

Worcestershire
Regulatory Services

Supporting and protecting you

Activity Report | 2024-25



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Foreword

Written by Simon Wilkes (Director of Regulatory Services)

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Many thanks,



Simon

Community Environmental Health

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

Quarter One

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Quarter Two

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Quarter Tree

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Quarter Four

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

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

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

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

Quarter One

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

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

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

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

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

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

Quarter Two

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

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

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

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

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

Quarter Three

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

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

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

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

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

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

Quarter Four

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

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

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

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

Technical Services

Written by Mark Cox (Technical Services Manager)

Quarter One

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Quarter Two

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Quarter Three

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

The revised Redditch Contaminated Land Inspection Strategy was approved in November which updated the strategy to take into account recent legislative changes and work undertaken recently. Work commenced on updating the Malvern Hills Strategy document for approval. For the officers supporting guests from Ukraine, significant time and effort continues to be dedicated to school registrations with the closing date for secondary schools being 31st October for September 2025.

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

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

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

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

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

Quarter Four

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

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

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

We've received heartfelt feedback from participants:

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Dog Control

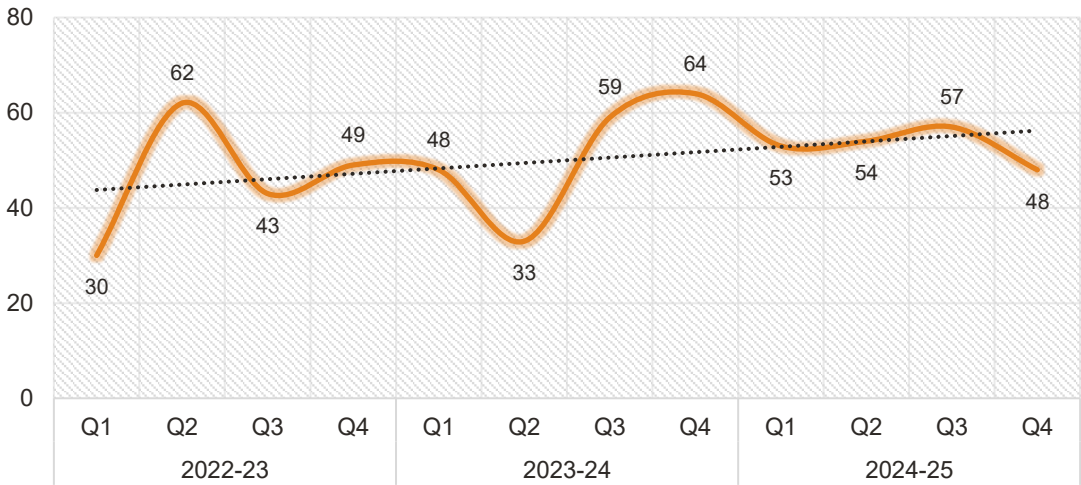
The data on this page outlines the number of dog control cases (complaints, enquiries, and reports of lost or stray dogs) handled by the service. Complaints received by WRS include reports of dangerous dogs, reports of dog fouling, and reports of dogs persistently straying. Complaints relating to the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

Comments

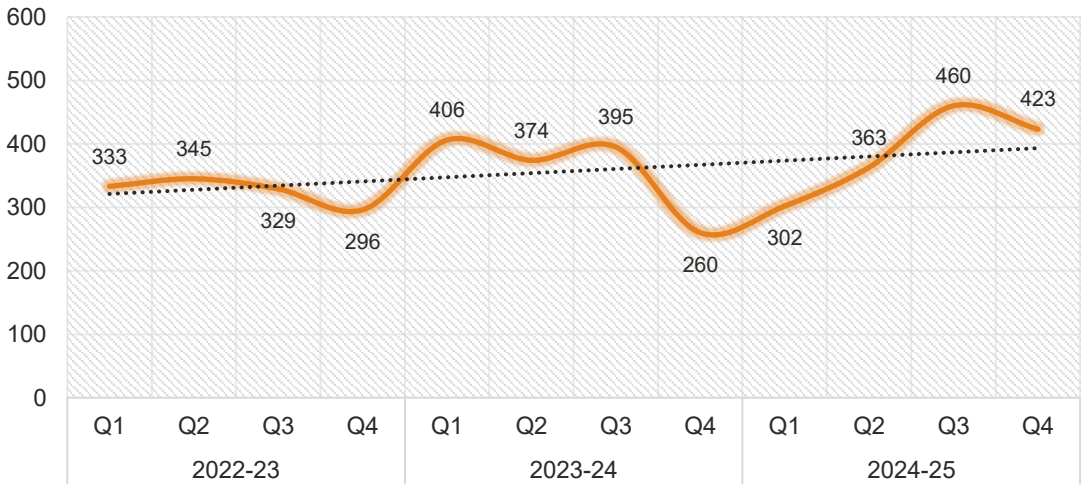
The number of cases received during the year is an increase of 18% compared to 2022/23 but an increase of 7% compared to 2023/24. Approximately 88% of cases were reports of lost or stray dogs with most cases categorised as "contained strays" (meaning dogs were found and held by members of the public).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

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

Complaints and Enquiries



Reports of Lost or Stray Dogs



Food Safety

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

Comments

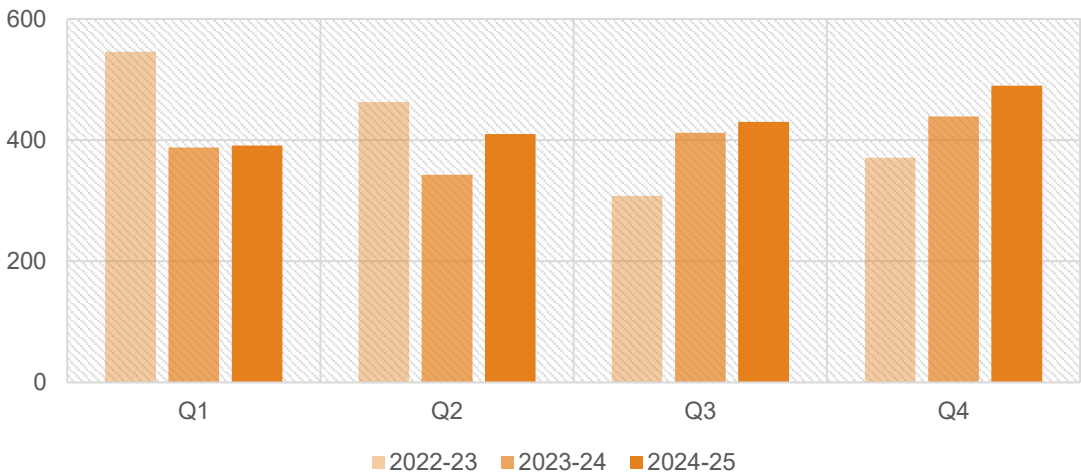
The number of cases received during the year is broadly comparable to 2022/23 but a reduction of 7% compared to 2023/24. The service tends to receive a greater number of enquiries (including requests for business advice) than complaints. Based on the complaints received during the year, however, 70%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

