



**Report to: Health and Wellbeing Committee, 20<sup>th</sup> June 2022**

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

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

**1. Recommendation**

**That the Committee:**

- 1.1 Note the contents of this report and in particular the progress made in respect of the strategy, and the national move towards 'living with COVID-19;' and**
- 1.2 Note the intention to discontinue the strategy in recognition of the ongoing work that continues to be carried out across priority areas.**

**2. Background**

- 2.1 The Council's COVID-19 Community Recovery Plan (CRP) was approved by the Council's Communities Committee in [July 2020](#) along with a £25,000 enabling budget to support progression of the strategy. The strategy was extended for a twelve-month period (until March 2022) period by Communities Committee in [March 2021](#).
- 2.2 During the extension period, Committee responsibility for oversight of the Community Recovery Strategy transferred to the Health & Well-being Committee following a Motion (Amendment to the Constitution) that was approved by Council in May 2021. A six-month update report was provided to this Committee in [November 2021](#).
- 2.3 Since the Strategy's approval the Country has been through a further 3 national lockdowns and is now following the Government guidance of 'Living with Covid'. On 24<sup>th</sup> February 2022, the remaining Covid regulations including the necessity to self-isolate following a positive test, ceased the widespread provision of LFT and PCR testing and ended self-isolation support payments.
- 2.3 Furthermore, government revoked the Health Protection (Coronavirus, Restrictions) (England) (No. 3) Regulations meaning that local authorities would manage local outbreaks of COVID-19 in high-risk settings as they do with other infectious diseases.
- 2.4 Many of the community impacts of COVID-19 are interlinked with the more recent national and international challenges including the cost-of-living crisis and the Russo-Ukrainian War. District Council's will be at the centre of work aimed at supporting residents and communities with these challenges and this work given its importance has become business as usual.

2.5 Worcestershire County Council are revising their Health & Wellbeing Strategy 2022-2032 with a priority focus on good mental health and wellbeing supported by three pillars;

1. Healthy living at all ages
2. Safe, thriving and healthy homes, communities and places and
3. Quality local jobs and opportunities.

It recognises the different ways that the Covid-19 pandemic has and will continue to impact individuals and communities.

2.6 A Worcester City District Collaborative is being developed with partners which will become the local delivery arm of the new Herefordshire & Worcestershire Integrated Care System and will drive the work within Worcester around health inequalities.

2.7 This report seeks to update Committee on progress against the 9 priority areas of the strategy set out in the table below and sets out the option to continue to undertake this work as business as usual through existing workstreams, multi-agency partnership working and existing and emerging oversight arrangements, and discontinue with a stand-alone COVID-19 Community Recovery Strategy.

**COVID-19 Community Recovery Strategy Priorities (Jul 2020 – Mar 2022)**

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

**3. Information**

**Housing & Homelessness**

- 3.1 The number of households that presented at risk of being made homeless in 2021/2022 was higher than forecast with an increase of 14.7% compared with 2020/2021. This figure is made up of approximately 67% single and 33% families which shows a shift towards more families approaching than in previous years.
- 3.2 The three main reasons for homelessness presentations are loss of private rented accommodation, family being no longer able to accommodate and relationship breakdowns including those due to domestic abuse.
- 3.3 Although relationship breakdown has always been in the top three causes of homelessness, there has been increase in approaches due to domestic abuse which are likely to be partly attributed to the end of the COVID 19 pandemic.
- 3.4 Additional funding has been made available to support the implementation of the Domestic Abuse Act 2021 and this is being utilised to employ two specialist domestic abuse specialist Housing Solutions Officers. Further funding will be used to provide extra temporary accommodation for Domestic Abuse survivors.

- 3.5 Extra pressures are also expected this year due to an increase in approaches from Ukrainian nationals repatriating via the Families scheme but families are unable to accommodate or the Homes for Ukraine scheme when the placement breaks down. So far in 2022/23 this has led to a further increase in the number of larger families approaching which puts extra demand on temporary accommodation placements.
- 3.6 The homeless service remains focussed on the prevention of homelessness adopting a pragmatic approach to tackle the causes of homelessness. The Homeless Prevention Grant (HPG) funds a number of housing outreach officers to provide support to those at risk of homelessness or in temporary accommodation. The HPG has also been used for a range of other reasons to prevent homelessness including assistance towards current and former tenancy arrears for those approaching as homeless and for rent in advance and deposits to enable move on.
- 3.7 A County wide homelessness and rough sleeper strategy is currently being developed and will include a Worcester City action plan to ensure a targeted response to homelessness in the City, particularly in light of the post Covid environment. A Housing Enabling Strategy will also be developed to identify and address the supply of affordable housing to meet increasing demand.

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

- 4.1 The council has continued to support and administer events and activities on public open spaces. Plans are in progress to deliver the Worcester Show on 14<sup>th</sup> August 2022, building on the success of the show in 2021 which attracted in excess of 15,000 people at Pitchcroft and is free to access. This year, the show is immediately preceded by a concert by Tom Jones on the same location. Although this concert will not be affordable to all, it provides an opportunity to attract greater interest in the City's green spaces and arts and cultural offer.
- 4.2 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 2021/22 Q4 period stood at 86%, whilst swim school attendance exceeded pre-pandemic levels by 460 participants.
- 4.3 Total active participation continues to grow steadily. There are currently 1,702 more active members at the end of March 2022 when compared to the end of April 2021, whilst the number of monthly 'pay as you go' customers has increased by 14,255 peaking at the end of the Q4 period.
- 4.4 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.
- 4.5 A number of improvements have been made across the City including small size pitch refurbishment at Perdiswell, the Riverside project, access to free tennis and the approved cricket wicket at Brickfields.
- 4.6 ACW (Active Communities Worcester) continue to deliver a diverse programme of activity at various locations around the city, with the team overachieving against their participation targets in all four quarters.

- 4.7 On a national basis Freedom Leisure continue to perform very well in terms of recovery, in comparison with several other leisure operators however the Council played a crucial role in financially supporting Freedom Leisure to enable them to continue to operate and sustain the City's leisure offer. The increasing costs of energy may impact upon Leisure providers with the Council may be needing to provide support to mitigate the impact to ensure continuity of the leisure provision.

