

Worcestershire  
**Regulatory Services**

*Supporting and protecting you*

# **Service Plan**

## **2023/24**

# **Worcestershire Regulatory Services Vision**

"That Worcestershire is a healthy, safe and fair place to live, where businesses can thrive"

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## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The plan broadly follows previous years, outlining how the service will operate over the following 12 months to deliver on both national and local priorities, some of which are highlighted in the plan, and indicating at a high-level what activities the service will carry out to achieve or address those priorities and how success will be measured. The Service will enter 2023/24 with a total agreed budget from the district partners of £3.753M made up of a base budget of £3.494M plus additional costs for various additional posts, increases in pay and hosting support charges. This includes a budgetary uplift to cover the pay increase on each spinal point, the cost of increased pension contributions by the employer and increases for hosting costs reflected by the large inflationary pressures faced.

Plans for 2023/24 are based on the most recent Strategic Assessment for the service, which identifies several cross-cutting priorities. These feature a number of areas that create the most issues for us and our partners. Addressing these via relevant control strategies will be an important modification to the way we have worked previously, allowing all relevant elements of the service to focus on problem solving and work with partners, including the Trading Standards team to address them. Uncertainty over what the world will look like post-Covid has been replaced by concerns over what the economy will look like as inflation continues to create pressures driven by a range of international issues including the war in Ukraine. Government has provided a financial settlement for the next two years that the District Councils network and others in the sector say will still mean local authorities making difficult decisions on service provisions, so the financial uncertainty that local government has faced since before the pandemic will continue for the foreseeable future.

The service will also continue to pursue work for other local authorities. We have already been successful with one or two new contracts and have retained the dog related contract with the north Gloucestershire districts. It will be interesting to see whether the focus of devolution on county footprints and the focus on these geographies of the wider “Levelling Up” approach will lead to fewer bodies looking beyond such boundaries for support. So far, many of the remaining 2-tier areas do not appear to have shown an interest in the agenda, so currently there is limited risk from this.

In making decisions regarding service delivery, the service will continue to risk assess what it does considering the economic impacts and impacts on health and well-being. Whilst risk will remain a key criterion against which we deploy resources, intelligence will be a major contributor, especially in relation to issues which cut across our teams. By gathering data and understanding issues, rather than simply rushing out to deal with problems, we will focus resources on where they deliver the best outcomes, with better long-term solutions. This was a key part of our response to the pandemic and will remain at the heart of service delivery moving forward.

Simon Wilkes  
Head of Worcestershire Regulatory Services

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## 1. INTRODUCTION

This is the thirteenth formal annual service plan to be produced by Worcestershire Regulatory Services and follows a similar format to the previous plans with an Executive Summary and details in appendices that follow on from the main commentary. The financial information covers the three-year accounting period 2023/24, 2024/25, and 2025/26 however the operational detail reflects the planned activities that the service will undertake in 2023/24.

2022/23 was another very busy year for WRS. It is the first for some time, where workloads have really felt like the influence of the pandemic was fully waning and we were moving into the realities of our business-as-usual work. In the early part of the year, we continued to have some limited commitments and, throughout the year we have had to have capacity available to support the Local Outbreak Response Team in case of a surge in cases. However, beyond this much service activity has been reflective of pre-pandemic activities, with the usual forms of demand being addressed.

Work from our usual local authority customers began to come in again, albeit still at a slightly reduced level, but income began to grow back toward pre-pandemic levels. A number of our Primary Authority relationships that had been semi-dormant during the most stringent of pandemic controls began to come to life as businesses responded to the re-opening of the economy. It looks like all our Primary Authority business have survived the pandemic and we hope to re-build our close working relationships with them during the coming 12 months.

It is probably too early to say whether the pandemic experience will lead to more local authorities seeking our support. The agendas for Devolution and Levelling-up focus, in two-tier areas on county footprints with the higher tier empowered to consider what is best for their areas. In recent months we have seen Devolution deals delivered to multi-county arrangements like the East Midlands and single county areas like Cornwall, so it seems likely that any local deal would be similar. However, it is worth noting that a significant number of 2-tier areas do not appear to be engaging significantly with this agenda for various reasons, so it seems unlikely to impact us significant in the coming year or so. Government has also been clear that re-organisation from the top down is not on the cards, which may mean more chance for us to service authorities struggling to maintain their own specialist services however, some areas may see unitary as the only way forward due to the financial situation and others may become more focused on co-operation within their county boundaries in two tier areas. Time will tell.

One thing that didn't change during the pandemic was the need to investigate breaches of the law and a number of cases were put through to council legal departments. Full details of activity will be reported in the Annual Report to be produced at the end of May 2023 and reported to the Board in June.

The coming year is likely to be dominated by:

- The end of the Food Standards Agency's Road map and the restoration of normal food related activity, although a new Code of Practice operating model is likely to be brought forward for 2024/5.

- Embarking on our programmes of work to tackle cross cutting issues,
- Seeking new, and maintaining existing, income streams to help support local delivery,
- The further development of the WRS website to better enable public interaction, and the finalisation of the automation project allowing for wider service elements,
- Continuing to develop and review practical procedures to maintain resilience and the benefits from service elements such as Legal Support and the Intel Unit that provide operational support to both WRS and Trading Standards functions

The focus on income generation will be to target areas of greatest benefit in terms of economies of scale, the required resource intensity and income reward. It is important that only those opportunities meriting our focus are pursued as the scoping and drafting of tender documents are time consuming and onerous.

For existing partners, managers will continue to identify any changes that can be made to service delivery to either improve marginal efficiency or improve service. This is particularly relevant for areas of high demand such as planning referrals and areas of significant officer resource, such as long-standing complaints or enforcement action. This will require close working relationships to support and assist partner colleagues to ensure that we are all working as effectively as possible together. We will also continue to work with colleagues from various districts to see what functions might reasonably be added to the WRS platform to improve delivery and possibly deliver some savings through economies of scale. Such changes may not cover all partners, but all of them need to agree if other partners wish to add functions to what WRS delivers on their behalf. We will also continue to engage with the County Council around its relationship with the partnership.

The look of the website was significantly improved as it was rebuilt on an updated version of the software platform on which it operates, and the completion of our automation project in the early part of 2023/4 will increase its functionality further, including the taking of on-line payments.

## **2. STRATEGIC ASSESSMENT AND PRIORITIES**

The service continues to use the Priority Regulatory Outcomes for England for local authorities, developed by a previous incarnation of the Office for Product Safety and Standards as a framework to link its activities back to the priorities of the partners. These are outlined below:

1. support economic growth, especially in small businesses, by ensuring a fair, responsible and competitive trading environment
2. protect the environment for future generations including tackling the threats and impacts of climate change
3. improve quality of life and wellbeing by ensuring clean and safe neighbourhoods
4. help people to live healthier lives by preventing ill health and harm and promoting public health
5. ensure a safe, healthy and sustainable food chain for the benefit of consumers and the rural economy

All our partners have priorities around supporting economic growth, protecting the environment, residents, neighbourhoods, and improving health and well-being in communities. While all our work meets one or more of the above aims, we know we are delivering what partners want.

Our Strategic Assessment, the key document that helps us determine priorities, has demonstrated that these 5 priorities also remain at the heart of what the data is saying we should focus on. It looks at a broad swathe of local, regional, and national data to help identify the key issues to be tackled over a 2-year period, with an annual sense check to ensure the environment has not changed significantly. Analysis for this purpose focussed on the six functions which generated a higher level of complaints and notifications and/or a higher level of proactive activity. This led to thirty-four analytical assessments and the recommendation for five tactical priorities to be adopted by the service during the coming year.

- **Supporting a safe and vibrant night-time economy**

The night-time economy is cross-cutting and was referenced within several analytical assessments. Pubs, clubs, restaurants, and takeaways were all prominent within the analysis of alcohol licensing, food safety and nuisance due to breaches of the public nuisance objective, the non-payment of annual fees, and/or poor hygiene standards and practices. Night-time economy hotspots such as Worcester City Centre were also connected to taxi licensing issues (over-ranking etc.), whilst persistent offenders were a significant factor influencing the rate of complaints in prominent neighbourhoods. In addition, PESTELO analysis (seen in appendix B of this plan,) has outlined a potential increase in offences at smaller businesses due to financial pressures, and the continued prominence of third-party platforms such as Deliveroo, Just Eat, and Uber Eats.

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

The sale and ownership of dogs is also cross-cutting and was referenced within several analytical assessments. Whilst stray dogs are generally found to be in good condition, and are usually reunited with their owners, a significant proportion of dogs are not microchipped, and dogs continue to be found in need of veterinary examination or treatment. In addition, noise from barking dogs is one of the most prominent nuisances, whilst PESTELO analysis has outlined potential issues in terms of the level of post-pandemic cases and trends regarding the breeding and sale of dogs via online platforms.

- **Promoting safe and clean communities**

Whilst domestic nuisance activity is significantly influenced by dogs, noise from audio-visual equipment and smoke caused by the burning of domestic and garden waste were prominent nuisances.

