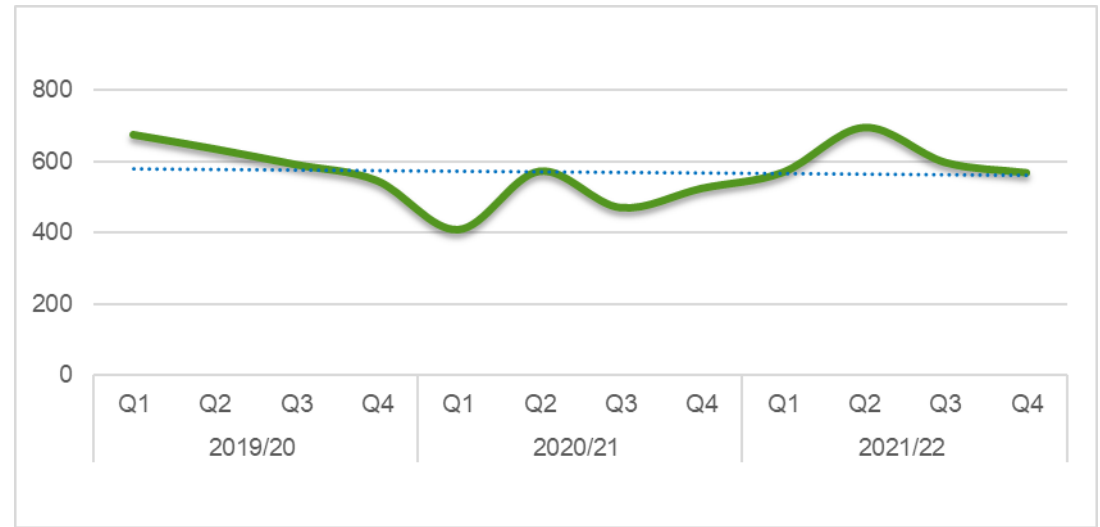
The data on this page relates to Environmental Health and Licensing cases (complaints, enquiries, applications, and notifications) where the subject and/or enquirer were located within the Bromsgrove district. The chart (right) shows the number of cases per quarter, whilst the chart (below) shows the number of cases recorded against each of the primary functions undertaken by WRS.