2021-22	Nov	Dec	Jan	Feb	March
Number of active members	6713	6450	6893	7018	7233
Number of pay as you go customers	14049	9719	14975	17387	17069
Number of people accessing outdoor classes	0	0	0	0	0

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

- 5.1 Financial hardship continues to be a challenge for many households with the range of financial support schemes available during the Covid pandemic. This is exacerbated by the increasing daily living costs including food and energy prices.
- 5.2 The on-going pressure is shown by the number of applications for Council Tax Support which remain high with 2,086 being made between 1<sup>st</sup> October 2021 and 31<sup>st</sup> March 2022. In addition, 214 applications for Discretionary Housing Payment were made in the same period.
- 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 passported via Worcestershire County Council in recognition of the importance of disseminating funds as close to those receiving it as possible.
- 5.4 Between October 2020 and 31<sup>st</sup> March 2022, 1,240 payments totalling £620,000 were made to individuals who met the eligibility set out for NHS Test and Trace Self-Isolation Payments. This was comprised of 725 (£362,000) main payments and 515 (£257,000) discretionary payments. This scheme ceased at the end of March 2022 and is no longer available.
- 5.5 As a council it will be critical for us to ensure that where we are able to deploy grant funding, this is undertaken in a way that supports those who are most vulnerable or in most hardship.
- 5.6 Worcestershire County Council received £3.95m of Household Support Fund (HSF) grant to support vulnerable households between 6<sup>th</sup> October 2021 to 31<sup>st</sup> March 2022 which was allocated as follows:

<b>Total Grant</b>		£3,949,139.00
At least 50% of the total funding will be ring-fenced to support families with children	50%	£1,974,569.50
<b>Commitments</b>		

Free Schools Meals 15,000 Children (Autumn, Christmas and Spring Holidays)		£945,000.00
Care Leavers Support		£203,000.00
Contingency to mitigate demand		£200,000.00
Act on Energy		£1,000,000.00
<b>Other Households and Families for Districts to Distribute</b>		<b>£1,601,139.00</b>

- 5.7 Of the Act on Energy allocation, 456 Worcester households received £363,200 in support for power and heating costs.
- 5.8 Worcester City Council received £377,095 of the £1.6 million identified for Districts to distribute. Food and food vouchers accounted for £282,518 of this expenditure, £1,644 in contribution to utility bills, £47,932 on wider essentials and £25,581 on housing costs to prevent families from homelessness. The remaining £20,000 was used to support Worcester Citizens Advice Bureau to resource and deliver training in order to effectively triage and handle the increase in demand from residents.
- 5.9 Government announced that a new HSF grant will be made available to County Councils and Unitary Authorities in England to support those most in need with the rising cost of living. This new grant will run from 1<sup>st</sup> April to 30<sup>th</sup> September 2022 and £3.95m has been allocated to Worcestershire and is being distributed as below:

<b>Total Grant</b>	£3,949,139.19	To be spent/committed by 30 September 2022
<b>Commitments</b>	<b>Amount</b>	<b>Purpose</b>
Free Schools Meals 15,000 Children (Easter, Christmas and Spring Holidays)	£875,000.00	Free School Meals 15,000 children £3 day x 15 days (Easter 10 days, Summer Mid Term £200k contingency for vulnerable children)
Pensioners 30%	£1,000,000.00	Pensioners through Pension Credit direct allocation and WAN
Act on Energy	£1,000,000.00	Act on Energy split between three focus areas
District allocation	£899,139.19	Districts to distribute in line with guidance
Contingency to mitigate demand and admin	£175,000.00	Contingency to cover demand and increase in spend to March and admin

- 5.10 Due to a change in allocation requirements, a third of the new Household Support Fund allocation of £3.95million for Worcestershire must be spent on supporting pensioners. In line with this expectation £1million has been agreed as a ringfenced

pot of funding, as well as other allocations having to ensure a third of their allocations support those of pensionable age.

5.11 Worcester City Council have received an allocation of £189,088. To meet the terms and timescales of the funding, support will be provided through exiting services. Worcester Foodbank will receive £50,000 to buy food and other supplies to top up donations to meet demand. Age UK will use £63,029 to deliver a cash and voucher scheme for over 66's in support of the cost of living. An allocation of £50,000 will increase the offer provided to residents through the Domestic Welfare Assistance Scheme and the remaining £26,059 will support the Spend to Save offer which keep families in danger of becoming homeless in their accommodation.

5.12 The Worcester City Discretionary Welfare Assistance Scheme (DWAS) continues to provide assistance to vulnerable households who are experiencing financial hardship and/or re-settling following a period of homelessness. In 2021/22, the Council spent £119,597.85 through this scheme, providing assistance to eligible households in the form of food vouchers, energy vouchers or white goods.

5.13 The table below shows the number of awards made through the scheme in 2021/22 broken down by award and household type:

	Single	Couple	Family	<b>Total</b>
Food Vouchers	61	6	26	<b>93</b>
Energy Vouchers	139	15	117	<b>271</b>
White Goods	218	13	210	<b>441</b>
<b>Total</b>	<b>418</b>	<b>34</b>	<b>353</b>	<b>805</b>

5.14 The scheme also received a proportion of the City Council's Household Support Grant funding, which has been used to extend the DWAS offer to additional households and with extra support available, for example with essential furniture, clothing and household items.

5.15 A review of the scheme will be undertaken during the early part of 2022/23 to ensure that the scheme continues to effectively meet the needs of the city's vulnerable residents, particularly in light of the rising cost of living.

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

6.1 The total recorded number of ASB incidents during January, February and March 2022 of 1,364 is similar when compared to the same period over the previous two years.

6.2 Worcester City Council has worked with partners to respond to reported instances of ASB. 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 has met twice since being established in October 2021.

6.3 In March Worcester hosted the Knife Angel in Cathedral Square. During its month long stay 150,000 people come to view the Angel. The Youth intervention Officers ran a programme of school visits and events delivered with engagement with 1,250

students from 22 schools from across Worcester, Malvern and Wychavon visited the Knife Angel and took part in an education workshop or assembly.

- 6.4 A successful "Safer Streets 3 – Violence Against Women and Girls project" funded by the Home Office with support from the Police and Crime Commissioner was delivered which supported a range of initiatives to improve the safety on Worcester's streets including improving lighting in the City centre, new CCTV cameras for deployment in areas where people feel unsafe, healthy relationship workshops with young adults, bystander training for the night-time economy staff and an extension to the street art programme.