- **Supporting commercial businesses to operate safely and responsibly**

Whilst commercial activity is significantly influenced by the night-time economy and the hospitality sector, retail food outlets were prominent within the analysis of food safety. Smaller retailers, for example, are more likely to be issued with 0, 1, or 2 food hygiene rating and are also known to be connected to Trading Standards offences. In addition, whilst problematic sectors are unknown, nuisances and health and safety at work offences were more prominent in non-food businesses which will include commercial businesses. This would also include the taxi trade, however, issues reported to the service are primarily the responsibility of other enforcement bodies. Furthermore, as outlined previously, financial pressures may lead to an increase in offences at smaller businesses.

- **Supporting industry to operate safely and responsibly**

In parallel with the previous priority recommendation, nuisances and health and safety at work offences were more prominent in non-food businesses which will include manufacturers, importers, and distributors. Such businesses are also higher risk from a food perspective (although they did not feature prominently within the analysis of food safety) and tie in with other functions such as Environmental Permitting. WRS will continue to investigate complaints, provide advice, and conduct routine interventions.

The five recommended tactical priorities can be aligned to one or more of the priorities outlined by our strategic partners in their corporate plans or strategies. Whilst the language varies, key priorities generally relate to economic growth that works for all, health and well-being, safer and stronger communities, and a maintained or improved environment.

Whilst the overall Council financial settlements for 2023/4 are slightly better than anticipated, our finance colleagues tell us they will be faced with a challenging financial situation for the foreseeable future. In the past, from a WRS perspective, this was addressed through transforming how things are done and generating income. We will look to support partners with this and encourage partners to consider what other enforcement related functions they might wish to consider operating under the WRS banner, where we might create economies of scale to assist with delivery and potentially reduce long term costs. Should further financial pressure be directed at savings from the existing WRS budget, we will need to prioritise what is delivered, to whom and how. To assist in this decision making, the service will continue to use 3 key criteria to consider when making decision on service provision:

- a) Are vulnerable people impacted?
- b) Are there Health and Well Being issues involved?
- c) Is there a positive/negative impact on economic activity?



We will also continue to develop our use of intelligence to support this. There remains a risk that demand which can no longer be met by WRS is simply re-directed to partners in other ways e.g., via other forms of complaint. At this stage, with the reductions we have seen so far, the risk of district partners facing challenges relating to whether they are meeting their statutory obligations are low and the position remains defensible.

### **3. PURPOSES**

Following its Systems Thinking work, WRS adopted 3 purposes to underpin service delivery and provide a common thread to run through all its functions.

1. Help me resolve my problem and stop it from happening to anyone else,
2. I want to assume everything is ok
3. Help me trade well and ensure my competitors do the same.

These purposes are expressed in terms that a customer (member of the public or a business,) might use, provide a focus for staff and were agreed by the previous Joint Committee. These purposes, combined with the priority outcomes encapsulate the Service's contribution to the wider community agenda, reflecting as they do the broad themes relevant to all partners.

### **4. FINANCE**

A summary of the budget position for 2023/24 is shown at Appendix C, along with the proposed budgets for the following two years. A more detailed breakdown will be available to the Joint Board in its regular financial reports. Income levels are difficult to estimate but we have set ourselves income targets going forward to maintain a greater resilience than would otherwise be possible.

### **5. AUDIT ARRANGEMENTS**

The Internal Audit Service will be provided under the current arrangement by Worcester City Council to the Host Authority. An audit was agreed for quarter 3 and 4 of 2022/3 but the departure of the officer who would have worked with us on it means, at the time of writing, this work has yet to be undertaken.

Where broad and in-depth scrutiny of the service is requested, member Authorities are requested by the legal agreement liaise about requests from their Overview and Scrutiny Committees and should use reasonable endeavours to agree joint scrutiny arrangements with a view to avoiding duplication of effort. Historically, WRS developed good working relationships with several of the partners' Overview and Scrutiny Committees, leading to the positive re-enforcement of performance in those areas.

The service's ability to provide bespoke support to individual partners is highlighted by the work done with the licensing enforcement programme undertaken before Christmas in Worcester city centre. Whilst the service could not support this kind of activity for all partners at the same time, we do hope to be able to offer this type of work more widely when it can be scheduled. Engaging with partners in this way and with projects like the redevelopment of town and city centres helps to build and maintain relationships with partner colleagues and helps to highlight the important role of regulation when looking at wider, long term policy development. Being able to support the work with Ukrainian refugees has also shown the ability of the service to be flexible with resource, however, this capacity was originally created during the pandemic, so when the various funding streams come to an end this capacity may no longer be available unless it is funded.

## **6. ACTIVITIES & OUTCOME MEASURES**

The service's IT system allows accurate reporting on activities. The service has continued to work with members to demonstrate the service's performance and the service's current core performance indicators are listed as Appendix D. Over time, with one or two notable exceptions, we have seen improvement or maintenance of most of these indicators, which we hope will continue in 2023/24. The non-business customer satisfaction figures improved in the run up to the pandemic, but we have struggled to maintain them at the levels we would like since then. The sheer demand for nuisance and other complaint work has at times, simply outstripped supply, so customers were less happy with how long it took us to get to them and to resolve issues where we could. The need to continue with the Food Roadmap work has exacerbated this as we have not been able to switch this work off, which we might otherwise do during the summer period. Expectations of what can be delivered remain very high in some cases and often are beyond what the law can deliver. No one is entitled to silence all the time at their home. We will continue to try to better understand the issues customers present and look to improve performance during the coming year.

The activities outlined below are examples of what is planned by the service, structured either as addressing a cross cutting priority or as a more business-as-usual activity. We have also included corporate, and staff related activities as our staff is our most important resource. We are a people business.

We believe that activity data combined with the core performance indicators will give Members the confidence that the Service continues to perform well, given the current financial constraints, and it continues to contribute to the wider local agenda. The approach is very much in line with Government thinking in terms of reducing burdens on and supporting local businesses, whilst tackling rogues who would ignore their responsibilities and criminals who use business as a model for generating criminal assets. It also addresses the significant demand that comes into the service as complaints/ service requests, covering a wide range of issues and concerns from residents, visitors, businesses and the other departments of partner authorities within Worcestershire.

	<b>OUTCOME</b>	<b>WHAT WE WILL DO</b>	<b>PURPOSE</b>	<b>NATIONAL PRIORITY</b>	<b>MEASURES</b>
1	<b>Supporting a safe and vibrant night-time economy</b>	<p>Vehicles in use by the Taxi trades are fit whilst in service</p> <p>Ensuring that all drivers and operators granted licenses meet the fit and proper test.</p> <p>Prevent Licensed premises from causing significant alcohol-fuelled crime/ disorder and ASB</p> <p>Ensuring that nuisance and other pollution related issues occurring within the NTE are tackled</p> <p>Monthly alcohol profile to be shared with partners, reviewed and suitable work tasked</p> <p>Respond to complaints regarding alcohol and similar licensing related issues e.g. underage sales, breach of conditions, poor conduct of licence holders, etc.</p>	<p>Help me to solve my problem and stop it from happening to anyone else</p> <p>I want to assume everything is ok.</p> <p>Help me trade well and ensure my competitors do the same</p>	<b>1,3,4,5</b>	<p>% of licensed businesses subject to allegations of not upholding the 4 licensing objectives</p> <p>Vehicles requiring work or taken off the road following intervention (Number and % of the total fleet.)</p> <p>% of service requests where resolution is achieved to customers satisfaction</p>
2	<b>Promoting the responsible sale, breeding, and ownership of dogs</b>	<p>Provide businesses with advice and assistance using a range of channels.</p> <p>Conduct risk based/ intelligence-led interventions with businesses, targeting resources towards potentially non-compliant businesses.</p> <p>Ensuring that dog-related nuisance and similar issues are tackled</p>	<p>I want to assume everything is ok.</p> <p>Help me trade well and ensure my competitors do the same</p> <p>Help me to solve my problem and stop it from happening to anyone else</p>	<b>1, 2, 3, 4</b>	<p>% of service requests where resolution is achieved to business satisfaction</p> <p>% of service requests where resolution is achieved to customers satisfaction</p>

3	<b>Promoting safe and clean communities</b>	<p>Ensuring that nuisance and other pollution related issues are tackled</p> <p>Respond to complaints and take appropriate action</p> <p>Provide relevant advice and information, available through a range of channels.</p> <p>Maintained preparedness for response to emergencies, including disease outbreaks.</p> <p>Protecting the environment and the public through monitoring air quality and ensuring that contaminated land is suitable for development.</p> <p>Air quality monitoring &amp; responding to contaminated land issues</p> <p>Supporting the planning system</p> <p>Respond to disease notifications and outbreaks</p>	<p>Help me to solve my problem and stop it from happening to anyone else</p> <p>Help me trade well and ensure my competitors do the same</p> <p>I want to assume everything is ok.</p>	<b>2, 3, 4</b>	<p>% of service requests where resolution is achieved to customers satisfaction</p> <p>Monitoring of the County-wide Air Quality strategy is delivered</p> <p>Rate of noise complaint per 1000 head of population</p> <p>Disease response plans are maintained, reviewed and updated on a regular basis</p>
4	<b>Supporting commercial businesses to operate safely and responsibly</b>	<p>Respond to complaints and take appropriate action, building our ability to resolve issues or re-direct callers on their first contact with us</p> <p>Businesses are supported to become economically successful and compliant with the law (Pollution, H&amp;S, Food Safety, Licensing) through risk based/ intelligence-led interventions</p>	<p>I want to assume everything is ok</p>	<b>1, 2, 4, 5</b>	<p>% food businesses broadly compliant at first visit/ inspection</p> <p>% of food businesses scoring 0,1,2* at 1<sup>st</sup> April each year</p> <p>% of service requests where resolution is achieved to customers satisfaction</p> <p>Number of 4* and 5* business</p>

