

ANNUAL REPORT

2020/21

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

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INTRODUCTION

This Annual Report has been produced for the Joint Board in accordance with clause 11.1 of Part 1 of the Worcestershire Shared Services Partnership Agreement. The report covers the progress and performance of Worcestershire Regulatory Services (WRS) for the period 1st April 2020 up to the 31st March 2021 and reports operational activity by the relevant service elements for the financial year. The report summarises key performance data for WRS and provides a summary of the financial position. The report also meets the requirement of the Regulators Code, which requires local authorities to publish a summary of their regulatory activities on an annual basis.

The year has been dominated by Covid 19. This has been the busiest year that all of our long standing staff have had to deal with. As members will see later in the report, not only has the service been directly engaged with the pandemic response, it has also taken on a number of other projects for the 7 Worcestershire Councils, contributing further to Covid control. Although there were some changes to what the service was required to deliver during 2020/21, much of what is often called “business as usual,” continued to be delivered. It is to the credit of the staff that they have continued to support the public with our normal activities, whilst others have been dedicated to pandemic controls. This has been achieved with a relatively small increase in staff numbers, so the teams have absorbed much of the pressure and carried on delivering. There was excellent work undertaken during 2020/21, with very good results across a range of service areas. WRS managers continued to work along the lines identified in the comprehensive 3-year Business Plan for the period 2020-23, adopted in February 2020.

Last year offered limited opportunities to develop new income streams, with most of our local government customers dealing with pandemic related issues. However, we have managed to retain the majority of our customers and will continue to look at where we can build on this. Work from other sources will also be a focus once the majority of pandemic activity is behind us. The service has previously looked more widely at contracts that we might have the skills to discharge perhaps outside of our role for the partners. There are restrictions in law on how far a local authority can go in its income generation activities before it needs to compete on a level playing field with other businesses through a vehicle such as a community interest company or a trust. At this point the service is well within the restrictions and can continue to build its portfolio of work areas.

As members will see, the service managed a significant underspend last year, but a proportion of this was down to spending that had to be deferred so there is a request to retain some of the carry-forward. Also areas like mileage claims were down due to lockdown, with travel being limited and officers having limited duties in work areas like food inspection.

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

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

Pandemic control activities are continuing into 2021/22 but we continue to support legitimate businesses and residents, particularly the vulnerable, where we are able and at the same time we tackle those who break the law, ignore best practice or adversely impact the environment. Central to this approach was and remains the availability of accurate data and intelligence sharing. Our intelligence unit coordinates and analyses intelligence obtained by WRS officers and external agencies, helping managers to target WRS resources more effectively and to forge links with other enforcement agencies and partners to share intelligence and target enforcement action. During 2020/21 we had several notes back from partners indicating that intelligence disseminated to them had supported operations in both Fire and Rescue and Policing. The continued management and co-location of the County Council's Trading Standards team alongside WRS helps to support this approach as well as providing an income stream to cover the cost of various support services that WRS provides to this team.

Simon Wilkes
Head of Regulatory Services

James Howse
Lead Financial Officer

KEY ACHIEVEMENTS FOR WRS IN 2020/21:

These are covered in a number of sections below:

PERFORMANCE

Our ability to report performance has improved throughout the years with the refinement of the IDOX UNiform management information system. The corresponding demand and activity data provided to Joint Board members has continued to provide a clear picture for them of the work being undertaken by WRS.

Our key performance measures continue to focus on customer satisfaction and the positive compliance of businesses. The pandemic has meant that proactive activities have been more limited this year, but we have targeted higher risk businesses when it was needed and the key priorities of each partner council within the regulatory arena have been fulfilled. Business and consumer satisfaction have remained high in spite of changes made in some areas to service delivery. Previous year's results appear in brackets in the relevant box providing a comparative view of performance over time.

	Measure	Figure	Commentary
1	% of service requests where resolution is achieved to non-business customers satisfaction	74% , (69.5%, 63.0%. 75.4%, 78.9%, 78.2%, 77.4%)	Based on an average score for 6 questions relating to the interaction of the service with non-business customers. 81% found their contact with WRS helpful, up from 78% last year. 90.4% found the information and advice provided easy to use, up from 84.4% last year. 68.3% felt that the length of time to resolve their problem was satisfactory (an improvement on last year,) and 76.3% (3% points less than last year,) felt that the speed of initial response from WRS was satisfactory. This last was not unexpected given the impact of the pandemic slowing our ability to respond to a number of cases. Generally, people appreciated the need for this and did not react negatively. Managers will continue to encourage staff to make decisions quickly in relation to the progress that can be made on service requests, and we will continue to look at how we can better manage public expectations around what is achievable with nuisance issues. Overall, given the pressures of last year, managers are happy with this result.

2	% of service requests where resolution is achieved to business customers satisfaction	98.4% , (97.4%, 97.2%, 97.7%, 97.1% 97.9%, 97%)	Based on an average score for 9 questions relating to the interaction of the service with business customers. Over 500 businesses replied to our questionnaires. Of those who responded, 98.5% (97.7% last year,) felt that their business had been treated fairly and 99.2% (98.5% last year,) of customers felt staff were polite in their dealings with them and informative. Some 99.2% (98.7% last year,) of customers found the information and advice we provided easy to understand and 98.2% (97.4% last year,) found their interaction with us helpful. 96.4% (95.9% last year,) were happy with the speed of our responses and, of those who made enquiries rather than being visited, 97.3% (96.5% last year,) were satisfied with the response. As you can imagine, as a regulator we cannot always tell businesses what they want to hear.
3	% Food businesses broadly compliant at first assessment/ inspection	<p>Bromsgrove 98.4% (97.1, 97.2, 98.7 99.1, 97.1,)</p> <p>Malvern Hills 98.6% (98.1, 97.2, 97.0, 97.7, 97,)</p> <p>Redditch 97.6% (95.6, 96.0, 96.7, 97.6, 95.1,)</p> <p>Worcester City 98.4% (97.5, 98.0, 98.0, 98.6, 98.2,)</p> <p>Wychavon 99.2% (98.0, 97.4, 97.8, 98, 99.1,)</p> <p>Wyre Forest 98.2% (98.1, 97.7, 97.2, 98.1, 96.6,)</p> <p>Worcestershire 98.5% (97.5, 97.3, 97.6, 98.2, 97.4,)</p>	For much of the year the Food Standards Agency had a moratorium on the normal food inspection programme. Therefore, the focus of visits represented by these figures only relates to premises visited due to a complaints or intelligence and new businesses seeking registration and a hygiene rating. Figures are not comparable with previous years' work because of this.
4	% of food businesses scoring 0,1 or 2 at 1 st April each year	<p>Bromsgrove 1.4% (2.9, 3.6, 1.3, 0.9, 2.9,)</p> <p>Malvern Hills 1.6% (1.9, 2.8, 3.0, 2.3, 3, 2.4)</p> <p>Redditch 2.4% (4.4, 5.1, 3.3, 2.4, 4.9,)</p> <p>Worcester City 1.6%</p>	Food premises scoring 2 or below on the Food Hygiene Rating System are deemed to be at risk of not producing safe food and are subject to further intervention until such time as they meet requirements or face formal action. As mentioned above, because of Covid and the suspension of the normal processes, these figures are not comparable with previous years.

		(2.5, 2.2, 2.0, 1.4, 1.8,) Wychavon 0.8% (2.0, 3.0, 2.2, 2, 0.8,) Wyre Forest 1.8% (1.9, 2.4, 2.8, 1.9, 3.4,) Worcestershire 1.5% (2.7, 2.7, 2.4, 2.4, 2.6,)	
5	% of drivers licence renewal applications issued within 5 working days of receipt of a complete application	96.9% (75.2, 91.4, 87.7)	This measure was introduced in 2017/18 and looks at how quickly driver licenses are renewed. This is one of the licensing processes where generally no additional paperwork is required before someone is re-licensed so generally this is one where the WRS team is in most control over timescales. This measure is much improved from last year. The taxi market has been impacted by the pandemic however renewal applications have been consistent with only a few drivers choosing not to renew. There have been some significant changes being made in house to ensure applications were still issued without face to face contact.
6	% of vehicles found to be defective whilst in service	6 = 0.39% Of 1514 vehicles on the road county-wide	As members will likely know, many of the Council garages were closed for much of the pandemic period and so vehicle tests could not take place. Many of the in-service failures are identified when vehicles are presented for one of their tests so it is hardly surprising that numbers are significantly down. We did no programmed enforcement due to Covid, so we hope to catch up on this work during 2021/22.
7	% of service requests where customer indicates they feel better equipped to deal with issues themselves in future	68.2% (58.1%, 59%, 72.5%, 73.8%, 76.8%, 74.2%)	This focuses on non-business customers. It is a specific question asked to members of the public in the questionnaire to test if the information and support provided to them by WRS is likely to help them deal with their own problems in the future. The measure is up on previous years but still lower than 3 years or more ago when the measure regularly exceeded 70%. Officers have noted increasing expectations of what can be achieved for customers so this has almost certainly influenced the figure over time.

8	Review of register of complaints and compliments	42 complaints (44, 27, 25, 31, 17, 24, 47, 70) 161 compliments (163, 128, 138, 103, 51, 57, 36, 24)	This is our longest running performance indicator in this format, hence the long list of previous year's figures. This year's figures are very close to last years. The biggest area for complaint this year related to not meeting people's expectations over nuisances. Often an issue does not reach the threshold for statutory nuisance and noise made by people that would constitute anti-social behaviour does not meet the threshold and is not a matter the service deals with.
9	Staff sickness absence at public sector average or better	1.9 days per FTE (4.4, 4.12, 12.45, 5.95, 2.3, 3.9, 7.7, 9.5)	This is clearly an exceptional year, with exceptional circumstances. Whilst the additional home working arrangements may have made it easier for people a little under the weather to work, given the additional work taken on over the period, this demonstrates the level of commitment from the team.
10	% of staff who are satisfied with working for WRS	93.5% 98%, 88%, (NB: Annual figures for 2017/18 and before, 80%, 85%, 77%, 82%)	50 of our 68 staff responded to the survey, the same as last year and still comparable with previous years except 2017/18 when a different process was used. Not all responded to all of the questions. This score is based on those who scored 5/10 or better for the question in the staff survey which asked, are you satisfied with working with WRS. Due to current time constraints we have yet to do more detailed analysis of broader staff comments but it is good to know that many are happy working for the service. 30/46 scored working for the service as 8/10 or better which is really pleasing given our expectations of performance.
11	% of licensed businesses subject to allegations of not upholding the 4 licensing objectives	Bromsgrove 5.4% (6.8% 8.7%, 6.73%, 3.8%, 7.9%) Malvern Hills 3.5% (5.7%, 4.8%, 4.94%, 3.6%, 3%,) Redditch 8.3% (8.5%, 7.1% 8.65%, 2.7%, 8.1%,) Worcester City 5.7% (8.8%, 8.1%, 8.19%, 5.8, 9.4%,) Wychavon 3.7% (4.2%, 4.0%, 4.97%, 4.0, 5.5%,)	Linked to the Crime & Disorder agenda and introduced following discussions with elected members, this measure is now in its sixth year. It still shows that generally premises across the County are well run and controlled by their operators. Comparing these figures with those over 6 years, the ones for 2016/17 still stand out as a blip in terms of improved performance and this year appears to be on the low average side, possibly because many premises have been closed for much of the year due to the pandemic. Many premises have, however been open