## **7. Domestic Abuse**

- 7.1 DAWN, a service to provide support to survivors of Domestic Abuse, 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.
- 7.2 We have been successful in providing some further reassurance to the longevity of the DAWN project by securing 3 years funding via the South Worcestershire Community Safety Partnership. The Police and Crime Commissioner confirmed the three years funding rather than 12 months which was previously the case.
- 7.3 The number of referrals received by Worcester Community Trust (DAWN Project) funded by South Worcestershire Community Safety Partnership for the period January to March is 187 and 73 have had positive outcomes. There are 12 on the waiting list for support. There are now 37 volunteer community champions.
- 7.4 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. Two Domestic Abuse Housing Solutions Officers have been appointed within the homeless team to provide specialist support to survivors of Domestic Abuse and to meet the Council's new broadened statutory duty from the Domestic Abuse Act, funded through New Burdens Funding and Homeless Prevention Grant. Although relationship breakdown has always been in the top three causes of homelessness the increase in approaches due to domestic abuse are likely to be partly attributed to the end of the COVID 19 pandemic.
- 7.5 Eight new properties providing safe accommodation are being sourced by the City Council through an arrangement with Platform Housing Group to provide the additional capacity for individuals and families fleeing Domestic Abuse. Worcestershire County Council commissions domestic abuse support services, additional Independent Domestic Abuse Advisors (IDVA's) 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 Bereavement services has now returned to business as usual operations post pandemic with both cremations and burials at levels similar to the two previous years before the Pandemic. The numbers attending both cremations and burials have returned to larger gatherings. Footfall around both sites has increased. On 15<sup>th</sup> December 2021, a memorial service was held facilitated with the inter faith forum which was attended by a number of families, well received and provided learning for future services.
- 8.2 The website continues to provide an integral support tool to the community with unique visitor numbers remaining at circa 2800 per month. The website has also seen several additional sections added including a detailed bio of every buried military personnel member from across Astwood.
- 8.3 Volunteering is increasing with several different groups working on specific tasks that include beekeepers and more than thirty ex service personnel who clean the military headstones and have provided us with all the new data for the website.
- 8.4 The service has seen several specialist burial services in the last few months including ceremonies for the Plymouth Brethren , Bahá'í Faith, and 2 Muslim services. The team are prepared to make adaptations and changes with immediate effect to make sure families receive the experience they seek from our service.
- 8.5 In late March 2022 the service launched its Covid related memorial the 'Forget me Not' garden. So far it has seen over 100 individual notelets written and posted and the wildflowers are nearing their first flowering which will be captured for the website.
- 8.6 The service has seen a number of important changes in the last few months to improve the public experience when visiting and also the environmental impact . These include:
- Introduction of the first phase of electric equipment 6 strimmer's and 1 sit down mower (removed need for 2 stroke fuel along with safer for staff to use and quieter)
  - Resurfacing of the car park
  - New bike shed
  - Rewilding project back up by two-page news article and information signs made by local environmental group WEG
- 8.7 Astwood Cemetery was assessed by Greenflag week commencing 16<sup>th</sup> May and the reception was very favourable with the outcome likely to be announced in July 2022.

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

- 9.1 Here 2 Help, the advice service operated by County Council continues to be developed into a longer-term service and most recently, has provided a key central point of contact in the County for the Homes for Ukraine scheme.
- 9.2 The number of community events increased significantly during the course of the year as government restrictions were eased. Annual events and postponed events combined to provide a great variety of activities for people to take part in City open

spaces. Total number of events supported for 2021-22 was 557, (compared to 445 for 2018-19).

- 9.3 A Volunteer thank you event was held on 26<sup>th</sup> March to acknowledge and highlight the valuable contribution of volunteers in the City. A Volunteer Expo is scheduled for 17<sup>th</sup> June in the Guildhall for agencies and charities to set up stalls for prospective volunteers to find out what opportunities there are in Worcester.
- 9.4 The council are developing an Asset Based Approach to Community Development (ABCD) aimed at facilitating and empowering communities to be self sufficient. The Community Engagement team have been working with communities to facilitate street parties and road closures for the Jubilee which will be used as a platform to engage and embed ABCD. A Community Engagement strategy against the principles of ABCD is being produced and will be presented to the Communities Committee.
- 9.5 Although Covid legislation and regulations are no longer in force, the Council continue to take a considered approach to individuals including those particularly vulnerable. This includes the provision of face masks, antibacterial wipes and hand sanitiser across its buildings.

## **10. Rough Sleepers**

- 10.1 During the Covid Pandemic there were several schemes aimed at addressing the needs of rough sleepers. This included 'Everyone In' which offered accommodation to all rough sleepers with an aim to develop long term housing plans. In addition, the Protect and Vaccinate programme was introduced in December 2021 until the end of March 2022 to accommodate rough sleepers and encourage take up of vaccines.
- 10.2 These schemes were successful in addressing the needs of many rough sleepers and providing an accommodation outcome to many of our more entrenched rough sleepers. 171 households were accommodated through these scheme with 126 successful in securing a suitable housing solution. Of these, 35 were our target priority rough sleepers who had previously been challenging to engage with. Of those not found suitable accommodation, two returned to rough sleeping in Worcester, two are rough sleeping in other areas and ten are sofa surfing. The remainder are unknown but have not been reported rough sleeping in Worcester City.
- 10.3 There is still a small cohort of 5 rough sleepers who did not engage with offers of accommodation during Everyone In or Protect and Vaccinate. Each week we can have between 3-11 new rough sleepers. Due to the reduction in funding for accommodation, the number of new rough sleepers has subsequently increased. Some of these are transient moving from other authorities and others sleep rough for a short period of time whilst housing options are secured.
- 10.4 No Second Night Out (NSNO) has been utilised to provide accommodation to new rough sleepers though due to a capacity of 5 rooms not everyone can be immediately accommodated through this provision. However NSNO has been successful in finding long term housing options for those accommodated with 26 households secured long term housing outcomes through their support during 2021/22.

10.5 Multi agency working between the local authority and partner agencies continues to remain strong in addressing the needs of rough sleepers and homelessness. This year we have funded the recruitment of 2 additional staff with MAGGs Outreach.

These posts will work alongside the local authority and other agencies to address the needs of our target priority rough sleepers. We have also secured funding to look at bespoke packages for our most entrenched rough sleepers that have not been able to have their needs addressed by regular housing options offers.

## **11. Conclusion**

11.1 As highlighted in the recommendations of this report, it is intended to discontinue with a Covid-19 Community Recovery Strategy. Across the range of services that have contributed towards this strategy, they have become much better prepared to adapt to changing demands.

11.2 Other key emerging issues such as fuel poverty and cost of living pressures are now presenting a greater focus for services as communities continue to recover from the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic.

11.3 Much of the work developed and undertaken as part of this strategy have become business as usual for Council services and are informing other pieces of work including the development of a revised Health & Wellbeing Strategy, a revised Rough Sleeping and Homelessness Strategy and the Development of a District Collaborative which will provide the platform to take this work forward.

11.4 The table below outlines which Committee's will continue to have oversight of the key strategic priorities identified through the Community Recovery Strategy moving forwards.