		<p>Hackney Carriage and Private Hire Drivers Licence applications are processed in a timely manner</p> <p>Consumers able to make informed choices on where to eat or purchase food through published food hygiene ratings.</p> <p>Implement and promote the FHRS and publish hygiene ratings and accrediting those which improve health and wellbeing of their workforce.</p> <p>Incentivise maintaining star ratings through the Healthy Eating Award and Triple 5 Award</p>			signing up for the Healthy Eating Award
5	<b>Supporting industry to operate safely and responsibly</b>	<p>Respond to complaints and take appropriate action, building our ability to resolve issues or re-direct callers on their first contact with us</p> <p>Provide businesses with advice and assistance</p> <p>Controlling environmental emissions leading to reduced environmental damage and better health</p>	<p>I want to assume everything is ok</p> <p>Help me to solve my problem and stop it from happening to anyone else</p> <p>Help me trade well and ensure my competitors do the same</p>	<b>1 2, 4, 5</b>	<p>% permitted businesses broadly compliant at first visit/ inspection</p> <p>% of service requests where resolution is achieved to customers satisfaction</p>
6	<b>Addressing Corporate issues</b>	<p>Respond to complaints and take appropriate action, building our ability to resolve issues or re-direct callers on their first contact with us</p> <p>Maintain a register of compliments and complaints with actions taken</p>	<p>I want to assume everything is ok</p> <p>Help me to solve my problem and stop it from happening to anyone else</p> <p>Help me trade well and</p>	<b>NR</b>	<p>% of service requests where resolution is achieved to customers satisfaction</p> <p>% of service requests where resolution is achieved to business satisfaction</p>

		Maintain links with county-wide TCG & take part in partner exercises to test plans, as appropriate	ensure my competitors do the same		Business Continuity plans are maintained, reviewed and updated on a regular basis
7	<b>Supporting staff to perform well</b>	Ensure necessary training is identified and delivered  Undertake annual staff survey.  Undertake annual staff performance reviews with regular feedback sessions from supervisors and managers	All officers must be able to undertake a range of activities that address our strategic and tactical priorities focusing on ensuring that the three purposes are met by/ for customers	<b>NR</b>	Staff sickness and absence at public sector national average or better  % of staff who enjoy working for WRS

## 6A: FOOD SERVICE DELIVERY

Following their audit of WRS, the Food Standards Agency asked us to ensure that members were clearly sighted on the volume of food work planned for in the coming year. The Agency had no significant concerns regarding what the service was doing, but they felt that members should be more aware of what the service intended to deliver each year so that, when approving the service plan, members were also giving their approval to the level of commitment in relation to food law enforcement.

The period for re-starting food law work and returning to a post pandemic normality ends on 31<sup>st</sup> March 2023. Currently, we are anticipating some backlog work will roll into 2023/4 but after this is completed, there is then an expectation that services will have returned to normal. The service normally commits 8-12 FTE between October and March to deliver the bulk of the food work programme each year, so an annualised equivalent of 4-6 FTE posts. Hopefully, with the end of pandemic support funding we will once again be returning to this level of commitment.

The table below is our best estimate currently of where we will be in terms of visits due and what we will be able to discharge with current resource based on the assumption that most visits can be delivered from September onwards. Some work will be undertaken in the first half of the year, but this will be limited due to commitments in nuisance, and members will see this in the levels from the Activity Data reports at quarterly Board meetings. We can never give a definitive picture at this point as visits will be undertaken till year-end and the results can influence what falls due next year.

<b>Element of Food plan</b>	<b>Visits that we will aim to complete</b>
<b>Estimated number of Food Hygiene visits scheduled for 2023/24 (based on the Food Hygiene rating system.)</b>	1742 of which approximately 175 will be in the higher risk categories and the remainder in categories C and D
<b>Estimated number of premises scheduled for alternative approaches to inspection during 2023/24</b>	500
<b>Estimated number of new registrations/ unrated premises that will require inspection during 2023/24</b>	800, of which about one-third will be low risk and can be dealt with by questionnaires
<b>Estimated number of overdue premises assessed as requiring a visit during 2023/24</b>	350 from previous years plus those previously identified on the system that would otherwise have been picked up during 2022/23

These figures should give members a reasonable picture of the volume of pro-active food hygiene related activity that should take place during 2023/24.

## **7. PERFORMANCE REPORTING**

Performance against outcomes will be reported to the WRS Board, quarterly, six-monthly, or annually, depending on the individual measure. The IT platform enables the collection and analysis of data which is both accurate and robust and recent improvements in data extraction have increased the frequency with which several measures can be reported. The service's ability to provide activity data has continued to improve as the benefits of the IT platform have been implemented. Use of time recording to give a better understanding of how much it costs to undertake specific activities is continuing to be refined. Members participated in a session in October 2019 with officers, part of which was to consider the suite of current measures and it was agreed that no changes were required currently. These are listed as appendix D.

## **8. STRUCTURE**

The WRS team's functions and management structure remain as follows:

- 1) The Community Environmental Health team provides Food Hygiene, Health and Safety at Work, Public Health and Nuisance functions using three teams. Three teams operate on a geographical split covering Redditch/ Bromsgrove, Wychavon/Malvern Hills, Worcester City/ Wyre Forest. The teams rotate around the three geographical areas on a quarterly basis so officers experience and become familiar with the whole county. The geographical teams are organised to reflect the balance of demand across the County. The legal support role also sits in this team as most of the casework emanates from here.

- 2) The Technical Services team provides all environmental health support around planning matters, delivers IPPC inspection, Air Quality and Contaminated Land Regime work, manages the pest control contracts and directly delivers the Dog Wardens service. The internal IT support and system management roles, due to the complex technical nature of the work and the in-house first-contact team of Duty Officers also sit within this team.
- 3) The Licensing and Support Services unit delivers all WRS licensing administration and licensing enforcement, along with the wider in-house clerical/ administrative support that is required.

We are in the process of reallocating the funding for the Business and Relationships Manager role to other roles within the service, boosting intelligence capacity and looking to generate some permanent communications capacity. The arrangement of 3 Team Managers and the Head of Service has successfully provided the necessary management cover and support in recent years, as well as promoting income generation in many areas of the service, although the pandemic stretched this to breaking point.

The Trading Standards element has been retained in the structure chart as, since October 2016, the Community EH Manager and the Head of Regulatory Services have been providing management support to the Trading Standards team. This will continue into 2023/24 with the County Council being happy with the arrangement and the funding situation meaning it is unlikely that further resource can be made available soon.

The support of management across the Trading Standard functions by WRS provides additional benefits with cross team working and knowledge, especially in areas of income generation and business support, to the benefit of both WRS partners and the County Council. The County Council asked the service to deliver the Safety at Sports Ground function several years ago and this will continue through 2023/24. WRS will also continue to deliver the petroleum licensing function for the County Council alongside the petrol vapour recovery work of the Environmental Permitting team.

## **9. TRAINING AND DEVELOPMENT**

Changes to the legal framework occur reasonably frequently and the increased income generation work requires highly competent individuals. To maintain the competence of its staff, meet contractual obligations and ensure that the partner's statutory duties are correctly discharged, the service must maintain a training budget for its staff. Over the life of WRS this has been massively reduced reflecting the financial realities that the service faces and the service uses various approaches to ensure the money is spent wisely. Developing staff to ensure there are opportunities to plan succession is also essential.



In recent years, there has been a focus on enabling staff to work across the Environmental Health professional areas. Few officers only remain competent for one of the professional disciplines. This paid dividends in the pandemic response as it allowed us to move people into either directly servicing the pandemic response or to backfill that capacity in high demand areas like nuisance.

Within Licensing, the pandemic gave the opportunity to review administrative processes and reduce the burden of several paper systems. Automating application processes and payment will further support this. This has allowed officers to look proactively at enforcement across the districts and this will be a focus for the next 12 months. There are some disciplines within licensing that our competent qualified technical officers require training within such as caravan licensing and animal health and this will be the focus to ensure that no officer only has experience of just a single local licensing regime.

In pursuit of this, a competency framework for Technical Officers was developed and it will continue to be used with the aim of identifying training needs and developing the competency of officers more widely. Broader competencies will allow a wider range of people to deliver technical work and enable the service to tender for such contracts outside of the existing Partnership arrangements.