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

Complaints and Enquiries



FHRS Interventions



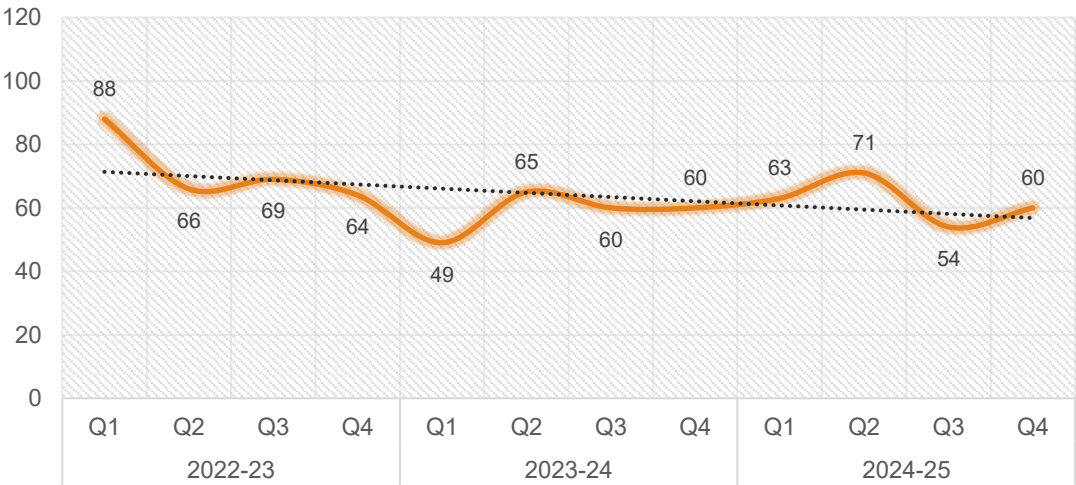
Health & Safety

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

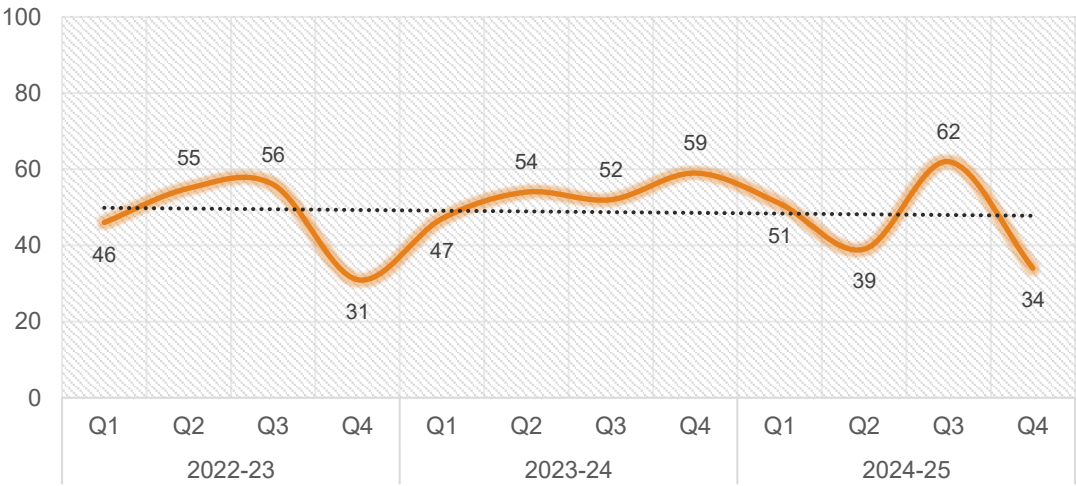
Comments

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

Complaints and Enquiries

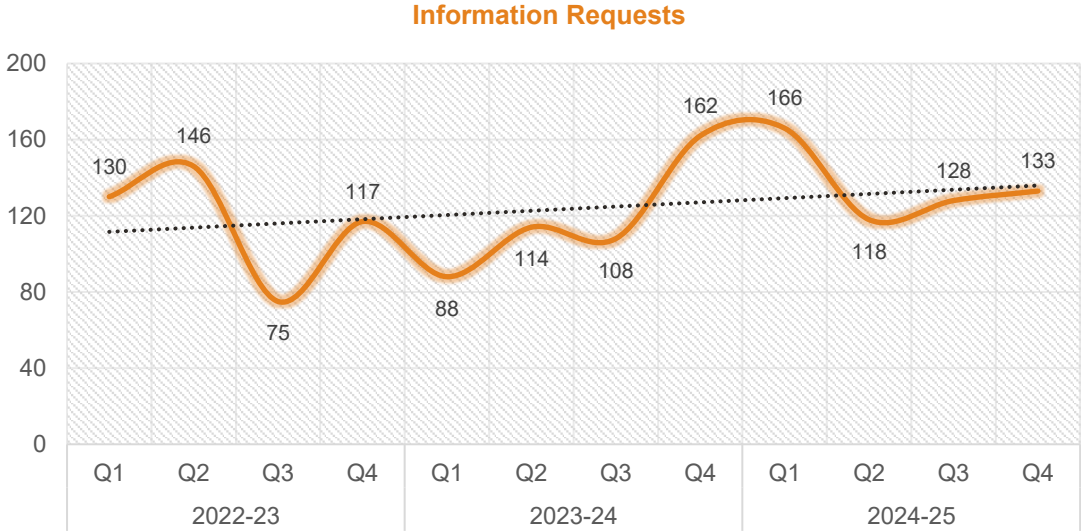


Accident Reports



Information Requests

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



Licensing

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

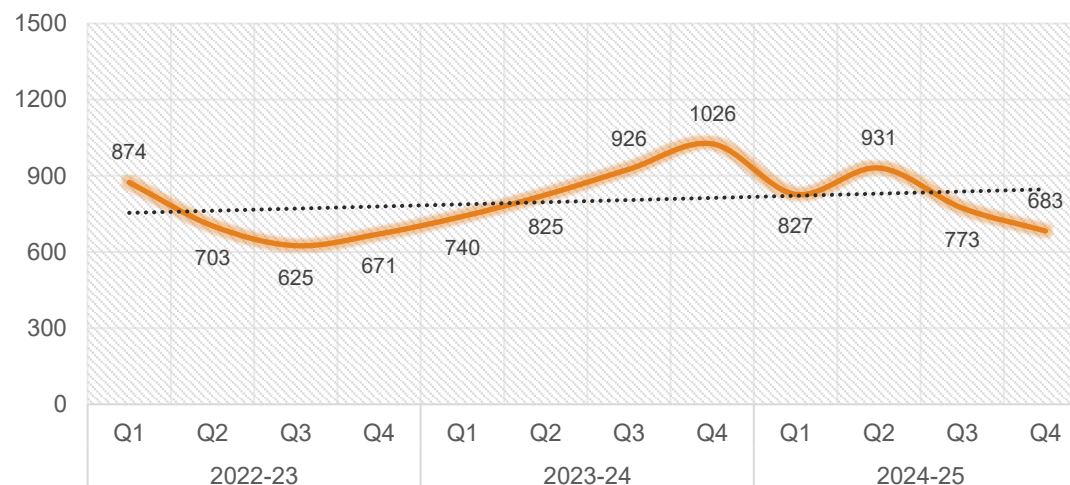
- Alcohol and Entertainment
- Animals
- Caravans
- Gambling
- Scrap Metal
- Sex Establishments
- Skin Piercing
- Street Trading, Amenities, and Collections
- Taxis

