



**Report to: Health & Wellbeing Committee, 15<sup>th</sup> November 2021**

**Report of: Corporate Director - Operations, Homes & Communities**

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**Subject: COVID-19 COMMUNITY RECOVERY PLAN – PROGRESS REPORT**

## **1. Recommendation**

### **1.1 That the Committee note the contents of the report.**

## **2. Background**

2.1 The Council's COVID-19 [Community Recovery Plan \(CRP\)](#) was approved by this Committee in July 2020 along with a further twelve-month extension during March 2021.

2.2 Since the plan's approval the Country has been through 3 national lockdowns and is now following the Government roadmap out of covid. The Government has also recently confirmed that the remaining Covid regulations have been extended to March 2022. These give the City Council powers to give directions which:

- restrict access to, or close, individual premises
- prohibit or restrict certain events (or types of event)
- restrict access to, or close, public outdoor places (or types of outdoor public places).

The Council is now focussing on recovery and the response activity has been reduced.

2.3 The CRP has been developed around 9 priorities that include –

Housing & Homelessness	Leisure, Recreation and Wellbeing	Financial Hardship & Welfare Support
Anti-social Behaviour	Domestic Abuse	Community Empowerment & Volunteering
Supporting Bereaved Families & Commemoration	Shielding & Vulnerable Population	Rough Sleepers

2.4 Community recovery from COVID-19 aligns with the recent constitutional changes approved by Council in May, and the creation of the Health & Well-being Committee. This is a bi-annual report that intends to update this Committee on the progress that has been made against each of the priority areas that will guide focus and resource over the coming weeks and months as recovery continues. A further update report will be brought to this Committee during May 2022.

- 2.5 At **Appendix 1** of the report is monitoring information relating to those key indicators linked to each of the 9 priority areas. It is important to note that the list of indicators are not exhaustive and can be updated but they are useful in focussing conversation and planning particularly when working with partners in many of the multi-agency forums that are supporting both the response and recovery effort.

### **3. Information**

#### **Housing & Homelessness**

- 3.1 The number of households who have presented to the council at risk of being made homeless during 2021/2022 is forecast to be 10% higher than 2020/21, these being above those levels recorded in 2019/20. This figure is made up of approximately 20% families and 80% singles, which is comparative to the breakdown of household types seen over the last few years and since the introduction of Homelessness Reduction Act.
- 3.2 The three main reasons for homelessness presentations remain the loss of private rented accommodation, informal accommodation coming to an end and relationship breakdown (violent and non-violent). The loss of private rented accommodation has been exacerbated by the removal of the imposed suspension on evictions. Eviction proceedings have commenced again and are taking place due to breach of tenancy agreement, selling and re-letting and rent arrears. Further government funding has just been announced to provide early intervention to deal with rent arrears and prevent evictions. It cannot be underestimated the impact that COVID-19 had and continues to have on family life and household relations and with the end of furlough adding additional pressure for some this remains a very real risk.
- 3.3 Proactive joint working with a range of partners continues to prevent and address the needs of a growing number of households facing homelessness. A greater number of partners are working alongside Council Officers out of Trinity Street Housing Advice Centre underpinning a collaborative approach and an excellent first point of contact. Effective use of available funding and support to prevent homelessness, address hardship, and sustain accommodation continues.

### **4. Leisure, Recreation & Well-being**

- 4.1 Between July and September 2021, the council has administered 246 events and activities on public open spaces. These numbers continue to be higher than the season average due to the number of events postponed from earlier in the year.
- 4.2 The Council delivered its largest Worcester Show event on 15<sup>th</sup> August, attracting in excess of 15,000 people. This year the event moved from Gheluvelt Park to Pitchcroft Racecourse – allowing more space for COVID-19 safety between over 100 stalls, performers, volunteers, and visitors.
- 4.3 An incredible line up of artists created an electrifying atmosphere, which carried across the entire venue. Highlights included Worcestershire resident and Dodgy front man Nigel Clark, delighting the crowds with his acoustic guitar; The Stiff Joints band, who proved a real hit and received a great reception; and community choir Got2sing, which surprised crowds with several flash mob performances. The Show celebrated the creativity of local people, with over 650 floral and craft entries received. The number of entries from schools doubled, with prizes for young people offered by Pershore College.

- 4.4 The Inland Waterways Association (IWA) Festival of Water (FoW) was held at Perdiswell on the weekend of 28th - 30th August 2021 was a great success with an estimated attendance of 3,000 each day. The IWA organisers were very pleased with the support and interest they received from the Worcester community.
- 4.5 Three legacy projects have arisen from the IWA FoW. Firstly, A Heritage Walking Trail running from the centre of Worcester following the river through Diglis and then along the Worcester & Birmingham Canal to Perdiswell. There is an aspiration to create an additional extension to the route to create a 6-mile circular walk.
- 4.6 The second legacy project engaged with local schools and groups to create contemporary pieces of artwork that were displayed at the FoW and retained to be used at future events and promotion. Schools and groups that took part were: Perdiswell Primary School, Christopher Whitehead Language College, Tudor Grange Academy, Bow brook House School, Pershore, Nunnery Wood High School and Perdiswell Young People's Leisure Club.
- 4.7 The third legacy project is an aspiration for a 'winding hole' to be created on the canal at Perdiswell Park. A winding hole is a widened area of a canal used for turning a canal boat. Feedback and research suggests installation of this feature would produce increased accessibility of this section of canal and thus a potential increase in visitors. The Canals and Rivers Trust are leading on this project.
- 4.8 Since reopening the facilities on the 12<sup>th</sup> April 2021 Freedom Leisure have seen a consistent increase in the number of customers returning to all three facilities. Membership recovery is increasing on a month by month basis and by the end of the Q2 period stood at 79%, whilst swim school attendances have already recovered to and surpassed pre-covid levels.
- 4.9 Total active participation is growing at a slower rate overall, but gym and group exercise classes continue to increase steadily. There are currently over 900 more active members at the end of September compared to the end of April. The number of 'pay as you go' customers peaked in July and August due to the school holiday programme resulting in more children visiting the pool and also taking part in the Freedom Leisure Children's summer activity programme, with the number declining sharply in September now that children are back at school.
- 4.10 The number of people accessing outdoor classes should no longer be used as a measure of success due to the return of the group exercise programme to indoor studios, although Freedom Leisure intend to continue to host classes externally where facilities and weather permit for the obvious benefits that approach is able to provide.
- 4.11 Freedom Leisure have also invested in the refurbishment of the two Artificial Grass Pitches at the rear of Perdiswell Leisure Centre with the facility being re-opened by the Mayor prior to use by the Walking Football group, a session set up to support men recovering from prostate cancer.
- 4.12 On a national basis Freedom Leisure are ahead of the curve in terms of recovery, in comparison with several other leisure operators.

