



Working For Worcester 2007 - 2008

Annual Report

**Working for Worcester 2007-2008
Annual Report – Worcester City Council
(Incorporating the Annual Statement of Accounts and the Best Value Performance Plan)**

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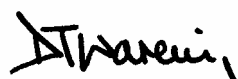
Foreword by the Chief Executive

Welcome to the new look Annual Report which is also the last Best Value Performance Plan. The Best Values Performance Plan is being phased out as the Best Value Performance Indicators are replaced by the new National Indicator Set. Performance planning is incorporated into the Corporate Plan while this Annual Report is now a retrospective look at the year from both an operational and financial perspective.

As well as these changes to the national performance regime, a lot has been happening at the City Council. Last summer saw exceptional flooding and Worcester employees were involved in the emergency, organising rest centres and dealing with the diversions as well as the clear up after the waters receded. We introduced the final phase of wheelie bins in the autumn thus accelerating our domestic refuse recycling rates to levels that seemed impossible a few short years ago.

Plans for the renaissance of the city have also taken a step forward with work starting on the new University city centre campus. We've also been successful in attracting funding from schemes depending on a public vote. We have winning schemes for both a pedestrian and cycle bridge at Diglis and an I-Play facility for Cripplegate Park. As well as being good schemes, they both depended on a lot of hard work generating public support.

These and many other achievements for the year are described in what follows.



Introduction and Summary

Welcome to “Working for Worcester”, the City Council’s account of the progress it has made during the last year. The report sets out our performance and key achievements of our 550 strong workforce against our vision, strategic priorities and targets for 2007/8.

Working for Worcester is the focus of our improvement planning process and sets out our priorities for ongoing improvements in the way we fulfil our obligations as a community leader and service provider.

The City Council is an Equal Opportunities Organisation and we are committed to equality of opportunity for both our customers and employees. This means that we aim for our services and employment opportunities to be equally available and accessible to all.

Working for Worcester helps stakeholders and external observers to check we’re doing the right things in the right way and explains -

- how we performed in the past year
- how the Council is organised and how it functions
- how the Council is funded and what the money pays for
- how we compare with other Councils.

The companion document to Working for Worcester, the Corporate Plan 2008-2013, lays out what we are aiming to achieve for this next year, and how we intend to build on our strengths and improve on our areas of weakness

Working for Worcester and the Corporate plan are published on our website as well as being available on CD-Rom.

If you have any comments about the way in which this plan has been written or presented we would be most interested in your comments. Please refer to the **Comment on this report** section at the back of this report for ways in which you can contact us.

Our Cabinet and Corporate Management Team

The Council operates on the Leader and Cabinet model under the Local Government Act 2000. The Cabinet is made up of the Leader and 6 Cabinet Members. Details of our current Cabinet (post May 2007) are set out on page 10.

The Council’s most senior employees are the Chief Executive and six Heads of Service making up the Corporate Management Team, whose details are set out on page 13.

Business Review

With over 550 employees, we manage assets of £50 million and have over 95,000 customers, providing services within Worcester City that affect our daily lives and the environment within which we live. We also seek to improve our City through our five key priorities. These are set out at page 27 showing our corporate responsibility.

We are an improving Council as recognised by the Audit Commission. Extracts from their external inspection of the Council are set out on page 35.

What we have achieved

The Chief Executive has outlined some of our key achievements during 2007/08. A summary is given on page 19.

Highlights of 2007/08 include; -

(Highlights from the detail of the report will be selected for the final web document.)

How we have performed

Our performance during 2007/08 continues to improve as set out at page 20.

(Highlights from the detail of the report will be selected for the final web document.)

Our financial health – financial statements

A summary of the financial statements is set out from page 29. We also plan to produce a Summary of Accounts leaflet and publish the information in our September copy of the Council magazine "City Life" as we did last year.

Highlights of our financial health are; -

(Highlights from the detail of the report will be selected for the final web document.)

A full statement on the Council's finances; the Annual Statement of Accounts, is included as Appendix I. This document is also available on the Council's website at; -

www.worcester.gov.uk/councilfinances.

Our commitment to corporate governance

Worcester City Council is committed to maintaining high standards of corporate governance.

Our corporate governance framework is aimed at achieving our business objectives in a way that is responsible, honest, transparent and accountable. Our Councillors and employees are committed to complying with our constitution and our codes of conduct for councillors and employees.

The Council has approved a code of conduct for employees outlining the behaviour expected of employees in their dealings with residents, customers, colleagues, suppliers, councillors and other partners and stakeholders. Copies of these can be found on our website.

The Council has approved a code of conduct for Councillors and this is reviewed by an independent Standards Committee. The roles of councillors, the cabinet and the Council's various overview and scrutiny committees (including the Audit Committee) is set out in the constitution.

The cabinet's role is to organise and direct the affairs of the Council in accordance with the directions of the Council, and its constitution, all relevant laws, regulations and corporate governance standards. The cabinet holds regular meetings and is scrutinised by four separate committees.

Details of how we have met the requirements of corporate governance are set out in our Annual Governance Statement. This shows how the Council delivers economy, efficiency and effectiveness through a sound system of internal control which includes the management of risk. The statement shows where the Council is taking action to improve these arrangements.

Remuneration of the Cabinet and Senior Management Team

Details of the remuneration for all councillors were published at the Annual Council meeting on 13th May 2008. A copy of the report can be found on our website. Councillors' remuneration is reviewed by an independent Remuneration Panel which makes recommendations to the Council.

The Council's Chief Executive and Senior Managers salaries are approved by the Council based on advice from the West Midlands Local Government Employers Association. Salary levels are reported (in bands of £10k) on page 93 (note 5) of the report.

Independent Auditors Statement

The Annual Statement of Accounts is due to be audited by the Audit Commission during August and September. They will make a report and statement by the end of September 2008, and this will be reported to the Audit Committee.

The Accounts will be open to public inspection and the auditor will be available to receive questions from interested persons, these arrangements will be advertised in the local press.

Previous Annual Audit and Inspection Letters can be found on our website.

Information for residents of Worcester (our "shareholders")

Information about the City Council and its activities can be found on our website at www.worcester.gov.uk.

Listening and Learning: The Council is committed to making Worcester a First Rank Cathedral and University City and we can best do this by ensuring that we continue to listen to residents and visitors views. We have a Citizens' Panel for Worcester, now in its fourth year. It is made up of over 1000 residents who twice a year receive a questionnaire from us. Last year we asked them for views on our Finances (see Page 39). Members of the panel also take part in smaller focus group exercises. For more information on the panel's work visit the Consultation section of our website www.worcester.gov.uk.

Our City



Vital statistics;

Area – 3,318 hectares

Population – 93,400 (ONS mid 2006 estimate)

Unemployment rate – 2.7% (February 2006)

42,219 Households (as at 30 March 08)

Transforming Worcester

In recent years Worcester has been going through a renaissance and the City Council is taking a lead in facilitating these changes.

The City centre's residential population is growing through the development of new apartment schemes alongside the canal and on other central brownfield sites, particularly in the city centre. The University of Worcester is set to expand over the next few years to include a second campus on the old Royal Infirmary site and the University, Worcestershire County Council, and the City Council are working to provide a new joint University and Public Library and Customer Service Centre on the site of our, soon to be vacated, Butts depot. New public spaces have been and will be created by the riverside following the refurbishment of the High Street. Plans

to regenerate the riverside parks over the next three years have also been agreed.

Worcester is the County town, with a thriving retail and commercial sector, and is a centre for national and international tourism. It is a special City with a proud heritage spanning more than 1,500 years. A network of green and open spaces, the River Severn runs through the city centre and provides a pastoral backdrop to the urban landscape. Worcester is within close reach of Herefordshire, the Vale of Evesham, the Malvern Hills and the Cotswolds. Two M5 motorway junctions make for easy access to the West Midlands, the north and the South West. Our two railway stations, Shrub Hill and Foregate Street, give frequent, direct rail services to London, Birmingham, and Cardiff. Birmingham International airport - the "Euro hub" - is nearby and offers direct flights to the USA and European cities.

Our Vision for the City and Community Strategy

Our ambitions for the City of Worcester are best expressed in our vision of **'First Rank Cathedral and University City'** We recognise that we cannot achieve this on our own, but that by working in partnership with others and demonstrating community leadership we can. The Worcester Alliance (our Local Strategic Partnership) brings together representatives from the public, private and voluntary sectors. Key partners include the University of Worcester, West Mercia Police, County Council, Learning and Skills Council, Primary Care Trust, Chamber of Commerce, Sanctuary Housing, BBT Thermotechnology Ltd, Hewett Recruitment, the Duckworth Trust, Worcester Live and the Worcester Volunteer Bureau.