		<p>Wyre Forest 5.1% (8.5%, 7.0%, 8.29%, 5.8, 9.4%,)</p> <p>Worcestershire 5.0% (6.8%, 6.4%, 6.78%, 4.4%, 6.9%,)</p>	<p>for takeaway and of course at times for wider operations under Covid restrictions.</p> <p>Complaints about premises generally relate to minor issues, mainly to do with noise. Many pubs are trying to diversify, offering music and other entertainment, which is within their license conditions, but sometimes this is not welcomed by some living nearby.</p>
12	Rate of noise complaint per 1000 head of population	<p>Bromsgrove 2.56 (1.96, 2.7, 2.82, 3.0, 2.7, 3.1)</p> <p>Malvern Hills 2.45 (2.07, 2.2, 2.39, 3.0, 2.3, 3.9)</p> <p>Redditch 3.67 (2.97, 3.2, 3.61, 4.1, 3.7, 3.5)</p> <p>Worcester City 3.10 (2.78, 3.2, 3.13, 4.2, 4.0, 2.9)</p> <p>Wychavon 2.08 (2.01, 2.1, 2.46, 2.7, 2.6, 2.5)</p> <p>Wyre Forest 2.71 (2.37, 2.6, 3.23, 3.4, 3.0, 3.0)</p> <p>Worcestershire 2.74 (2.35, 2.7, 2.93, 3.4, 3.1, 3.8)</p>	<p>Looking at the figures in this part of the table, this unusual year appears to have been average to slightly above for nuisance complaints. We have said at several points in the year that noise complaints did increase, possibly because people were less aware of their environments during the day as they'd normally be away at work. It still suggests that overall the environment for Worcestershire residents is good.</p> <p>1,635 noise complaints were investigated during 2020/21, 252 more than the previous year, with 1,140 or 69%, related to noise from domestic properties.</p>
13	Total Income	<p>13.42%</p> <p>Note: £405,00 as a % of previous budget of £3.017M</p> <p>Using the current budget the figure yielded is 12.67%</p>	<p>This excludes any income for Covid related activities so it retains comparability with previous years. Slightly down on last year as many of our regular customers asked for no service during the initial period of lockdown but business picked up after this and we managed to retain the majority of customers and a significant income stream. Once out of the pandemic response, we will be able to focus more on this aspect again.</p>
14	Cost of regulatory services per head of population.	<p>Based on outrun cost of £3.049M against the current ONS population estimate of 601,113 the service cost is:</p> <p>£5.07 per head</p>	<p>This is the amount spent by the partners following the off-setting of cost with income, then divided by the most recent mid-year estimate offered on the County Council's website. It is difficult to benchmark this figure as WRS functions are not all of those reported in the relevant part of the RO return to the MHCLG.</p>

PERFORMANCE MANAGEMENT

Strong management of performance is vital for the success of this service, ensuring that customers are satisfied and partners are reassured by the cost effective delivery of the service on their behalf. Whilst everyone must accept responsibility for managing performance, the WRS management team is committed to driving performance forward so that a high standard of service delivery can be maintained.

Management team meetings are used to review performance against the service plan and to highlight any issues of concern. Principal Officers (first line managers) attend these wider management meetings to ensure a two-way flow of information between management and staff. This has been supplemented throughout the pandemic with a weekly informal meeting of the Head of Service and Team Managers to ensure everything is kept under review. Teams have their own detailed plans that sit below the service plan signed off by Joint Board. Progress against this is monitored by Team Managers and Principal Officers.

The Management team also looks to the strategic direction of the service and ensures that the operational and financial resources available to partners are used in the most efficient manner to achieve both their individual strategic aims together with WRS priorities.

Continued refinement of our IT platform ensures our ability to report to Joint Board on our performance measures and that this remains accurate. The Uniform system operates well across all functions but there will be a need in the next few years to re-procure our main back-office system. The service also subscribes to the national IDB intelligence database, enabling it to share intelligence with other local authorities in the region and nationally so that common issues and individuals can be identified and work to deal with them co-ordinated. MHCLG is looking to encourage the broader use of the system, especially at district council level.

There are a wide range of bodies to which the service must report data (e.g. Food Standards Agency, Department of the Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, Health and Safety Executive, Department for Business, Innovation and Skills, Gambling Commission etc.). All statutory reports are submitted so as to ensure that WRS continues to meet its partner's statutory obligations. It was hoped that the central bodies would accept a single data return for all partners but it now appears that all Departments with the exception of the Health and Safety Executive continue to require individual returns for each partner. WRS provides these as necessary.

A short summary of activity data is included at Appendix 5 to avoid duplication with the wider and more detailed set of activity data that is provided in the final Activity Data Report for 2020/21, which members will receive at the same meeting where this Annual Report is presented.

Internal Audits

There were no internal audits during 2020/21 due to the pandemic. At least one, looking at some elements of licensing will take place during 2021/22.

SERVICE DELIVERY HIGHLIGHTS

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

Community Environmental Health Team

Nuisance

The various lockdowns throughout the year have resulted in a number of spikes in demand for the service. A significant increase in specific types of complaints have been noted, namely those relating to domestic noise, smoke nuisance and of course, alleged breaches of the COVID-19 Business Restriction Regulations. We believe the former two may be attributed to the fact that people were at home and being annoyed by things that they wouldn't normally encounter as they would be at work during the day. We re-configured officer roles in the service to meet Covid and statutory responsibilities whilst delivering on council service priorities and operated agile and flexible arrangements in moving people around in response to the significant and differing demands we experienced in what was a quickly changing regulatory environment.

Lockdown also appears to have led to reduced tolerance of some unavoidable noise sources such as construction site noise, even where this is taking place during normal daytime working hours. Telling people that such work needs to continue in spite of the fact they are trying to work at home has not been easy.

The easing of lockdown restrictions then led to a spike in complaints about noise from licensed premises. However, this had been anticipated by the service and many complaints were dealt with on the basis that some degree of extra noise was inevitable from premises having to carry on their operations almost entirely outdoors.

An appeal against an abatement notice relating to noise from a large distribution centre was lodged against one of the partners, however eventually the company accepted there was a problem, withdrew their appeal and worked with us to ensure that the actions necessary would abate the nuisance. This proved successful and the affected residents were very pleased with the significant reduction in noise levels. It is sad that company did not respond as positively in the first instance.

Two prosecution files were submitted in relation to noise from barking dogs. The first case resulted in fines and costs of £764. The second case is going to trial, with the next hearing due in October 2021.

A number of notices have been served during the period in relation to issues as diverse as noise nuisance, accumulations of waste, pest problems, light nuisance and inadequate drainage systems. We are continuing to work with a business in Wychavon to assist them with complying with an abatement notice relating to noise from an automated car wash. Numerous complaints were received relating to light nuisance from upgraded lighting at a major supermarket in Malvern Hills and following our intervention, the supermarket agreed to revise the lighting to the satisfaction of the affected residents.

Food Hygiene

Following the Covid pandemic the Food Standards Agency suspended all routine food inspection work in Q1 other than a requirement to monitor high risk premises, (e.g. non-compliant premises rated FHRS Levels 0-2), dealing with any new Approved Premises and responding to complaints. However, we continued an ongoing dialogue with businesses, particularly those posing the highest risk and new registrations, conducting Covid-safe visits where there appeared to be a problem.

There have also been fewer food complaints as pubs and restaurants remained closed. We continued to try and re-rate businesses under the Food Hygiene Rating Scheme wherever possible and appropriate, for example where they had completed structural works, or introduced food safety management systems to address a low rating or those who needed an initial rating having recently opened. To assist in this, we piloted novel methods of working such as virtual visits by video call to be followed up with physical visits when permitted.

We continued to receive new Food Premises Registrations and under the restricted circumstances assessed risk by sending a questionnaire to all new businesses to help us identify type of food being produced. This system also enabled us to maintain contact with our very low risk businesses and we continue to receive a good response. In many cases we have been able to give a business a hygiene rating from the information provided, in others we will verify information by phone or a Covid-safe visit. We have carried out remote inspections of some premises but the demand on resources from Covid work has limited some activities.

Food officers also spent time working with NeoKare Nutrition (Redditch,) a new food factory producing processed human baby milk. The company, who have a factory in India, were recommended to the county by the FSA/DIT. It is the first private business of this type to operate in the UK and has been a learning curve for all parties. Their long-term plan is to export their products throughout Europe.

In Q4 the food programme, which had been virtually suspended since 2020 by the Food Standards Agency, gradually began to take a new shape to cope with the backlog of premises due visits, both existing and new. We added two new contractors during this period who have been able to make a small but not inconsiderable contribution to what is one of our main statutory functions. During this period, officers in the CEH team were also involved in inspecting FHRS 0-2 premises. Regrettably, many of these premises had not improved, some had deteriorated with Hygiene Improvement Notices having to be served and two requiring the submission of case files for the consideration of prosecution identified. We also piloted a remote inspection platform with a view to using this to review selected Level 5 businesses as part of the catch-up programme during 2021.

The Principal Officer who leads on Food Safety was also involved in supporting the Worcestershire LEP-driven “Make It Worcestershire” (MIW) recovery programme for the hospitality industry. MIW is essentially a promotional platform created by a partnership of the WLEP, the County and District Councils, the HWCC and WRS.

WRS also put in a successful bid for some support funding from BEIS and made a presentation to an LGA webinar.

Floods 2020/21

Once again, the Team responded to severe flooding in the County. We contacted all affected food businesses providing pre-opening advice and support and followed up with visits to ensure that good hygiene conditions were met before they re-opened. This included swabbing to check that food preparation surfaces were safe to use. We also provided advice and support to help the affected communities.

Brexit

Despite lockdown restrictions we continued to provide an Export Certificate service without extended delays which enabled our major exporters to trade as normal. Our Food Lead also became heavily involved in Brexit preparations for food businesses, attending various webinars and having to deal with a constantly changing landscape of information.