### **Ongoing oversight of COVID-19 Community Recovery Strategy Priorities**

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

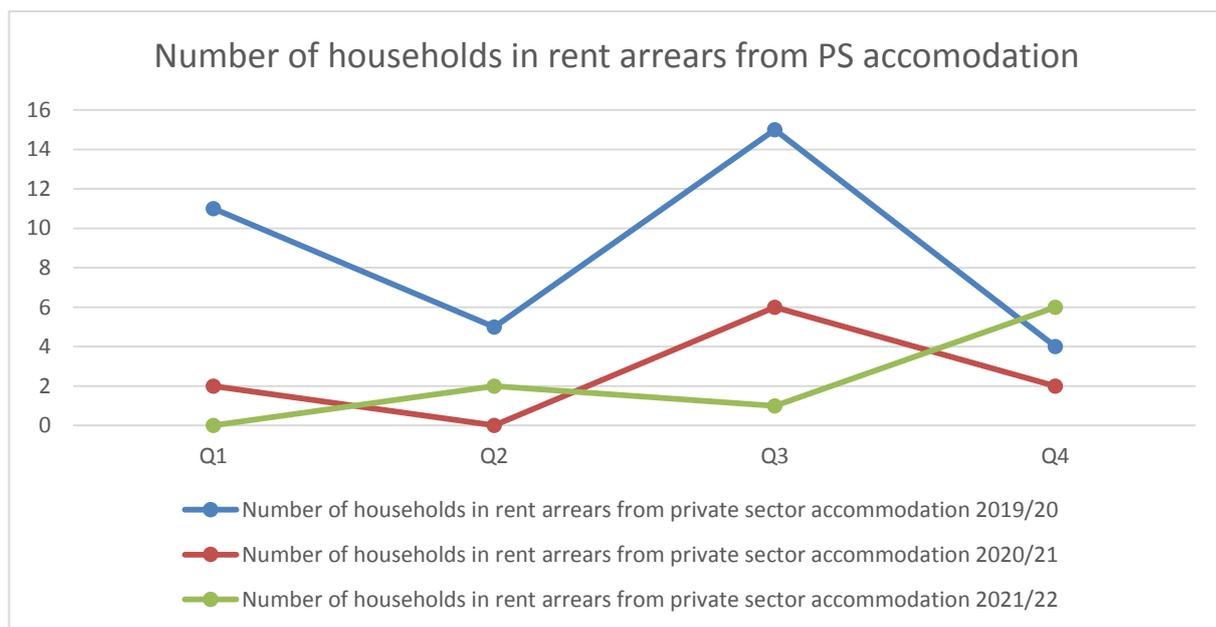
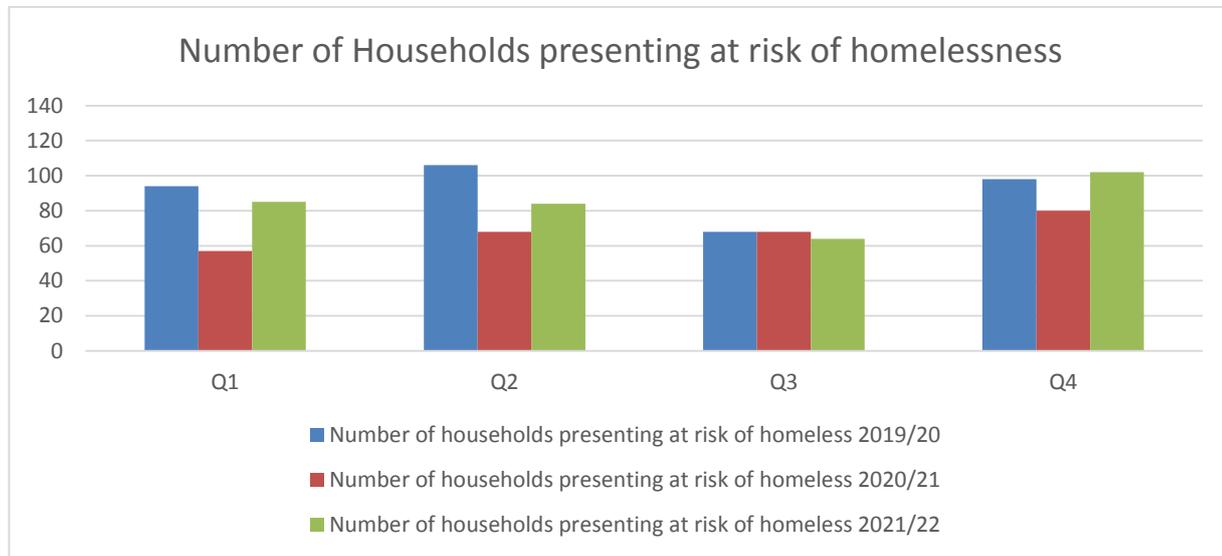
**Ward(s):** All

**Contact Officer:** Tom Mountford – Head of Homes & Communities  
**Tel:** 01905 722529  
**E-mail:** [Tom.mountford@worcester.gov.uk](mailto:Tom.mountford@worcester.gov.uk)