Led by the City Council, the Worcester Alliance is now working to the second edition of its Community Strategy. It sets out a five year vision for the City with a number of outcomes that the Alliance is working towards. These are linked to both the wider county partnership outcomes and also the City Council's Corporate priorities and projects.

The Alliance's annual City Summit in July 2007 brought together key partners to endorse an action plan for the Alliance to deliver the Community Strategy. Its four priority projects are:

- Focusing on two of Worcester's most deprived wards: Warndon and Gorse Hill
- Developing a 'Masterplan' for the city centre
- Addressing Transport needs and congestion
- Tackling the causes and effects of climate change

The City Council is playing a leading role in the realisation of the Alliance's vision. For more information please see www.worcesteralliance.org.uk

Running the City

The Councillors Role

The City is divided into 15 electoral wards, each one providing two or three councillors.

<INSERT Ward Boundaries Map with councillor info>

The over riding duty of councillors is to the whole community, but they have a special duty to their ward constituents, including those who did not vote for them.

The current makeup of the Council is; -

Conservative	17
Labour	13
Liberal Democrat	3
Association of Independents	2

All Councillors meet to decide the Council's overall policies and set the budget each year. The Council elects the Leader of the Council and a Cabinet (from the majority political group) annually. While the full Council of 35 councillors is responsible for setting the overall budget, council tax levels and agreeing overall policy, the Cabinet has the executive authority to make the majority of decisions and to ensure its priorities are delivered.

Developing Councillors

We are committed to ensuring that all of our councillors are able to receive the training and development they need to carry out their roles. We recognise that continuous development for councillors is a key attribute of a successful organisation and each councillor can complete an annual development plan with our Training Officer. These development plans are used along with our Corporate Plan and other statutory or service needs to produce an annual training plan in June for all councillors. The delivery of this training plan is overseen by our Member Training Champion, Councillor Lucy Hodgson, a councillor level Training and Development Panel and our Training Officer.

The Cabinet

The Council's Cabinet are responsible for ensuring that tasks and targets made in last years performance plan are implemented. They are primarily supported in achieving this by the Council's Chief Executive and Corporate Management Team.

In Worcester the cabinet is made up of seven councillors – each carrying responsibility for their own 'portfolio' or range of services.

Cllr Simon Geraghty

Leader of the Council

Simon's role is at the heart of local government in Worcester and, as Leader of the Council, he provides strategic leadership and vision. He aims to make sure the Council plays its full part in the ongoing renaissance of the city as well as striving to continue to improve its services at the lowest possible cost to the council taxpayer. Simon chairs the Council's cabinet which is responsible for leading the development of council policies and overseeing the delivery of those plans. He also liaises with the County Council, neighbouring district councils and other bodies at regional and national level as well as being the current Vice-Chair of the Worcester Alliance. Born and bred in Worcester, with a degree in Politics, Simon became Deputy Leader in 2003 and is now one of the youngest council leaders in the country.

Cllr Barry Mackenzie Williams

Deputy Leader

Barry's role is to assist the Leader in providing strategic direction for the Council. He has responsibility for overall governance, performance and service delivery, ensuring the Council meets its targets and manages the themes that cross portfolios. Barry brings a wealth of experience to this role from a varied career as a naval officer, civil servant and barrister.

Cllr Francis Lankester

Portfolio Holder for Safe and Strong Communities

Francis is a teacher by profession and has previously held the tourism and riverside regeneration portfolio. He is now responsible for reducing crime and the fear of crime in the city, working within the Local Area Agreement to improve the quality of life in city neighbourhoods and working with partners to tackle housing shortages in the city and increase affordable housing.

Cllr David Tibbutt

Portfolio Holder for Urban Renaissance

David was consultant cardiologist at the Worcester Royal Infirmary until 1998, when he retired. He then became an advisor to the Ministry of Health in Uganda for continuing Medical Education, and still visits the country to work in a mission hospital. In his Cabinet role he is responsible for delivering a high quality built and natural environment, particularly in the city centre, as well as enhancing local transport choice. He is also helping to develop Worcester's cultural events and visitor appeal, aiming to position the city as an all year round tourist destination.

Cllr Allah Ditta

Portfolio holder for A Cleaner and Greener City

Allah Ditta was Worcester's first Asian mayor and now takes responsibility for one of the Council's highest profile portfolios. He is responsible for making the city's streets, neighbourhoods, parks and open spaces cleaner and more attractive for residents and visitors. He also oversees the encouragement of sustainable waste management through recycling and reducing waste, including collection of bulky rubbish.

Cllr Roger Knight

Portfolio Holder for Performance, Improvement and Efficiency

Roger worked in private sector procurement with a leading DIY chain before he retired. He is responsible for making the best use of financial resources by delivering services through grant aid, external contracts and partnerships, and generating income by selling council services and securing sponsorship. He is also responsible for

balancing the budget and keeping council tax increases to no more than 2.5% - above the retail prices index – making sure the Council is efficient, raises its productivity and enhances value for money.

Cllr David Clark

Portfolio Holder for Customer Care and Citizen Engagement

David has varied professional experience that has embraced Theatre Management, Personnel Management, Sales and Marketing and running his own retail business in Worcester for a number of years. He is now Recruitment and Media Officer for Age Concern Worcester. David's City Council role is for clear performance standards, improving communication and consultation with residents and the Council's workforce, championing the needs of council customers and the continuing development of our customer service centre.

Overview and Scrutiny

In addition to the Cabinet the Council also appoints Councillors to four Overview and Scrutiny Committees. Members of these scrutiny committees and their component panels are drawn from the remaining Councillors who are not in the Cabinet (often referred to as 'back bench councillors'). Their function is to scrutinise the work of the Cabinet, the progress made by each individual cabinet member in their respective areas of work and key decisions made by council officials.

The four Overview and Scrutiny committees are the:

Scrutiny Committee – chaired by Councillor Geoff Williams.

< pic >

The Scrutiny Committee investigate matters of local concern and have the ability to scrutinise proposed Cabinet decisions before they are taken, cross examine Cabinet members on their proposals and recommend alternatives.

Performance Management and Budget Scrutiny Committee chaired by Councillor Stephen Hodgson.

<pic>

The Committee monitor progress made against the Corporate and Service Plans, as well as scrutinise the Council's budget and performance

Policy Development and Value for Money Committee chaired by Councillor Keith Burton

The Committee undertakes reviews of existing policies and develops new policies for consideration by the Cabinet.

Audit Committee chaired by Councillor Liz Smith

This Committee scrutinises Accounts and receives the Annual Management Letter.

Regulatory Committees

In addition to these Committees the Council also has regulatory committees for planning and licensing as well as a Standards Committee who monitor the ethical framework within which Councillors must operate. There are also committees to consult with the Trade Unions representing Council employees on personnel, human resource issues and safety issues.

Providing the service

The Elected representatives set out the vision, determine resources and monitor progress. Implementation of the Council's activities falls upon officers (employees). Employees of the Council are led by a Corporate Management Team.

David Wareing, Chief Executive,

As Chief Executive, it's David's job to oversee the delivery of services to residents according to the policies decided by councillors. He chairs the Corporate Management Team meeting where issues affecting the Council are discussed and debated. Responsible for a 600 strong workforce, David also oversees the development of the Customer Service Centre the Council's corporate communications and web site, and works closely with partner organisations to improve services in the city.

The rest of the Council's corporate management team is split into service areas headed by a senior manager.

John Scarborough

Head of Governance and Corporate Support

Remit:

- Monitoring Officer
- Legal and Democratic Services
- Internal Audit
- Support to Council committees
- Electoral services
- Business Support
- Property and Facilities
- Transportation (including Residual Engineering responsibilities)

Service priorities for 2007/08 included;

- Provide advice and support to project teams delivering corporate priorities
- Assess feasibility of telephone registration for electoral roll.