The size of the officer cohort in the service makes buying in trainers to deliver technical training to our teams economically viable for the service. A lot of aspects of professional practice and process are common across the enforcement professions so we can continue to offer this as an option to colleagues within Trading Standards and some of our neighbours where we have spaces available on the courses that we arrange. On-line and virtual training is now offered on several platforms, helping to manage costs and allowing officers to maintain competence.

## **10. BUSINESS CONTINUITY**

There is no doubt that the Covid 19 pandemic has tested the business continuity plans of the service and it has risen to the challenges. The decision by the six districts to have a single, Environmental Health service paid dividends in terms of the service's ability to balance pandemic controls with business-as-usual activities. It is doubtful that six separate services, subject to similar levels of financial reduction over the past 10 years could have responded as well as the shared service.

Business continuity plans for the service were developed and have been shared with the relevant Emergency Planning teams in the partner authorities. If the impact of the on-going financial constraints is that partners require reductions that are not currently envisaged, this will threaten our ability to maintain the full range of interventions across these functions whilst responding to large scale events and delivering contractual obligations. Priorities have therefore been established as part of the Business Continuity Planning process so the service is clear what will stop and what will continue in event of an emergency and how the service would respond to incidents such as the potential destruction of our office base or at least it temporarily being out of action. Additional consideration is required where reductions are suggested to ensure the impact on income generation is understood and this item is included in the current Risk Register. Cyber security is the major consideration currently with a number of high-profile attacks on local authorities that have caused chaos for the delivery of services and have resulted in the complete loss of a

lot of data. We are working closely with Wyre Forest's IT team to ensure we limit the threat and are giving wider thought to contingency measures. Recent incidents suggest that temporarily we may need to return to full paper recording for a period before digital resource can be restored!

Despite Trading Standards returning to County Council control, the Community Environmental Health team and the Trading Standards and Animal Health unit will continue to work closely together to ensure that, in event of an emergency or capacity shortage, officers can support each other when necessary. Having the teams managed by the same Manager on a day-to-day basis, together under one roof and in one office space will continue to allow both teams to utilise pairs of hands, extra eyes and ears and boots on the ground, to tackle any incident or alteration to work demands that may require additional resource or a different workforce allocation. In event of a significant issue like an animal disease outbreak, the County Council has previously agreed that any support required from WRS staff will be paid for. The Trading Standards team has also engaged significantly more with Licensing as it has developed its work on illicit tobacco as a number of these premises are licensed.

## **11. LOCAL ENTERPRISE PARTNERSHIPS**

The service remains engaged with the Worcestershire Local Enterprise Partnership with the aim of improving our relationships with local businesses and identifying their needs with a view to contributing to the growth of the local economy. Throughout the pandemic, the service engaged with the "One Worcestershire" approach to recovery and business support, engaging with Economic Development colleagues as part of the recovery group. Things like the Business Charter for Regulators, launched during 2012, will continue to inform how we engage with the business community in Worcestershire, and we hope that the LEP and others will continue to champion the service and our balanced approach to regulation and enforcement. We wait to see how government's "levelling up" agenda will interface with the LEP-led local Industrial Strategy. Previously, Government has seen this as a way of translating national policy on creating economic growth into local action and, where possible, we will look to support this.

## **12. OTHER PARTNERSHIPS**

The service continues to need to work closely with a range of partners to deliver what is required against a number of agendas. The importance of the six local authority partners is recognised and we will continue to maintain our existing interfaces with other elements of these organisations

With the County Council having taken back direct control of Trading Standards functions, it has been essential to retain the strong links between both groups of staff. This is facilitated by the current co-location of teams, with Trading Standards and Animal Health continuing to occupy a section at Wyre Forest House for the foreseeable future. This is particularly relevant for the two Intelligence Officer posts that are split between the two organisations.

Customer demand will have a significant impact on the nature of our interactions with partners as we move the service forward. Close partnership working with a range of professional and community groups is essential to ensure deliver of the outcomes required by partners. Key partners for engagement include:

- West Mercia Police & West Mercia Police and Crime Commissioner
- The Environment Agency
- The Health and Safety Executive
- UKHSA
- Local Partnership bodies e.g., Community Safety Partnerships, Safer Communities Board, Health and Well-being Board
- Adult and Children Safeguarding Boards
- Hereford & Worcester Fire & Rescue Service
- Citizens Advice Consumer Service, local Citizens Advice Bureaux and other 3<sup>rd</sup> sector organisations
- County Council Public Health team
- Regional Regulatory Partnerships and National Bodies (CIEH, MJAC, CEnEHMB, CEnTSA, CTSI, ACTSO, NTSB,).

Existing links to these bodies will be maintained. Additionally, to ensure WRS provides an attractive product for external clients, engagement with equivalent partners in other geographical regions will be pursued, which will include the collation/interpretation and review of intelligence data in such areas.

Locally, the service has made a good commitment to engaging with the agenda around organised crime. Serious Organised Crime groups are a key target for policing at regional and national level. Business activities are a good way of providing a vehicle for the laundering of money as are property purchases in general. Modern day slavery and other forms of exploitation are now part of what officers are asked to keep an eye out for when visiting businesses. This goes well beyond what Trading Standards colleagues have traditionally dealt with in doorstep crime and scams and builds on the work of licensing colleagues in relation to addressing CSE. The service has seats at the Serious and Organised Crime Joint Actions Group (SOCJAG,) in the county and regularly contributes to Multi-Agency Tasked Enforcement (MATES,) interventions with the police and other enforcement partners from various agencies.

### **13. CONSULTATION & ENGAGEMENT**

We will address national consultation on legislative change through the relevant professional channels. We will continue to engage local members in relation to local policy issues, especially around licensing matters. For general engagement with the wider community of elected members, we will provide several Member Newsletters per year covering the various activities that the service undertakes across the County. We will try to make this information specific to districts where it is relevant, to reassure members that our activities are seeking to protect

everyone and support businesses across the whole of Worcestershire. It is hoped that the Activity Data reports that will continue to be provided to the WRS Board will provide elected members on the Board with sufficient information to also feedback to the wider membership in their respective authorities.

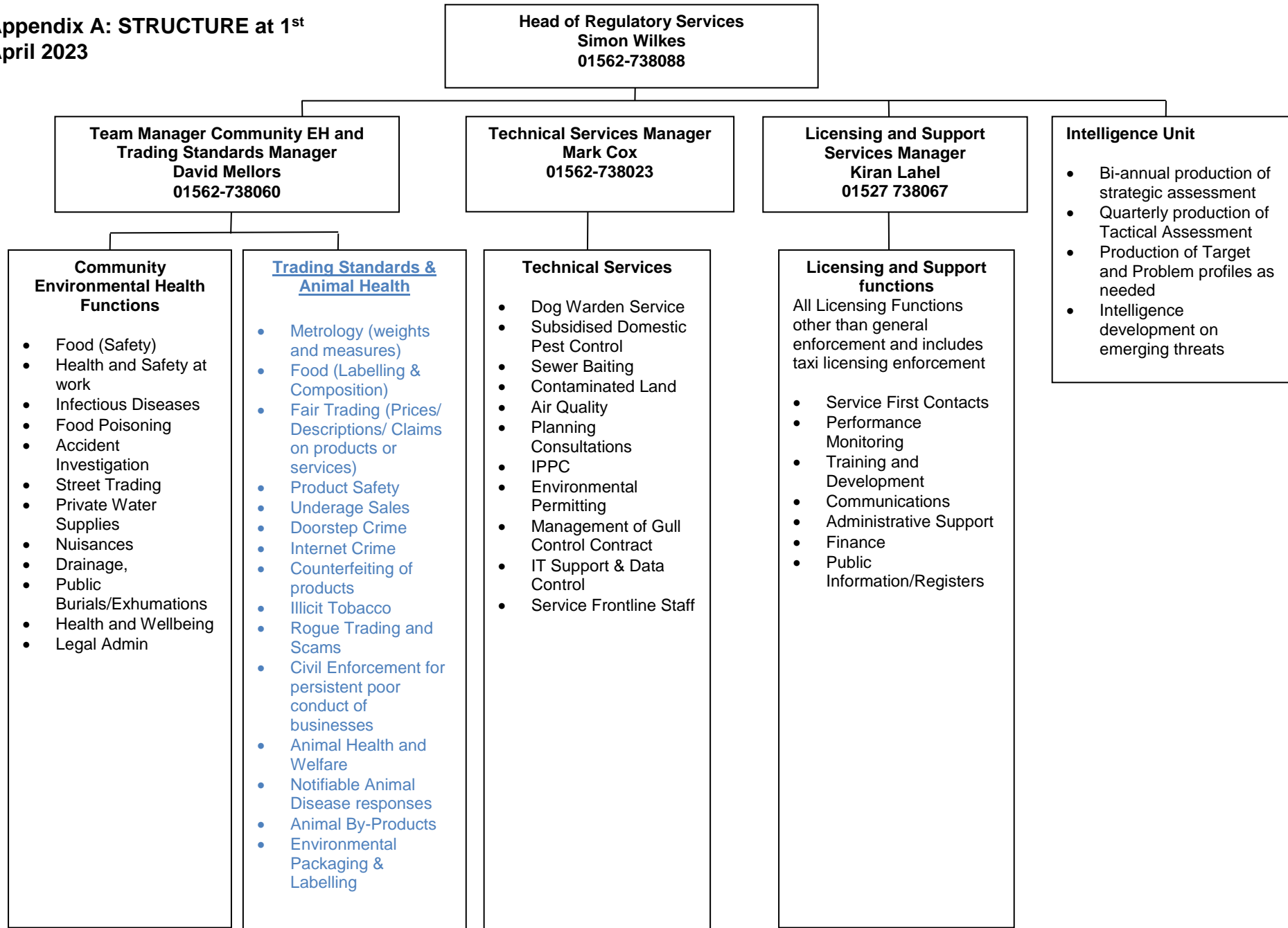
In terms of business engagement, we will continue to work with colleagues at Worcestershire LEP and Worcestershire Business Central on engaging with our business customers to improve our ability to address their needs. The approach outlined in our business charter will provide the basis for our interactions with the business community.