Appendix 5: District Council Summaries

Malvern Hills District Council

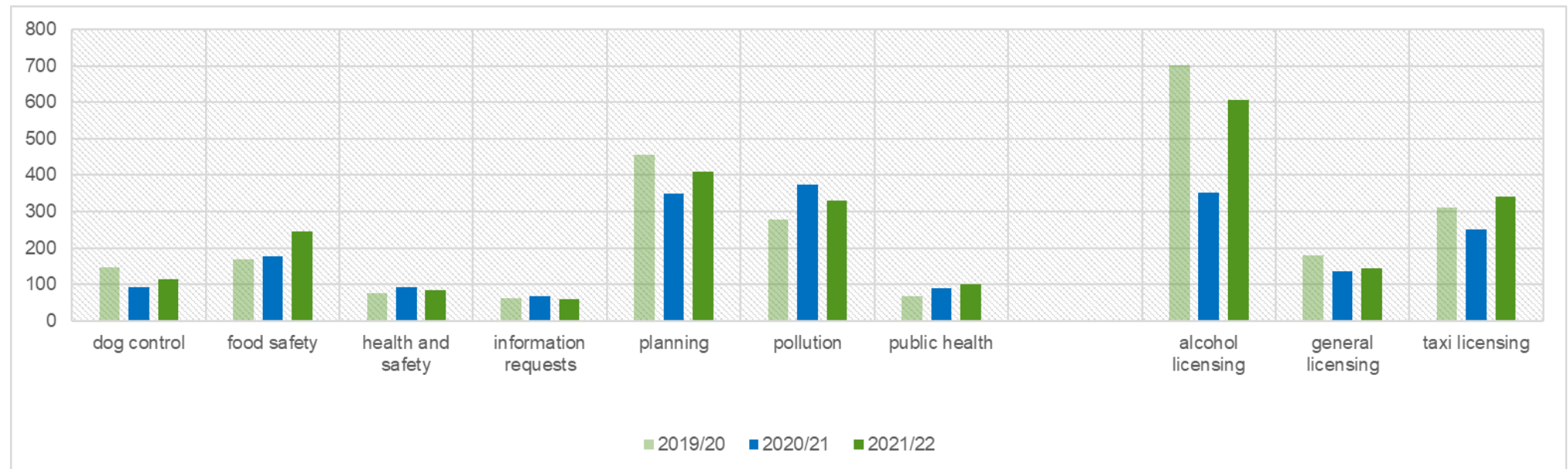
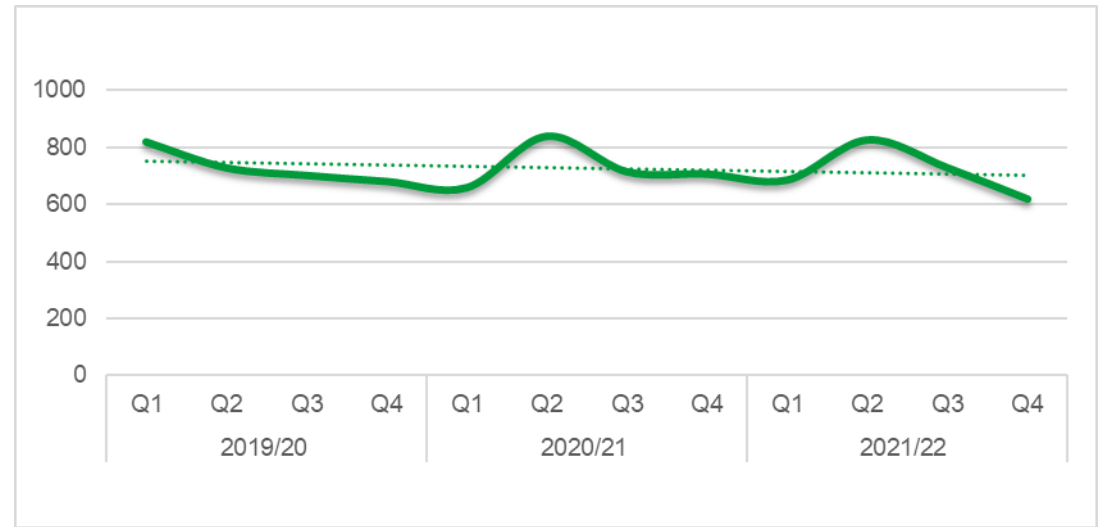
The data on this page relates to Environmental Health and Licensing cases (complaints, enquiries, applications, and notifications) where the subject and/or enquirer were located within the Malvern Hills district. The chart (right) shows the number of cases per quarter, whilst the chart (below) shows the number of cases recorded against each of the primary functions undertaken by WRS.