Mike Harrison
Head of Cleaner and Greener City

Remit:

- Recycling and Refuse Collection service
- Street sweeping and Public cleansing
- Parks and Open Spaces
- Recycling
- Environmental Health (including licensing)
- Public conveniences
- Cemeteries and crematorium

Service priorities for 2007/08 included;

- Introduce the third phase of a three year programme to change to wheelie bins collections for refuse and recycling
- Environmental improvements in Gorse Hill/Warndon area as part of LAA project
- Work with the police to deliver Fixed Penalty Notices for litter and dog fouling across the City
- Continue improvements to public toilet provision

Grahame Lucas
Head of Financial Services

Remit –

- Collection of Council Tax and Business Rates
- Housing Benefit and Council Tax benefit administration (delivered by the shared service)
- Finance and accountancy services
- Concessionary Travel
- Business continuity and Risk Management

Service priorities for 2007/08 included;

- Implementing Benefits improvement plan arising from BFI inspection
- Presenting the annual accounts by 30 June
- Maintaining a Balanced Budget
- Improving efficiency and value for money

John Wrightson

Head of Urban Environment

Remit-

- Planning, and Conservation
- Economic Development and Worcester Renaissance
- Building Control
- Strategic Housing services

Service priorities for 2007/08 included ;

- Developing the sub-regional role of Worcester
- Licensing for Landlords of Houses in Multiple Occupation
- Introducing the Local Development Framework
- Working in partnership with Advantage West Midlands, Worcester University and the County Council to accommodate the University expansion on the former Worcester Royal Infirmary Castle Street site
- Reducing the use of bed and breakfast accommodation for homeless families and development of alternative temporary accommodation

Carol Brown

Head of Performance, Innovation and Efficiency

Remit –

- Performance and Service Planning
- Human Resources and Organisational Development
- Business Transformation (E-Government)
- Information Technology
- Procurement
- Scrutiny

Service priorities for 2007/08 included:

- Implementing the CPA Improvement Plan
- Reviewing corporate performance planning
- Implementing the Council's Human Resources strategy
- Working to achieve Level 2 – Equality Standard for Local Government
- Improving/strengthening the scrutiny process

Alan Stuttard

Head of Safer and Stronger Communities

Remit –

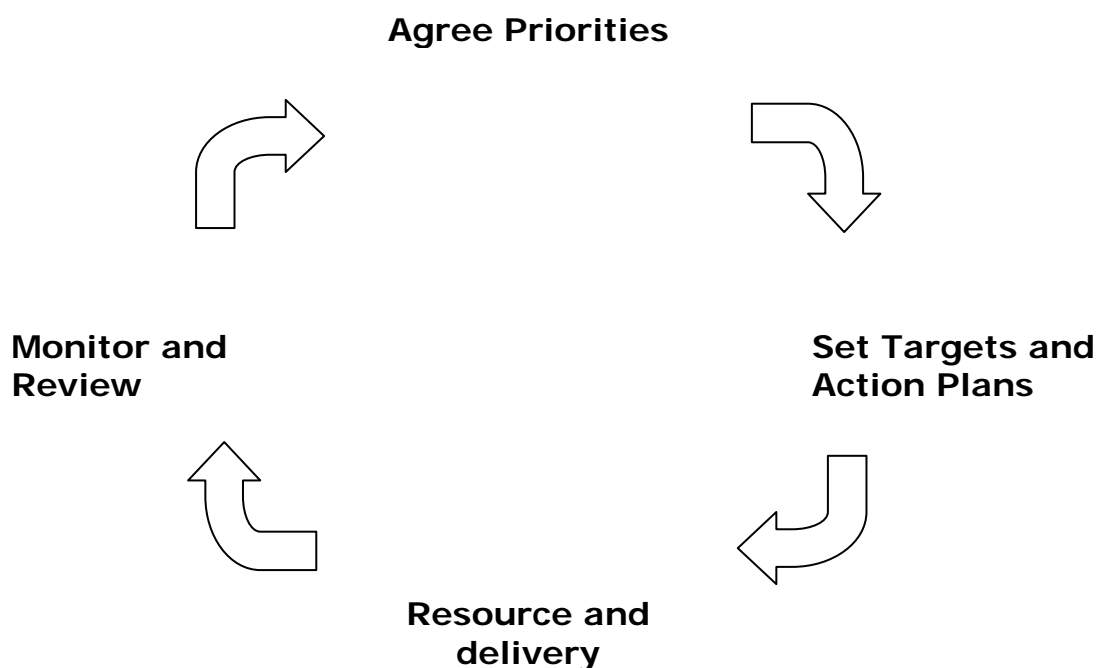
- Recreation and Leisure Management
- Community Development
- Museums Arts and Heritage
- Tourism
- LAA (Partnerships)
- Community Safety

Service priorities for 2007/08 included;

- Implement three year improvement programme for King George V Playing Fields
- Improve effectiveness of multi-agency working on Anti Social Behaviour in Worcester PSA2 Hot Spot Area
- Complete the Commandery refurbishment
- Support the development of the new Destination Management Organisation: VisitWorcester
- Review the use of the Foregate Street Museum and Library building with respect to the implications of transfer of library
- Support and develop the Worcester Alliance

Managing Performance and delivering improvements

Last year, our external auditors acknowledged that ***'the Council is moving on from monitoring performance to managing performance'***. At the heart of our approach to performance we continue to use the basic principles of agreeing priorities, setting budgets, resources and targets and reviewing delivery.



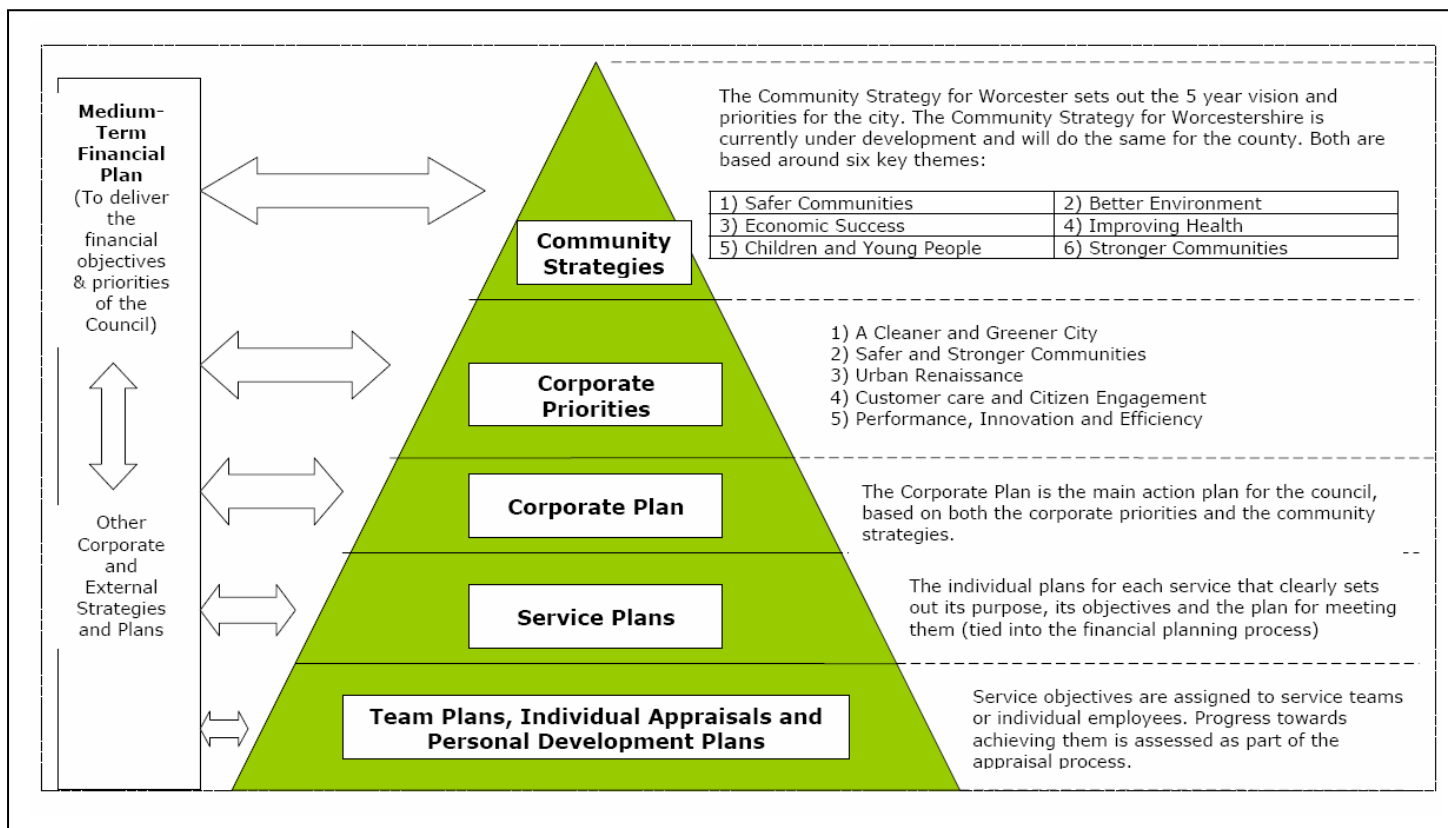
This year we have started a fundamental review called the Performance Management Programme and this has already led to a redesign of the performance planning process which has changed the way the Corporate Plan and Service Plans look and are produced. We are also looking at the way we measure performance and report it and this Annual Report is a product of that.