2021-22 members by site	April	May	June	July	Aug	Sep
PLC - memberships/swim	4129	4295	4451	4559	4802	4814
SJSC	976	1010	1038	1047	1090	1104
NWSC	426	473	481	510	520	517
Total	5531	5778	5970	6116	6412	6435

2021-22	April	May	June	July	Aug	Sep
Number of active members	5531	5778	5970	6116	6412	6435
Number of pay as you go customers	1083	3020	3654	4957	6045	3897
Number of people accessing outdoor classes	3950	2288	1533	1512	1329	120

## 5. **Financial Hardship & Welfare Support**

- 5.1 Financial hardship continues to be a challenge for many households despite the continuing range of financial support schemes. This is linked to increasing daily living costs including food and energy prices, reduction in benefit income and either permanent loss of employment or the longer-term financial impacts of furloughing.
- 5.2 The on-going pressure is shown by the number of requests for Council Tax Support which remain high with 14,074 being made in the first 2 quarters of 2021/22.
- 5.3 The council has been at the forefront of administering and deploying financial grants at both an individual and organisation level focussing on relieving hardship. This funding has in the main been provided direct from Government or via Worcestershire County Council in recognition of the importance of disseminating funds as close to those receiving it as possible. These grants include –
- **COVID-19 Test & Trace Support Payment** (£500 per person) – between October 2020 and 10<sup>th</sup> September 2021, £309,000 (632 payments) have been provided to individuals who have been told to self-isolate by NHS Test and Trace or the NHS COVID-19 app, are in receipt of benefit or on a low income, and will lose income because they cannot work from home. This scheme has been extended to March 2022.
  - **Summer Grant** (Food & Essential Supplies) – the council was allocated £25,236 to support people who were struggling to afford food and other essentials due to COVID-19. This money was deployed to 5 key areas that included –
    - 1) Worcester Cares (£5,236) – to support the provision of food and coordinated support and communication of street kitchens in helping rough sleepers and vulnerable people
    - 2) Discretionary Welfare Assistance Scheme (£10,000) – broaden access to the scheme (single households and working households in receipt of UC to be included) and broaden range of assistance provided (to include food vouchers, fridge freezers and washing machines)
    - 3) Citizen Advice Worcester (£10,000) – in order to provide grant payments, relieve debt and prevent financial hardship including homelessness.
- 5.4 Financial Hardship and Welfare Assistance is another of the priority areas where it is very likely that a pipeline of issues will require managing as the Country continues out of lockdown. As a council it will be critical for us to ensure that where, able to

deploy grant funding, this is done in a way that supports those who are most vulnerable or in most hardship. Officers remain in close contact with agencies such as the Foodbank. At this stage there has been no request from Foodbank for additional support. They are still receiving a high demand for services.

- 5.5 A new Government Household Support Fund is being made available nationally and will be allocated/administered to Worcestershire County Council of £3,949,139.19. At least 50% of the total funding must be spent on families with children. In terms of type of support, the expectation is that the Household Support Fund should primarily be used to support households in the most need with food, energy and water bills. It can also be used to support households with essential costs related to those items and with wider essential costs.
- 5.6 In exceptional cases of genuine emergency, it can additionally be used to support housing costs where existing housing support schemes do not meet this exceptional need. It has been proposed to allocate this funding in the following ways:
- £1.5m Free School Meals
  - £1.5m Act on Energy to address thermal comfort and energy costs
  - £1m to be shared across the 6 LA's based on a set formula using deprivation figures.

It will be important to identify which organisations in Worcester City may be better placed to deploy these monies due to their position and relationship with and within communities. Further detail of how this will be used in Worcester City is yet to be understood.

## **6. Anti-social Behaviour**

- 6.1 The total recorded number of ASB incidents during July, August and September at 936 is lower when compared to the same period over the previous two years. Worcester City Council has worked with partners to respond to report instances of ASB. Youth intervention work ensures young adults are safeguarded during the Covid19 pandemic; providing mentoring and interventions to help our younger generation make better decisions. Officers are supporting and reassuring residents who report localised issues and are working with partner organisations to support vulnerable individuals. Multi-agency meetings such as Safer Worcester have continued to meet and new Worcester City specific ASB case management meeting is being established in October 2021.
- 6.2 During the months of July, August and September 421 young adults have received direct support from City Council officers. Providing either mentoring, outreach to locations where young people are congregating and providing consequence or awareness training in education settings.
- 6.3 Worcester City Council has continued to use Public Space Protection Orders where appropriate to improve the quality of life for local communities. Earlier in the calendar year Communities Committee agreed to extend the Dog Control PSPO for another 3 years, from July 2021-2024 and the Alcohol PSPO for three years, from August 2021-2024. During the previous quarter Communities Committee requested a public consultation on footpath closures at two railway level crossings. Officers have completed the consultation and reporting back on responses to Communities Committee in November 2021.

- 6.4 Community safety ward level conversations with members continue and will also encompass a wider range of safeguarding issues. A successful "Safer Streets" bid was submitted and will be used to support a range of initiatives to improve the safety on Worcester's streets including additional lighting at the riverside and rangers during the night-time economy. The Covid Outbreak Management Fund will also enhance the support available to young people.
- 6.5 The Knife Angel has toured around the UK and has become recognised as a National Monument Against Violence and Aggression and will be coming to Worcester. The national monument provides an opportunity to raise awareness of the impact of violence and aggression on communities. The sculpture itself is very emotive and gives people the opportunity to reflect and discuss the impact on victims of aggression and violence and to promote the services and help available to people exposed to or at risk of such behaviour.

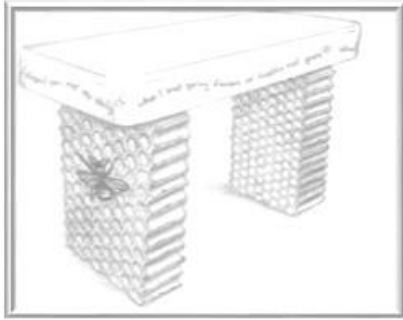
## **7. Domestic Abuse**

- 7.1 For many survivors domestic abuse worsened during the pandemic, children witnessed more abuse taking place, some abusers used COVID-19 as a tool to abuse and control. Statistics show that domestic violence incidents nearly doubled in a year nationally, rising from 200,000 in 2019/20 to 369,000 in 2020/21 and during the pandemic. The police service received approximately 1,150,000 domestic abuse calls in the year of 2020, an average of 130 calls an hour.
- 7.2 The number of referrals received by Worcester Community Trust (DAWN Project) funded by South Worcestershire Community Safety Partnership for the period 1<sup>st</sup> April – 30<sup>th</sup> Sept 2021 is 155. Of those, 73 have come from individuals residing in Worcester (44 have come from Wychavon and 21 from Malvern Hills). There are 27 on the waiting list for support. 67 referrals were made by the individual themselves, through the website or by calling in. 55 referrals were from health, social care and education agencies. 86 of those referrals have diagnosed mental health conditions (55%) and 23 had physical disabilities. 40% of the individuals referred suffered from physical abuse and 37% had reported incidents to the police.
- 7.3 Dawn is providing one to one face to face targeted intervention and support across South Worcestershire, in WCT centres and other community venues. DAWN support includes crisis intervention, safety planning, referrals for safe housing, emotional support, the Freedom programme, signposting and referrals to other agencies, referrals to Foodbanks, support with child protection conferences, legal appointments, support at court, core groups and in meetings face to face and via telephone, zoom and teams.
- 7.4 Dawn has experienced new challenges over the last 6 months as they work with individuals who have experienced domestic violence and abuse during lockdown. They have seen that victims and survivors have increased levels of risk, substantive delays in civil and criminal court processes, PTSD, mental ill-health, and experienced the loss of ability to engage in meaningful targeted intervention during lockdown due to isolation. To provide support domestic abuse champions have been trained including 24 professionals and 11 community. Over 63 positive outcomes have been achieved. During these months 53 households presented as homeless due to domestic abuse and were supported into safe and suitable accommodation.

- 7.5 White Ribbon Day Thursday 25 November is an international day set up to to end violence against women. Worcester Community Trust are holding an event at Warndon Community Hub to raise awareness of violence against women and girls and provide access to local information and support.
- 7.6 The new Domestic Abuse Act has provided a framework to understand the need in a more robust way, develop a strategy and commissioning plan and require the establishment of a multi-agency domestic abuse partnership. This work is progressing well, and 35 units of suitable leased accommodation are being created by Rooftop Housing, additional staff resources are being recruited within the Housing & Welfare Advice Team utilising New Burdens Funding received by Worcestershire County Council and Worcester City Council. Worcestershire County Council is also commissioning domestic abuse support services, additional IDVA and Drive capacity and training. All the services statutory, voluntary and community will work together in a joined up and targeted way to deal with domestic abuse.