For members of the public, we will continue to survey customers who have used the service to look at how we dealt with their issues, not only from a satisfaction point of view, but also to see if they feel better equipped to deal with future problems. We will look at ways of making this more efficient using digital channels, but previous experience showed a drastic fall in responses when this was used as the only route for getting feedback. For now, we will have to continue with a mixed model of paper surveys and digital feedback. Helping people to help themselves is at the heart of model of public service engagement we are pursuing, and it is essential we move people down this route and reduce the expectation that we will always do it for them. This idea is now developing further with all partners signing up to the “digital first” concept that, where possible, initial contact with partners will always be via a digital channel rather than necessarily requiring either telephony or face-to-face interactions. The new format of the WRS website is being tailored to suit the various digital devices used to access services on-line. The new system for on-line application and making complaints on-line that are directly entered into our back-office system will also improve efficiency in this area.

## **14. RISK & GOVERNANCE**

The current arrangements came into force on 1<sup>st</sup> April 2016 following the departure of the county Council from the formal partnership. The original legal agreement indicated that partners would pursue the shared services model for a period of at least 10 years. The 2016 agreement re-iterated this, but it contains no formal end date. The Legal Officers from the six partner councils are of the view that review is not required and that the current agreement can, in theory continue in perpetuity. Officer members of the Board will need to keep a watching brief on the service and perhaps look at reviews every few years to ensure the service is continuing to deliver. A copy of the current Risk Register is appended at Appendix E and has been reviewed and updated for this plan. The number of commercial contracts and obligations increasing creates some risk, particularly where sub-contractors or skilled technical staff are involved. This revised document recognises the wider geographical area that the service now covers and level of technical expertise that must be maintained. The good news is that the pandemic has confirmed our preparedness for a number of the eventualities identified and we have been able to continue to function well in most work areas throughout.

**Appendix A: STRUCTURE at 1<sup>st</sup>  
April 2023**



## Appendix B: Operating Environment Horizon Scanning PESTELO assessment

### 5.1 Political

The UK withdrawal from the European Union (EU), commonly known as 'Brexit', continues to be a significant factor in the political landscape. The UK officially left the EU on 31<sup>st</sup> January 2020 but remained in the EU single market and customs union during a twelve-month transition period. This period ended on 31<sup>st</sup> December 2020 however, whilst the UK and EU have been operating under a trade and cooperation agreement, there continues to be uncertainty as to how future trade will be conducted with EU member states. The agreement, for example, does not cover certain aspects of financial services or the exportation of food products<sup>1</sup>. In addition, there are broader trade concerns as the UK seeks trade agreements with other nations (e.g., United States of America and New Zealand).

Aside from trade, the future of the UK's laws is also uncertain, particularly where they originate from EU directives such as those relating to employment standards, environmental protection, and food safety. The UK Withdrawal Act 2018 effectively transferred EU laws onto the UK books, and gave ministers powers to amend laws using secondary legislation<sup>2</sup>.

### 5.2 Economical

The impacts of Brexit, whilst uncertain, are forecast to be worse in the long run compared to the Coronavirus pandemic<sup>3</sup>. Recent forecasts suggest that leaving the EU will reduce the UK's potential gross domestic product (GDP) by 4%, whilst the pandemic would reduce GDP by a further 2%. A shrinking economy can result in lower wages, job losses, restricted access to credit, and general fear or uncertainty. Whilst this affects large and small businesses, the latter generally faces greater challenges due to a lack of cash reserves and working capital. From a short-term perspective, the impacts of Brexit have seen significant disruptions to supply chains caused by delays at ports and shortages of delivery drivers.

As the UK seeks post Brexit trade deals, particularly with countries outside the EU, food and drinks manufactures are seeking to export a greater volume of food and drink products. A greater volume of exports will result in a higher number of requests for export health certificates which are issued by local authorities to confirm that goods meet health requirements of the destination country.

The pandemic, referenced throughout this assessment, continues to pose additional financial uncertainty for businesses and consumers. The implementation of restrictions (such as national lockdowns), and the varying of those restrictions at various times or within different regions, meant that business sectors had to close and/or could only operate under certain conditions. The travel sector, for example has faced ongoing uncertainty due to border closures and countries

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<sup>1</sup>[https://ec.europa.eu/info/strategy/relations-non-eu-countries/relations-united-kingdom/eu-uk-trade-and-cooperation-agreement\\_en](https://ec.europa.eu/info/strategy/relations-non-eu-countries/relations-united-kingdom/eu-uk-trade-and-cooperation-agreement_en)

<sup>2</sup><https://www.instituteforgovernment.org.uk/explainers/eu-withdrawal-act>

<sup>3</sup><https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/business-59070020>

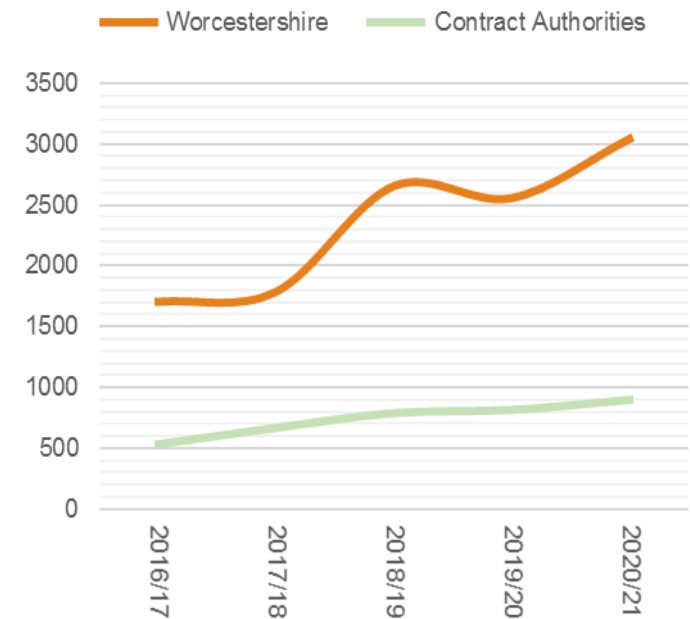
having differing travel requirements. The hospitality and events industries were largely required cease trading or change their method of operation to trade outdoors or offer delivery services. Whilst businesses have been able to access financial support (e.g., the job retention scheme or business rates relief), this has failed to cover the full financial obligations of businesses and the level of support as varied per sector. Although many businesses will continue to trade, some will be forced to close or enter administration.

From a consumer perspective, the cost of living has continued to rise with inflation at its highest rate for ten years<sup>4</sup>. The rate of inflation impacts upon the cost of goods and services with, for example, household energy, petrol, used car, hotel, clothing, household goods, and raw material prices becoming more expensive in the past twelve months. In addition, the Food and Drink Federation has recently warned that consumers will inevitably face higher food and drink prices if manufacturers are forced to absorb the cost of proposed Government policies during the few years<sup>5</sup>. Their report entitled “Eating into household budgets: The Government’s recipe for food price inflation” states that the price of shopping per household could increase by more than £160 per year.

Economic uncertainties, whether caused by Brexit, the pandemic, or a rise in the cost of living may lead to businesses needing to provide cheaper alternatives or implement cost cutting measures. Both are of concern to regulatory bodies as they are more likely to result in non-compliances and fraud.

Whilst the above highlights economic uncertainty, there continues to be a drive for local development. The West Midlands Industrial Strategy aims to bring investment into the conurbation which, in turn, will influence developments in North Worcestershire and bring business opportunities to the County along the M42 corridor. Further developments are also likely following rail improvements such as the completion of Worcestershire Parkway and the ongoing HS2 project. Aside from commercial development, the drive for affordable housing remains a national priority. As district councils strive to reach housing targets, developments are being considered on any available land including greenfield and brownfield sites. In addition, planning reforms continue to be discussed which aim to implement housing targets for local authorities, digitize the planning process, replace ‘Section 106 obligations’ with a national levy, and create a traffic light system for land classification<sup>6</sup>.