Cabinet members continue to look after thematic areas as portfolio holders, which helps to foster our one-council approach as they now each oversee numerous functions and services from across the Council. The creation of key priority groups for each corporate priority, drawing membership from the Cabinet, senior management and key service staff, helps focus on what is important by constantly monitoring progress against our promises and meeting regularly to ensure that any barriers to achieving our goals are removed. To cascade performance management down through the organisation services produce their service plans which are based around corporate priorities and these in turn inform the content of individual employees' appraisals.

In addition performance monitoring reports are submitted to the Corporate Management Team, Cabinet and the Performance Management and Budget

Scrutiny Committee on a quarterly basis. Overview and Scrutiny members are also active in monitoring the progress of Improvement Plans and progress against priorities. Performance monitoring information is available to all staff via the Council's IT network.

The performance management framework in a large organisation such as the Council can seem confusing but here is how it all fits together;



These internal arrangements exist against a background of a changing national regime. Comprehensive Performance Assessment is being replaced by the Comprehensive Area Assessment, where the emphasis is on the experience of the citizen living in or visiting an area – in our case the area is Worcestershire county. This will be introduced in 2009 but the new national performance indicators “National Indicators” are already in place and we have started to collect them in 2008.

Achievements in 2007-08

Performance news stories

(This are a selection of press releases from the year, mainly good news stories but all positive, and may be scattered about the web document or in any case links provided to the full text - See Appendix III)

- I-Play comes to Worcester
- Plans to reduce budget
- All party response to Local Government financial settlement
- Benefit fraud success
- Implementing the national planning application form
- Star rating for restaurants "Scores on the Doors"
- Start of work on the University campus
- Response Centre for Homeless(Night Assessment Centre – NAC)
- Pedestrian and Cycle bridge lottery funding
- GPs at leisure centre scheme
- Work begins on St John's sports centre
- Bus pass/smart cards
- New hate crime reporting scheme
- Shared services
- Final phase of wheelie bins
- First HMO emergency prohibition order
- Ranking 14th nationally as most desirable place to live
- Uncollected council tax
- Summer floods – Council leadership
- Rocketing recycling rates
- Green flag for Gheluvelt
- City Summit/Community Strategy

- A449 spring clean
- New Parking Charter

Performance progress

Each year we show the results of how we performed against a range of national and local performance measures (performance indicators). These can track how we are faring 'year on year' against our previous performance and where comparative information is available, against other councils.

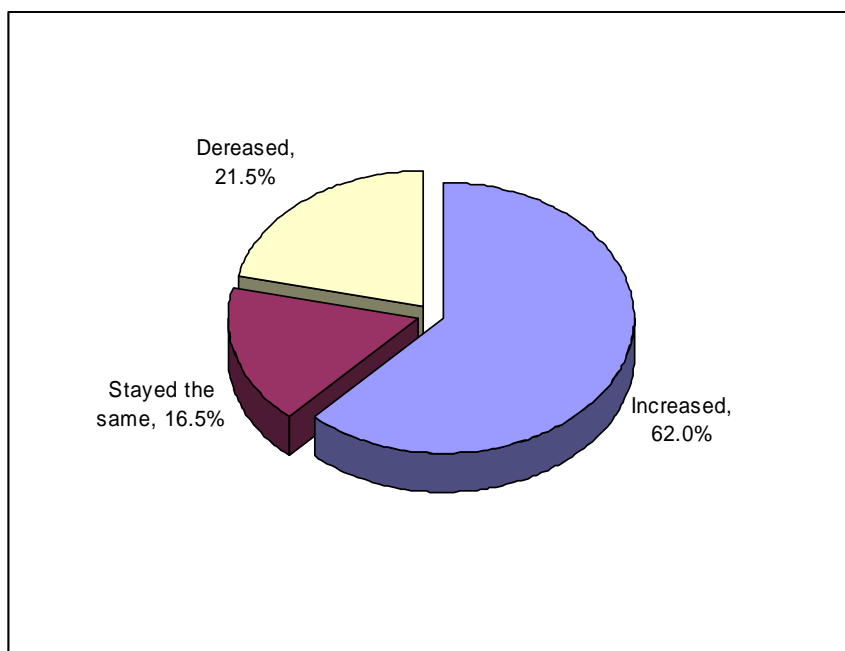
The following diagrams show that, where year on year comparisons can be made, for both the national set of indicators and our local indicators, the Council has improved its performance in more areas than not.

Note that these indicators include a few that are financial and, for these comparisons, a 3% inflationary element was allowed for in measuring year on year movements.

Performance relative to previous year - National and Local performance indicators

Each year we show the results of how we performed against a range of national and local performance measures (performance indicators, see Appendix I). These indicators can track how we are faring 'year on year' against our previous performance.

The following diagram shows that, where year on year comparisons can be made, for both the national set of indicators and our local indicators, the Council has improved its performance in more areas than not.



Worcester's comparative performance against all District Councils 2006-07

This table shows our performance against other district councils for the most recent year where comparative information is available (2006-07). The performance of all districts is used to produce four quartiles and our performance is then fitted into this framework. Service managers are taking action to improve these services as represented in the "Poor" and "Below average" sectors.
 "Top performance" is the best 25%,
 "Above average" is the second 25%, etc..

% Racial incidents with further action
Visits/ usages of museums
Visits/usages to museums in person
Conservation areas - character appraisals
Conservation areas - management plans
Planning min apps in 8 weeks
Planning other apps in 8 weeks
New homes on brown field sites
Environmental Health checklist score
Contaminated land - proportion sites with info
Household waste collected
Change in household waste collected
Cost waste collection
Street and environmental cleanliness (fly-posting)
Street and environmental cleanliness (fly-tipping)
Household waste recycled
Case processed correctly
Preventing homelessness
Repeat Homelessness
Priv. dwellings 6 months empty - returned to occupation
Senior black and ethnic minority staff
Buildings w/facilities for people with disabilities
1

Top Performance (22 PIs)

No. of pupils visiting museums and galleries in organised school groups
Planning major applications in 13 weeks
Household waste recycled
Overpayments that were recovered.
Avg time change in circumstances
Working age (18-65) from ethnic minorities
Senior staff with a disability
NNDR collected (Business rates)
Invoices paid on time
Duty to promote race equality
2

Above average (10 PIs)

Vehicle crimes per 1000 pop.
Burglaries per 1000 households
Planning service checklist
Abandoned Vehicles investigated
Abandoned Vehicles removed
Pop'n served by kerbside collection of 2 recycl.
Street and environmental cleanliness (grafitti)
Street and environmental cleanliness (litter)
Previous year's overpayments recovered this year
Avg. time new claims
Working age (18-65) with disabilities
Early retirements / staff
Days sick per member of staff
Senior women
3

Below average (15 PIs)

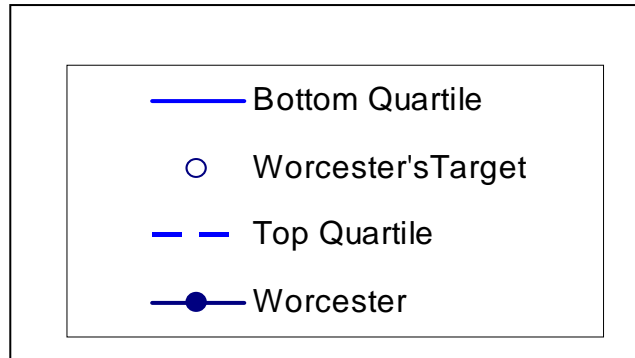
Violent offences by stranger
Violence licenced premises
Planning appeals
Pollution control improvements
Pop'n served by kerbside collection of 1 recycl.
Household waste composted
Household waste composted
Ave stay in B&B
people sleeping rough on a single night
% change families in temporary accom.
Ill health retirements / staff
Council Tax collected
4

Poor performance (12 PI)