## **8. Supporting Bereaved Families & Commemoration**

- 8.1 The team have worked tirelessly throughout the ongoing pandemic in their efforts to enable families to lay their loved ones to rest with as much dignity as possible. Whilst restrictions created by Covid have made things more difficult and challenging the bereavement team have consistently managed to meet the needs of our community as we have travelled towards a returning sense of normality.
- 8.2 From Monday 19<sup>th</sup> July 2021 the national restrictions on attending chapel services were lifted as well as mandatory face coverings, allowing 105 to attend per service. Whilst this news was greeted with relief the Service continues to work hard to minimise potential transmission of COVID. The decision was taken to try to maintain mask wearing within the chapel. Pleasingly this has been met with no resistance to date.
- 8.3 The new website helped expand our reach and sees circa 2500 unique visitors per month since its launch in April 2021. This has enabled people to use the contact facilities embedded in the site to ask for assistance and information and has supplemented the calls made to the office increasing our reach. The team has never been as integrated with the community but there is still more to do. The site also offers links to a range of supportive charities and agencies.
- 8.4 In terms of flexibility the Team and arrangements will continue to be as flexible as possible. This can range from letting a deceased's beloved pet into the chapel, to hosting a Greek orthodox burial and grave side buffet. Flexibility is what helps families cope and has been of paramount importance throughout the pandemic.
- 8.5 In late March 2021 the service presented a project to give something back to the community whether they had been directly or indirectly affected by Covid. The project (Forget you Not) is to create a wildflower meadow that surrounds a beautiful niche where two bespoke carved granite benches (Image below left) sit around a specially designed granite beehive shaped post-box (image to right). This bespoke memorial post box will be sited on the Cemetery lawn, section 25 which is right at the top of the site as you exit Astwood Cemetery.



- 8.6 All the wildlife carvings are indigenous to Worcestershire and will tie into the Greenflag work ongoing at the sites. In time once the project is established the service may introduce additional items including the opportunity to purchase glass butterflies to display within the wildflowers.
- 8.7 As result of the ongoing national logistics issues plans have been delayed between both our suppliers and their intermediaries and our supplier and our site. The good news is that the footings will be completed by the end of Oct and delivery of all the described items will be in place by late November. Once they are set up we will begin to decide on a suitable launch date.

## **9. Shielding & Vulnerable Population / Community Empowerment & Volunteering**

- 9.1 The City Council has supported 11 days of outreach vaccine clinics in quarter 1 and 2 of this year. These have been at KGV hub, Heart of Worcestershire College and the Guildhall to address areas where take-up had been poor and young people and to provide drop in venues without appointments. The clinics were promoted by social media campaigns, door knocking 3,000 properties and community messaging with targeted messaging depending on the audience in mind for each location. The number of vaccines administered during Q1 and 2 at these clinics is circa - 3,000. Five further outreach clinics for flu and/or covid vaccines are scheduled to take place imminently.
- 9.2 Hear 2 Help is still in operation and funding has been provided to make this a longer-term service. Plans for how this service will continue and the role it will play are still in development.
- 9.3 The Council received four grant applications between July and September, awarded three of those grants during the period with the fourth pending decision at Octobers panel meeting. A total award of £3,500 was approved supporting Worcester Athletic Club to make small but significant improvements to their facilities, Worcester City FC Supporters Trust to enable them to create a community sports zone at the Worcester Show and the Battle of Worcester Society to facilitate the 370th Anniversary of The Battle of Worcester parade.
- 9.4 Worcester residents are keen to learn to live with Covid and return to as normal as possible activity. A Volunteer Expo in the Guildhall was held on 1<sup>st</sup> October and attracted 120 visitors. The Worcester Community Action event arranged for over 30 agencies and charities to set up stalls for prospective volunteers to find out what opportunities there are in Worcester.



9.5 The council would like to encourage and support communities to have street parties and build on the community engagement, support and level of volunteering provided during the pandemic. To this end officers has been putting in place a simplified application process with allocated officer support. This will be launched in the coming weeks.

## **10. Rough Sleepers**

10.1 The approach of making an emergency accommodation offer to all rough sleepers and committing to support them, underpinned by each rough sleeper having a personalised housing plan continues. All rough sleepers are supported to register with a GP where necessary and access a vaccination.

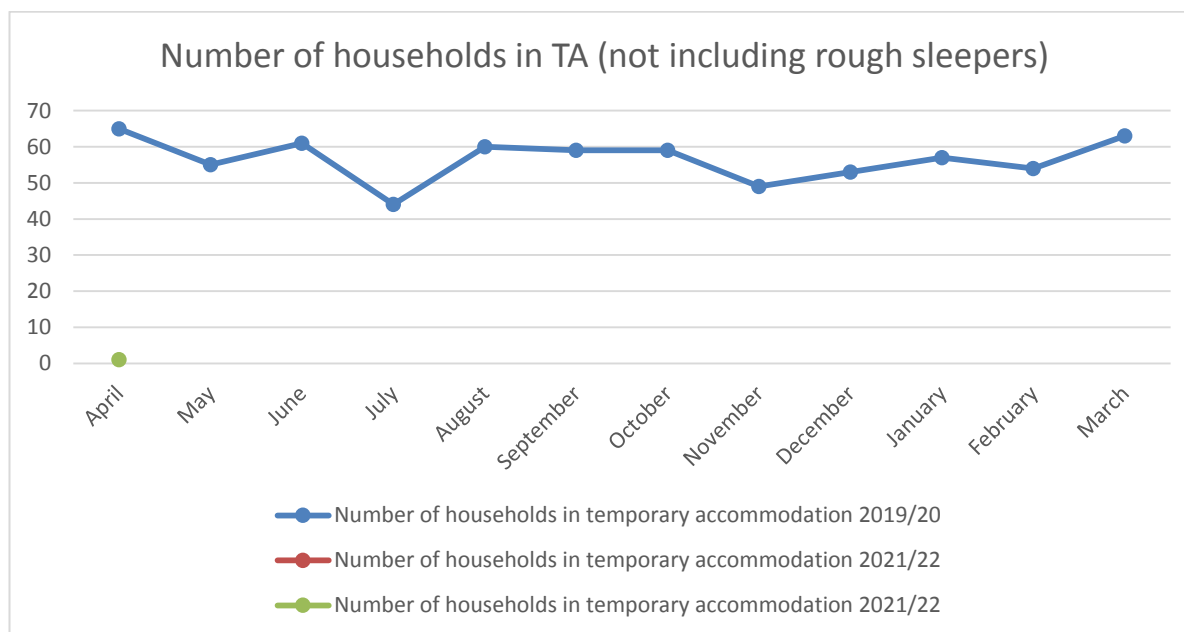
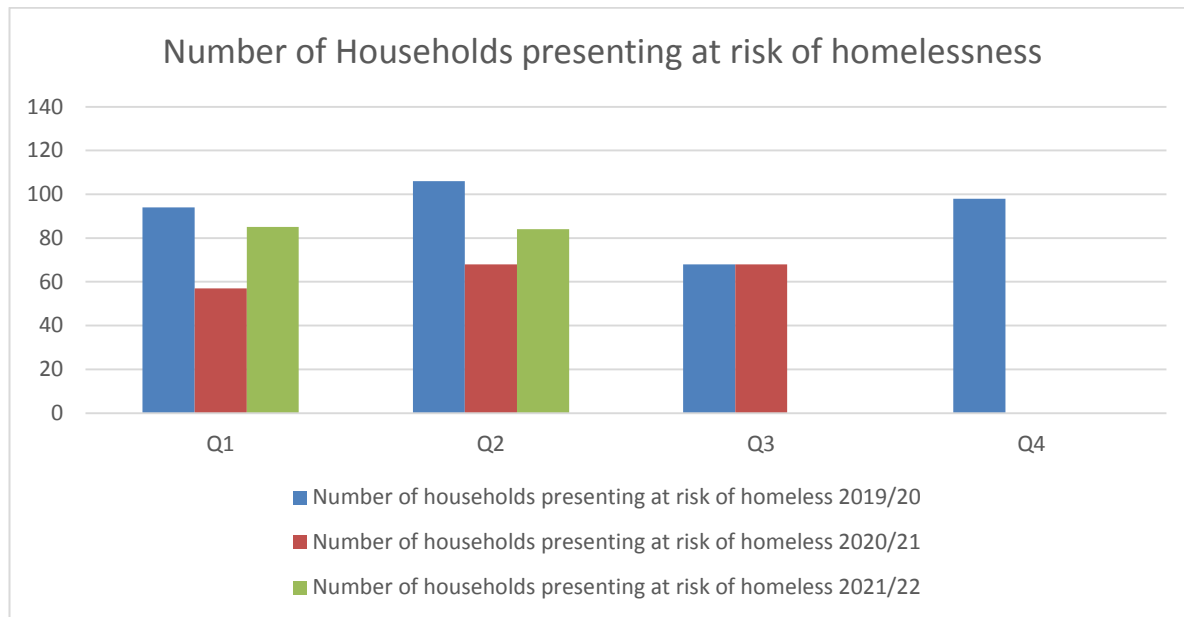
10.2 All rough sleepers accommodated at the Fownes Hotel, Ombersley Rd and other temporary accommodation have been provided with a move-on offer of accommodation. The Fownes Hotel and Ombersley Rd are no longer being used to accommodate rough sleepers and a new facility has been opened working in partnership with Caring for Communities and People to provide emergency accommodation to any person who is new to the streets in Worcester. This facility is funded using Government Rough Sleeper Initiative Round 4 Funding.