There was a significant increase in requests for Export Certificates and we were able to work with several businesses to resolve some major export issues which presented themselves.

Local Outbreak Response Team

In Q1 we began to engage with the local outbreak management process that provided the key mechanism for controlling the spread of Covid 19. The focus was outbreaks at those workplace settings where our Health and Safety at Work role is relevant. However, we were able required to contribute well beyond this remit and became involved in outbreaks at schools, care homes and the larger high-risk businesses enforced by HSE due to our expertise in communicable disease control.

Worcestershire's Local Outbreak Response Team (LORT) was established on 1 July 2020, when the Outbreak Control Plan was published. It comprises Public Health Practitioners operating under the direction of the Director of Public Health with a unit of WRS Environmental Health Officers. A team of four EHPs and part of the time of a Principal Officer was embedded into the County system to deal with any incoming demand as a priority workstream.

We continued to build on the local outbreak management process, developing our outbreak investigation and back-tracing response where WRS expertise in communicable disease control and health and safety at work proved invaluable.

The arrangement was immediately called into action when the team was asked to support Herefordshire Public Health in in their investigation into a major farm outbreak on the county border, where over 100 Covid cases were identified in overseas workers. The lessons learned from the Herefordshire incident were soon put to the test with two outbreaks in Worcestershire, the first at a food packaging firm which distributes vegetables and salad products and the second at a large food manufacturer.

In September officers were involved in providing advice and guidance to a public house in Welland where two members of staff and a member of the public were found to be infected. This generated social media interest and this contrasting small business outbreak demonstrates that Covid can affect any workplace setting. Hence

investigations were supplemented by an ongoing WRS programme of providing targeted business advice and support countywide, particularly in respect of the hospitality sector, to help ensure Covid safe workplaces and businesses.

In early December, we sent out information to all our registered 'wet bars' advising them of Covid controls required and how they needed to comply with food law now they were required to offer a 'substantial meal' with alcohol service. As the Board will be aware, many struggled to comply with this requirement leading to much negative publicity.

At the start of Q4, the CEH officers embedded in the Public Health LORT team were at full stretch dealing with Covid outbreaks in businesses large and small. During the period, the agreement with HSE that we could deal with Covid measures at premises enforced by them continued to work well, enabling WRS officers to give Covid advice which might not have been otherwise available at short notice.

Various projects were run to provide business support including advisory visits to commercial and industrial estates combined with letter drops providing updated advice and contact information. In general, most businesses had implemented good control measures and it was obvious that most of the infections had been picked up in the community. The exception was some small offices which decided on a full return to work for their employees only to find themselves having to close when most staff went down with Covid.

The LORT team was instrumental in detailed backwards contact tracing of Covid cases to try and trace common sources of infection and our Principal Officer in the LORT spent considerable time working with the Three Counties Showground on re-planning a safe events programme for the first half of 2021 and also working with Worcester Racecourse on its recovery programme after a year in which it was not only flooded twice but also remained closed due to pandemic.

Covid-related enforcement work

In addition to our regular Public Health related work, the Covid-19 pandemic saw the team responding to significant additional responsibilities.

The first phase of response from the Community Environmental Health Team was to make proactive checks that businesses were required to be closed. Officers were tasked to undertake patrols to check that businesses were closed and over 2,000 visits were made countywide. Compliance was generally high, though Prohibition Notices had to be served in respect of 14 premises. Officers adopted an Engage/Educate/Encourage/Enforce approach to implementing the Business Restriction Regulations, supported by targeted patrols, intelligence-led investigations and the excellent relationships forged through close liaison with the local Policing Teams.

The team responded to over 500 service requests in Q1, providing support and advice to businesses, investigating reports of businesses trading despite restrictions, or trading in a manner that breached restrictions. This task was particularly onerous as the rules and regulations were subject to regular change at extremely short notice, requiring a high level of professionalism from Officers in keeping abreast of the changes in legislation and applying them practically in assisting businesses to comply.

Projects were undertaken relating to the takeaway sector, the control of legionella, garden centres, outdoor markets and golf courses to support business compliance with the Covid regulations. Monitoring visits were also made to warehouses and certain HSE enforced premises by agreement.

In Q2 the team dealt with over 900 Covid-related service requests and incidents across the County between 1 July 2020 and 30 September 2020 inclusive. Officers continued to interpret the ever-changing legislation and guidance in order to support businesses to operate in a COVID secure manner. Advice was well received and the business sectors affected by closure or significant adaptations to their operating models in the vast majority of cases acted positively and appropriately to achieve compliance. Where businesses failed to comply with the legislation, officers have issued prohibition notices. Challenges from traders and their solicitors have been forthcoming but in each case the service has maintained a robust position to protect the public health.

Q4 saw the implementation of Operation Corona Fries, which targeted takeaway food premises with poor food hygiene standards (FHRS 0-2) and were considered likely to employ poor COVID-19 controls. An intelligence product recognised this correlation by using data provided by the COVID Advisors. 13 businesses were inspected for both food hygiene and COVID controls. Rather surprisingly, COVID controls were found to have been satisfactorily implemented but, of the 13 businesses inspected, 6 maintained their poor FHRS rating indicating no improvement on prior performance, 6 had their FHRS score reduced, and one improved slightly from a FHRS core of 2 to 3, which indicates the business is broadly compliant. Work with these businesses is ongoing to secure compliance.

Working in partnership with the business community

The Team has also been working closely with Economic Development and Town Centre management teams to support the delivery of grant funding to those eligible for either Council or Government financial support packages, assist in recovery plans for city centre and town centre businesses and provide advice and support for businesses in respect of safe working practices and government guidance. We have also made regular contributions to the County Covid Business Support Group and County Recovery Groups.

Primary Authority relationships

Work continued on Primary Authority arrangements as businesses have felt the pressure of the pandemic and needed more support than ever to ensure that changing regulations were being implemented correctly. Managers have been working closely with OPSS (The Office of Product and Public Safety) to ensure that any changes have been communicated to our portfolio of Primary Authority Partnerships. All our food Primary Authorities have survived the pandemic although most have been inactive for the past year apart from Aspens whose main contracts are in schools.

In December we welcomed two new Primary Authority businesses –Alimenti (Malvern) a small food consultancy and Mindful Chef (Redditch) a web based healthy meals provider who have trebled their business in the past year.

Health & Safety at Work

Two lengthy and complex investigations resulted in successful prosecutions. These involved serious injuries sustained at a workplace and a fatality in connection with leisure activities. An investigation into a serious accident at a hotel in Droitwich was concluded by the company accepting a Simple Caution. This is an admission of guilt which is placed on record and may be considered by a Court in the event of any future contraventions.

Serious Crime

The team has been a significant contributor to the joint operations which have arisen from the work of the Serious Organised Crime Focus Groups across the County including joint operations at takeaways and restaurants, barbers' shops and nail bars.

Safety at Sportsgrounds

This year saw the team taking on safety at sportsgrounds work on behalf of the County Council and regulated premises across the County have been contacted with guidance regarding the controlling of crowds in relation to COVID security.

Worcestershire Works Well

The county's wellbeing at work scheme also restarted activity with a new set of standards and a contracted management scheme led by the Chamber of Commerce. WRS continues to have a role on the Steering Group and provides four representatives to support businesses already part of and new to the scheme.

Technical Services Team

Environmental Permitting

With many businesses closed or with modified operating procedures during most of last year, the permitting inspections had to be flexible. We worked with the businesses we permit to ensure they received the appropriate level of support. We were lucky that none of the businesses went bankrupt and all were subject to a light touch 'inspection' where their operation represents a low risk and for those with higher levels of risk on-site inspections were undertaken. We are fortunate that generally we have good compliance levels in Worcestershire, however we are mindful that we often receive intelligence around non-compliance through visiting customers (mainly competitors not applying for permits where they are required). Despite our exposure to such information was much reduced last year we are working with a couple of businesses where permits are required to be applied for and a couple where breaches of existing permits require further engagement with the business.

Local Air Quality Management

Frustratingly during a period where there was significant change to traffic and therefore traffic related pollution our local air quality monitoring was disrupted by the closure of the laboratory used for analysis of the diffusion tubes during lockdown in March 2020. In that period, we took the opportunity to switch laboratories and was able to recommence monitoring in July 2020 providing an opportunity to annualise the data that can be used in reporting. Given that the annualised data result omitted

the March – June period with most significant traffic reduction it is interesting to note that despite this, during 2020 the nitrogen dioxide levels in our areas of greatest concern were roughly 19% down on the previous year. As you would expect this is not considered a representative year for air quality monitoring, reporting and action planning. A lack of traffic during the past year has also meant it has not been possible to investigate the 'normal' pattern of traffic contribution to pollution and similarly drafting of plans to tackle this has not been possible.

Planning support on technical issues

As many of our Planning Officer colleagues will testify, planning applications and discharge of condition requests have continued at a pace. Significant volumes of consultations have been received for us to assist. Most relate to contaminated land (70%) with smaller numbers for nuisance and air quality.

Dog Warden Service

The number of straying dogs was significantly down last year, likely due to the number of people working from home or on furlough who were able to be around for their pets. Following contractor difficulties early in the year, the low numbers of dogs and restrictions on hospitality and travel helped, as the dog wardens agreed to provide out of hours cover on a rota basis so that service standards could be maintained. We were successful in retendering at the end of the year and now have a contractor able to deliver the service across all Districts WRS provide the service for.

Subsidised Pest Control & Worcester City Gull Control

With the exception of Bromsgrove, the levels of spend by the District Councils that offer a subsidised pest control service have decreased significantly this year, consistent with the trend over the previous few years. In Bromsgrove there was a small increase. Sewer baiting on behalf of Severn Trent Water was completed in all six District Council areas within budget.

The COVID restrictions did not impact on pest control service delivery which permitted access for technicians into residential properties. However, for gull control there was a significant impact because a large number of the premises where access is required to treat gull nests, are commercial. Whilst licence applications to treat the nests were successful (a legal requirement) some could not be implemented where a business was closed or could not permit access to our technicians. Nonetheless there were some particularly successful elements of the work that was completed, including nest and egg removal in Britannia Square with hawk flying to disrupt attempts by the gulls to re-nest. A full assessment of the work was presented at Environment Committee in October 2020. In preparation for this year's breeding season liaison with Natural England commenced early and agreement was reached to pave the way for an Organisational Licence to be set up as a pilot for Worcester City to undertake egg and nest removal without the requirement to submit licence applications for each roof to be treated during the 2021 breeding season.