Performance Trends

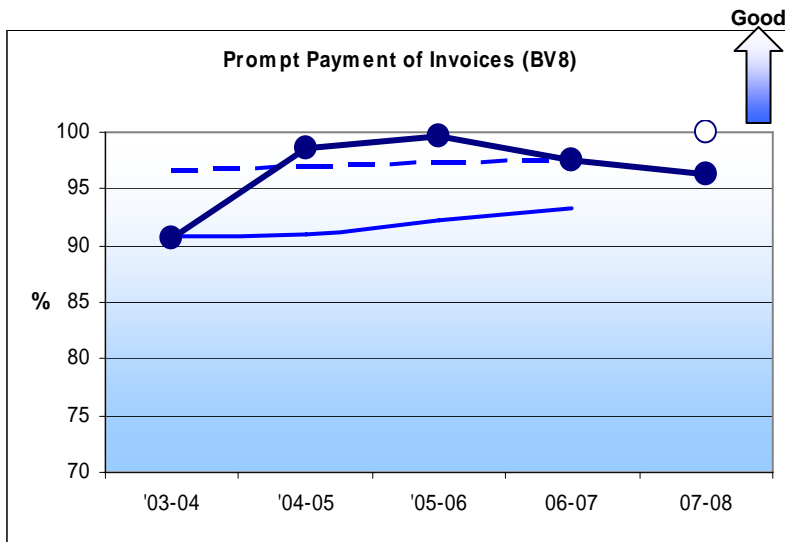
The following are a set of charts for individual indicators where performance information is available for several years and where a trend in performance can be demonstrated. Also included for comparison is the trend of the top and bottom 25% for all district councils (top and bottom quartiles) and Worcester's target for the year.

The key to all these charts is:

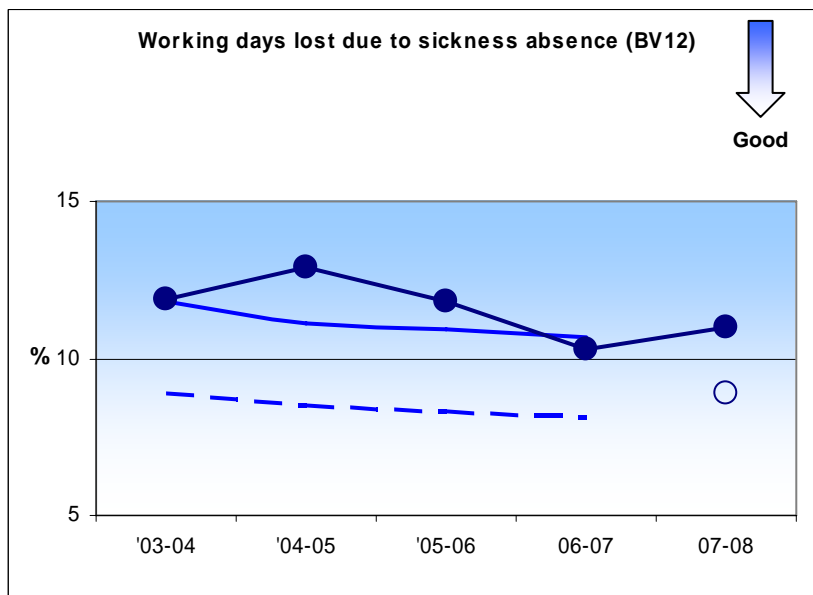


In each chart, the area between the dotted and the smooth curves represents the 50% of all district councils closest to the average, whilst the area outside the lines represent the top and bottom 25% nationally (i.e. the top and bottom quartiles). So that where Worcester is outside on the dotted line side, our performance is in the "best" 25% of all districts, and when it is outside of the continuous line side it is in the poorest performing 25% (bottom quartile).

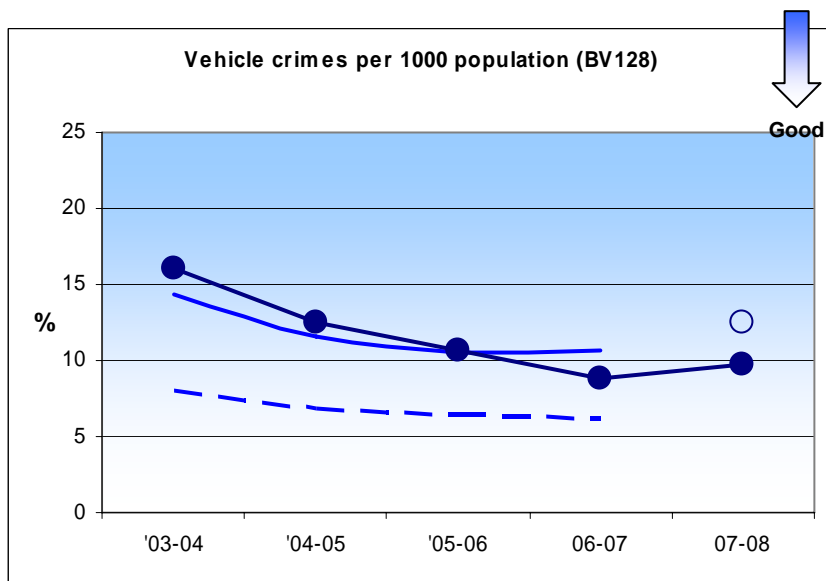
Note that in some of the charts the better performance is towards the top, and in the rest (for example, cost PIs) better performance is indicated by progress towards the bottom of the chart. Each chart has a way-up symbol to show which is the case.



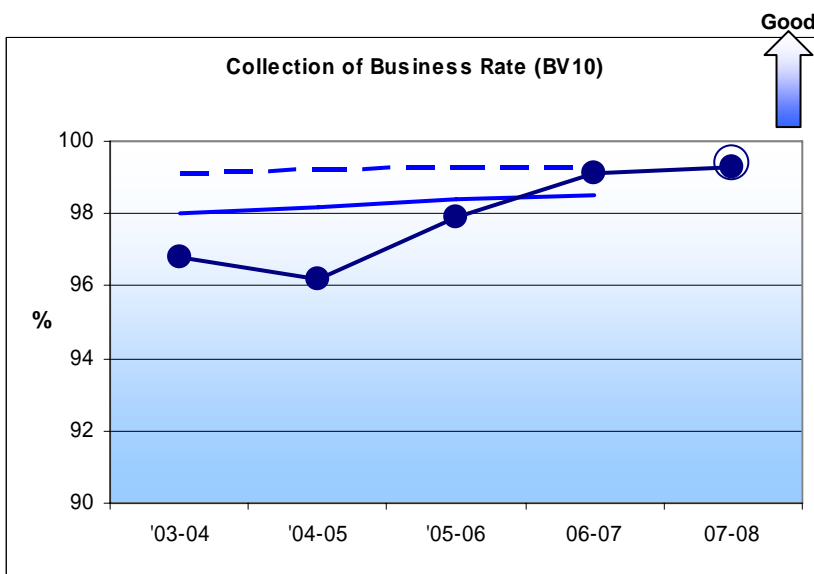
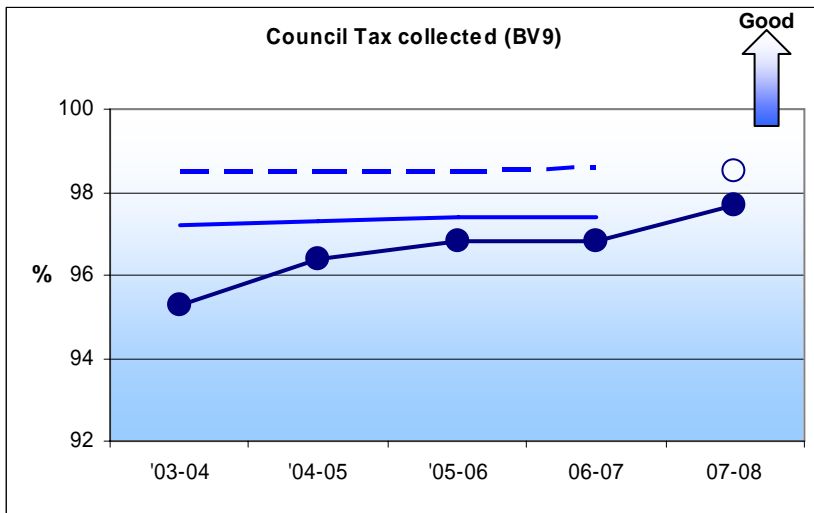
The percentage of invoices that were paid within 30 days (96.3%) This performance indicator measures how quickly we paid the year's commercial supplier invoices. The drop in the result from the previous year is due to teething problems with the electronic ordering system.