10.3 There have been 53 rough sleepers so far during 2021 and the multi-agency approach continues to be used to support these individuals from the streets into accommodation.

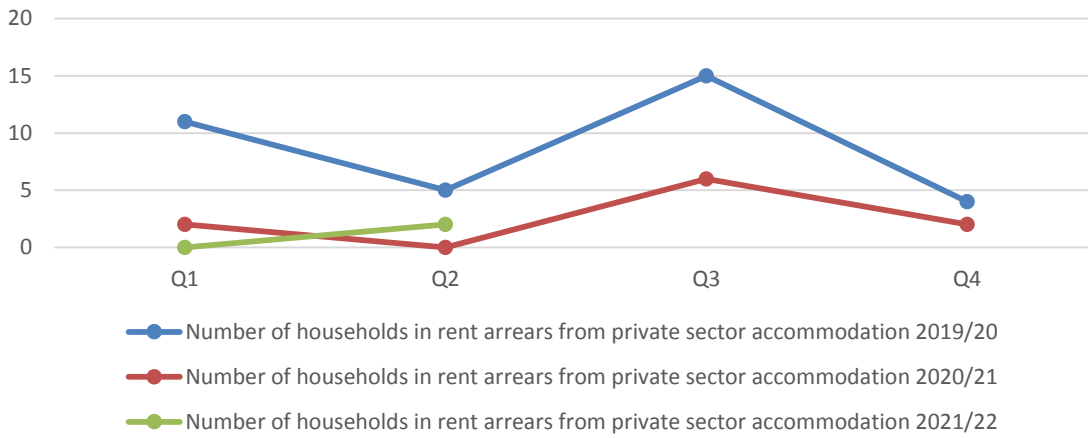
**Ward(s):** All  
**Contact Officer:** Nina Warrington Tel: 01905 722494  
Nina.warrington@worcester.gov.uk  
**Background Papers:** N/A