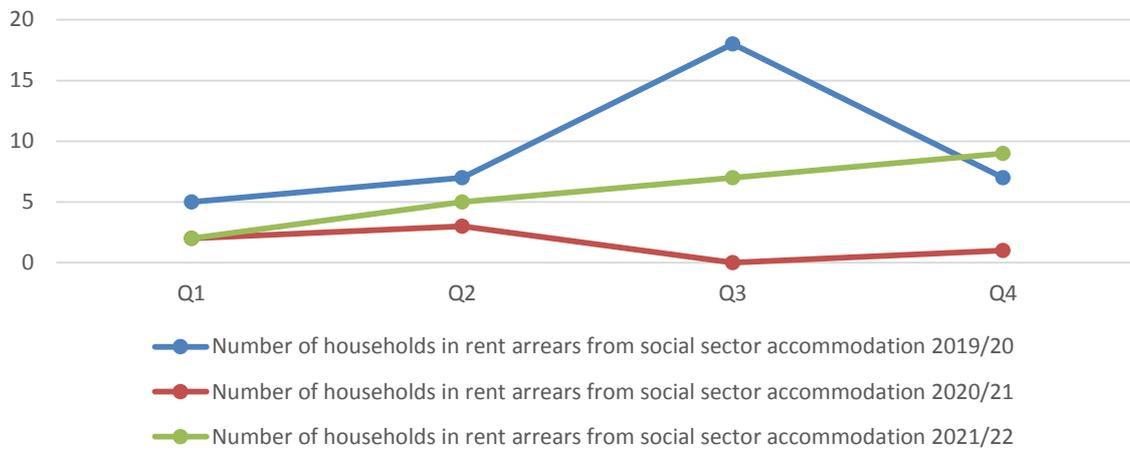
**Background Papers:** None

## Appendix 1 – Progress Against Community Recovery Indicators

### Housing & Homelessness

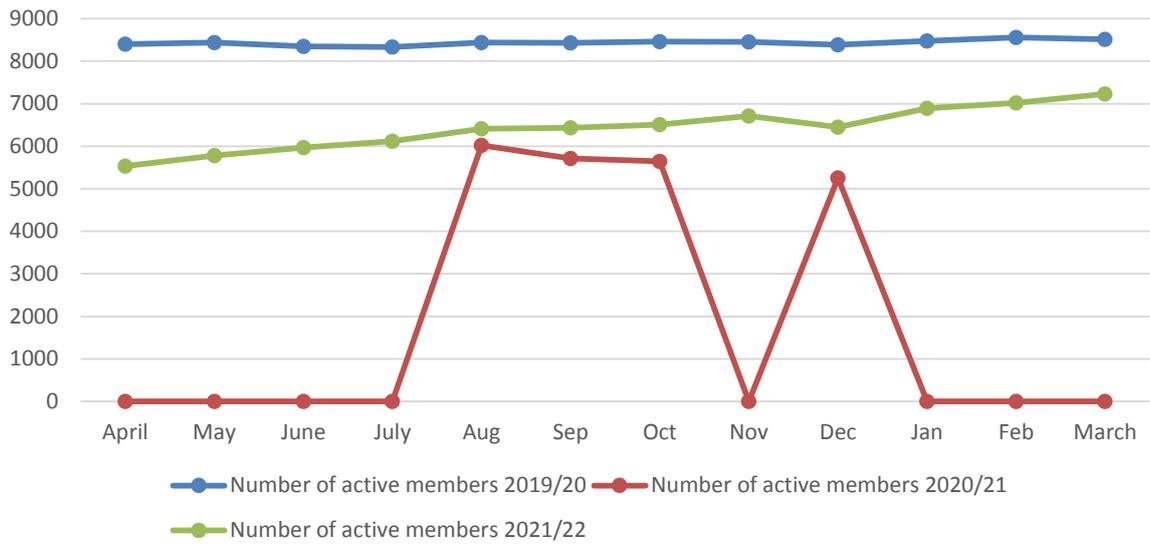


### Number of household in rent arrears from social housing sector

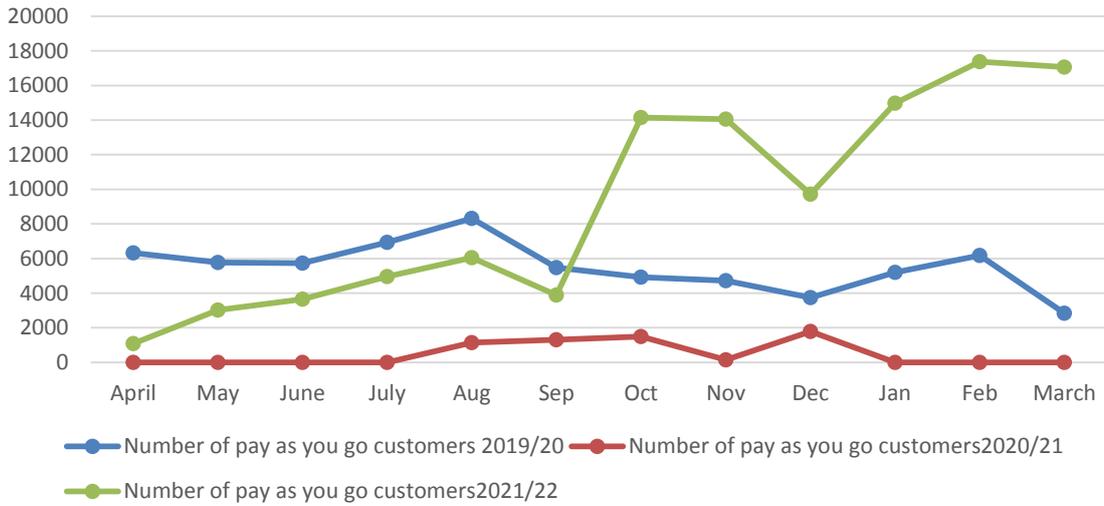