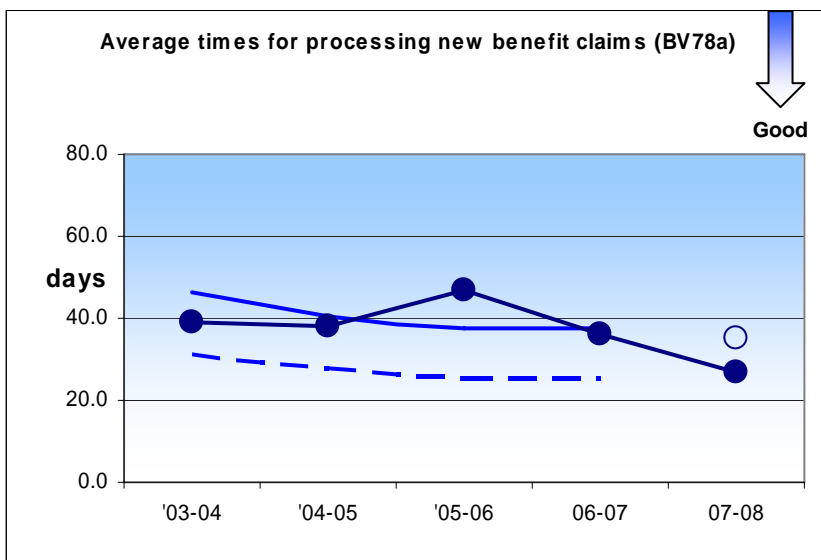
As reported in the quarterly reports during the year, after a good start sickness rates have risen and the average for the year was 10.98 days per employee. This has fallen back from 10.3 despite the have initiatives in place which have reduced the overall rates from around 12 days for 2006-07 and CMT reaffirmed with managers the critical importance of managing absence in accordance with the agreed procedures and we are looking in detail at the quarterly picture to ensure that everything is being done to maintain the progress we achieved last year.



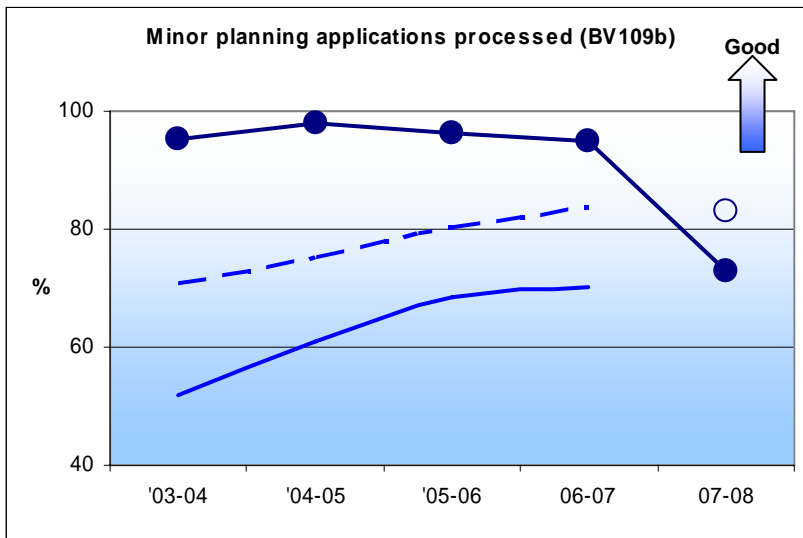
Vehicle crime (9.8 per 1,000 population) is an area that has demonstrated a generally improving trend for several years although there was a slight upturn for 07-08. The Council has contributed to this trend by now having Secure Car Park status for 75% city centre car parking spaces.



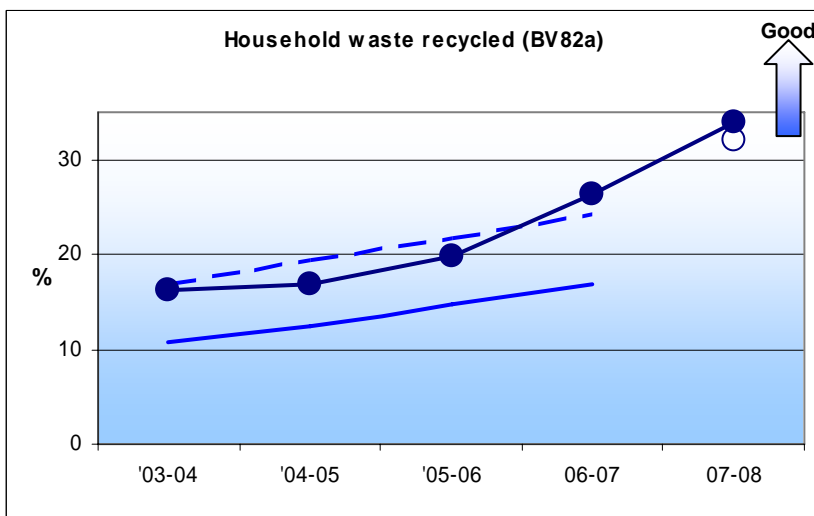
Collection of both Council Tax (BV9: 97.69% from 96.98% the previous year) and Business Rates (BV10: 99.28% from 99.1%). There has been greater recovery activity and eradication of backlogs for both sides but the success at this translates into a disproportionately greater effect for business rates because there are fewer accounts worth considerably more. Again this has been achieved against a background of transfer.



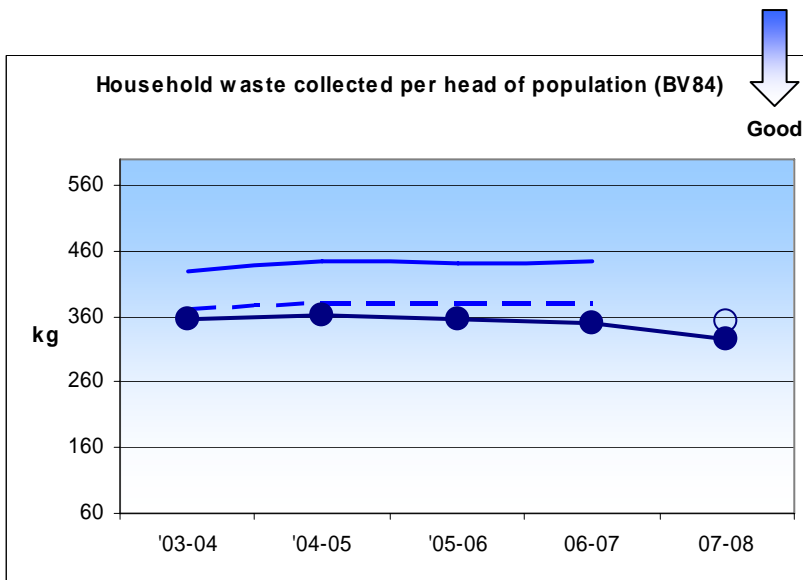
Benefits processing: new claims (BV78a) 27 days from 36 days the previous year; and changes in circumstances (BV78b) 7 days from 10 days. This improvement has been achieved with accuracy (BV79a), as tested by quarterly sample checks, of close to 100% and against a background of upheaval of the transfer to the South Worcestershire Shared Revenues & Benefits Service and the physical move to Pershore.

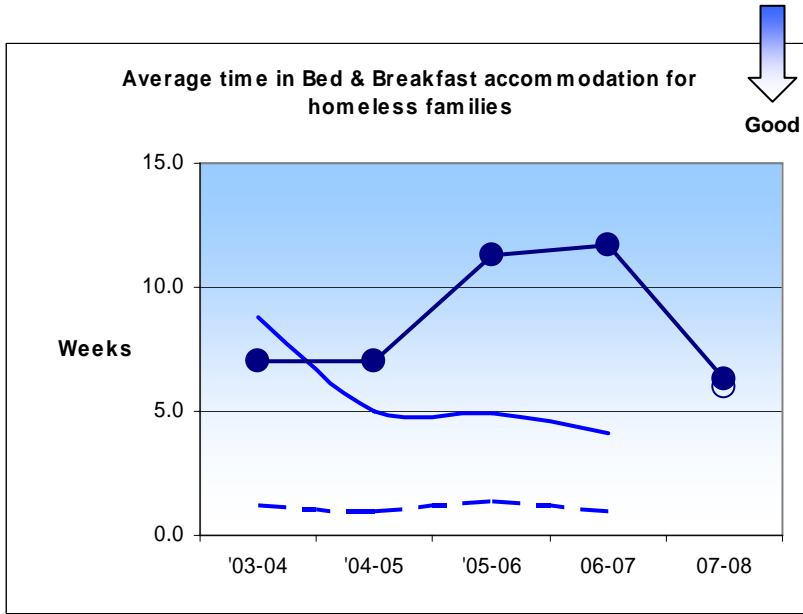


Planning applications (BV109a, b & c, 75.0%, 72.5% and 82.2% respectively): This performance underlines concerns previously expressed through the year about the capacity of the section, with its support, to accommodate the workload with the current establishment. These issues are being addressed by a Business Process Review of the wider Planning Service, commissioned by CMT, and a review of the Development Control IT system as part of that.