Any developments, whether commercial or residential, could impact upon the volume of planning enquiries received by WRS. Over a five-year period, there has been a 76% increase in the volume of planning enquiries referred to the service by planning departments. Whilst most cases have been received from Worcestershire authorities, approximately 1 in 5 enquiries has been undertaken on behalf of contract authorities including



<sup>4</sup><https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/business-59316544>

<sup>5</sup><https://www.fdf.org.uk/dfd/news-media/press-releases/2021-press-releases/cost-of-government-regulation-will-mean-higher-food-prices-for-consumers>

<sup>6</sup><https://www.homebuilding.co.uk/news/planning-reforms>

Gloucester City Council, Tewkesbury Borough Council, and Mendip District Council. Approximately 90% of planning enquiries have been consultations, whilst 50% have related to contaminated land. Planning authorities are required to consider air quality, contaminated land, and nuisance.

### 5.3 Social

As outlined previously, there has been a well-documented increase in the number of households purchasing dogs during COVID restrictions. The price of certain breeds was reported to have double during the initial lockdown with dogs, on average, costing around £1,900. This led to a significant increase in the number of breeders, particularly unlicensed breeders, as people sought to supplement lost income and/or expand existing hobbies. The Dogs Trust are now reporting, however, that owners are reconsidering owning pet as their circumstances have changed following the easing of restrictions. This has resulted in a 35% increase in calls from people looking to 'give up' their dog<sup>7</sup>. Where dogs become unwanted pets, this could lead to an increase in the number of stray dogs and/or the number of complaints about noise from barking dogs left unattended. In addition, the Dogs Trust also state there has been a 66% increase in puppies requiring assistance from their puppy pilot scheme which rehabilitates and rehomes dogs that have been seized (and quarantined) after being illegally imported into the country<sup>8</sup>. There has also been an increase in breeders offering to mutilate (ear cropping) puppies to follow a social media trend.

Towards the end of 2020, following an increase in the level of complaints, WRS commenced an intelligence gathering operation targeting illegal breeding. Analysis undertaken for the operation, which considered information provided by the public and adverts listed on prominent selling sites, identified eleven targets located across the county. It also identified that illegal breeding was likely to be more prominent in Kidderminster, Stourport-on-Severn, Worcester, and Evesham. The service has since commenced several investigations and is undertaking a proactive communications strategy to advise the public and prospective licence holders.

A study commissioned for the Department for Food, Environment and Rural Affairs (Defra) has found that, whilst diets are slowly changing, UK consumers are not meeting the standards required for a healthy diet. There have been reductions in salt,

sugar, and red and processed meat consumption, but consumption of fruit, vegetables, and fibre, has shown little or no change<sup>9</sup>. The study also found that, although consumers continue to buy food from large supermarkets, other forms of retailer (e.g., mini supermarkets) and the online grocery market (vegetable boxes, Hello Fresh etc.) have increased in popularity. In terms of the 'out-of-home environment', there has been significant growth in the proportion of individuals eating out on a regular basis, whilst digital technology has contributed towards the expansion of online food delivery platforms such as Deliveroo, Just Eat, and Uber Eats. As a final consideration, the study found that there has been an increase in the sale of ethical and sustainable products over the last ten years, including the consumption of plant-based meals. In addition, whilst consumers are concerned about food provenance and safety, this is dependent on the food group, and other factors such as price, availability, and quality. There are, however, more people choosing to adopt specific diets such as vegan or flexitarian.

<sup>7</sup><https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-58518892>

<sup>8</sup>[https://www.dogstrust.org.uk/about-us/accounts-annual-reviews/annual-report/dt\\_annualreport2020\\_v21\\_final.pdf](https://www.dogstrust.org.uk/about-us/accounts-annual-reviews/annual-report/dt_annualreport2020_v21_final.pdf)

<sup>9</sup>[https://www.rand.org/content/dam/rand/pubs/research\\_reports/RR4300/RR4379/RAND\\_RR4379.pdf](https://www.rand.org/content/dam/rand/pubs/research_reports/RR4300/RR4379/RAND_RR4379.pdf)



The Licensed Private Hire Car Association have stated that more than half of the licensed taxi drivers in the UK have not returned to the trade since the pandemic. The shortage has prompted concerns of the safety of women, students, and night-time workers struggling to get home<sup>10</sup>. Several councils have responded by cutting the cost of a licence, whilst the Department for Transport has stated it plans to revise taxi licensing guidelines in 2022.

There has been a significant increase in the number of drink spiking incidents report to Police forces across the UK in recent months. Whilst drink spiking is not directly investigated by WRS, the National Police Chief's Council state that most cases have involved young women and have taken place at licensed premises or private parties<sup>11</sup>. There have been calls for drink covers, better training for night-life staff, and for more rigorous searches of clubbers. Campaigners have also called for dedicated welfare staff within venues to help people get home safely.

## 5.4 Technological

The development of technology continues to play a significant role in modern society, with the UK previously identified as one of the most cyber-dependant economies of G20 member nations. Technology is increasingly used, therefore, to commit criminal offences. This poses a threat to local authorities who are often ill-equipped to investigate such matters; particularly where the offence relates to social media platforms like Facebook and Instagram. This was emphasised several years ago when Government, as part of a wider strategy, created the National Trading Standards eCrime Team to monitor and investigate

During July 2020, an intelligence product was commissioned to assess whether unregistered food businesses were operating via social media. The analysis, which focussed primarily on public Facebook groups, found that it was realistic that platforms were being used to advertise food products or services, but it was highly unlikely that businesses were unregistered. It also outlined those unregistered businesses were more likely to be connected to low risk activities such as the sale sweets or cakes.

consumer and business frauds. Whilst the use of technology has not been significantly referenced previously, the most prominent offences enabled by technology relate to unlicensed or

unregistered dog breeding, scrap metal, food, and taxi services advertising via websites or “buy and sell groups”. Facebook has also become a prominent place to report stray dogs, app-based private hire booking systems are becoming increasingly popular, and technology has been used during the pandemic to circulate ant-COVID rhetoric.

A recent study of shopping behaviour in the UK suggests that there has been strong shift towards online purchases in the past year<sup>12</sup>. This shift has, of course, been driven by the pandemic and the need for consumers to restrict their movements to ‘essential journeys’. The study also suggests that shopping habits continue to be driven by convenience, home delivery and availability; whilst over third of consumers have completed a purchase via a mobile app. There has also been an increase in the proportion of consumers utilising a research-based approach prior to purchasing; however, this largely driven by older consumers (persons aged 45 and above). Separate studies suggest that consumers would be more likely to shop for fresh and packaged food, online in future due to the

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<sup>10</sup><https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/business-59158230>

<sup>11</sup><https://www.theguardian.com/uk-news/2021/oct/23/hundreds-of-uk-drink-spiking-reports-in-the-past-two-months>

<sup>12</sup><https://www.thinkwithgoogle.com/intl/en-gb/consumer-insights/consumer-trends/consumers-adapted-shopping-behaviour-covid>

pandemic<sup>13</sup>, whilst the most prominent platforms included the major supermarket chains<sup>14</sup>. As outlined above, there has also been significant expansion of online food delivery platforms such as Deliveroo, Just Eat, and Uber Eats.

Whilst technology poses a threat to local authorities, it also provides significant opportunities as WRS can promote its services and circulate guidance to wider audience via its website and social media feeds. It can also operate more efficiently by accepting online payments, updating customers via public access, and referring complainants to more suitable organisations. In addition, the development of technology provides additional opportunities for the service, and its partners, to prevent, detect, and disrupt crime, whether through the sharing of intelligence or via tactical action.

## 5.5 Environmental

Local authorities have a responsibility to regularly review and assess air quality in their areas against national objectives. Where areas are unlikely to meet the objectives, they must be designated Air Quality Management Areas and action taken, alongside others, to work towards meeting the objectives. Whilst regulations refer to several pollutants, nitrogen dioxide (NO<sub>2</sub>) and particulate matter (PM<sub>10</sub> and PM<sub>2.5</sub>) are of primary concern and are commonly connected to combustion processes for fossil fuels such as vehicle exhaust emissions and industrial processes. The pandemic, and the implementation of restrictions, has greatly improved air quality across the country. Research has indicated that cities and large towns have experienced a 38% reduction in the level of NO<sub>2</sub> concentrations, whilst monitoring data within Worcestershire has also identified general improvements. Despite this, there continues to be areas of concern and seven air quality management areas remain in force across the county. Any changes to the status of areas, however, is dependent on reliable long-term data being available for assessment. This can only begin once public behaviour return to 'normal' (whatever that looks like in a post restriction environment). It is not known, for example, whether the levels of travel will return to those seen in 2019, or whether flexible working will mean more people continue to work from home. Whilst air quality monitoring is effectively in a state of suspension it continues to be a significant factor in the planning and environmental permitting processes.