Other work:

Petroleum Licensing

This is a function we deliver for the County Council. Inspections have continued for our petroleum storage premises and there are a number of sites currently undergoing renovations. We have been engaged with a number of operators about the possibility of integrating Electric-Vehicle recharging on their sites. Issues arise due to compliance with the electricity standards and explosive environments of the garage sites but we continue to liaise with the industry.

Covid Advisor delivery

In November 2020 approval was given to WRS setting up a combined Worcestershire COVID Advisor team. Initially funded from a Defra COVID Compliance and Enforcement Grant for four months, we were able to get COVID Advisors in post from the end of November. The team of 20 COVID Advisors were increased to 27 by allocation of funds to specifically provided additional support in Worcester City, Redditch and Bromsgrove Council areas. The WRS COVID Advisor business case set out a procedure to determine deployment of COVID Advisors to provide guidance to businesses and encourage appropriate behaviour by the public. They were supported by a smaller enforcement team focusing tackling businesses identified as failing to comply with the restrictions. WRS deployed COVID Advisors based on a number of priorities following reviews of PHE infection rate data, LORT (Local Outbreak Response Team) feedback on employment setting outbreaks, concerns raised by Incident Management Teams, reports of compliance concerns, Police reports of COVID related issues or others (such as youth congregations) and requests for assistance from partners (for example assisting schools that struggled to maintain social distancing amongst parents at school gates).

COVID advisors maintained records of their engagements and any issues identified. The number of interactions with the public and businesses increased month on month as the economy was reopened and more of the public returned to the high street and recreational areas. The issues identified have shifted during each stage of the pandemic but have largely been around appropriate controls and risk assessment elements (staff wearing face coverings, pinch points, queue management and signage) in businesses and appropriate conduct by the public (face coverings in shopping centres, social distancing at school gates and recreational areas).

It has been very difficult to measure the success of the Advisors. However, given that on average one thousand members of the public were engaged with on a weekly basis and between 500 and a thousand businesses are supported in some way, there will have been benefits from the reminders and extra care taken as a result.

Lost to Follow-up Contact Tracing

From December 2020 WRS have also assisted Public Health with local contact tracing. When National NHS contact tracers have been unable to contact someone within 2 days of a positive test, the 'case' is referred to WRS to make additional attempts at contact. The purpose was to ensure the case is self-isolating and to obtain contact details for those who they have been in contact with and are likely to require to self-isolate as well. Working with our District Council colleagues in Worcester City, Bromsgrove and Redditch (mainly) we have been able to bring about an enhanced rate of success to the contact tracing with 10% more cases completed than the national set up. This will have assisted with infection control.

Licensing

The Licensing team have continued with business as usual activity throughout the pandemic ensuring the trade can continue to work where they have been able to and supporting the application process. Both Licensing and Community Environmental Health have worked closely on Covid Enforcement priorities with licensing officers supporting where necessary.

The pandemic forced our hand to move many processes to remote measures either by phone, email or video call. These have continued where appropriate alongside the introduction of licensing appointments at each district to ensure a licensing presence. We have also worked closely with District Communication teams to ensure communication with the sector is current and timely to enhance the customer journey and this has been well received by all licence holders. The Team now look forward to implementing the new legislative guidance set by the Department for Transport on Taxi Standards and carrying out more enforcement activity across the districts.

Hackney Carriage and Private Hire

Covid has restricted much policy work during the year, however the long-awaited introduction of the Statutory Taxi and Private Hire Vehicles Standards has started working through policy development and committee stages, with all six districts now proposing to go out to consultation on a draft policy to be introduced during 2022. The Statutory Standards published on 21st July 2020 set-out a range of robust measures to protect taxi and private hire vehicle passengers, particularly those most vulnerable. Government advice is that licensing authorities must work together to ensure that, above all else, the taxi and private hire vehicle services the public use are safe. The Licensing team will continue to work on the implementation of these standards in 2021/22. The team are aware of the importance of these standards and will work to ensure the correct procurement of services are administered across all districts.

New service elements and ways of working

Electric Vehicles

A number of districts have now approached us to look at a planned approach for the introduction of electric vehicles as part of their wider council carbon neutral agenda and we will continue to look at the best approach for their fleet of vehicles taking into account the make-up of their current fleet and the age criteria policy of each council.

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

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

Pavement Licenses

In response to the coronavirus pandemic, the Business and Planning Act 2020 ("the 2020 Act") made temporary provision for a fast-track process to allow businesses selling food or drink to obtain authorisation from the local authority for the placement of furniture such as tables and chairs on highway adjacent to their premises also known as a pavement licence. This was a new temporary licensing regime that the team constructed together working collaboratively with all six districts to ensure a new end to end process was in place with all payment engines integrated before the implementation date of July 2020.

Alcohol, Entertainment and Gambling

Unlike previous years the applications in this area of licensing remained low due to the hospitality and night time economy sector being hit hard by the Covid pandemic. There was a small surge towards the end of the year due to some restrictions being lifted on 12th April in line with the Prime Ministers 'Roadmap' out of lockdown. The team have worked with businesses to provide support where appropriate, but it has been a quiet year.

In Q4 due to the easing of some restrictions and relaxation of 'off sales' as part of the Business Planning Act 2020 (temporarily modify the Licensing Act 2003) the team were proactive in looking at suspended licenses to ensure sales were not taking place where licenses have been suspended. Some of this work was jointly done with trading standards colleagues.

Animal Licenses

WRS are well represented in this area of work as we sit on both the Licensing and Animal Welfare Group and the Canine, Feline Sector Group. Both of which have strong links with DEFRA and policy change. Unfortunately, this sector again was hit hard during the pandemic with more people working from home and choosing not to go away many businesses struggled. WRS introduced a deferral process for renewal applications early in the year to give business owners some respite whilst they were in financial difficulty. The team also communicated with businesses throughout the pandemic to ensure we could offer advice and support where we could.

As with other local authorities across the country WRS have noticed an increase in illegal puppy breeding, nuisance issues and the high prices that are being charged for the sale of puppies throughout various points during lockdown. In response to this the team started an intelligence operation to capture this information and act where appropriate. The operation has been extended to the end of May 2021 but the team have already noted a number of repeat offenders after initial analysis. The team will work closely with Trading Standards colleagues where there is a suggestion that illegal importation is linked to activities.

There have been a number of consultations that WRS have contributed to which may lead to further work for us in the next financial year. In December 2020, the government announced an 8-week public consultation on the trade of primates as pets in the UK, with an aim of banning the sale, trade, breeding and keeping of any primate as a pet. Currently, 85 species of primate can be kept in the UK without any legislation and can be bought kept and sold as easily as a goldfish or budgie. The second consultation also in December 2020 was the legal requirement to micro-chip cats and once again this had an 8-week consultation process.

FINANCIAL MANAGEMENT

Budget 2020/21

Quarterly financial monitoring reports are provided to managers and finances are regularly considered by officers from the partners ahead of each Joint Board meeting. Bromsgrove DC operates a robust ordering and authorisation process to ensure the transparency and accuracy of costing. Good management of costs, income generation and the management of vacancies led the service being some £147,990 underspent at the end of the year. Some of this was due to income generation, however, some expenditure was also limited, hence the request to carry forward a proportion of the underspend. The lead-in time for replacement dog warden vans was too long to bring it in ahead of year end. A proportion of the DBS checks for taxi drivers were deferred due to Covid restrictions and them being allowed to defer renewal. Both of these will need to be done during 2021-22. We were also unable to recruit sufficient capacity of agency staff to some roles, which meant our existing capacity had to absorb the pressure. A large underspend on stray dog related contracts also made a significant contribution with the service dealing with significantly fewer stray on behalf of the six councils.

The draft outrun budget for 2020/21 is included as Appendix 3, along with the proposed budget for 2021/22 onwards at Appendix 4. The outrun position is subject to final audit, although the budget has now reduced so far that this is no longer a statutory requirement for specific audit of the WRS accounts. Hence, this will be done as part of the overall audit of Bromsgrove District Council's accounts.

Until 2020/21, the operating assumption was a cash standstill budget, with increasing income targets set to balance the budget each year. For that year, partners agreed an uplift to cover the 2.75% salary increase and also a significant uplift in pension forward funding. Members recognised that the income generation progress could not deliver the increase expected, especially in the current climate with financial uncertainty and the Covid pandemic. Officers have committed to reviewing accommodation needs during 2021/22 to allow the resolution of future charges for the physical hosting of the service at Wyre Forest House. Should it be necessary, the service's reserve may help partners to buffer some financial impacts should the financial model for the service become difficult to achieve, whilst determining the way forward for the delivery of these functions should the local authority financial situation become significantly worse in the future.

WORKFORCE PLANNNING AND HUMAN RESOURCES MANAGEMENT

The WRS structure has now been in place since October 2015 with Simon Wilkes as the Head of Service with a team of four Managers looking after different areas of the service. David Mellors as Environmental Health and Trading Standards Manager covering all of the responsibilities of his Community Environmental Health team, (Food Safety, Health and Safety and Statutory Nuisance, with some other minor areas) and the Trading Standards remit (Weights and Measures, Food and Agricultural Standards, Product Safety, Fair Trading, Animal Health) on a contractual basis since the County's departure from the partnership in 2016. Mark Cox continues to head up the Technical Services Team covering Technical Pollution (managing Planning, IPPC, Contaminated Land, Air Quality), Dog Wardens, Pest Control, Information Management & Database administration and more recently the first contact team of Duty Officers. Kiran Lahel has now been appointed permanently to the role of

Licensing and Support Services Team Manager. This leaves her substantive post of Business and Relationship Manager vacant and we will decide how best to use this during 2021/22. One of the things that has emerged from the pandemic response is how limited our management capacity is and we have struggled at times to service all of the necessary management commitments.

Staff turnover remains low, although occasionally a member of staff will decide to move onto pastures new. This has allowed us to recruit new but experienced staff from either other backgrounds to suit our income generation work or from other local authorities. All of the newcomers have added value to what is being delivered. At the 1st April 2021, the total permanent staff establishment was around 68 FTE, although some of this capacity is on fixed term contract. It was also supplemented during the year with additional agency staff and others to deliver Covid related activities such as the Covid Advisor project.

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

Staff Survey

50 of our 68 staff responded to the survey, the same number as last year. This is comparable with previous years except 2017/18 when a different process was used. This score (93.5%,) is based on those who scored 5/10 or better for the question in the staff survey which asked, are you satisfied with working with WRS. Due to current time constraints we have yet to do more detailed analysis of broader staff comments but it is good to know that many are happy working for the service. 30/50 scored working for the service as 8/10 or better which is really pleasing given our expectations of performance.