Household waste recycled (BV82ai) (34%) having benefited from the final phase of wheelie bin introduction in October 2007. This has also led to a further reduction in household waste collected (BV84b) to 326kg per head of population from 349kg for the previous year, easily within the target of 354kg for the year.





The average length of stay in bed and breakfast accommodation for homeless families (BV183(i) 6.3 weeks) an almost 50% improvement from the previous years average of 11.7 weeks. The figure doesn't quite meet the year's target but the trend is firmly in the right direction. Homelessness preventions (BV213) performance has fallen to 8.4 per thousand households, and just falls short of our target of 8.3 for the year. This is due to reduced opportunities in private sector housing although nationally we are still likely to remain in the top quartile.

Capacity building

The City Council is constantly striving to increase its capacity to provide services that achieve its priorities and statutory obligations. We do this through a variety of means. We constantly monitor and review services to make them more efficient and eliminate waste, we train staff to make them more effective and we look for sources of external funding. Reviews of processes include effective use of information and the introduction of new, more effective systems.

Often, increased capacity results from better matching of resources to demand. For example, we continue to develop the website to provide a broad range of information at all times that would otherwise require a telephone call or a visit. This is switching demand to more cost effective, self-service "channels". We've also moved away from the rigid nine to five working day to allow home working for appropriate staff, by providing home computer access to Council systems over the internet, an initiative that has been expanding over the year. A further example of channel switching is the provision of cash kiosks in the Customer Service Centre to provide the facility to accept straightforward payment transactions without tying up cashiers.

During the year we established a business case for a full Business Process Review of Planning and Building Control, agreeing a methodology and governance arrangements for the project which is now being fully implemented in the current year.

We are reviewing the whole way we manage and ensure the consistency of Business Transformation projects for the authority with a complete register of projects with corporate impact.

We undertook a Business Process Review of Refuse and Recycling which improved the communication between the depot and the Customer Services Centre leading to fewer complaints and less time spent investigating missed bins with the spin-off of several staff attaining BPR qualifications.

We undertook a thorough corporate information audit looking at the way in which staff keep and access administrative and operational information. The recommendations are currently being considered.

The Strategic Housing Team reviewed the process of application for social housing to prepare for the introduction of Choice Based Lettings which aims for better management of demand for housing. As a result of the review we commissioned a new system which was introduced at the start of this year.

A full review of Performance Management has tightened up the Council's Service planning and Corporate planning so that new plans were produced in time for the start of this year. They will better align service activity to our priorities and statutory obligations making the whole organisation more effective.

The City Council continues a full programme of training of its employees make sure they maintain their ability to perform their roles. This has included putting fifteen managers through Herefordshire/Worcestershire Leadership Development Programme and 47 staff gaining the European Computer Driving License. We also have young men and women as apprentices in Parks and at the Commandery.

During the year we have also been successfully assessed for the West Midlands Member Development Charter Milestone award.

Statement on Workforce Contracts

We did not award any contracts during 2007/8, which involved the Code of Practice on Workforce Matters in Local Authority Service Contracts.

However we transferred City Council employees who worked in Revenues and Benefits to the South Worcestershire Shared Service and the employees of the Worcestershire FA Development Team (for whom we were the host authority) have been transferred back to the County Football Association, and these transfers have been under the provisions of TUPE in 2007/08.

The Council will include in any future contracts awarded the requirement to comply with the Code of Practice on Workforce Matters in Local Authority Service Contracts.

Our Financial Health – Financial Statements – Summary of Accounts

What are Accounts and why do we produce them?

Large organisations like companies or Councils have to keep a written record of their income and expenditure. We also have to publish these records. Councils must tell the taxpayers in their area where their money came from, what they did with it, what they own and what they owe.

Each year the Council has to produce a set of accounts just like any other organisation. These have to comply with strict accounting rules (Financial Reporting Standards) and Standards (Statements of Recommended Practice).

The government also requires the Council to comply with the Accounts and Audit Regulations.

Our Statement of Accounts for 2007/08 has to be completed and approved by the Council before 30th June 2008. The Accounts are audited by Grant Thornton LLP independent external Auditors.

What is in this summary of accounts?

This section gives a summary of the Statement of Accounts which is a snapshot of the finances as at 31st March 2008; showing;-

- How much money we have at 31st March 2008 (reserves)
- How the money is invested at 31 March 2008 (buildings, equipment and cash)
- How we raised income during the year
- How we spent money during the year
- How we performed against our budget
- How we performed in looking after the money

How do we plan our finances and budgets?

Worcester City Council's finances are at the heart of what we do; where the money comes from and where it is spent affects us all and the services provided by the Council. But we may not always understand the financial terms and budget information that we hear about. The funding of local authorities can be a complex and confusing area so we have produced this section of the report, which aims to jargon bust the accounts, explain some of the financial terminology and offer a simple and clear guide on how financial decisions are reached.

What do we do with taxpayer's money?

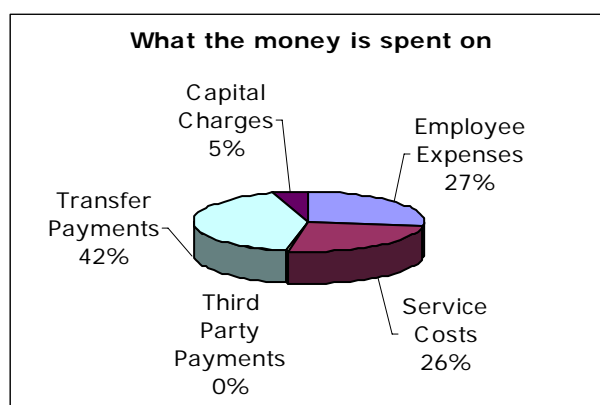
Our financial resources help us in achieving our aims as a council. These aims are :

- Cleaner and Greener City
- Safer and Stronger Communities
- Urban Renaissance
- Customer Care and Citizen Engagement
- Performance, Innovation and Efficiency

We have to decide what services we can provide to meet the needs of the city whilst balancing the budget. We do this by using both our regular income (for recurring costs like employee salaries) and our reserves (for one-off initiatives).

Revenue Income and Expenditure

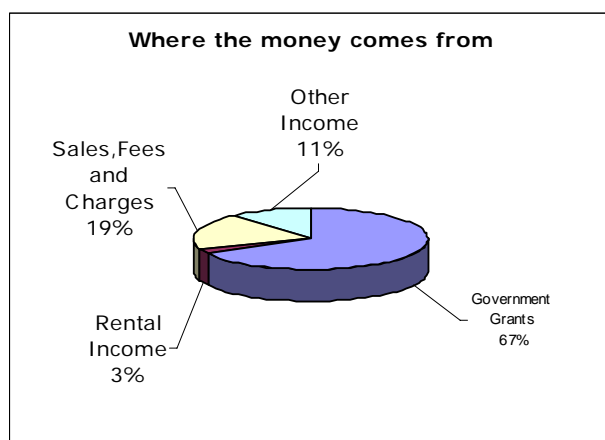
The Council's Income and Expenditure Account is equivalent to the Profit and Loss Account included in private sector accounts. It shows the cost of running Council services during the financial year, where the money came from to pay for services and the surplus or deficit at the end of the year. *Revenue* includes spending - and income - generated from day to day running costs, for example, employees related expenses, transport, premises, supplies and services. For 2007/08 the Income and Expenditure Account details the gross costs of service provision amounting to £56.7 million. A simple explanation of this expenditure is set out in a chart below.