Appendix 5: District Council Summaries

Redditch Borough Council

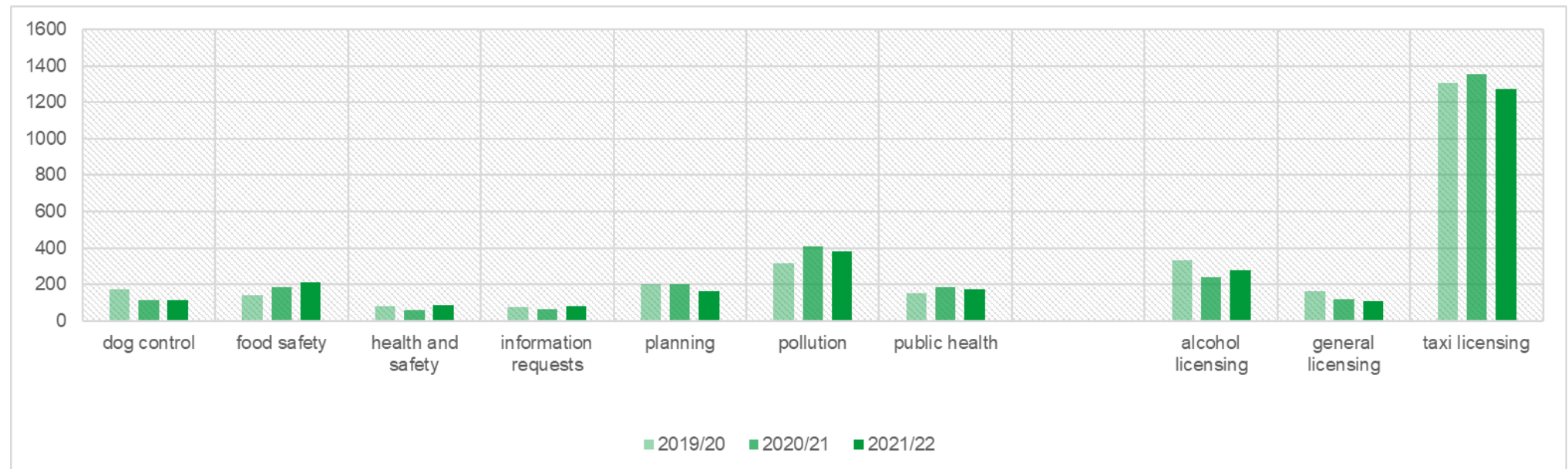
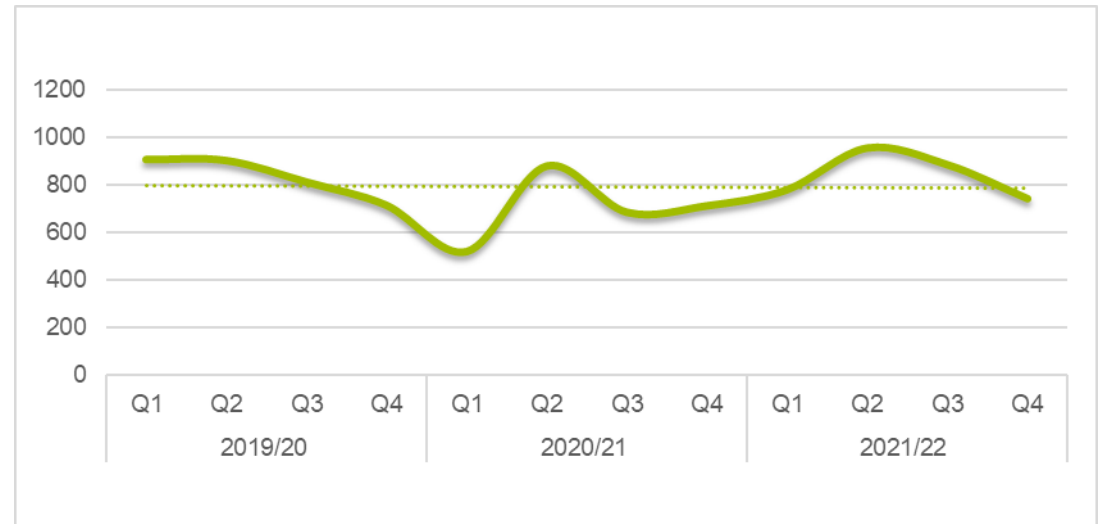
The data on this page relates to Environmental Health and Licensing cases (complaints, enquiries, applications, and notifications) where the subject and/or enquirer were located within the Redditch district. The chart (right) shows the number of cases per quarter, whilst the chart (below) shows the number of cases recorded against each of the primary functions undertaken by WRS.