## Appendix 1 – Progress Against Community Recovery Indicators

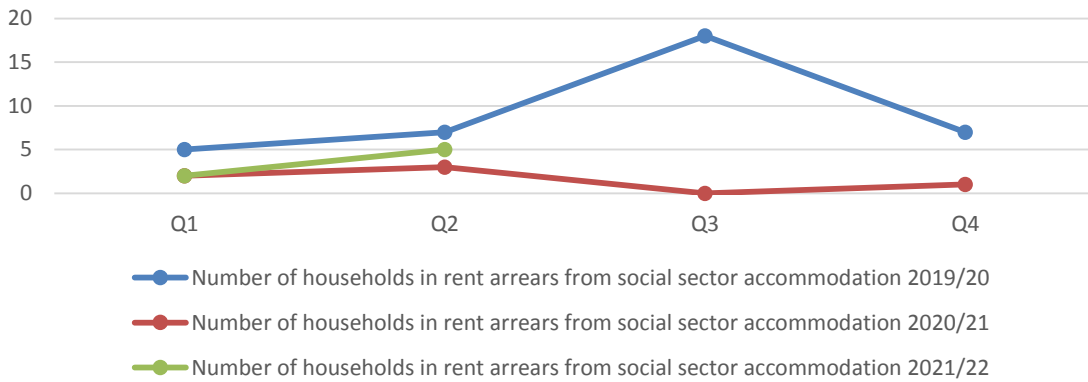
### Housing & Homelessness



Number of households in rent arrears from PS accommodation

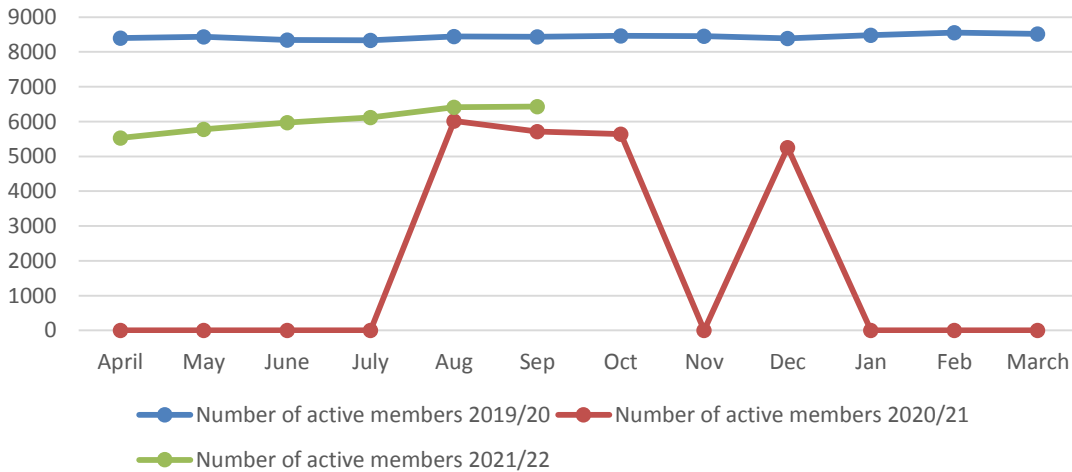


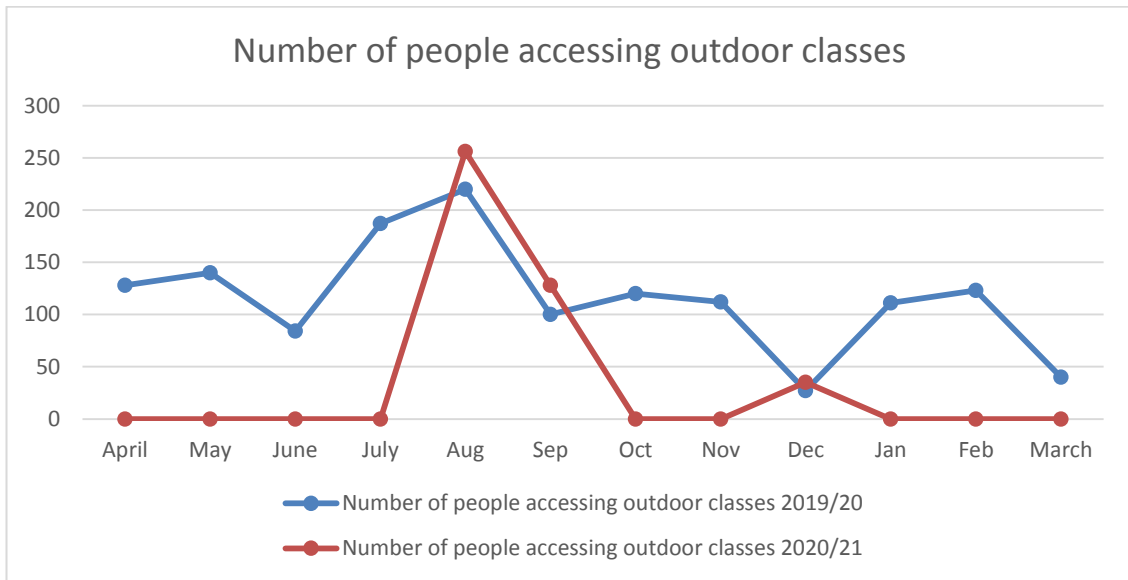
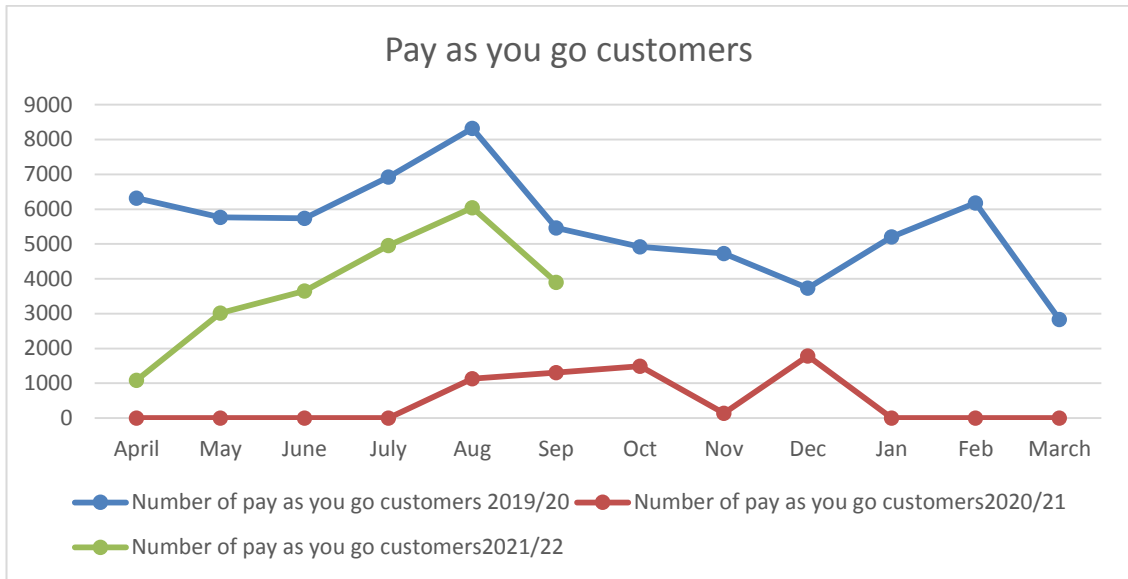
Number of household in rent arrears from social housing sector