The AQMAs in Worcestershire include:

- Welch Gate, Bewdley
- Horsefair/Coventry Street, Kidderminster
- Lickey End, Bromsgrove
- Worcester Road, Bromsgrove
- Redditch Road, Bromsgrove
- Worcester Road, Wychbold
- Worcester City

*An interactive map of these areas is available via the WRS website. Visit [worcsregservices.gov.uk](https://www.worcsregservices.gov.uk), and search for air quality management areas.*

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<sup>13</sup><https://www.statista.com/statistics/1232115/uk-shoppers-that-will-mostly-shop-online-by-category/>

<sup>14</sup><https://www.statista.com/forecasts/870307/united-kingdom-top-online-stores-united-kingdom-ecommercedb>

The Office for Environmental Protection is a new public body which was legally created in November under the Environment Act 2021. It is due to be fully established early in 2022 and will review and report on government's progress in meeting environmental goals, monitor and report on the implementation of environmental law, advise government on proposed changes to the law, and investigate suspected failures to comply with environmental law by government and other public bodies<sup>15</sup>. From a WRS perspective, the latter would include compliance with national air quality objectives.

Scientists have warned that extremes of weather will strike the UK more frequently, after 2020 was one of the warmest, wettest, and sunniest years on record. Due to the climate crisis, heatwaves are expected to become longer, hotter, and more frequent, whilst rainfall could become variable and more extreme<sup>16</sup>. In recent years, the UK has seen storms which have resulted in record levels of flooding. More extreme weather could significantly impact upon the level of complaints received by WRS – particularly noise and smoke nuisance complaints as people spend more time outdoors.

## 5.6 Legal

Aside from laws resulting from EU directives and ongoing reforms to planning laws, there are limited legal changes that would significantly impact upon the functions undertaken by WRS.

The Government has launched reforms to the Human Rights Act which aim to respect common law traditions and strengthen the role of the UK Supreme Court, restore sharper focus on protecting fundamental rights, prevent the incremental expansion of rights without proper democratic oversight, and emphasise the role of responsibilities within the human rights framework<sup>17</sup>. In particular, the proposals seek to prevent abuses of the system by foreign criminals, and strike a proper balance between individuals' rights, personal responsibility, and the wider public interest. The proposals, however, commit to staying within the European Convention on Human Rights. It is not known what impact reforms will have on intelligence gathering processes with the right to privacy, for example, covered by Article 8 of the existing act.

New powers to crack down on puppy smuggling and increase protections for farm animals have been introduced by Government. The Animal Welfare (Kept Animals) Bill aims to address primates being kept as pets, dogs attacking or worrying livestock, the exportation of livestock, the importation of dogs, cats, and ferrets, and legislation connected to Zoos<sup>18</sup>. The bill follows additional legislation, which received royal assent during April 2021, which increased the maximum sentence for animal cruelty offences.

The Taxis and Private Hire Vehicles (Safeguarding and Road Safety) Bill is a Private Member's Bill sponsored by Peter Gibson, Conservative MP for Darlington. It seeks to improve the safety of taxi passengers and address the issue of a driver obtaining a licence from one authority, after having their licence refused or

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<sup>15</sup><https://www.theoep.org.uk/what-we-do>

<sup>16</sup>[https://www.globalcitizen.org/en/content/climate-change-extreme-weather-uk-britain-future/?utm\\_source=paidsearch&utm\\_medium=ukgrant&utm\\_campaign=genericbrandname&gclid=EAlaIQobChMI99u8zezl9AIVDevTCh06ugSYEAAAYASAAEgLSJ\\_D\\_BwE](https://www.globalcitizen.org/en/content/climate-change-extreme-weather-uk-britain-future/?utm_source=paidsearch&utm_medium=ukgrant&utm_campaign=genericbrandname&gclid=EAlaIQobChMI99u8zezl9AIVDevTCh06ugSYEAAAYASAAEgLSJ_D_BwE)

<sup>17</sup>[https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment\\_data/file/1040409/human-rights-reform-consultation.pdf](https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/1040409/human-rights-reform-consultation.pdf)

<sup>18</sup><https://commonslibrary.parliament.uk/research-briefings/cbp-9229>

revoked by a different authority<sup>19</sup>. The bill would mandate local licensing authorities to record taxi licence refusals, revocations, and suspensions on a national database, which other authorities would be required to consult and seeks to build on previous legislation which led to the development of the NR3 Taxi Sanctions database hosted by NAFN.

## 5.7 Organisational

Local authorities are primarily funded through government grants, council tax, and business rates. Since its inception, the budget for WRS has comprised of contributions from its strategic partners, supported by income generated from various activities. This does not include Licensing income, which goes back to the partners and some income streams which were present before WRS was formed. Between 2016 and 2020, WRS was required to meet all increases in financial pressure through increased income generation and managed to achieve this. Several WRS partners however, and local authorities in general, continue to face financial challenges. This means that future budgets for the service are continually 'subject to potential change'. The on-going problem for WRS is to offset any future reductions through income generation, whilst being able to fulfil statutory responsibilities.

Worcestershire is a 'two-tier' authority which means functions are divided between the county and district councils. In July 2021, Government produced a report entitled "Unitary local government" which considered proposals, rationales, and alternatives to local government restructuring<sup>20</sup>. A recent leak in relation to a white paper on levelling up suggested that Government were planning, as part of that process, to move wholesale to unitary arrangements. Subsequent responses from Government indicated that this will not be the case and further steps to unitary arrangements will continue to require local unanimity.

The Intelligence Operating Model, and National Intelligence Model, have at their centres, several key principles. These include clear and consistent tasking, adopting a problem-solving approach and taking evidence-based decisions. Whilst WRS has chosen to adopt the principles and the processes associated with intelligence-led enforcement, this continues to pose significant challenges. Decision makers, for example, are continuing to adjust to tasking and coordination requirements, whilst thinking more broadly about "knowns" and "unknowns". In addition, operational officers require further training to understand their role in an intelligence-led organisation, the importance of evaluating information, and concepts such as the problem analysis triangle (a crime requires an offender, a victim, and a location). The most significant challenge faced by the service, however, is how it becomes more proactive and less reactive. This is also connected to how the service utilises its intelligence capabilities to develop its understanding of the entities committing offences, any emerging threats, and any problem sectors.

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<sup>19</sup><https://commonslibrary.parliament.uk/research-briefings/cbp-9305>

<sup>20</sup><https://researchbriefings.files.parliament.uk/documents/CBP-9056/CBP-9056.pdf>

**Appendix C: 3 years of budgets (figures in £000's)**

<b>Account description</b>	<b>Budget 2023 / 2024 £000's</b>	<b>Budget 2024 / 2025 £000's</b>	<b>Budget 2025 / 2026 £000's</b>
<b>Employees</b>			
Monthly salaries	3,364	3,449	3,531
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
<b>Sub-Total - Employees</b>	<b>3,393</b>	<b>3,478</b>	<b>3,560</b>
<b>Premises</b>			
Rents	70	70	70
Room hire	2	2	2
Trade Waste	1	1	1
<b>Sub-Total - Premises</b>	<b>73</b>	<b>73</b>	<b>73</b>
<b>Transport</b>			
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	58	58	58
<b>Sub-Total - Transport</b>	<b>93</b>	<b>93</b>	<b>93</b>
<b>Supplies &amp; Service</b>			
Equipment - purchase/maintenance/rental	30	30	30
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	67	67	67
Telephones	21	21	21
Taxi Tests	22	22	22
CRB Checks (taxi)	26	26	26
Support service recharges	118	121	123
Support service recharges - ICT	67	67	67
<b>Sub-Total - Supplies &amp; Service</b>	<b>433</b>	<b>435</b>	<b>438</b>
<b>Contractors</b>			
Consultants / Contractors' fees/charges/SLA's	269	234	234
Advertising (general)	5	5	5
Grants and subscriptions	13	13	13
Marketing/promotion/publicity	287	252	252
<b>Sub-Total - Contractors</b>			
<b>Income</b>	<b>-524</b>	<b>-529</b>	<b>-534</b>
Grants / Primary Authority / Food Training / Contaminated Land / Stray Dogs / Ad Hoc			
<b>Sub-Total - Income</b>	<b>-524</b>	<b>-529</b>	<b>-534</b>
<b>Income</b>			
From partners for Technical Officers	-143	-110	-112
Funding from Worcs City Council for Pest Control	-8	-8	-8
Funding from partners for Increase in Rent	-11	-11	-11
Funding from partners for Increase in ICT	-8	-8	-8
Funding from partners for Increase in Hosting Charges	-9	-9	-11

<b>Sub-Total - Income</b>	<b>-177</b>	<b>-147</b>	<b>-151</b>
<b>Additional Income</b>			
<b>Income to be found due to unavoidable salary pressures</b>	<b>-82</b>	<b>-160</b>	<b>-235</b>
<b>Sub-Total - Income</b>			
<b>DISTRICT PARTNERSHIP BUDGET</b>	<b>3,494</b>	<b>3,494</b>	<b>3,495</b>
<b>20-21 Partner Percentages</b>			
<b>Bromsgrove District Council</b>	14.52%		
<b>Malvern Hills District Council</b>	13.00%		
<b>Redditch Borough Council</b>	17.49%		
<b>Worcester City Council</b>	16.72%		
<b>Wychavon District Council</b>	23.19%		
<b>Wyre Forest District Council</b>	15.08%		
<b>Total</b>	<b>100.00%</b>		

Additional costs for posts for new or additional activities will be allocated using this formula unless the work is requested by either one partner or a group of partners, in which case the relevant partners will agree a formula for cost allocation.