### Leisure, Recreation & Well-being

#### Active Freedom Leisure members

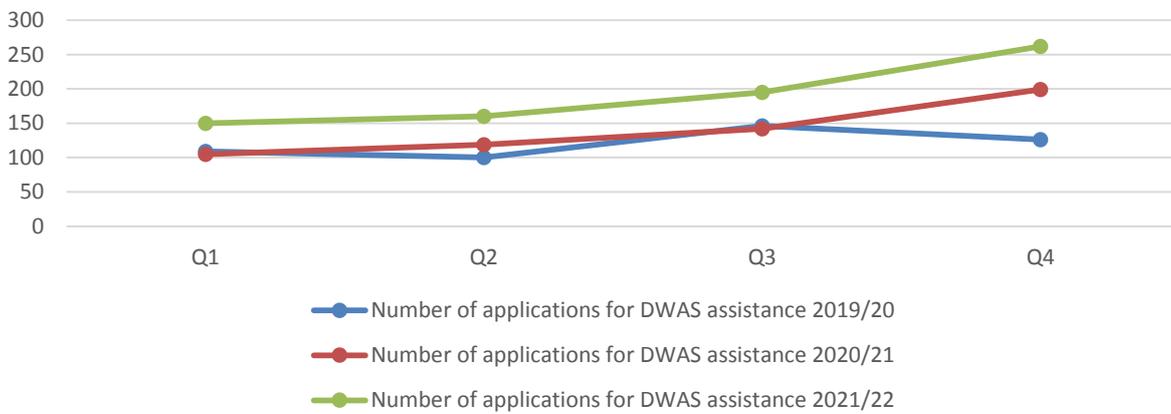


### Pay as you go customers

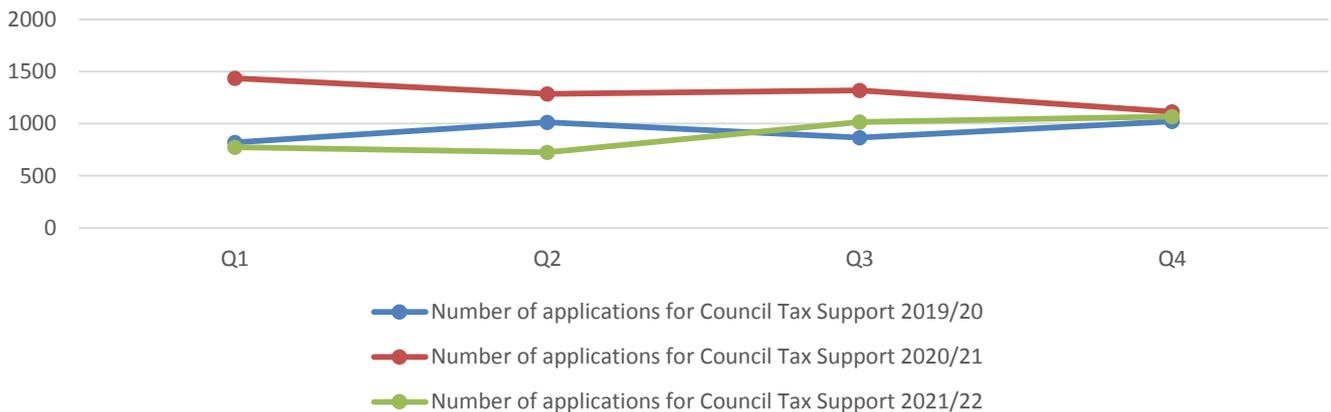


### Financial Hardship

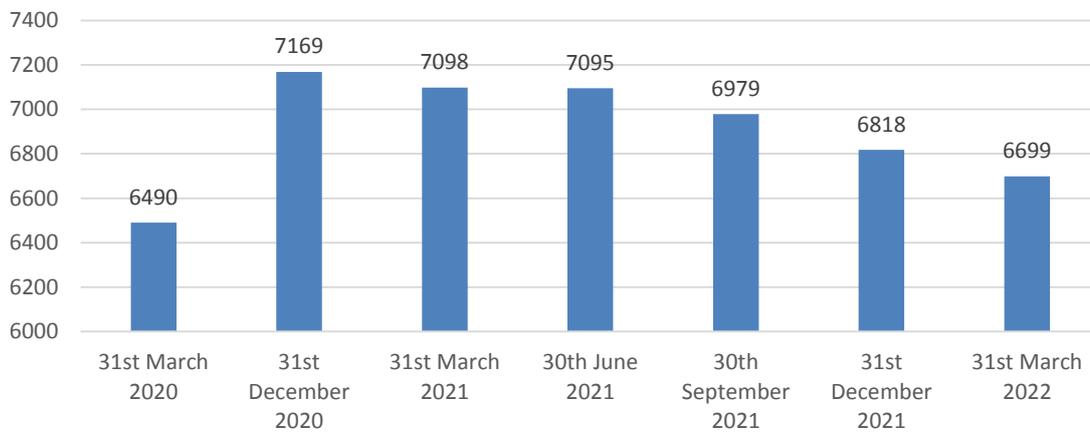
#### Number of applications for Discretionary Welfare Assistance scheme