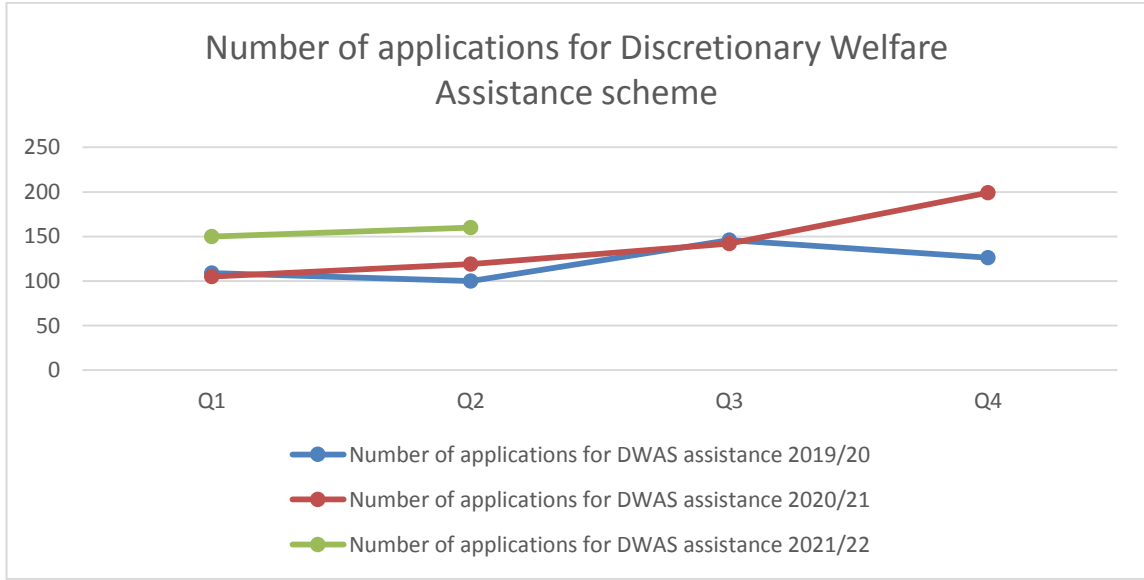
## Leisure, Recreation & Well-being

Active Freedom Leisure members

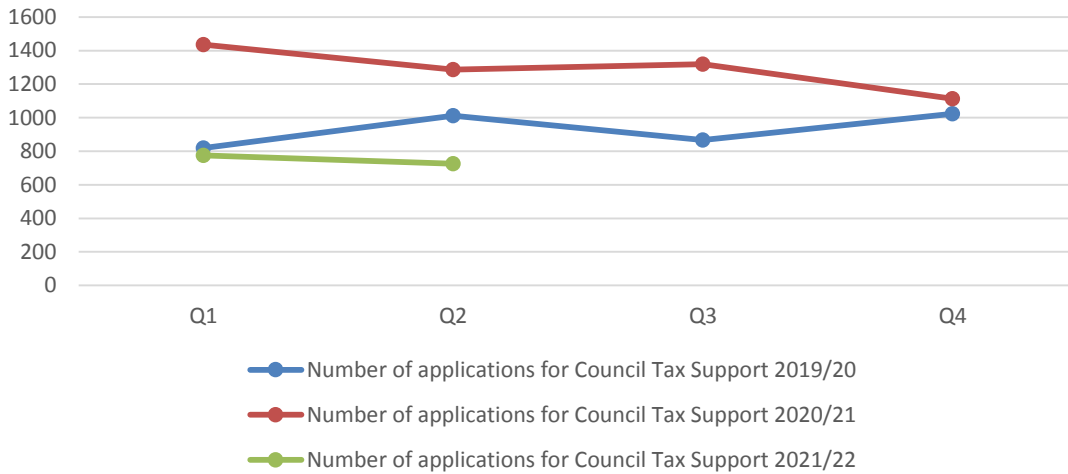




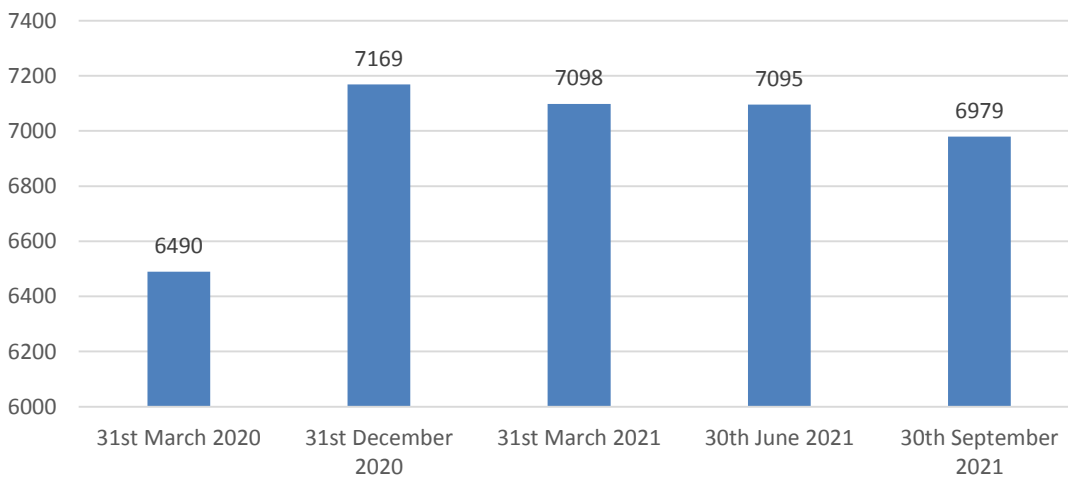
## Financial Hardship



### Number of applications for Council Tax support

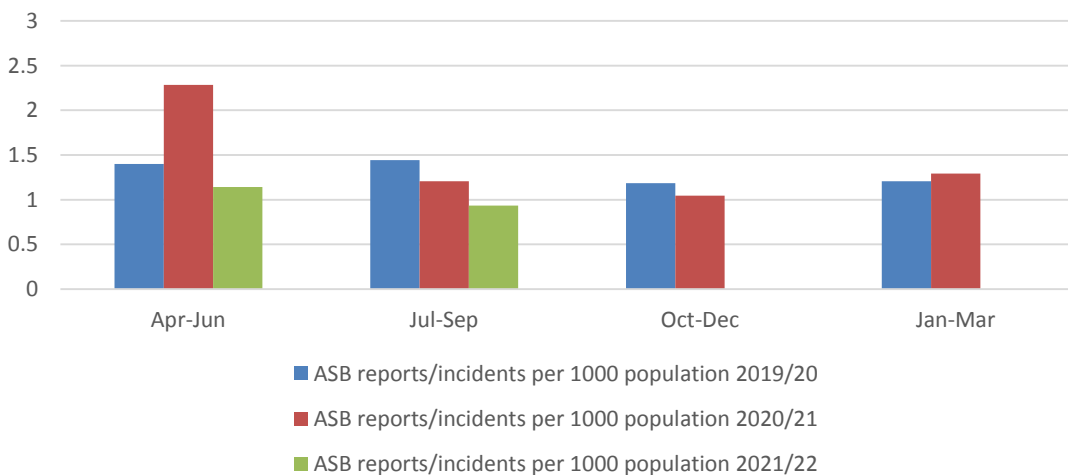


### Number of Council Tax Support claims being paid

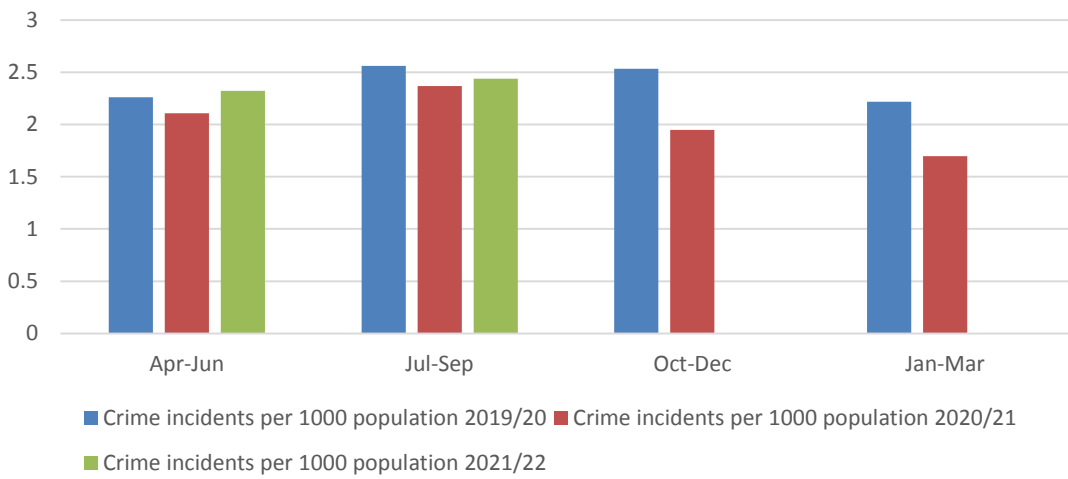


## Anti-Social Behaviour

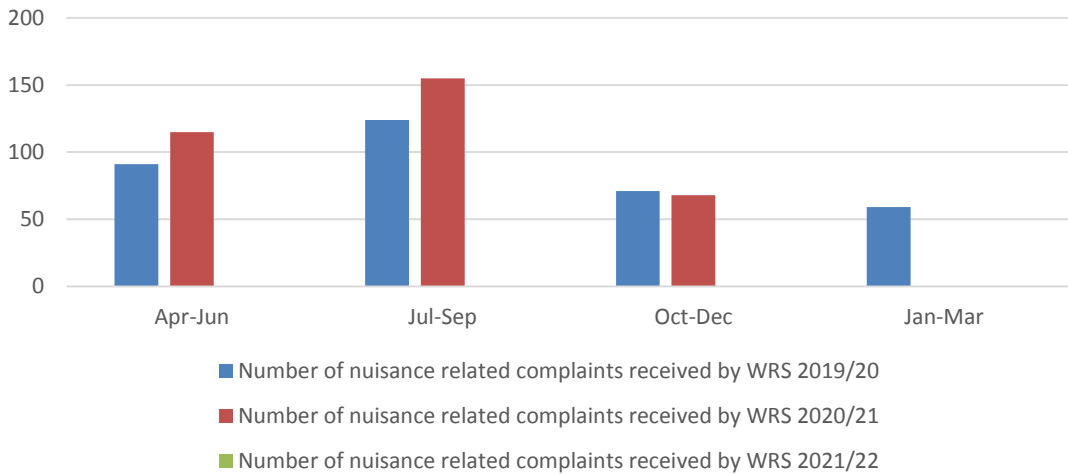
### ASB reports/incidents per 1000 population