The table below covers off the additional payments that are likely to flow from the current allocations of additional funding for the additional Technical Officer capacity required for several pieces of work and to cover the salary and pension pressures going forward.

	<b>Budget</b>	<b>Contributi on Pest Control</b>	<b>Contributi on Technical Officers</b>	<b>Partner Contributi on</b>	<b>Contributi on Increase in Rent, ICT &amp; Hosting Charges</b>	<b>Unavoidab le Salary Pressures</b>	<b>Total Partner Contributi on</b>
	<b>2023 / 2024</b>	<b>2023 / 2024</b>	<b>2023 / 2024</b>	<b>2023 / 2024</b>	<b>2023 / 2024</b>	<b>2023 / 2024</b>	<b>2023 / 2024</b>
<b>Budget 2023 / 24</b>	<b>£000's</b>	<b>£000's</b>	<b>£000's</b>	<b>£000's</b>	<b>£000's</b>	<b>£000's</b>	<b>£000's</b>
<b>Bromsgrove District Council</b>	508		12	521	4	12	537
<b>Malvern Hills District Council</b>	455		18	473	3	11	487
<b>Redditch Borough Council</b>	613		8	621	5	14	640
<b>Worcester City Council</b>	578	8	75	660	4	14	678
<b>Wychavon District Council</b>	812		19	831	6	19	856
<b>Wyre Forest District Council</b>	528		11	539	4	12	555
<b>Total</b>	<b>3,494</b>	<b>8</b>	<b>143</b>	<b>3,644</b>	<b>27</b>	<b>82</b>	<b>3,753</b>
	<b>Budget</b>	<b>Contributi on Pest Control</b>	<b>Contributi on Technical Officers</b>	<b>Partner Contributi on</b>	<b>Contributi on Increase in Rent, ICT &amp; Hosting Charges</b>	<b>Unavoidab le Salary Pressures</b>	<b>Total Partner Contributi on</b>
	<b>2024 / 2025</b>	<b>2024 / 2025</b>	<b>2024 / 2025</b>	<b>2024 / 2025</b>	<b>2024 / 2025</b>	<b>2024 / 2025</b>	<b>2024 / 2025</b>
<b>Budget 2024 / 25</b>	<b>£000's</b>	<b>£000's</b>	<b>£000's</b>	<b>£000's</b>	<b>£000's</b>	<b>£000's</b>	<b>£000's</b>
<b>Bromsgrove District Council</b>	508		13	521	4	23	548
<b>Malvern Hills District Council</b>	455		18	473	4	21	498



<b>Redditch Borough Council</b>	613		9	621	5	28	654
<b>Worcester City Council</b>	578	8	40	625	5	27	657
<b>Wychavon District Council</b>	812		20	832	7	37	876
<b>Wyre Forest District Council</b>	528		11	539	4	24	567
<b>Total</b>	<b>3,494</b>	<b>8</b>	<b>110</b>	<b>3,611</b>	<b>29</b>	<b>160</b>	<b>3,800</b>
	<b>Budget</b>	<b>Contributi on Pest Control</b>	<b>Contributi on Technical Officers</b>	<b>Partner Contributi on</b>	<b>Contributi on Increase in Rent, ICT &amp; Hosting Charges</b>	<b>Unavoidab le Salary Pressures</b>	<b>Total Partner Contributi on</b>
	<b>2025 / 2026</b>	<b>2025 / 2026</b>	<b>2025 / 2026</b>	<b>2025 / 2026</b>	<b>2025 / 2026</b>	<b>2025 / 2026</b>	<b>2025 / 2026</b>
<b>Budget 2025 / 26</b>	<b>£000's</b>	<b>£000's</b>	<b>£000's</b>	<b>£000's</b>	<b>£000's</b>	<b>£000's</b>	<b>£000's</b>
<b>Bromsgrove District Council</b>	508		13	521	5	34	560
<b>Malvern Hills District Council</b>	455		18	473	4	31	508
<b>Redditch Borough Council</b>	613		9	621	6	41	668
<b>Worcester City Council</b>	578	8	40	625	5	40	670
<b>Wychavon District Council</b>	812		20	832	7	54	894
<b>Wyre Forest District Council</b>	528		11	539	5	35	579
<b>Total</b>	<b>3,494</b>	<b>8</b>	<b>112</b>	<b>3,613</b>	<b>31</b>	<b>235</b>	<b>3,879</b>

## Appendix D: Performance Measures Relating to Outcomes

	Measure	Reporting Frequency	Background
1	% of service requests where resolution is achieved to customers satisfaction	Quarterly	Based on questionnaires send out to a significant number of members of the public who use the service.
2	% of service requests where resolution is achieved to business satisfaction	Quarterly	Based on questionnaires send out to a significant number of businesses inspected or otherwise contacted by the service.
3	% businesses broadly compliant at first assessment/ inspection	Annually	Based on the proportion of businesses meeting the key purpose from a regulatory perspective i.e. food businesses produce safe food.
4	% of food businesses scoring 0,1 or 2 at 1 <sup>st</sup> April each year	Annually	Based on proportion of businesses scoring 0 1 or 2 stars on a national Food Hygiene Rating Scheme assessment (2 stars and below is deemed to be at risk of not producing safe food.)
5	% of drivers licence renewal applications issued within 5 working days.	6-monthly	Based on the proportion of drivers' licence renewals issued within 5 working days of receipt of application. Note new applicants all require DBS checks and time frames for this fall outside of WRS control, hence they are not included.
6	% of vehicles found to be defective whilst in service	6-monthly	Percentage of vehicles either found defective on routine inspection or stopped during enforcement exercises, that are required to be removed from service for remedial work before being allowed to carry on operating.
7	% of service requests where customer indicates they feel better equipped to deal with issues themselves in future	Quarterly	Based on questionnaires send out to a significant number of members of the public and businesses who have used the service.

8	Review of register of complaints and compliments	Quarterly	Ratio of compliments received to complaints against service
9	Staff sickness absence at public sector average or better	Quarterly	Sickness recorded using host processes. The service will ask HR to provide details of the public sector average to compare against at year-end.
10	% of staff who enjoy working for WRS	Annually	Taken from the staff survey.
11	% of licensed businesses subject to allegations of not upholding the 4 licensing objectives	6-monthly	Indicator, linked to Crime & Disorder agenda, looking at performance of premises license holders and control on their activity.
12	Rate of noise complaint per 1000 head of population	6-monthly	Place indicator, potential link to quality of life and health and well-being.
13	Total income	6-monthly	Expressed as a % of the base district contributions to the revenue budget for the year 2016/17 to provide comparison against base line but also % of the current base budget.
14	Cost of regulatory services per head of population	Annually	Will be total spend divided by the total population, based on the most recent mid-year estimate available at the time of publication. NB: Calculation will offset income against revenue budget to account for external income sources

## Appendix E: Risk Register 2023/4

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 moved to Office 365 during 2021/22, which provides 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 be re-negotiated in February 2023. Work has commenced on negotiating new contract. The cost of moving systems is prohibitive currently and, whilst the system has its faults, it provides the necessary functionality and will allow the enablement of data transfer from electronic forms.
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 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 to what was required.. Consultants are available to provide short term cover and, whilst this worked well in peacetime to cover peak demand periods, the pandemic has revealed the 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. 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. 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	<b>Green</b>	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	<b>Amber</b>	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 remains difficult and consideration may be given to creating our own capacity.
Hosting support does not deliver necessary financial and HR	Efficiency of management reduced; staffing issues remain unaddressed,	On-going	Low	High	<b>Amber</b>	Issues with the new BDC finance system have mainly been resolved, however some workarounds remain in

support to ensure efficient management	and performance suffers					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	<b>Amber</b>	New legal agreement limits variations in contribution before partners must move to contractual relationship but this is quite high before it kicks in (20%.) Leanness of organisation minimises overheads and focuses resource at the front line. Growth strategy should generate income to support partners in the future but there are limits to this without additional capacity being added to the system. Invest to save capacity has been committed by partners to see if this achieves the necessary outcomes but even this is now fully occupied.
Robust arrangements in place in relation to obtaining legal advice and monitoring legislative changes.	Loss of cases is costly and damages reputation.	On-going	Low	Medium	<b>Green</b>	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	<b>Amber</b>	Limited detail of what is required for statutory minima can make decision making difficult around what is required in law as a minimum.  The LGA is clearly aware of impact of budget reductions on regulation and has made it clear 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	<b>Green</b>	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