Appendix 5: District Council Summaries

Worcester City Council

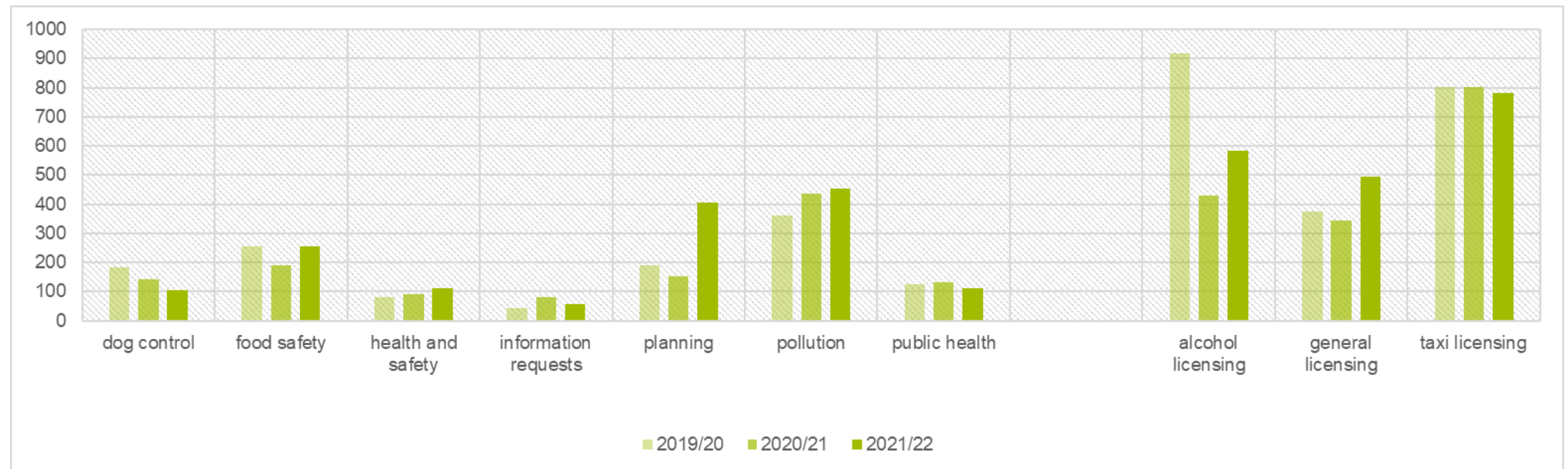
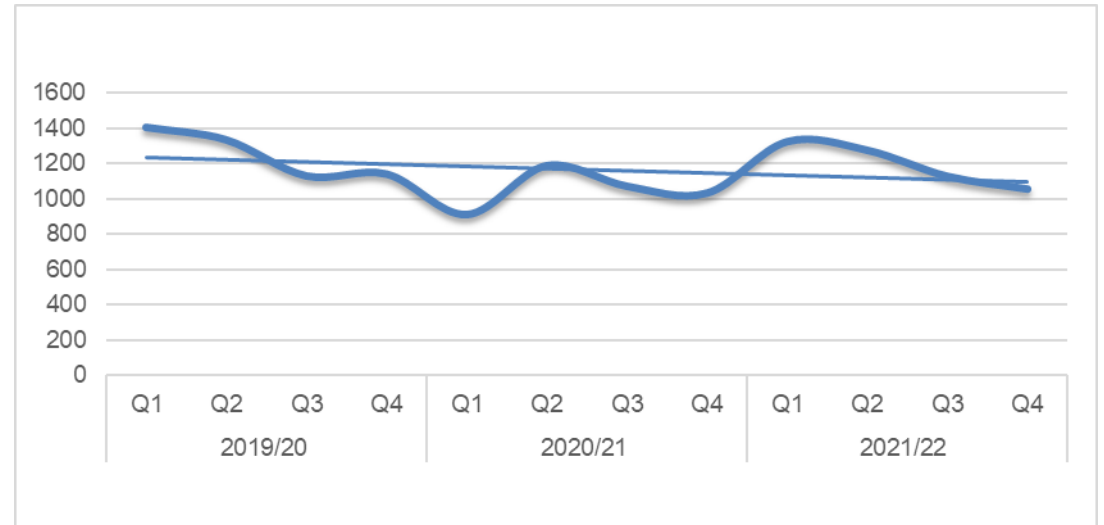
The data on this page relates to Environmental Health and Licensing cases (complaints, enquiries, applications, and notifications) where the subject and/or enquirer were located within the Worcester City district. The chart (right) shows the number of cases per quarter, whilst the chart (below) shows the number of cases recorded against each of the primary functions undertaken by WRS.



Appendix 5: District Council Summaries

Wychavon District Council

The data on this page relates to Environmental Health and Licensing cases (complaints, enquiries, applications, and notifications) where the subject and/or enquirer were located within the Wychavon district. The chart (right) shows the number of cases per quarter, whilst the chart (below) shows the number of cases recorded against each of the primary functions undertaken by WRS.



Appendix 5: District Council Summaries

Wyre Forest District Council

The data on this page relates to Environmental Health and Licensing cases (complaints, enquiries, applications, and notifications) where the subject and/or enquirer were located within the Wyre Forest district. The chart (right) shows the number of cases per quarter, whilst the chart (below) shows the number of cases recorded against each of the primary functions undertaken by WRS.