Comments

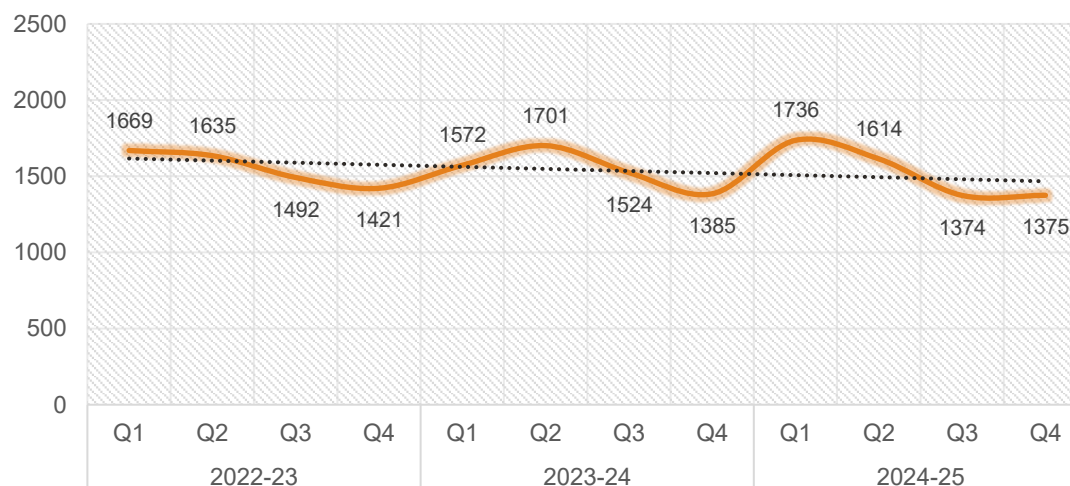
The number of cases received during the year is an increase of 3% compared to 2022/23 but a reduction of 4% compared to 2023/24. Approximately 65% of cases have been applications and registrations with 31% relating to private hire or hackney carriage vehicles and 24% relating to temporary events.

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

Complaints and Enquiries



Applications and Registrations



Planning

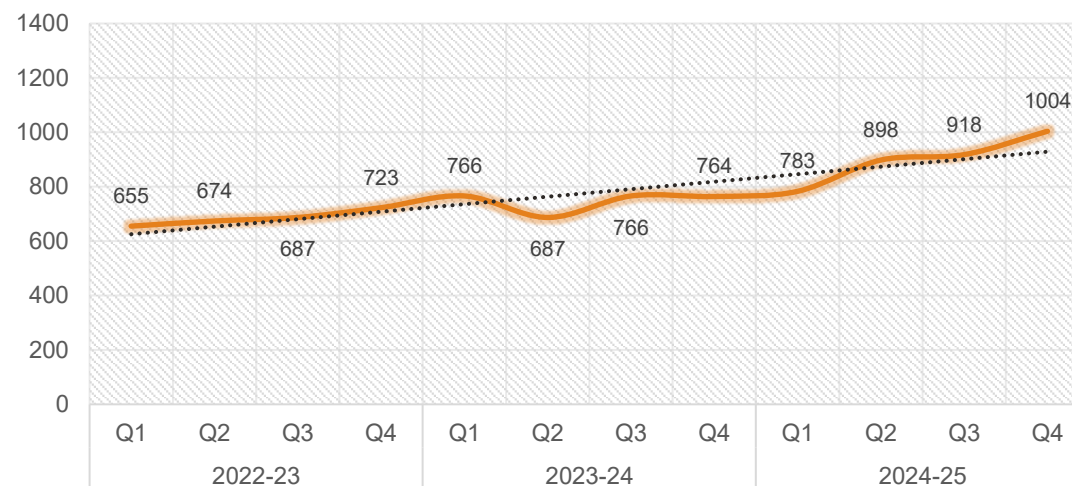
The data on this page outlines the number of planning enquiries received by the service. Planning enquiries processed by WRS are either consultations or requests to discharge planning conditions, however, enquiries only relate to the following areas:

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

Comments

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

Planning Enquiries



Planning Enforcement & Enviro-Crime

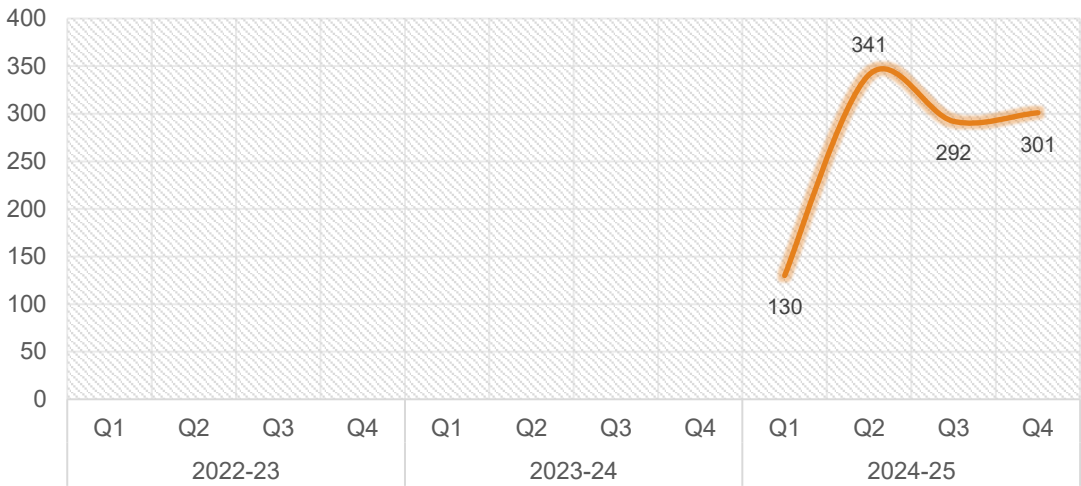
The data on this page shows the number of planning enforcement and environmental crime cases (complaints and enquiries) received by the service. Complaints handled by WRS include reports of fly-tipping, littering, and planning breaches at residential or commercial premises. The planning enforcement and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

