

WRS Board

Date: 27th June 2024

Title: Activity and Performance Data Quarters 1, 2 3 and 4 2023/4

Recommendation

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

Background

The detail of the report focuses on the final quarter of 2023/24, but the actual data allows comparison with previous quarters and previous years.

Contribution to Priorities

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

Report

Activity Data

Looking at the data, last year, 2022/23 and 2023/24 can probably be seen as our first truly post-pandemic period with figures for activity beginning to be more comparable with each other and those before the pandemic. In several places, the data varies by a handful of percentage points compared with 2022/3 and are significantly different from 2021/22, where there was a significant burst of activity required, linked to people's perceptions of coming out of pandemic controls. We can probably safely say we are now into a new normal of demand levels.

Members will be aware of the engagement undertaken during Q4 with the Food Standards Agency on inspections at lower risk premises. Of the 1,569 interventions conducted at businesses included in the Food Hygiene Rating Scheme (FHRS) during the year, only 57 were rated as non-compliant (rated 0, 1 or 2). Approximately three quarters of these ratings were issued to hospitality businesses (such as takeaways, pubs, or restaurants) whilst a further 10% were issued to small retailers.



As members will see, food safety cases have been running below the trend line for virtually all this year. Some 32% fewer food safety cases were recorded during 2023/4 compared with 2021/ 22, and 6% below 2022/23 levels. Most food safety cases are enquiries such as requests for business advice or requests for export health certificates. Of the 426 actual complaints recorded during the year, 71% related to issues with products purchased from food businesses (e.g., poor quality food or the presence of foreign objects), while some 29% related to poor hygiene standards or practices.

While complaint/ enquiry numbers for health and safety remained stable through Q4, reported accidents showed a slight increase. Overall numbers of cases recorded during the year is a reduction of 27% compared to 2021/22, and a reduction of 8% compared to 2022-23. Some, 47% of case demand came from reports of accidents, with most of these cases relating to injuries where a worker was incapacitated for more than seven days or injuries to members of the public. Slips, trips, and falls (whether on the same level of from height) continue to be the most prominent cause of accidents occurring in workplaces.

Q4 demonstrated the usual drop off in stray dog numbers but this was after a busy year compared to the pre-pandemic years where numbers fell, year on year. The number of dog control cases recorded during the year was 35% higher than in 2021/22, and 7% higher than 2022/23. Some of this was likely driven by the ban on XL Bully type dogs but this did not cover all the increase. Approximately 87% of recorded dog cases related to stray or lost dogs, mainly "contained strays" where dogs have been found and held by members of the public. Overall, 59% of strays have been reunited with their owners, however, figures vary significantly between local authorities, and this is slightly lower than previous years meaning a greater burden on the public purse as the statutory seven-day kennelling fee is not paid by the owner. The increase in the number of stray dogs reported across Worcestershire has also come with a greater number of stray dogs being picked up with welfare concerns.

The actual number of complaints about dog control (excluding barking nuisance,) are relatively small. Of the 68 complaints recorded during the year, 40 related to dog fouling and persistent straying, 17 related to dangerous or out-of-control dogs, and 11 related to welfare concerns.

Overall licensing work looks like it followed the general trend, although the total volume of licensing cases recorded during 2023/24 was 6% higher than both 2021-22 and 2022-23. Approximately 64% of cases were applications and registrations; with 42% relating to the taxi trades and 24% relating to temporary events under the Licensing Act 2003. Licensing complaints and enquiries continued their upward trend during Q4. Most of these contacts are simply enquiries but, of the 597 complaints recorded during the year, 289 related to taxi licensing, 142 related to alcohol licensing, and 106 related to animal licensing (such as unlicensed dog breeding).



Quarter 4 saw a significant increase in information requests. Historically, this has been linked to an upturn in planning applications, but planning work appears to have remained steady during the second half of 2023/4. The anecdotal reports of increases in FOI activity may account for at least some of this. On planning, the number enquiries completed during the year was 19% lower than 2021/22, but 5% higher than 2022/23. Approximately 93% of enquiries were requests for support with consultations, with 49% related to contaminated land. Around 14% of enquiries were completed, on a contractual basis, on behalf of local authorities outside of Worcestershire.

Nuisance complaints have followed their long-established seasonal pattern through the year, and with our poor wet Winter, numbers fell slightly further during Q4. Overall, the number of pollution cases recorded during the year was 21% lower than 2021/22, and 11% below the level in 2022/23. Approximately 72% of nuisance cases related to noise nuisances (up slightly on last year,) with noise from domestic properties (such as noise from barking or noise from audio-visual equipment) the most prominent sources. A further 13% of nuisance cases related to those caused by smoke, fumes, and gases such as the burning of domestic waste or dust from construction sites. Public Health complaints, often linked to nuisance and dealt with under the same or similar legislative provisions were lower in the second half of the year, at levels like 2022/23 but below the levels in 2021/22.