Some issues with IT during the pandemic have been flagged but this is mainly down to the need to change to remote meetings and the use of platforms like Teams, which have been rolled out without the usual preparation and the ability of the networks to deal with the volume of data traffic. This has been a common experience for everyone working in local government during the pandemic so no criticism is intended of our IT host. They have responded incredibly well in the circumstances as have many small in-house teams.

Staff Sickness

During 2020/21 staff sickness reached 1.9 days per FTE. We assume that more home working will have meant staff were more likely to work if they were feeling under the weather or work through minor ailments as the commute was not a barrier. It also demonstrates the strong commitment of the team to ensuring issues were addressed in spite of the pandemic. Whilst an aging service is likely to have a slightly higher rate of sickness due to natural causes, managers will continue to work to maintain the figures in the normal range of 3-6 days.

ACCOMMODATION

WRS remains located at Wyre Forest House, Finepoint Way, Kidderminster. The contract was renewed during 2020 but concerns were expressed at the increase in charges, which Wyre Forest removed on the understanding that fees for the coming years would be agreed ahead of 2022/23. The use of flexible and mobile working is generally now the norm, and has been expanded further during the pandemic. Staff frequently using home as their start and finish point for work in the field and some officers have now been enabled to work at home.

Office based activity provides a benefit to team performance, identity and morale so, once the pandemic has run its course, field officers will likely return to their normal flexible pattern of coming into the office a few days per week to liaise with managers and colleagues or for meetings, and on the other days they work flexibly, usually with home as the start and finish point. The touch down points retained in each of the councils have provided an excellent venue for licensing appointments and these have been welcomed by the taxi trade in particular. Where possible we have offered face to face licensing engagement during the pandemic but this has been on an appointment only basis not as a drop in surgery pre pandemic. This is something that we are likely to continue as it provides a useful balance between availability for the trade and efficiency of service delivery. Taxi drivers/ operators can be told what they will need over the telephone, ensuring that their face to face time can be used more effectively to ensure complete applications are made and that paperwork has been completed correctly.

These work patterns enable staff to strike a better work/life balance which is essential for good morale, whilst maintaining the team ethos, having an organisation with which the staff identify and belong to, and also giving the opportunity to share ideas and issues with other team members. In spite of what those who evangelise about the benefits of virtual contact say, it does not build the kinds of trusting, working relationships necessary for the work that we do, so whilst we will be making more use of systems like Teams, it will not wholly replace face to face interaction between staff members. However, as part of the review of hosting costs, the service will review desk allocations to see if it can reduce its footprint in Wyre Forest House.

BUSINESS TRANSFORMATION (SERVICE DELIVERY)

The further training provided to both managerial and operational staff on the components of an intelligence model, the process of developing raw information into finished intelligence (the intelligence cycle) and how to use intelligence during decision making processes has been at the heart of our response to the pandemic, and delivering both enforcement and Covid Advisor capacity to the places where it can do the most good. Weekly reviews of the full intelligence picture using WRS data, Public Health and Public Health England data, intelligence from the Police and other sources was used to direct and task our operational capacity to the parts of the county where it had the potential to have the most impact. That's whether it related to helping businesses with queues, persuading parents to keep apart whilst waiting at the school gates or our enforcement of business restrictions. The pandemic response has helped us to see how we can better deploy the intelligence model as a business tool with our normal work and at least one operation looking at food businesses with low food hygiene rating scores has led to positive outcomes.

We have talked in previous annual reports about how we have been developing the Intelligence Operating Model as an approach for our services but the work during the pandemic has probably helped that to mature more quickly. The key will be seeing it routinely contributing in our "business as usual" operations. Whilst WRS has

traditionally undertaken strategic tasking in the form of business planning, the tasking and coordination process was not routinely employed at a tactical level until more recently. Each operational team now has a tactical tasking group that convenes to review on-going enforcement activity, consider proposals for new 'project based' work and assess the level of available resource. This ensures a range of factors are considered during decision making processes including the level of risk, our priorities and available intelligence. This change of thinking is of critical importance as the service places a greater emphasis on taking 'evidence based decisions' and continues towards an intelligence led approach. In addition to tasking, a service wide tactical assessment is now produced on a six monthly basis and statistical bulletins on a quarterly basis. We will continue to commission products including 'problem profiles' like previous ones on food hygiene standards, noise pollution and dog welfare so that we have the best possible understanding of the issues we face.

RISK MANAGEMENT

WRS recognises that the development of policy, delivery of service priorities and the management of its services for six partners attract risk. In reviewing its service risks and the effects of management strategies and policies WRS seeks to:

- Identify, assess and manage risk
- Safeguard the services assets and equipment
- Focus on the delivery of its service to its customers

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

The risk register at Appendix 2 includes some consideration of Covid related risks, although many of the generic risks cover the impacts because responding to pandemic influenza had already helped to inform some of the risks identified. We have seen that many of the elements of our response have served us well during the pandemic. Having mobile and flexible working patterns already embedded in the service has meant that officers have experienced an increased flexibility in work patterns as opposed to the major upheaval to those usually present in the office 5-days per week. Even those whose roles would normally require them to adopt the more usual office based work pattern have been enabled as flexible workers and many have found this helpful.

However, these work patterns do create their own risks around feelings of isolation, lack of team identity and loss of belonging to the organisation and basic things like risk of muscular-skeletal injury because people spend long hours working at desks that are not ideal. So, whilst the service will make more use of virtual meetings, they will not fully replace face to face interaction, nor will they lead to the abandonment of a physical location for the service. As part of the review of hosting costs however, the service will look at its footprint in Wyre Forest House to see if it can be reduced.

As was mentioned earlier, the Food Standards Agency has provided an indication of what it is likely to expect in the coming months as a return to normal business with food business regulation. Many areas of work have had to continue but in a Covid secure way. We went through a period of restricting our interventions in people's homes in relation to nuisance issues until we have devised safe ways that limited the risk of our officers or even our equipment carrying the virus into people's homes. These controls will likely need to remain in place for some time while the virus continues to circulate in the population. This may mean we have to respond less slowly to some complaints as we will continue to allow time between deployments so that cleaned down equipment can be quarantined for a time before its next deployment. Likewise, other areas of work like food inspection will need to be delivered in a Covid-secure manner with the correct PPE and controls in place. The staff, as front line workers are advised to do lateral flow tests regularly to monitor their own health.

EQUALITY & DIVERSITY

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

THE NEXT STEPS

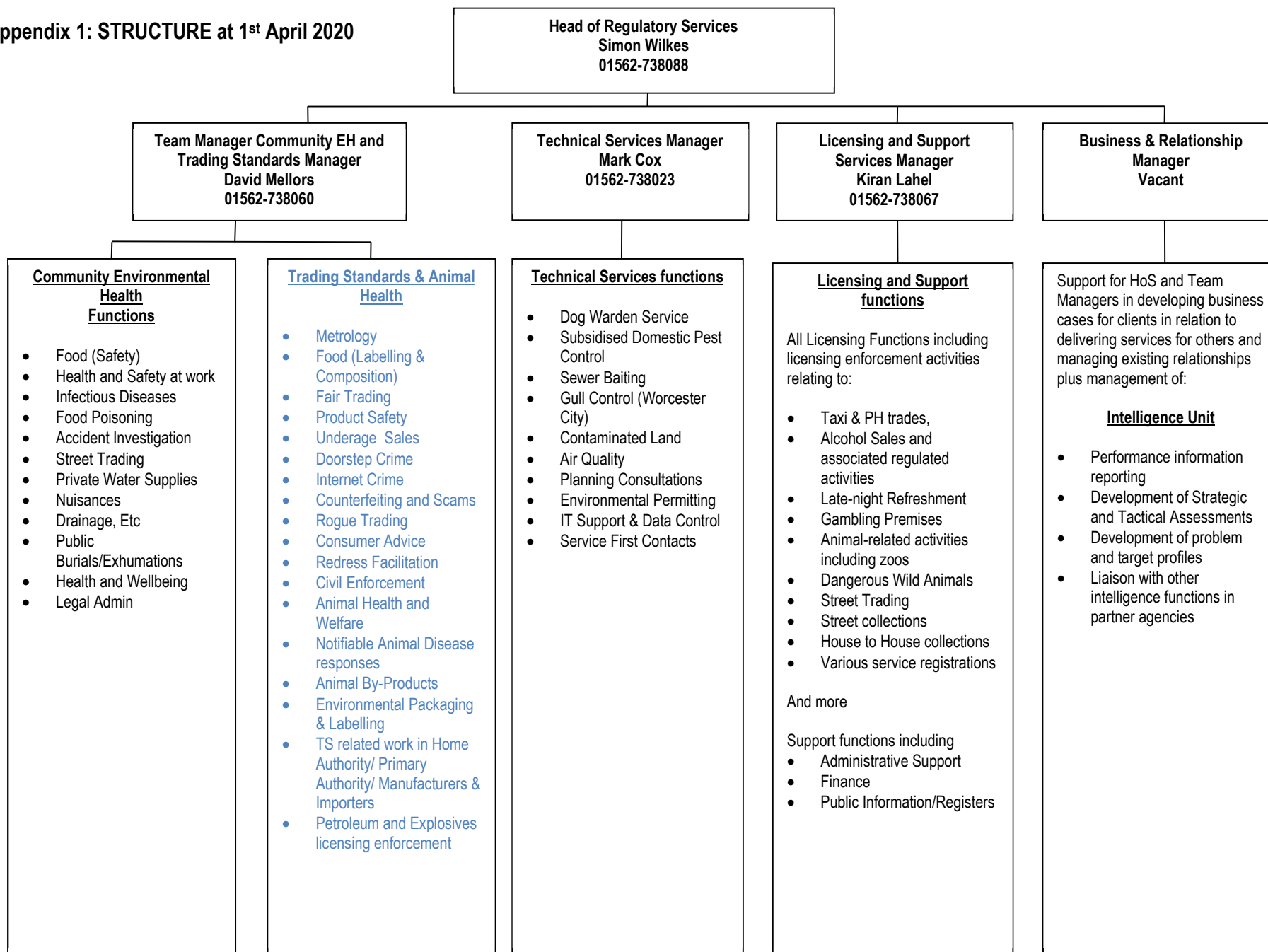
Without the challenges of Covid 19, this would be a look forward at how we move on into the new financial year and what the headline areas for work are. We would be talking about key areas for activity and development being:

- Continued delivery of the WRS Business Plan and our annual operational service plans
- Maintaining existing income streams and looking at other ways of generating income for the service,
- Following our philosophy of continuous improvement, continuing to review operations to improve marginal efficiencies,
- Continuing the process of channel shift by increasing the customer's ability to use self-help, do transactions on-line and monitor progress of work.
- Continue to work closely with County Council Trading Standards colleagues and other partner agencies by maintaining links that help to support both WRS and other services to the benefit of local people.
- Continue to engage with partners to see if any other services could sit well on the WRS platform.