Comments

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

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

Complaints and Enquiries



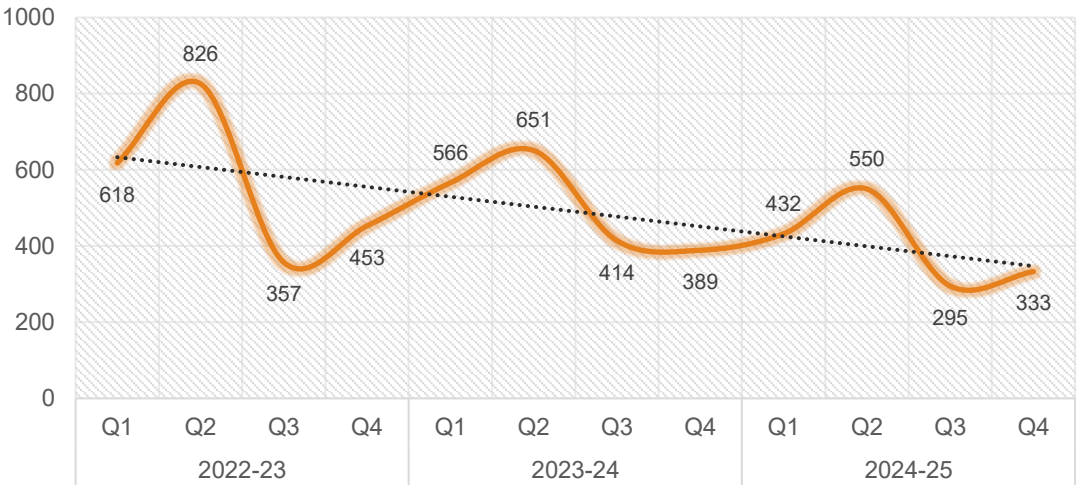
Pollution

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

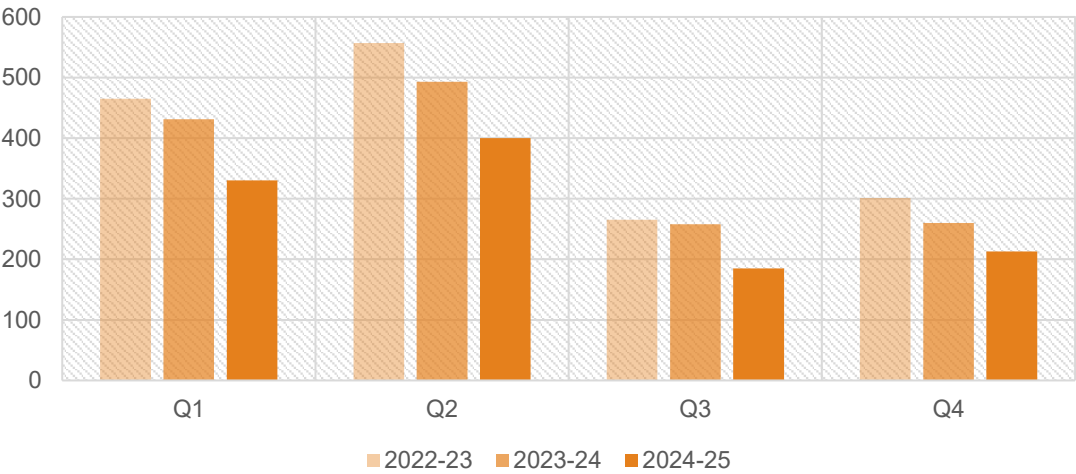
Comments

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

Complaints and Enquiries



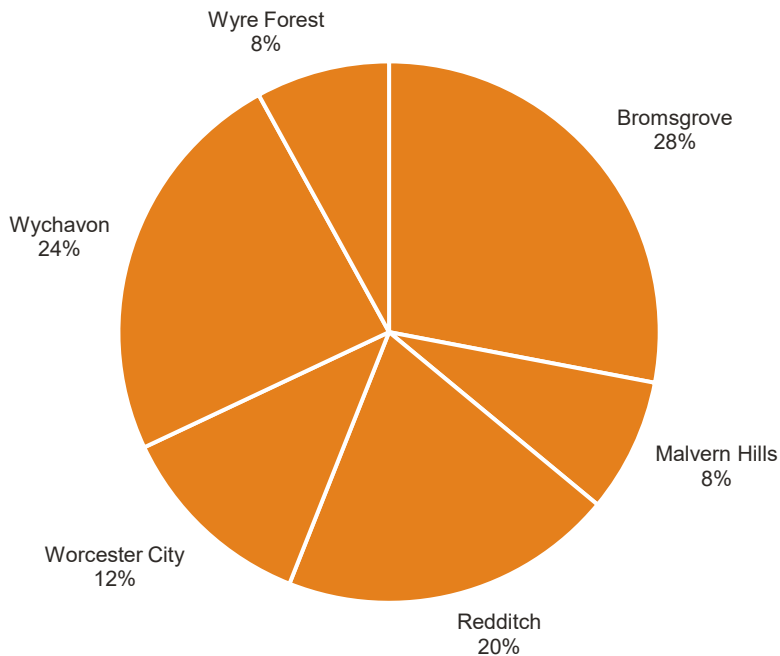
Complaints and Enquiries (Noise Only)



Noise

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

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



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

Public Health

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

Comments

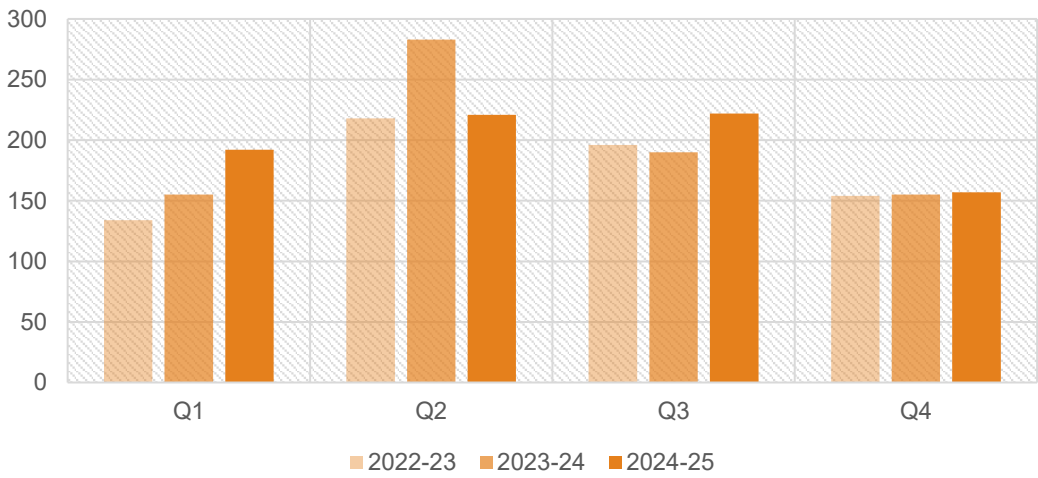
The number of cases received during the year is broadly comparable to 2022/23 but a reduction of 5% compared to 2023/24. Approximately 59% of cases related to pest control such as enquiries about domestic treatments, enquiries about sewer baiting, or complaints about pest activity caused by the actions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