Homes for Ukraine

Support has continued to be provided to Bromsgrove and Redditch Councils with the provision of the Homes for Ukraine scheme. This has involved host and guest checks, support and guidance as well as facilitating appropriate payments. This has been completed utilising staff formerly employed as COVID Advisors.

Planning Enforcement

Steps were taken in Q4 to formally move planning enforcement for Bromsgrove and Redditch from being a contracted element to part of the WRS day job, with the associated uplift in contributions for the two partners. All Member forums approved this, and it is expected that all work will be completed by the beginning of June 2024 to make this a reality. Former Contact Tracing and Enforcement staff had been utilised to support planning colleagues in tackling a backlog of planning enforcement issues. Several significant cases remain on-going through the enforcement process and, work has, so far, been well received.

Performance

The year was mixed again from a customer satisfaction perspective with the business customers level falling to 94.6% from its usual 97/ 98% level, but the non-business customer measure improving slightly to 60.4% from 59.2% last year. However, non-business customer



satisfaction remains lower than may previous years.

More detail on these is contained in the Annual Report. The fall in business satisfaction is difficult to account for as little has changed in terms of process or support information provided. With non-business customers, resources to address nuisance complaints continue to be stretched during the Summer, although last year was quieter than some due to the relatively poor weather. Also, despite increasing the number of requests for feedback, both electronic and letters, responses from members of the public remain relatively low with 271 businesses and only 161 non-business customers responding. In better scoring years we would expect 200-250 responses. Clearer communication and officers maintaining agreed contact intervals with complainants may improve this situation. Whilst we will never achieve 100% satisfaction because of the nature of our work, we know we can do better than this. People who felt better equipped to deal with issues ended the year at 56.6%, slightly below the 57%, 58.5% and 58.1% of two of the previous three years, but well below previous figures.

The figures for licensing processing are slightly below last year's 97.5% but still good with 96.8% of taxi driver renewals completed within 5 working days of having a full application. The number of vehicles suspended is lower than last year but above the level in the previous year at 70, (compared to 84 and 59 respectively.) As members will see from the detail, much of this is driven by a single fleet. Members should also note that the testing regime in one of the partners (with no failures,) is different from the others. Failure rates may reflect the current economic climate, with cost-of-living pressures continuing to impact on members of the trade. However, members should remember that the safety of the travelling public is paramount in their role as the licensing authority.

Numbers of compliments and complaints are down on the previous 2 years, but the ratio remains good at around 4:1.

Staff sickness is up very slightly at 3.07 days per FTE, compared to 2.93 days last year. This includes all staff on our books during the year and is a significant improvement on the 2021/22 figure of 5.2 days, and below the 5-year average including 22/3 (3.71 days.)

Staff satisfaction was at 94%, slightly higher than last year and still an excellent result given the pressures. 52 of our staff cohort responded, which was a little disappointing, but two-thirds of staff who responded scoring the service as 8/10 or better to work for, which shows most staff do like working in the environment we provide. Further work will be done during the year to look at more detailed feedback for the staff.

The proportion of businesses licensed under the 2003 Act (alcohol and entertainment,) allegedly not uphold the 4 licensing objectives shows an increase in all districts this year with a number achieving the highest reported level since the introduction of this indicator. The first thing to



say is this measure looks at allegations, not at actual breaches. We previously explained to members that, after pandemic lockdowns where hospitality premises were closed for long periods, the general tolerance of noise and similar activities from this type of premise seemed to have reduced, so as these businesses sought other activities and uses of their outside spaces to increase revenue, this made residents living in the vicinity unhappy. Whilst this was less prevalent last year, it appears to have returned with more reports than ever. This year nuisance from businesses, including the hospitality sector represents a slightly greater proportion of nuisance complaints than in previous years. Anecdotally, we have also seen a reduction in some parts of the community to acceptance of locations in Worcestershire being used for events and festivals. For some people, the economic benefits that flow into an area with increased visitor numbers does not appear to outweigh the inconvenience created. The data still shows that most premises across the County are well run and controlled by their operators, and we know from interactions with Police colleagues that concerns tend to be limited to smaller numbers of premises.

Looking at figures for the rate of noise complaint per 1000 head of population, these are somewhat at odds with the above measure, but we must remember that noise complaints about domestic premises far outnumber those regarding businesses. Our poor summer last year led to a low to low-average year for figures for this indicator across all partners. Although the proportion fell slightly this year, domestic noise still represents more than half of such complaints and, as we have alluded to in previous Activity Data Reports, noise from dogs and from audio devices remain key drivers of this. With commercial premises it tends to be a small number of these that certain residents have concerns about, and things like a change of management in a pub and the business looking at more diverse ways of bringing in revenue can lead to friction with the local community. Overall, it still suggests however, that the environment for Worcestershire residents is good.