All of these things will feature, however, we know from last year the Covid 19 is a huge drain on resources and, even as we hopefully come out of the pandemic, there will continue to be a need to staff Covid related interventions. We will continue to work alongside Public Health colleagues in the Track, Trace and Test regime, dealing with local outbreaks arising in a wide range of businesses and other premises, potentially including schools.

The Food Standards Agency has provided us with a draft of their proposed approach to re-starting and catching up with work that has been missed. An 18-month programme of interventions starting in October 2021 will need to be delivered, ensuring that the vast majority of food businesses receive a physical visit during that period. This is ahead of a new approach to food hygiene being introduced from 1st April 2023. Making a good start on this in the last 6-months of 2021/22 will be important. Of course, none of our usual work has gone away and nuisances, health and safety breaches, licensing offences and all of the very technical matters we deal with have to be addressed. There is never a quiet time in the world of regulation and the service will be doing its best to cover all that is required.

Appendix 1: STRUCTURE at 1st April 2020



Appendix 2 – WRS Risk Register

Risk Description	Consequences	When is this likely to happen	Current Position			Control measures
			Likelihood	Impact	Matrix RAG Status	
Loss of Data through IT failures	Disruption to Service Provision. Inability to produce records and data.	On-going	Low	High	Green	Wyre Forest ICT has effective processes and business continuity plans in place. WFDC upgraded relevant systems including Windows. The service is in the process of moving to Office 365 during 2021/22, which will provide better access to a range of provisions including Microsoft Teams and Power BI
Issues with the WRS database system	Impact on work planning. Self-help may not enable savings required	On-going	Low	High	Green	The contract has been retendered and awarded through the CCS framework for a two-year term with a view to moving to a cloud based system via a tendering process at that point. This will begin to be investigated next year.
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	Green	The pandemic has shown that we were well prepared for the need to maximise working from home and now all staff, including some previously regarded as office based can now do this. Touchdown stations remain available in partner council locations. Working from WFDC new depot was not required in 2020 because of the other steps taken. Managers can look at whether a further reduction in space occupied is feasible once the end of pandemic controls is reached.
Maintain our capacity to achieve service delivery	Disruption to service e.g. Major staff sickness (e.g. flu pandemic) or Unable to recruit or retain suitably qualified staff.	On-going	Low	Medium	Amber	The pandemic response has shown that the service was well-placed to respond and less than a handful of officers have themselves suffered the illness. Consultants are available to provide short term cover and, whilst this worked well in peace-time to cover peak demand periods, the pandemic has revealed the

						<p>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 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.	<p>Disruption to service.</p> <p>Negative media coverage.</p> <p>Increased public health risks</p>	On-going	Low	High	Green	<p>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.</p>
Effective and efficient contract arrangement for dog control	<p>Disruption to service if no kennels available. Negative media coverage.</p> <p>Increased public health risks</p>	On-going	Low	High	Green	<p>The Out of Hours and Kennelling contracts were re-rendered to enhance the existing arrangements and provide resilience.</p>

Hosting support does not deliver necessary financial and HR support to ensure efficient management	Efficiency of management reduced; staffing issues remain unaddressed and performance suffers	On-going	Low	High	Amber	Issues around access to the financial system from Wyre Forest House should be relieved with new BDC finance system procurement. Workarounds remain in place in the interim.
One or more partners continue to be under great financial pressure and may consider alternatives to the partnership to deliver their service	Creates reputational issues for remaining partners and increases the need to manage overheads. Difficulties in delivering highly varied levels of service	On-going	Medium	High	Amber	New legal agreement limits variations in contribution before partners have to move to contractual relationship but this is quite high before it kicks in (20%.) Leanness of organisation minimises overheads and focuses resource at the front line. Growth strategy should generate income to support partners in the future but there are limits to this without additional capacity being added to the system. Invest to save capacity has been committed by partners to see if this achieves the necessary outcomes.
Robust arrangements in place in relation to obtaining legal advice and monitoring legislative changes.	Loss of cases is costly and damages reputation.	On-going	Low	Medium	Green	Continued close working with BDC legal team and other partners who don't use BDC for advocacy. Technical and legal training days for staff. Difficulty in keeping informed of Case Law developments. Membership and attendance of Officer Technical Groups outside the County does assist.
Service provision complies with Government requirements	Adverse comments following audits e.g. FSA Intervention by Government bodies i.e. FSA, whilst highly unlikely, is damaging to reputation.	On-going	Low	High	Amber	Limited detail of what statutory minima are can make decision making difficult around what is required in law as a minimum. LGA 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. Service has developed systems that follow the principles of the requirements of bodies like FSA so can show some level of compliance but service isn't operating to the letter of the current Code. The Code is however currently going through major changes and likely to move to a point where it is closer to the WRS model of operation.

						Environmental reporting for Local Air Quality Management, Pollution Prevention and Control and Private Water Supply Inspection reports to Defra and DWI have received positive responses with no issues of concern raised by these bodies.
Failure to deliver external contract work at the level expected by the business or local authority with whom we have the contract	Damage to reputation, loss of future income streams, financial impact of paying damages	On-going	Low	High	Green	Ensure contract negotiations are clear on performance criteria and these are clearly recorded in the final documentation. Monthly reviews against performance criteria. Select staff to ensure competence of those undertaking work outside Worcestershire. Maintain strong links with the customer's monitoring staff. Intervene early with corrective action

Appendix 3: Detailed out-turn for Regulatory Services 2020/21

	Full Year Budget 20-21	Committed Expenditure Apr - Mar 21	Variance
	£'000	£'000	£'000
Direct Expenditure			
Employees			
Salary	2,851	2,689	-163
Agency Staff	0	113	113
Employee Insurance	25	4	-20
Sub-Total - Employees	2,876	2,806	-70
Premises			
Rent / Hire of Premise	54	52	-2
Cleaning	1	0	-0
Utilities	0	0	0
Sub-Total - Premises	55	52	-2
Transport			
Vehicle Hire	13	1	-12
Vehicle Fuel	8	5	-3
Road Fund Tax	1	1	0

Vehicle Insurance	5	3	-1
Vehicle Maintenance	3	4	1
Car Allowances	75	45	-30
Sub-Total - Transport	104	58	-46

Supplies and Services

Furniture & Equipment	32	42	10
Clothes, uniforms and laundry	2	0	-2
Printing & Photocopying	17	12	-5
Postage	11	11	0
ICT	40	82	42
Telephones	21	14	-7
Training & Seminars	23	10	-13
Insurance	20	14	-6
Third Party Payments	144	144	0
Sub-Total - Supplies & Service	309	328	19

Contractors

Dog Warden	145	39	-106
Pest Control	50	75	25
Taxi / Alcohol / & Other Licensing	62	32	-30
Other contractors/consultants	3	3	0
Water Safety	5	1	-4
Food Safety	1	0	-1
Environmental Protection	10	43	33

Grants / Subscriptions	13	16	3
Advertising, Publicity and Promotion	6	0	-5
Sub-Total	293	209	-83
Income			
Training Courses / Bereavement / Works in Default / Sewer Baiting etc	-440	-405	34
Sub-Total	-440	-405	34
Service Total	3,197	3,049	-148
To be recommended			
Refunded to Partners	0	78	78
Stray Dog Van Reserve	0	30	30
DBS Check Reserve	0	15	15
Food Inspections Reserve	0	25	25
Sub-Total	0	70	70
Net Position	3,197	3,197	-0

Appendix 4: 3-year budgets 2021/22 to 2023/24

Account description

	Budget	Budget	Budget
	2021 / 2022	2022 / 2023	2023 / 2024
	£000's	£000's	£000's
Employees			
Monthly salaries	2,935	3,012	3,090
Training for professional qualifications	0	0	0
Medical fees (employees')	2	2	2
Employers' liability insurance	25	25	25
Employees' professional subscriptions	2	2	2
Sub-Total - Employees	2,964	3,041	3,119
Premises			
Rents	52	52	52
Room hire	2	2	2
Trade Waste	1	1	1
Sub-Total - Premises	55	55	55
Transport			
Vehicle repairs/maint'ce	3	3	3
Diesel fuel	8	8	8
Licences	1	1	1
Contract hire of vehicles	4	4	4
Vehicle insurances	5	5	5
Van Lease	9	9	9
Fares & Car Parking	5	5	5
Car allowances	70	70	70
Sub-Total - Transport	105	105	105

Supplies & Service

Equipment - purchase/maintenance/rental	22	22	22
Materials	9	9	9
Clothing, uniforms & laundry	2	2	2
Training fees	23	23	23
General insurances	19	19	19
Printing and stationery	17	17	17
Books and publications	2	2	2
Postage/packaging	11	11	11
ICT	40	40	40
Telephones	21	21	21
Taxi Tests	22	22	22
CRB Checks (taxi)	26	26	26
Support service recharges	100	100	100
Support service recharges - ICT	44	44	44
Sub-Total - Supplies & Service	356	356	356