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

Complaints and Enquiries



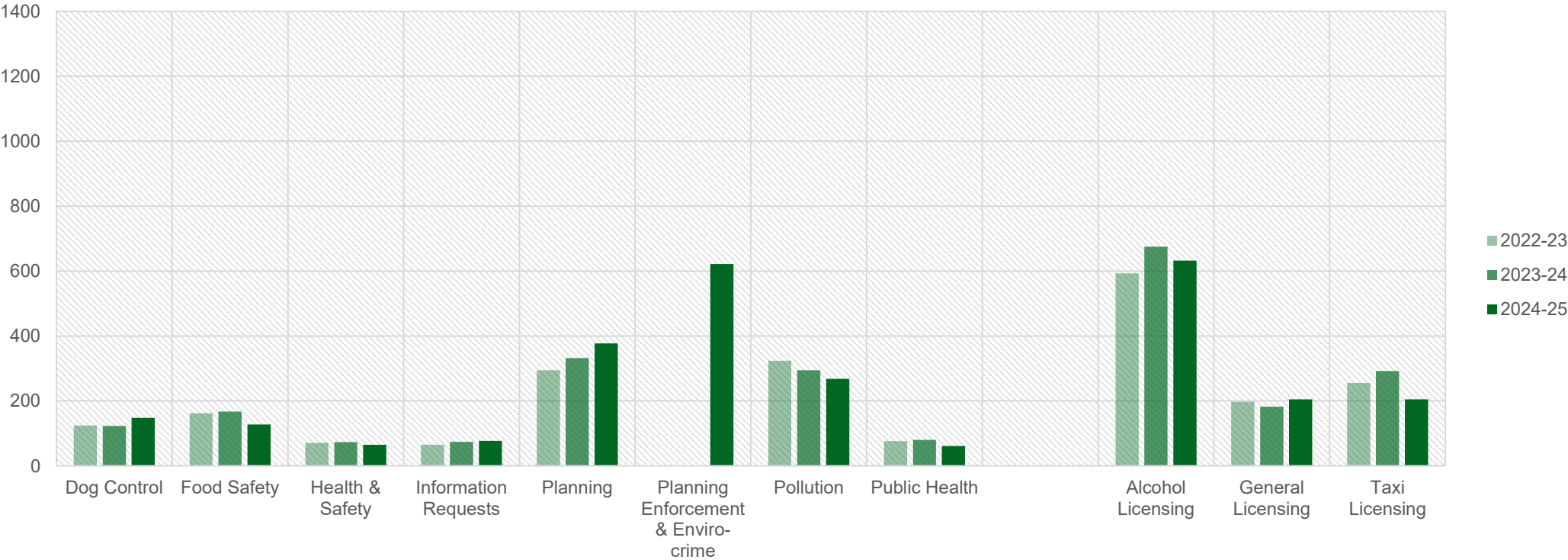
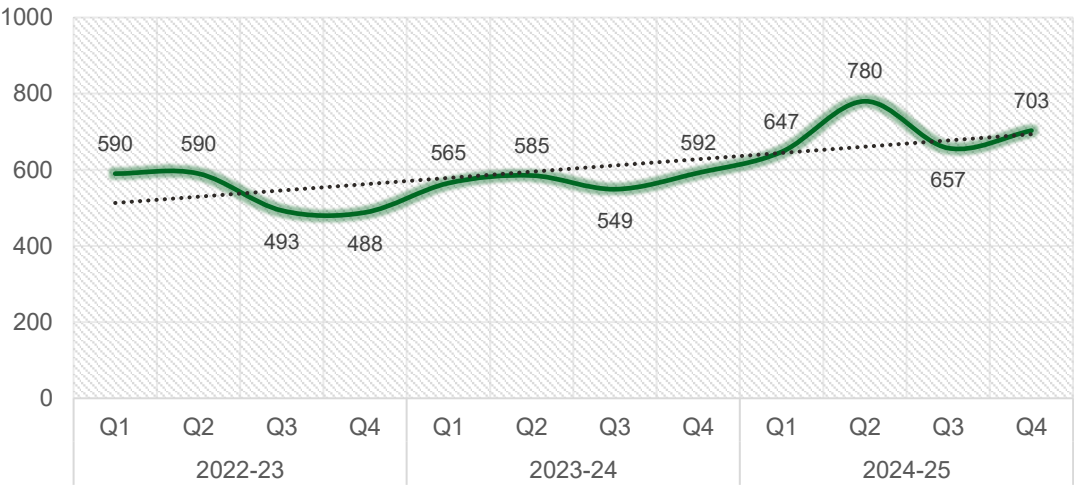
Domestic Subsidised Treatments