#### Number of applications for Council Tax support

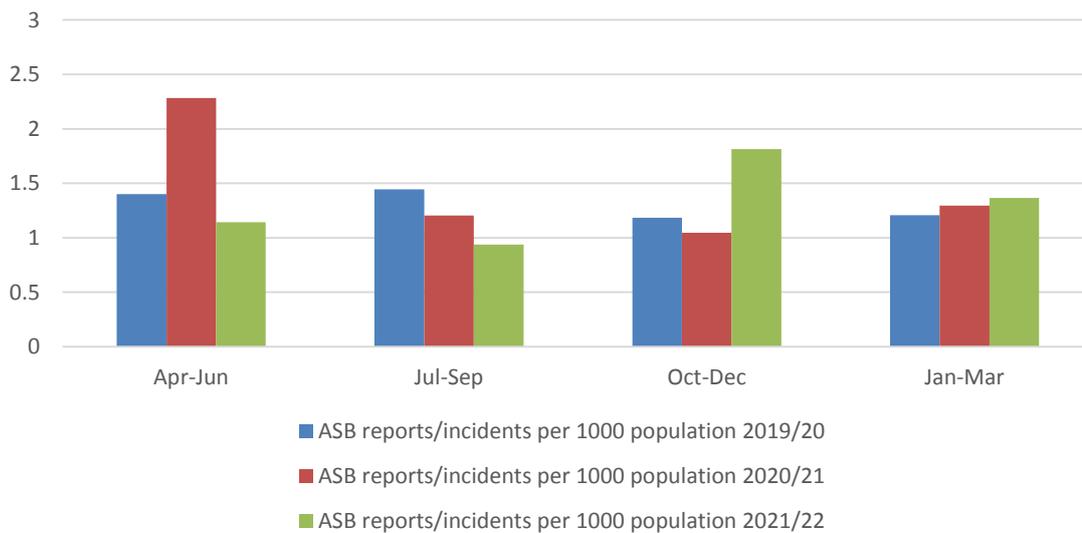


### Number of Council Tax Support claims being paid

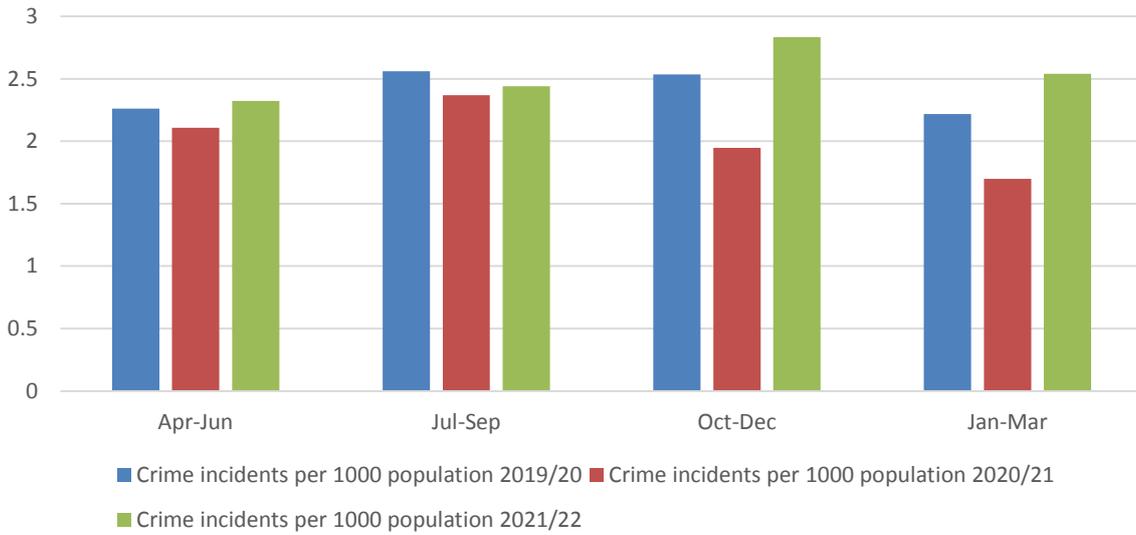


### Anti-Social Behaviour

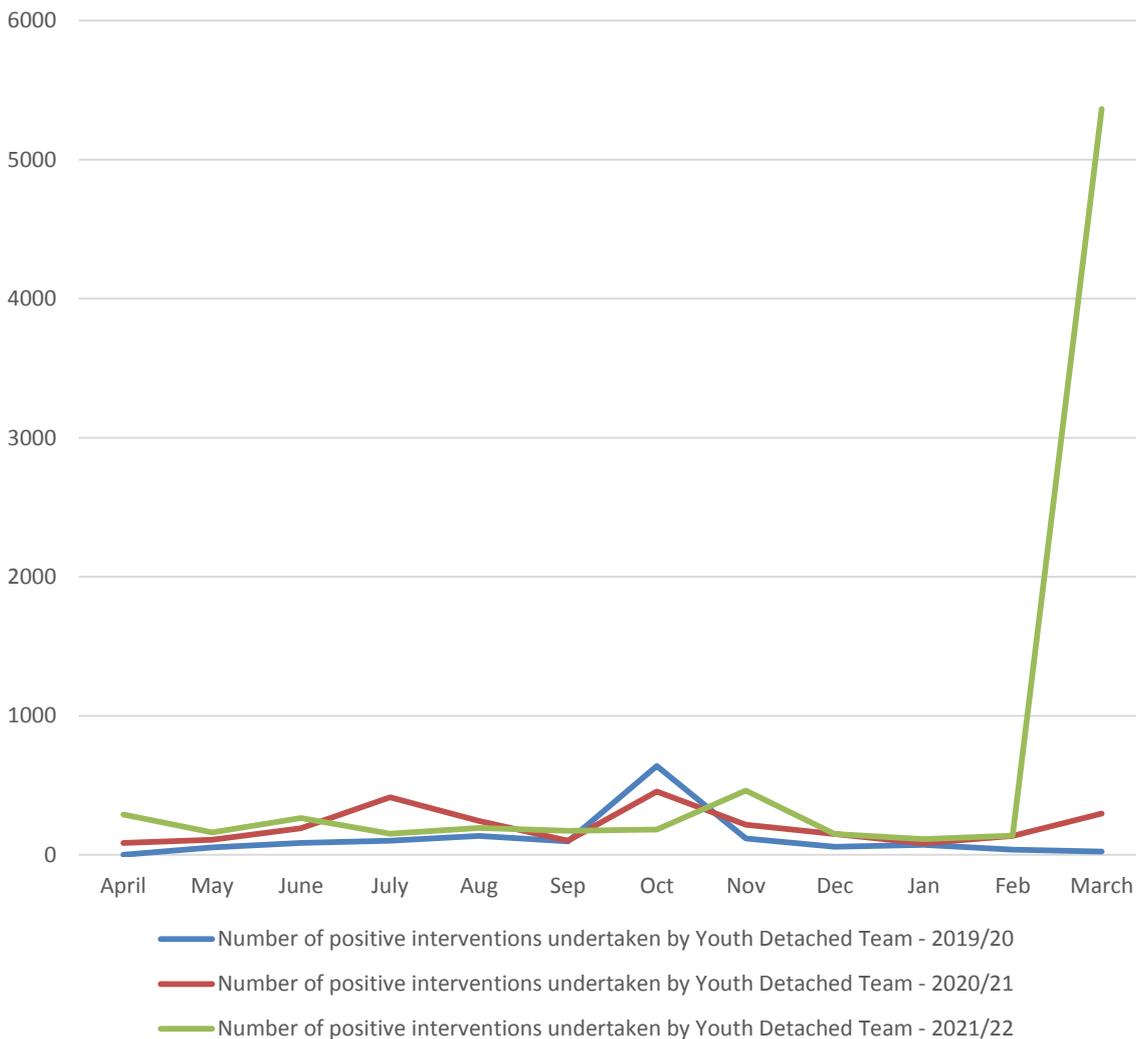
#### ASB reports/incidents per 1000 population