Budget
2020 / 2021
£000's

Budget
2021 / 2022
£000's

Budget
2022 / 2023
£000's

Contractors

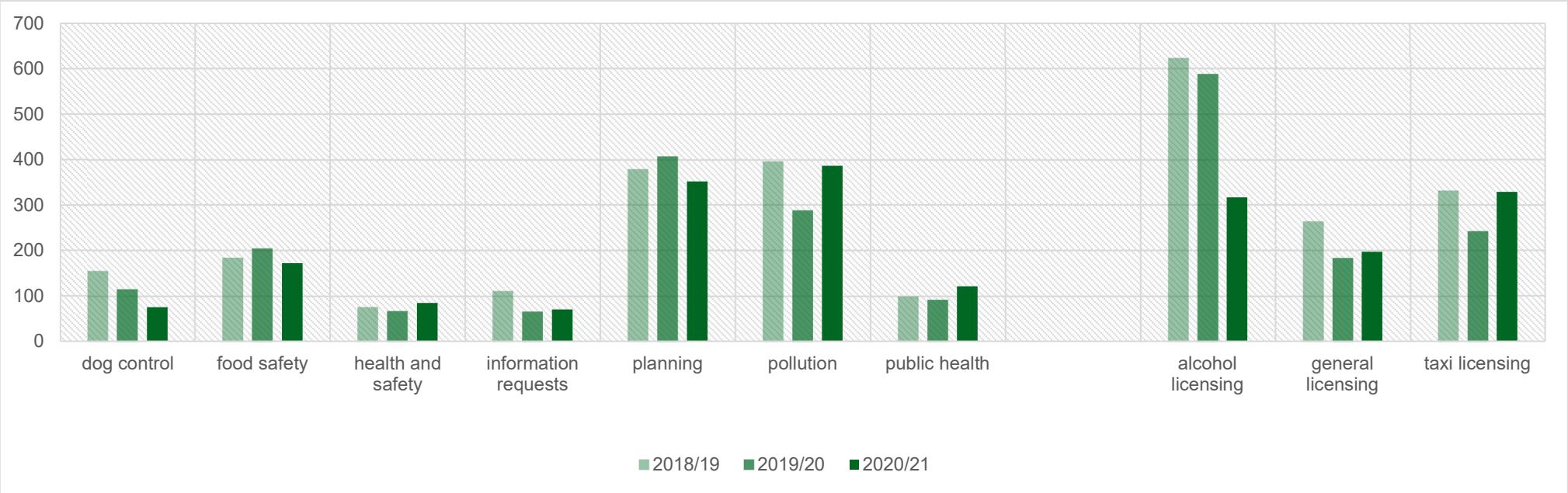
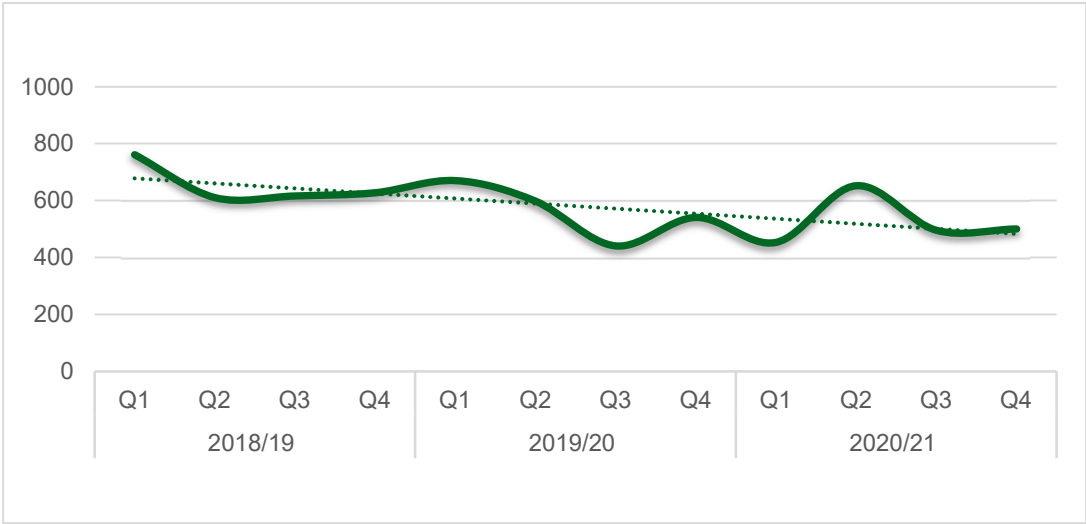
Consultants / Contractors' fees/charges/SLA's	229	229	229
Advertising (general)	5	5	5
Grants and subscriptions	11	11	11
Marketing/promotion/publicity	2	2	2
Sub-Total - Contractors	247	247	247

Income

Grants / Primary Authority / Food Training / Contaminated Land / Stray Dogs / Ad Hoc	-372	-372	-372
Sub-Total - Income	-372	-372	-372
Income			
From partners for Technical Officers	-97	-100	-104
Sub-Total - Income	-97	-100	-104
Additional Income			
Income to be found due to unavoidable salary pressures	-60	-134	-208
Sub-Total - Income	-60	-134	-208
DISTRICT PARTNERSHIP BUDGET	3,197	3,197	3,197
Current Partner Percentages			
Bromsgrove	14.59%		
Redditch	17.57%		
Wyre Forest	15.15%		
Wychavon	23.29%		
Malvern	12.82%		
Worcs City	16.58%		
Total	100.00%		

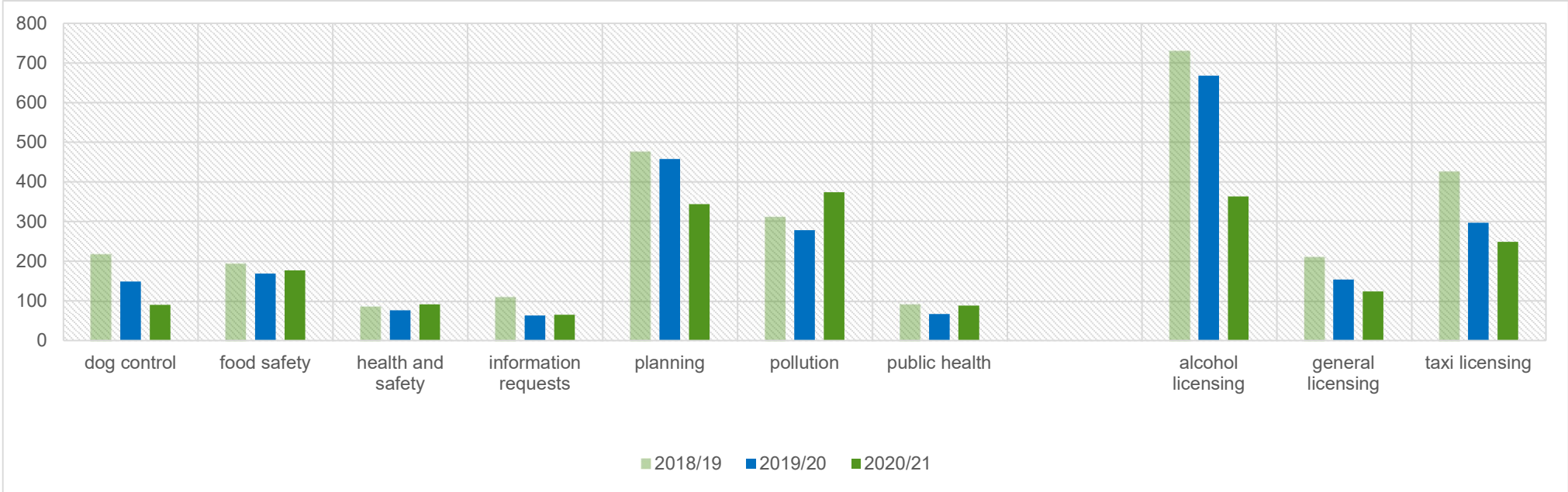
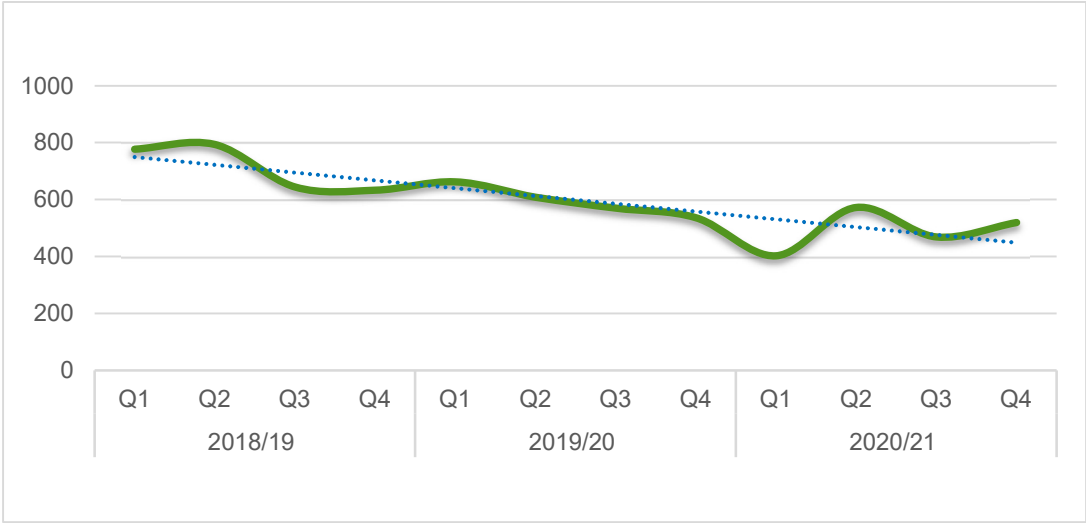
Appendix 5: District Council Summaries

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



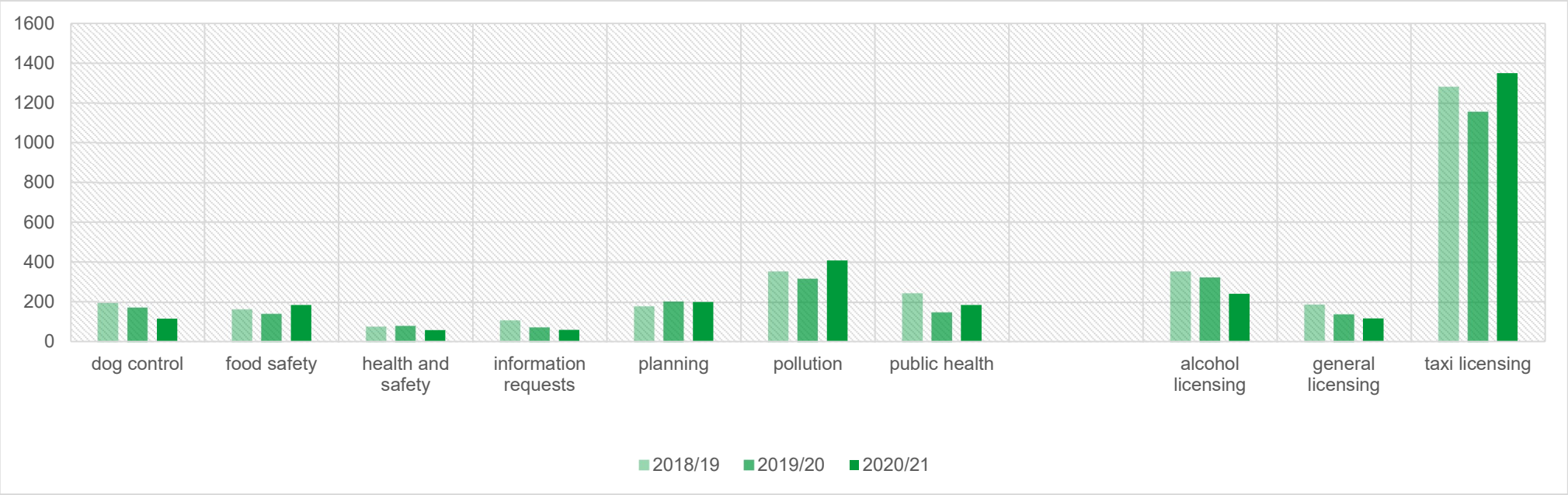
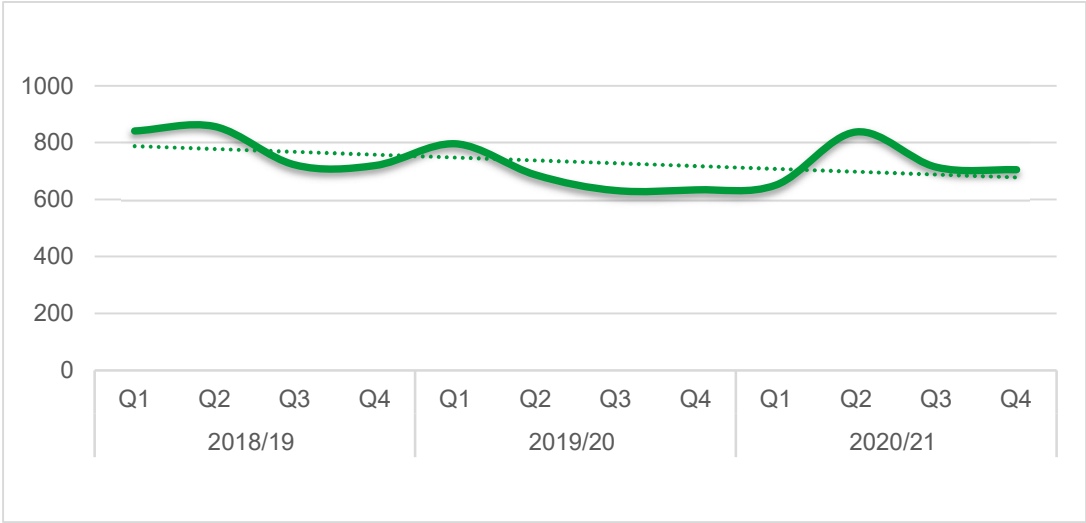
Appendix 5: District Council Summaries