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

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

Bromsgrove District Council

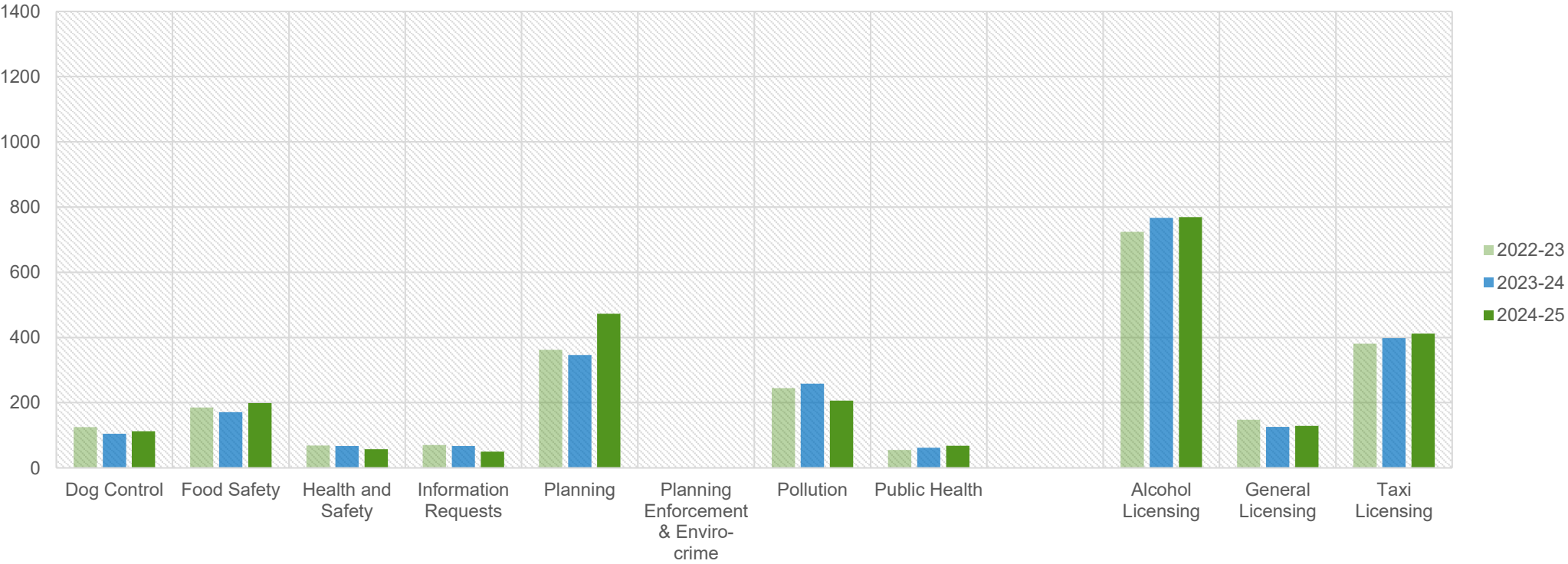
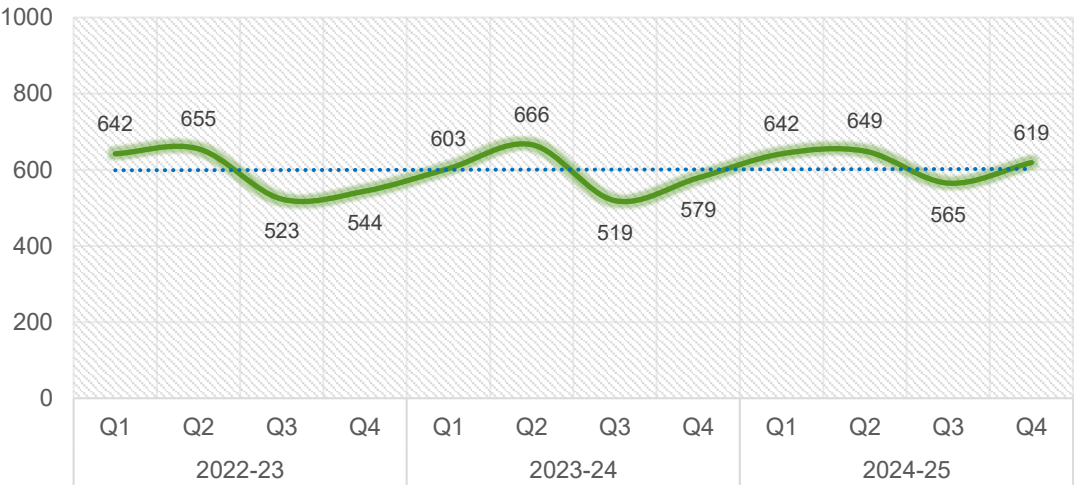