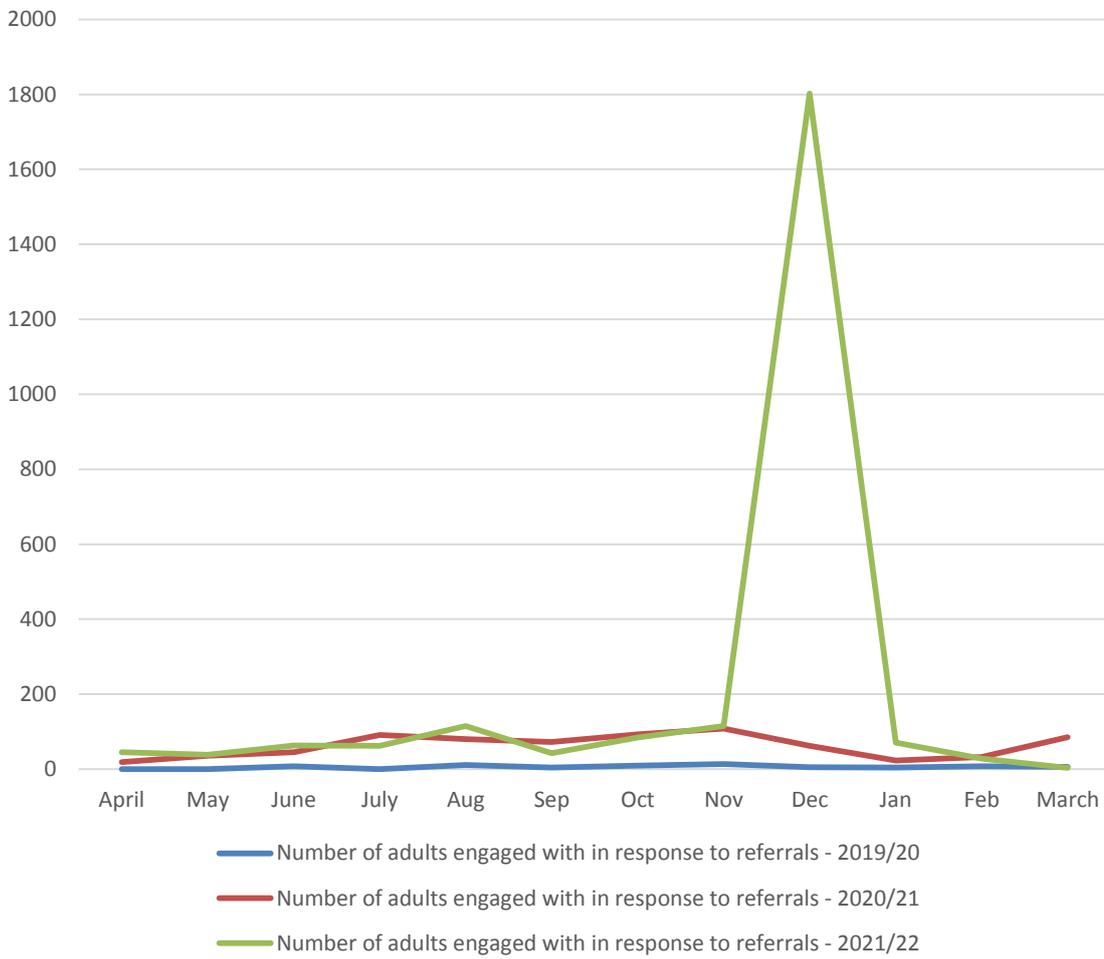
Crime incidents per 1000 population



Number of positive interventions by Youth Detached Team

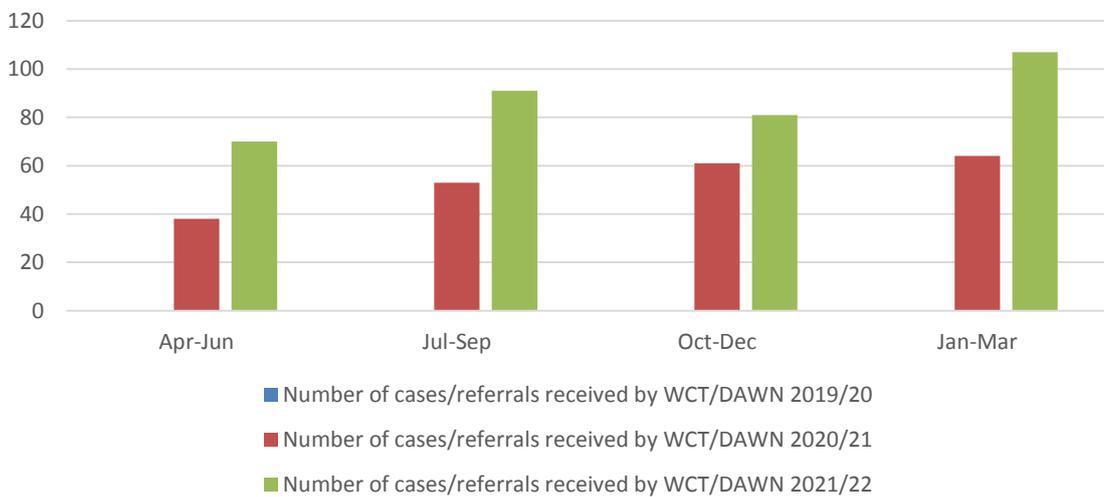


Number of adults engaged with in response to referrals

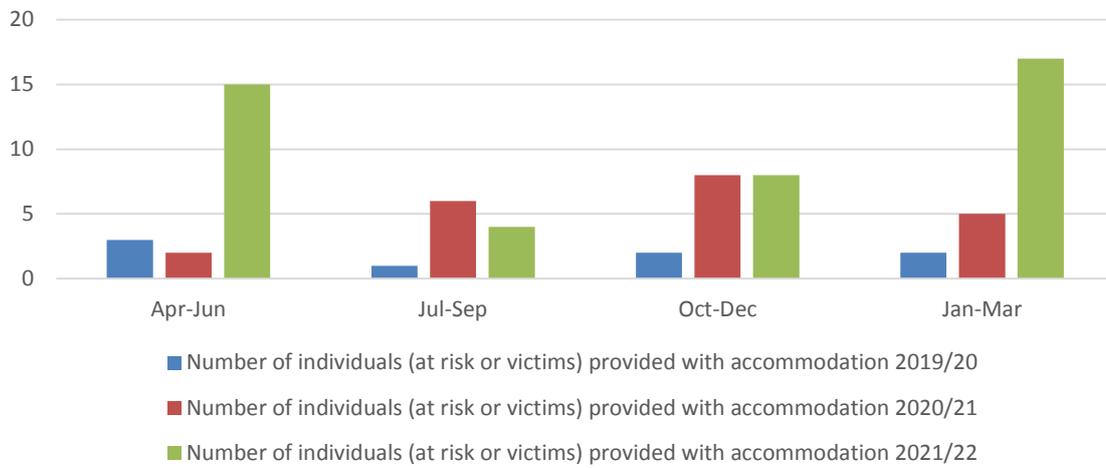


**Domestic Abuse**

Number of cases/referrals received by WCT/WMWA

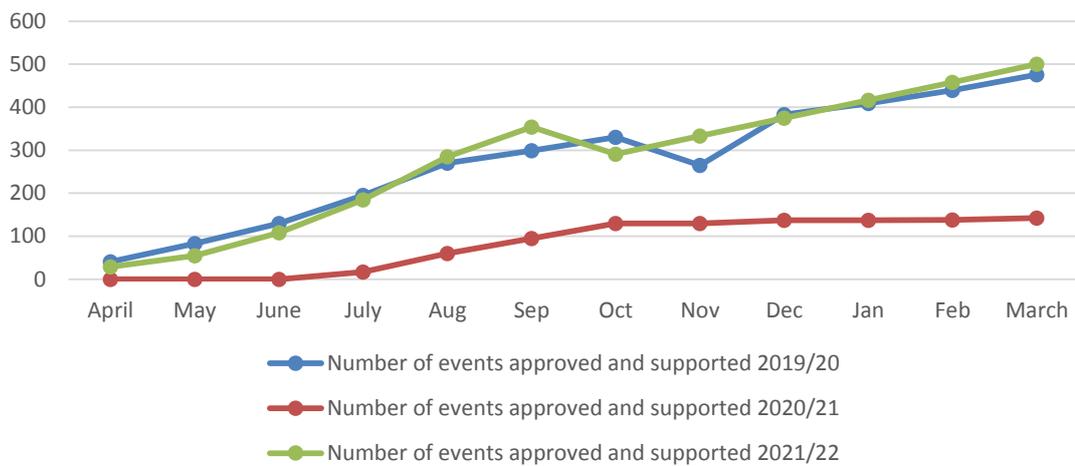


Number of individuals (at risk or victims) provided with accommodation



**Shielding & Vulnerable Population / Community Empowerment & Volunteering**

Number of events approved and supported



## Rough Sleepers