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



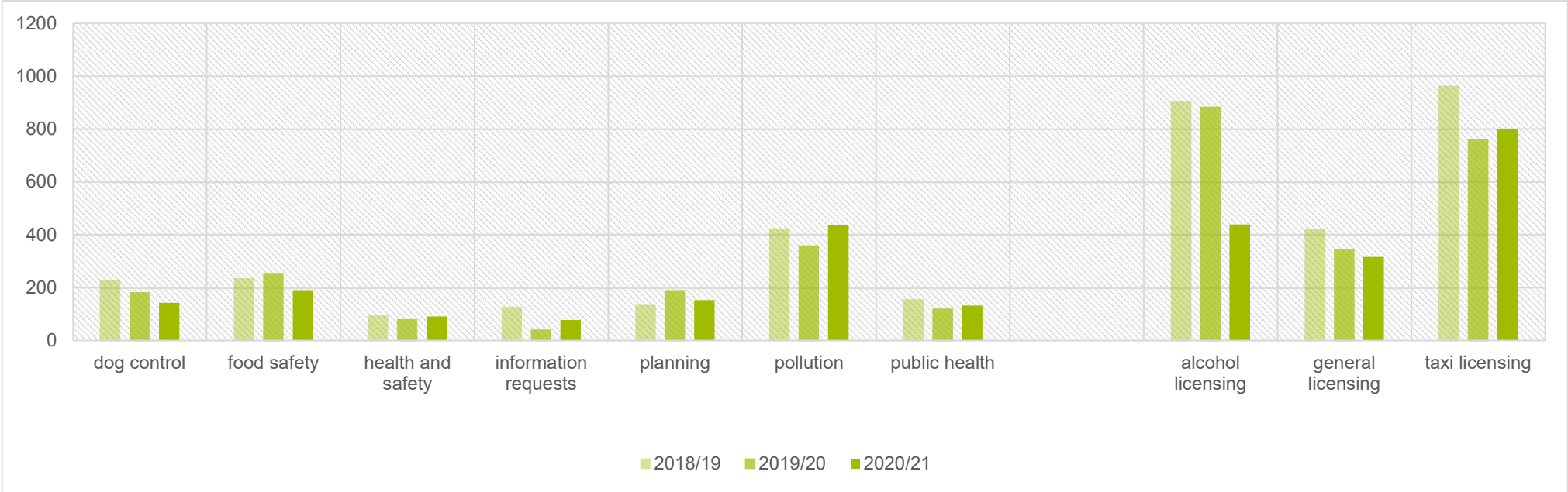
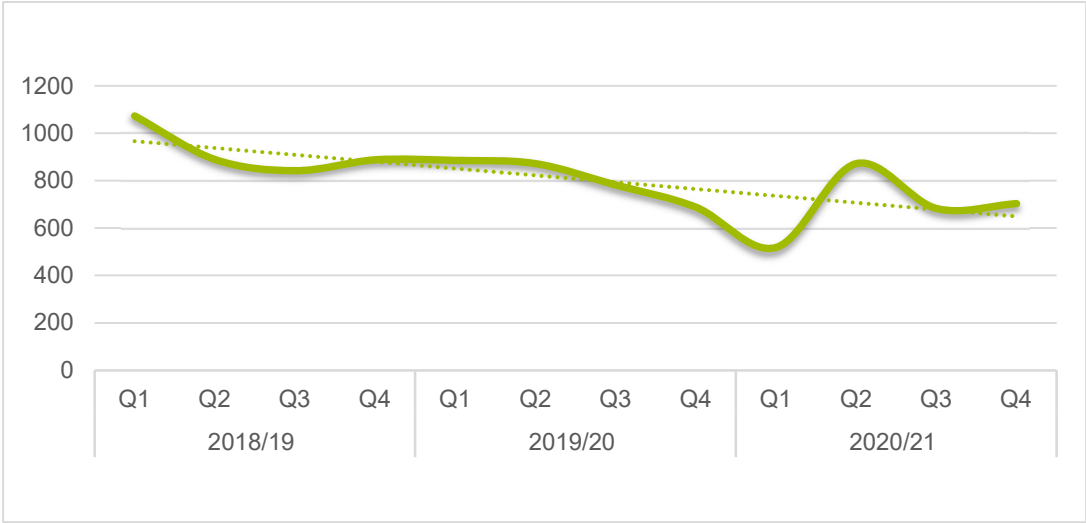
Appendix 5: District Council Summaries

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



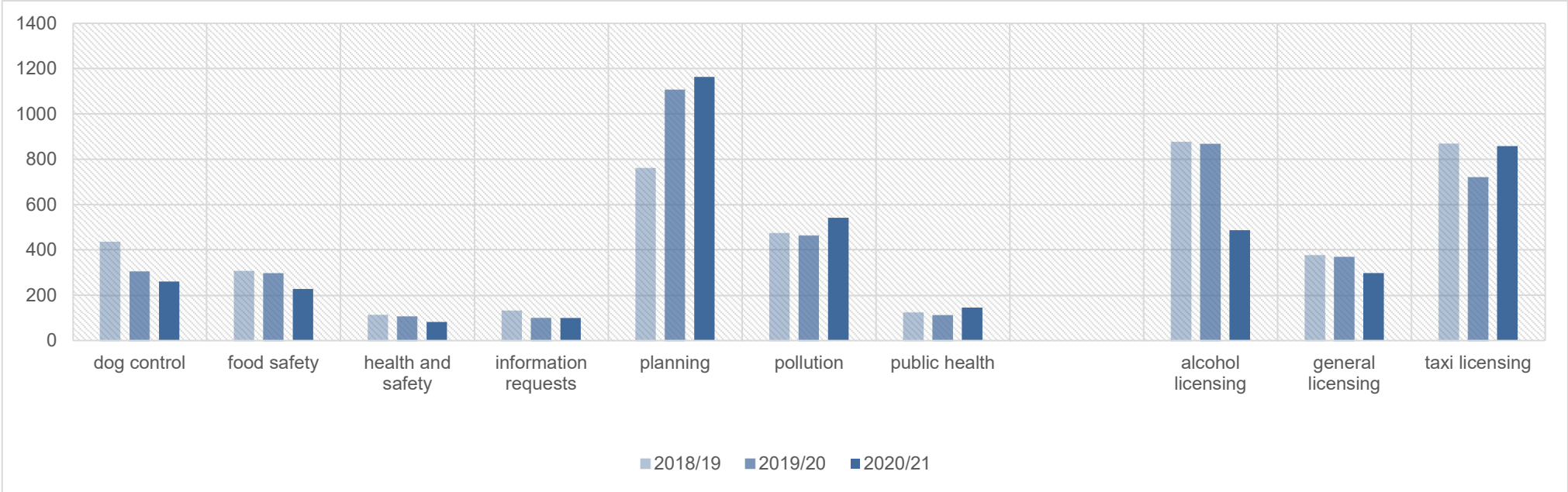
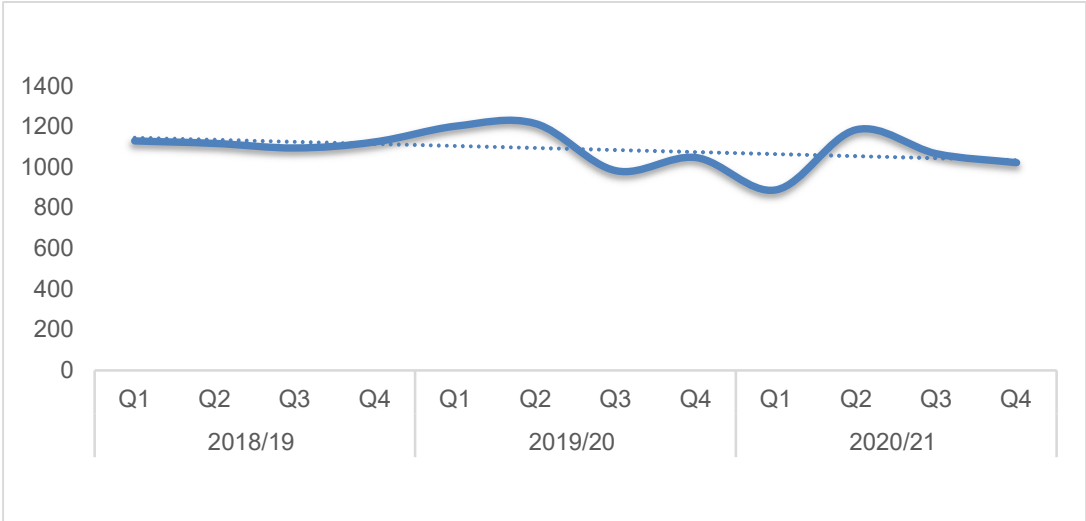
Appendix 5: District Council Summaries

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



Appendix 5: District Council Summaries

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



Appendix 5: District Council Summaries

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