Malvern Hills

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

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

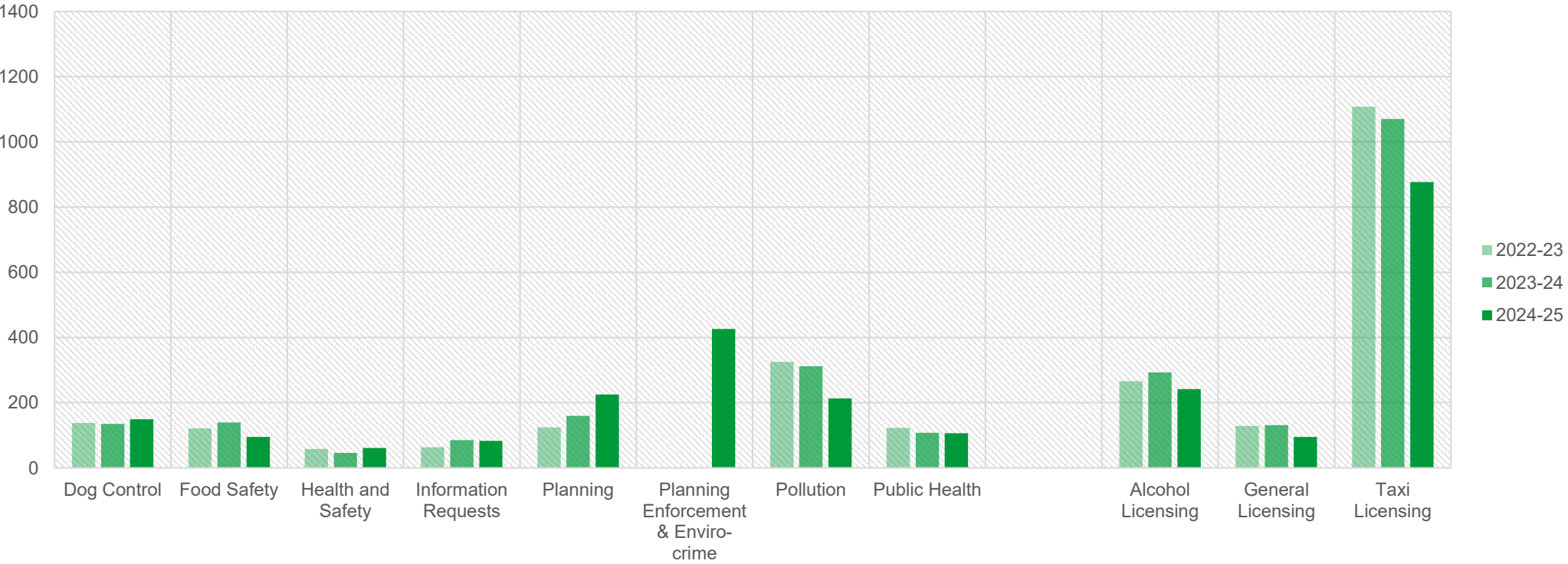
Malvern Hills District Council



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

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

Redditch Borough Council

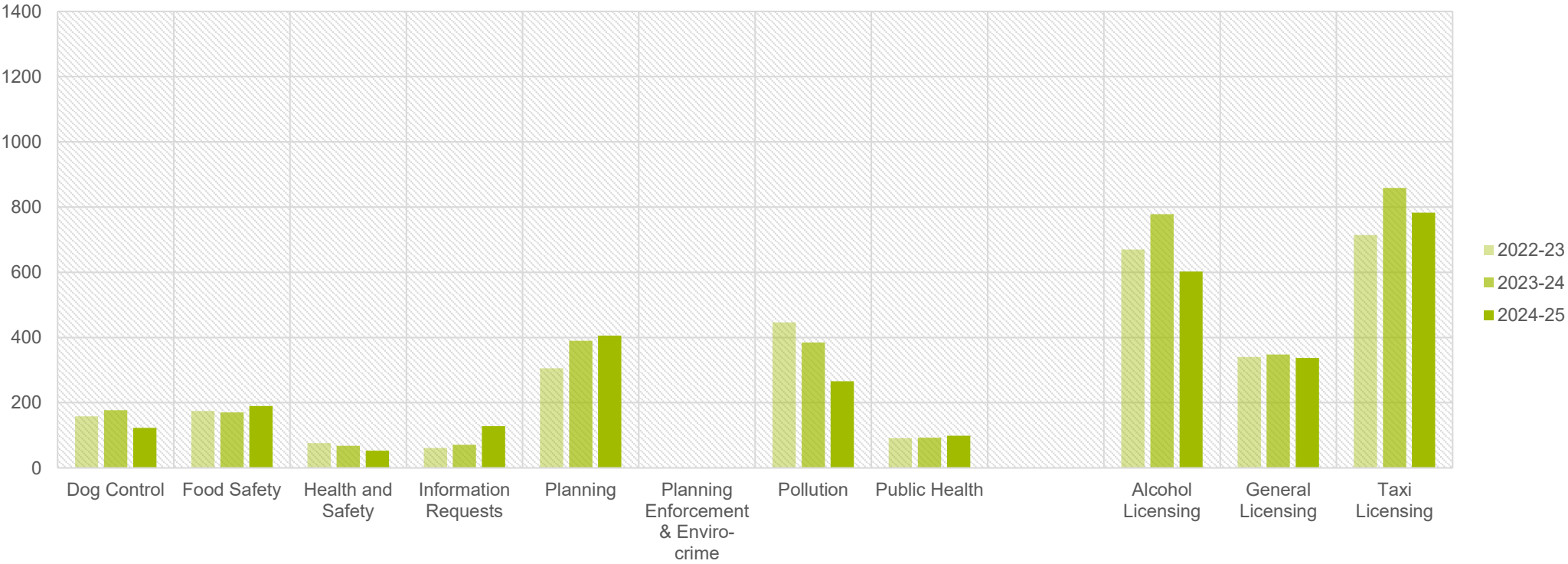


Worcester City

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

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

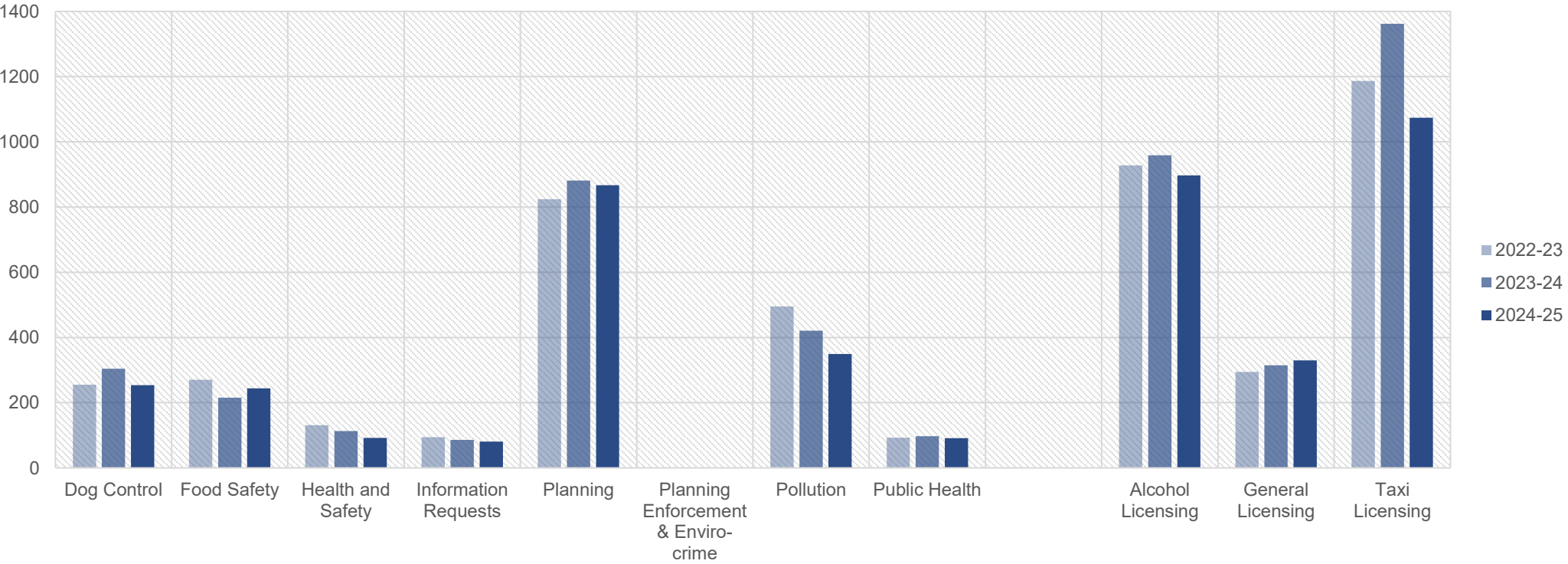
Worcester City Council



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

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

Wychavon District Council

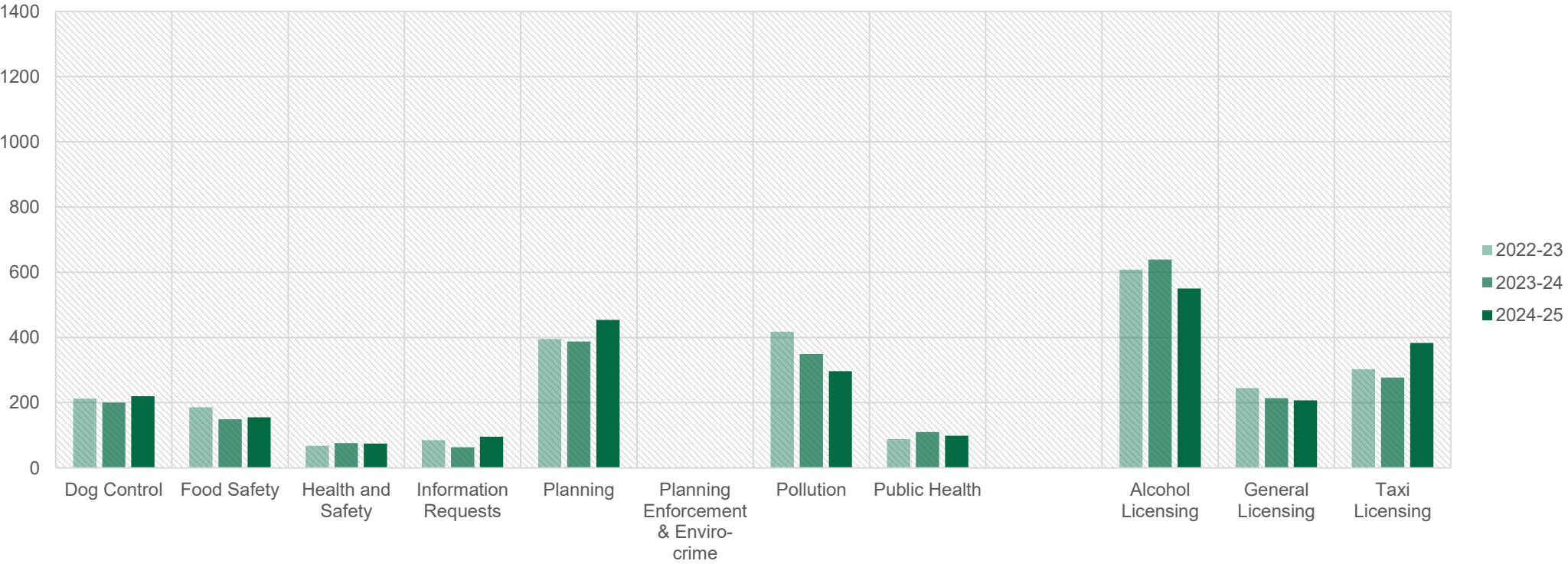


Wyre Forest

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

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

Wyre Forest District Council



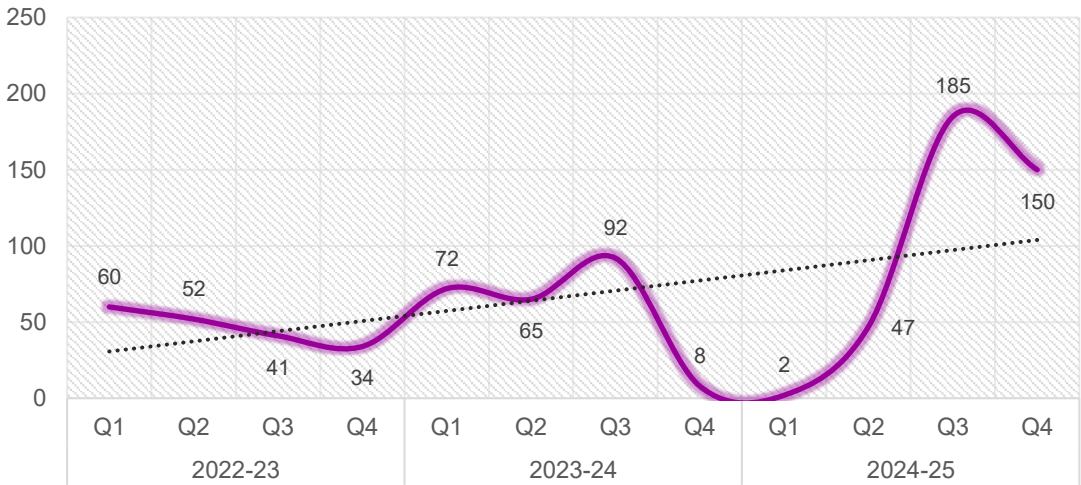
Birmingham City

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

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