Overall income was good and income from non-partner sources was over £500,000, represents over 16% of the budget from 2016/17, which we have used for comparison over the years, and over 13% of current net revenue.

Various pressures from salaries and inflation have driven up costs in recent years. Therefore, the cost per head of population is up this year at £6.14 per head of population. As we have said previously, it is difficult to compare our costs with others because of the way the service is delivered, however we are sure this spend is comparable or modest compared to similar local authorities that are discharging these functions.

Contact Points

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Background Papers

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



Appendix B: Performance indicator table

Table of PIs 2023/4

Indicator	Reporting period	Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4/ Outrun
1. % of service requests where resolution is achieved to customers satisfaction	Quarterly NB: fig is cumulative	69.3	64.4	60.7	60.4
2. % of service requests where resolution is achieved to business satisfaction	Quarterly NB: fig is cumulative	97	94.5	92.0	94.6
3. % businesses broadly compliant at first assessment/ inspection	Annually	98.4	Bromsgrove 99.3 Malvern Hills 98.6 Redditch 98.3 Worcester City 99.5 Wychavon 98.7 Wyre Forest 97.5 Worcestershire 98.7	98.5	Bromsgrove 99.4 Malvern Hills 98.2 Redditch 98.2 Worcester City 99.2 Wychavon 98.2 Wyre Forest 97.8 Worcestershire 98.5
4. % of food businesses scoring 0,1 or 2 at 1 st April each year	Annually	1.6	Bromsgrove 0.7 Malvern Hills 1.4 Redditch 1.7 Worcester City 0.5 Wychavon 1.5 Wyre Forest 2.5 Worcestershire 1.3	1.5	Bromsgrove 0.6 Malvern Hills 1.8 Redditch 1.8 Worcester City 0.8 Wychavon 1.8 Wyre Forest 2.2 Worcestershire 1.5
5 % of drivers licence renewal applications issued within 5 working days of receipt of a complete application	6-monthly	NA	93.9	NA	96.8
6 % of vehicles found to be defective whilst in service Number of vehicles found to be defective by district and the percentage this	6-monthly	NA	34 = 2.19% of 1550 vehicles on the road county-wide BDC 4 MHDC 2 RBC 18 WC 7	NA	70 = 4.23% of 1,655 vehicles on the road county-wide at 1 st April BDC 6 (of 96) MHDC 3 (of 186) RBC 43 (of 444) WC 14 (of 322)



	represents of the fleet county-wide			WDC 0 WFDC 3		WDC 0 (of 486) WFDC 6 (of 121)
7	% of service requests where customer indicates they feel better equipped to deal with issues themselves in future	Quarterly NB: fig is cumulative	68.8	60	55.7	56.6
8	Review of register of complaints/compliments	Quarterly NB: fig is cumulative	4/33	7/59	17/77	26/121
9	Annual staff sickness absence at public sector average or better	Quarterly NB: figure is cumulative	0.76 days per FTE	1.42 days per FTE	1.89 days per FTE	3.07 days per FTE
10	% of staff who enjoy working for WRS	Annually	NA	NA	NA	94%
11	% of licensed businesses subject to allegations of not upholding the 4 licensing objectives	6-monthly	NA	Bromsgrove 6.8 Malvern Hills 2.3 Redditch 3.0 Worcester City 6.9 Wychavon 1.4 Wyre Forest 6.6 Worcestershire 5.0	NA	Bromsgrove 9.9 Malvern Hills 5.8 Redditch 8.7 Worcester City 13.8 Wychavon 6.2 Wyre Forest 9.1 Worcestershire 8.8
12	Rate of noise complaint per 1000 head of population	6-monthly	NA	Bromsgrove 0.71 Malvern Hills 0.65 Redditch 0.57 Worcester City 0.97 Wychavon 0.72 Wyre Forest 0.86 Worcestershire 0.79	NA	Bromsgrove 2.19 Malvern Hills 1.91 Redditch 2.45 Worcester City 2.86 Wychavon 2.04 Wyre Forest 2.29 Worcestershire 2.33
13	Total income expressed as a % of	6-monthly	NA	£204,718, which is 6.8% as a proportion of the	NA	£502,641, which is 16.6% as a proportion of the



district base revenue budget (16/17)			2016/17 revenue budget figure (£3,017,000)		2016/17 revenue budget figure (£3,017,000) and 13.3% of the current net revenue budget of £3,766,000
14 Cost of regulatory services per head of population (Calculation will offset income against revenue budget)	Annually	NA	NA	NA	Based on overrun cost of £3,767,000 against the County Council population estimate of 613680 for 2023, the service cost is: £6.14 per head