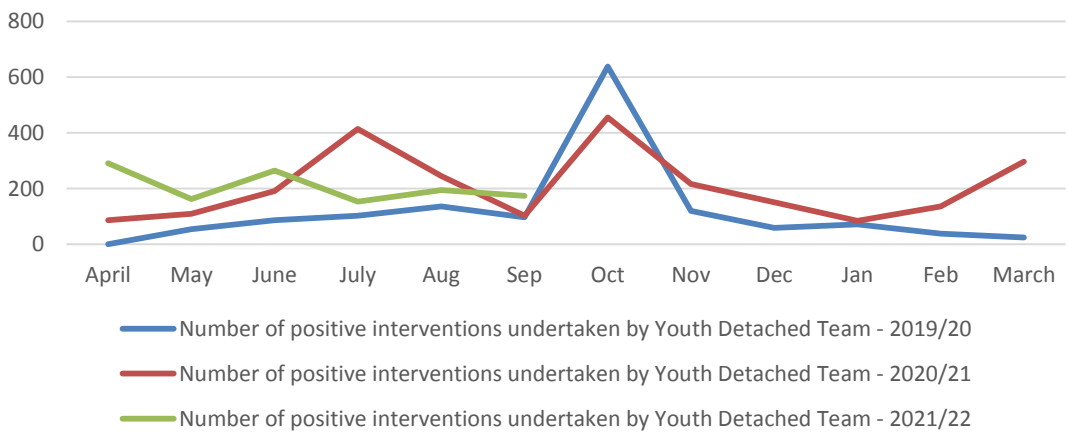
### Crime incidents per 1000 population



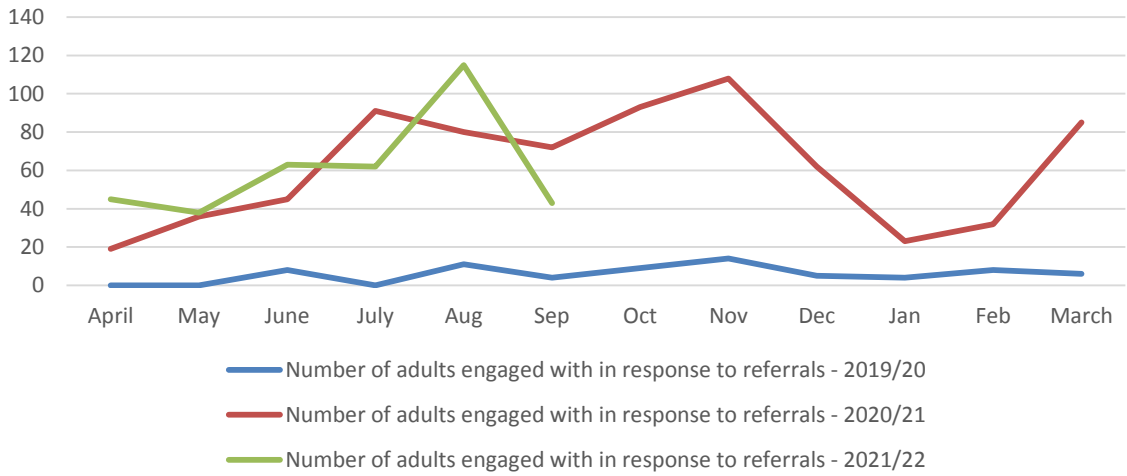
### Number of nuisance-related complaints received by WRS