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

Birmingham City Council



Cheltenham

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

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

Cheltenham Borough Council



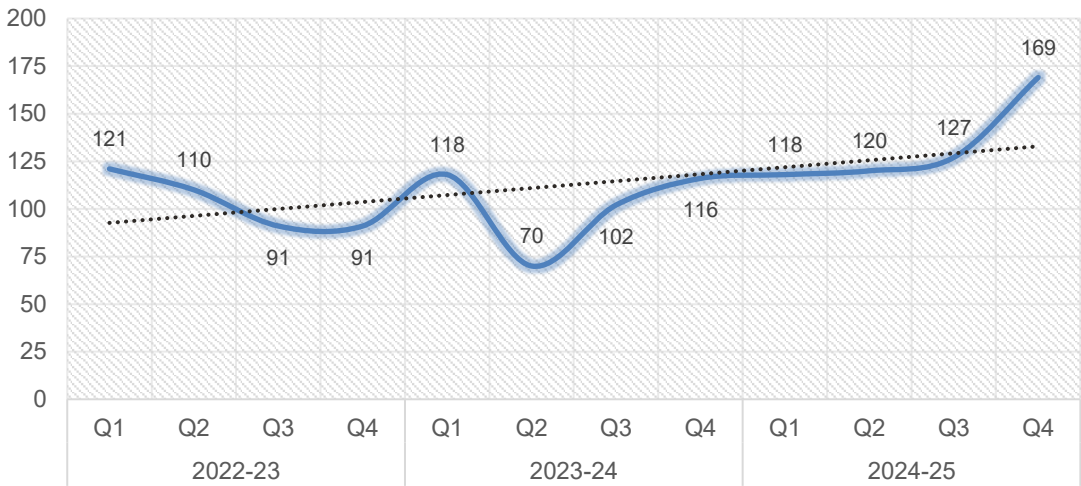
Gloucester City

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

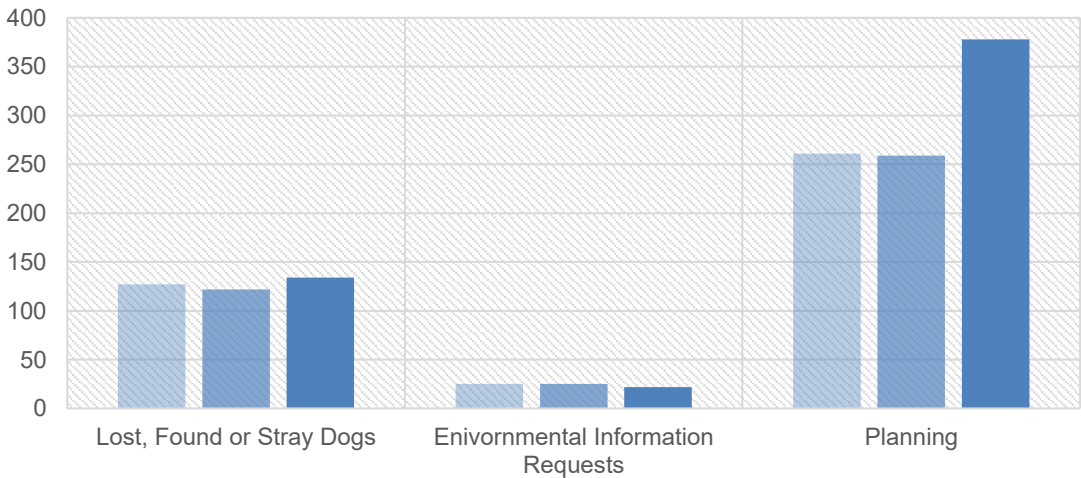
The dog control work undertaken for the authority is part of a contract with two other Gloucestershire authorities to deliver the collection, kennelling, returning of dogs to owners, and rehoming of stray dog functions. The contract was recently renewed and has been highly successful in reducing stray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

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

Gloucester City Council



2022-23 2023-24 2024-25



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

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

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

Tewkesbury Borough Council