### Number of positive interventions by Youth Detached Team

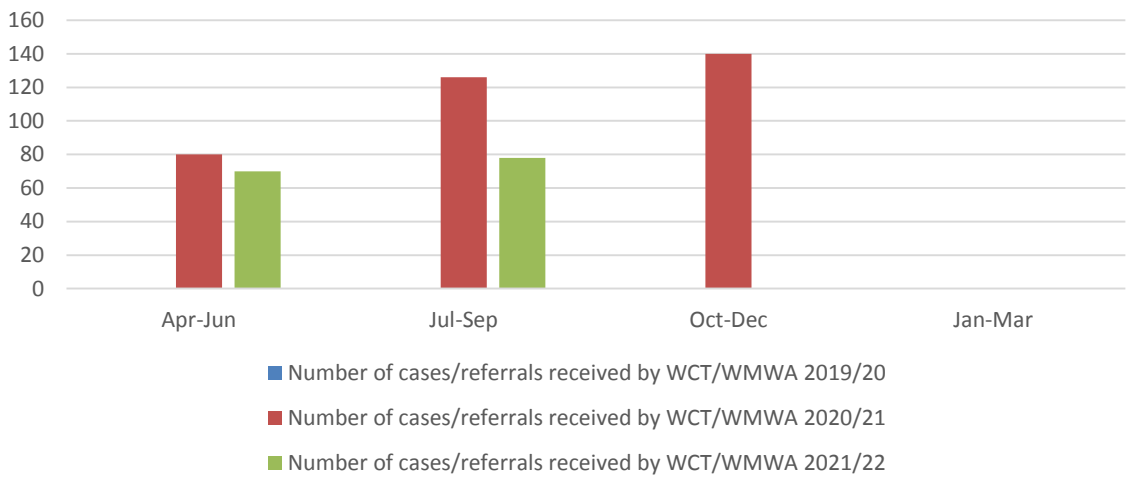


Number of adults engaged with in response to referrals

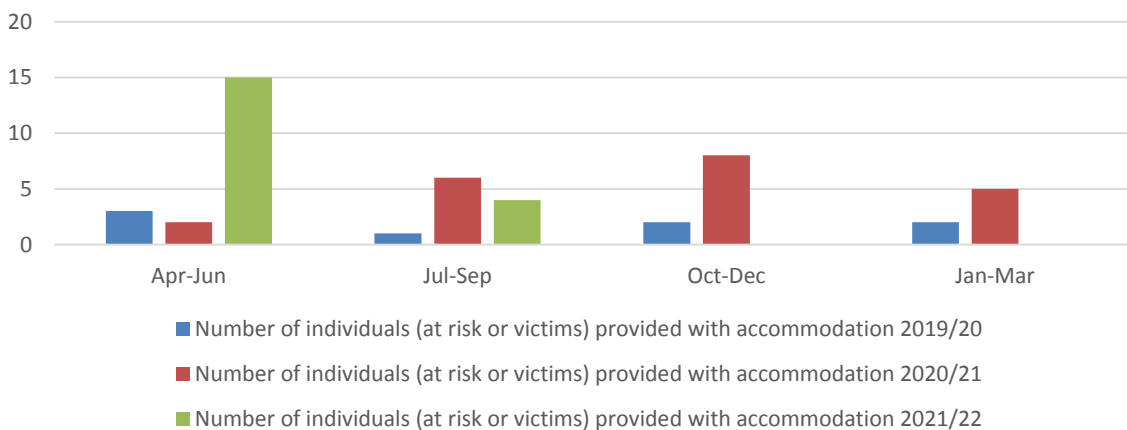


**Domestic Abuse**

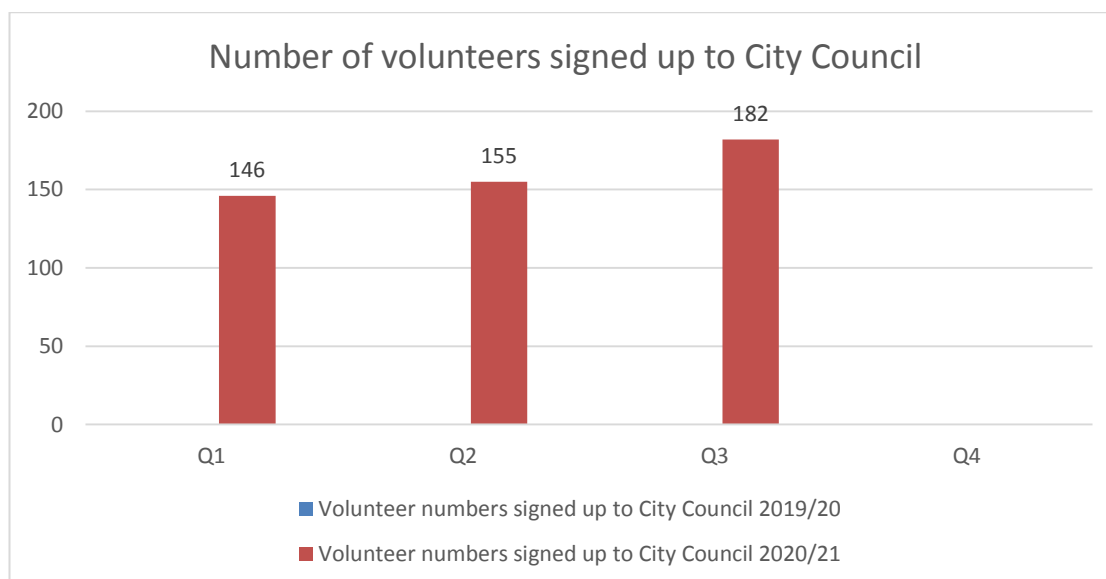
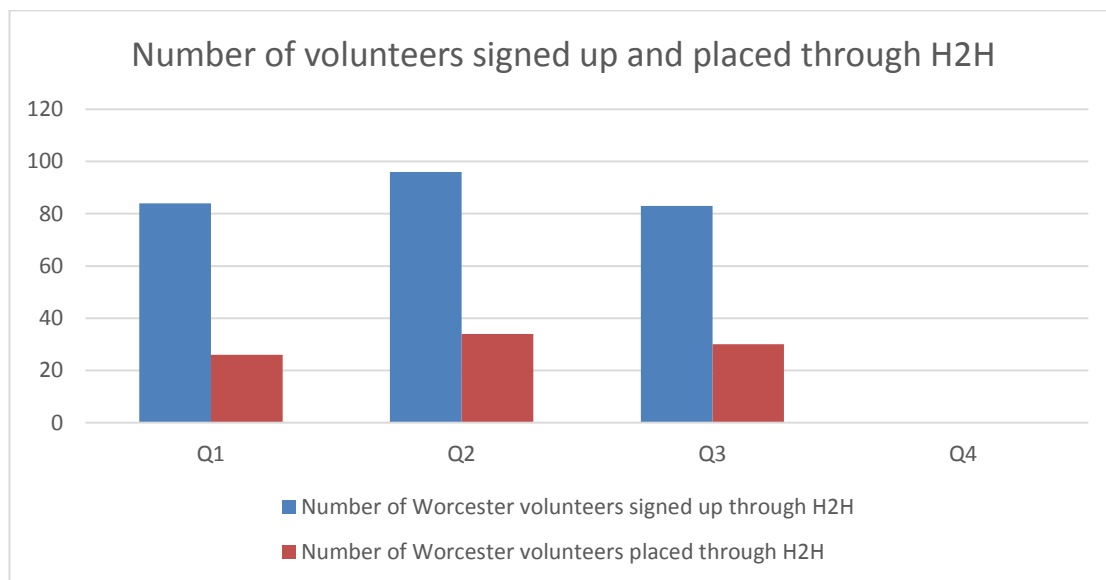
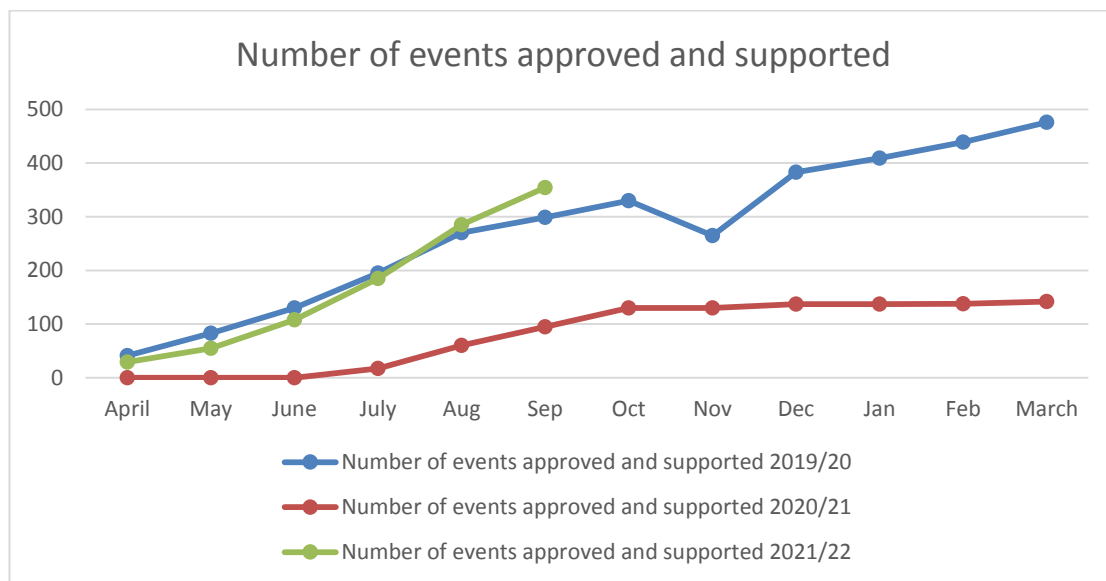
Number of cases/referrals received by WCT/WMWA



Number of individuals (at risk or victims) provided with accommodation



## Shielding & Vulnerable Population / Community Empowerment & Volunteering



Number of volunteers signed up to city council

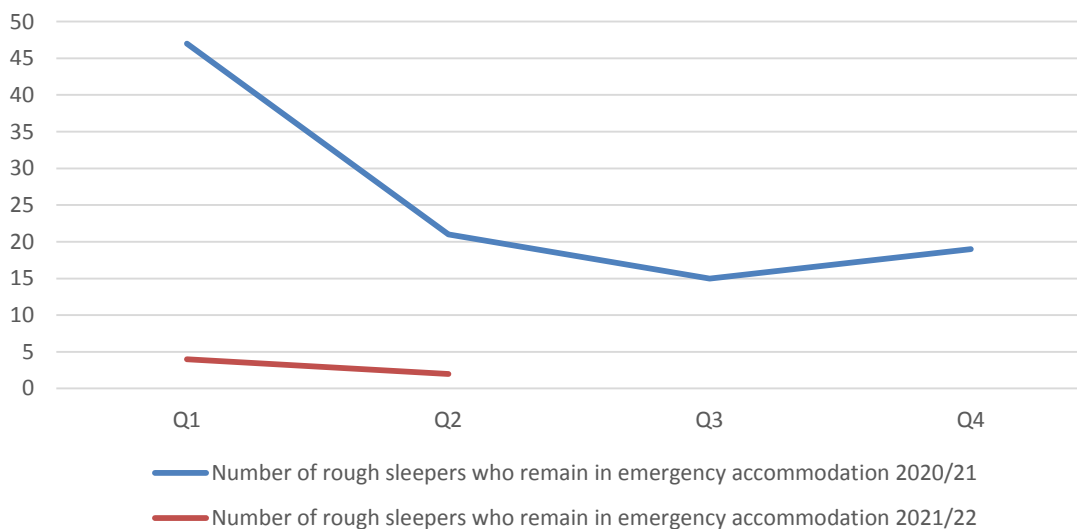
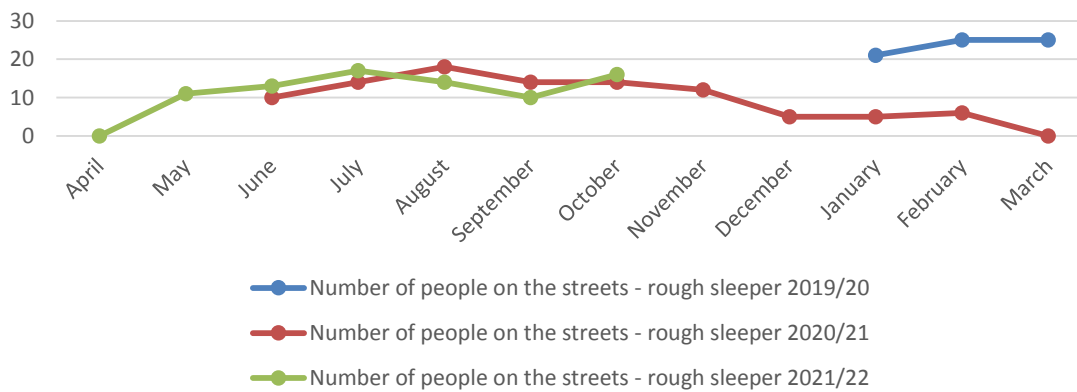


Number of organisations signed up to the Find It, Do It portal



### Rough Sleepers

Number of people on the streets - rough sleeper (as at 1st of month)



### Number of single persons accepted as homeless