Employee Expenses	15288
Service Costs	14676
Third Party Payments	204
Transfer Payments	23745
Capital Charges	2876
	<hr/>
	56789
	<hr/>

Where the Revenue money came from, 2007/08:

A simple explanation of the gross income of £40.3 million shown in the Income and Expenditure Account is set out in the chart below;



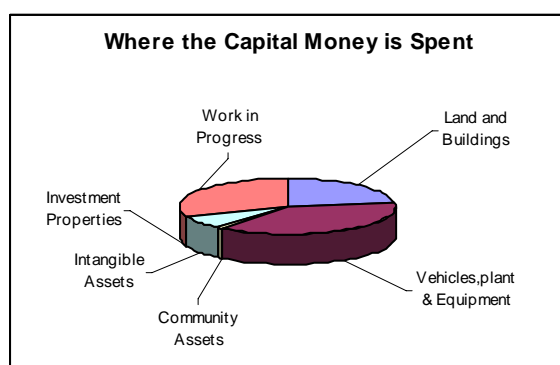
Government Grants	26,974.00
Rental Income	1,175.00
Sales, Fees and Charges	7,652.00
Other Income	<u>4,528.00</u>
	<u><u>40,329.00</u></u>

Did we keep to our Budget?

Not Quite! The net City Council Expenditure for 2007/08 was £16.09 million compared to a budgeted £15.88 million. This therefore led to an effective overspend of £0.2million for 2007/08. This resulted in a transfer from general fund of £0.2 million.

Capital Income and Expenditure

Capital spending includes investing in new assets and the refurbishment of old ones like buildings, large equipment and vehicles. Capital expenditure amounted to £4.23m in 2007/08. This compares to the budget of £7.08m. This net under spend is in starting work on a number of projects. A simple table explaining "**Where the Capital money is spent, 2007/08**" is set along with a graph below.



Land and Buildings	755
Vehicles, plant & Equipment	1279
Community Assets	31
Intangible Assets	273
Investment Properties	1
Work in Progress	<u>1036</u>
	<u><u>3375</u></u>

What do we own?

Operational Buildings providing services; Museums, Sports Centres, Community Centres, and Toilets	£m 20.9
Hostel	0.5
Sports pitches	0.7
Cemeteries and Crematorium	1.7
Car Parks	22.0
Allotment Sites	0.2
Offices and Depots	8.5
Commercial Property – shops and units	1.9
Bus Shelters	0.2
Vehicles	2.4
Other non-operational assets	1.7

Simplified Balance Sheet

<i>What the Council owns and is owed</i>	£ m's
<i>What we own:</i>	
Buildings, Land, Vehicles and Equipment	69.00
Stock	0.11
Cash in Bank	0.01
Cash Invested	4.96
Money owed to the Council	8.40
<i>What we owe:</i>	
Money owed by the Council – short term	8.70
Money owed by the Council – over a number of years	37.72
Total value of what we own	£36.06
<i>Funds held by the Council:</i>	
Amounts used to buy assets	55.39
Revaluation Reserve	2.97
Collection Fund	(0.16)
Pensions Fund deficit	(26.87)
Reserves & provisions set aside for future	4.33
General Reserves	.40
Total value of the Council	£36.06

What are we worth (our Reserves)?

General Reserves:	£000's
At beginning of the year	979
Contribution from General Reserve	(577)
Balance at the end of the year	402

The Council has a duty in law to keep a sensible (prudent) level of General Reserves. It is our policy to be well within the target range

of £0.6 - £1.0 million to protect the Council from risk and exposure to increasing costs as highlighted in the Medium Term Financial Plan, this shortfall in 2007/08 will be addressed in 2008/09.

<i>Reserves set aside for future:</i>	<i>£000's</i>
The money set aside for the future are: -	
Revenue Reserves	
Reorganisation Reserve	126
Three Choirs / Elgar Festivals	31
Recreational Improvements	193
Planning Appeals	4
Arts & Museum service	33
Land Charges	26
Internal Audit Reserve	25
Occupational Health	28
Building Control	18
Pre LSVT Housing Contracts	107
Central Training	56
Budget Funding – Planned	138
Budget Action Plan 2008/09	916
s. 106 Interest	24
Capital/Other Reserves	
Depot Relocation	1,629
Nunnery Lane Deposits	16
Guildhall Floodlights	30
Housing Environmental Warranty Reserve	934
Total Reserves	4,334

Cash Flow:	£000's
Operational Cash in during the year	(121,133)
Operational Cash out during the year	122,706
Other Financing Activities	(1,625)
Net inflow in cash	(52)

How well have we performed?

Finances:

In 2007/08 we invested at a higher average rate than our target.
 Borrowing Money – average interest rate: xxx%
 Investing Money – average interest rate: xxxx%

Payment of what we owe:

Prompt payment – The Council's target for paying invoices on time is 100%. We are, up to the end of March 2008 (2007/08), paying 96.19% on time.

Collection of what is owed to us:

Business Rates – we improved our collection rate in 2007/08 by 0.2% having improved by 1.2% in 2006/07 i.e. 1.4% over two years.

Performance against national and local measures:

Each year we show the results of how we performed against a range of national and local performance measures (performance indicators). These can track how we are faring 'year on year' against our previous performance and where comparative information is available against other councils. Performance is also assessed against a basket of government set top quartile 'aspirational targets' which it expects all Councils to achieve. Further details showing where year on year comparisons can be made, for both the national set of indicators and our local indicators are shown within this Annual Report.

Annual Audit of our Accounts:

	<i>2004/05</i>	<i>2005/06</i>	<i>2006/07</i>	<i>2007/08</i>
Annual Accounts due:	31 st Aug	31 st July	30 th June	30 th June
Submitted on time:	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Number of Audit Qualifications	0	0	0	

The Council's external auditors are required to give an opinion on the financial statements and this should be "unqualified" showing the accounts to present fairly.

Assessments of performance

intro inc. current CPA score, some comment on the change of performance regime

Annual Audit and Inspection Letter 2006/07

The Annual Audit and Inspection Letter includes the assessment of "Use of Resources" and "Value for Money" assessments

Good performance and improvement by the Council

The External Auditor recognised, in her letter, that the Council has made good progress in many areas. Amongst a number of positive references to performance it will be noted that: -

- o Since 2004... ..the Council has steadily improved, a trend which has continued in the last year. The Council's performance in many services now compares well
- o with other areas.
- o Public satisfaction has been maintained and represents best quartile performance of the national indicators sampled this year, 40% showed best quartile performance (improved from 34% last year) which is better than the average of 33% achieved in district councils across the country.
- o Approximately 64% of indicators improved over the year, more than the average (57 to 59%) achieved by other district councils.
- o The ratings for overall satisfaction and user satisfaction with the handling of complaints have been maintained and, in the light of deteriorating performance in many other councils, both have improved their comparative position and now represents best quartile.
- o The Council effectively engages with a number of partners and contributes to wider community outcomes in a number of ways...
- o The value for money delivered by the Council continues to improve...
- o Overall spending... ..costs per head of population... .. Worcester's comparative position has improved; it now spends less than average in its group.
- o Council Tax levels, as in previous years, remain below average.
- o Financial Management – the Council continues to perform well in this area.

The audit letter makes many other positive references to improvements and good performance throughout the document.

Value for money

Theme score 2 (adequate performance)

Key findings and conclusions

The Council is continuing to make progress on delivering value for money. Comparative costs show a positive trend. Though overall spending has marginally increased, when total costs per head of population are considered alongside councils serving similar areas, Worcester City's comparative position has improved; it now spends less than the average in its group. Council tax levels, as in the previous year, remain below average.

Expenditure comparisons by service area remain largely unchanged from last year and continue to reflect the Council's priorities. Overall, performance has improved but progress has not been consistent.

Comparative performance trends show above average numbers of indicators in the top quartile and above average improvement rates, however the achievement is not consistent. Culture is strong but other areas of activity still carry too many indicators showing unfavourable 3rd and 4th quartile performances.

The Council did not meet its annual cashable efficiency savings target for the year but is still on target to achieve the cumulative three year target by the end of the next financial year.

The Council prepared an action plan to address the recommendations contained in last year's Use of Resources report and this need to be delivered.

With support from the Audit Commission, the Council has undertaken a review of its approach to performance management. The review revealed that targets have not been consistently used to challenge year on year improvement.

Targets and priorities are not comprehensively aligned throughout the planning process. It concluded that the inconsistent application of the basic principles of performance management is likely to be hindering improvements in service delivery and value for money.

Inspections

Housing inspection

The Strategic Housing Service was judged by the Audit Commission to be 'fair' with 'promising' prospects for improvement.

They said that: "Customers have good access to services and Worcester's work to prevent homelessness is particularly strong. It is working with neighbouring councils to allow more new affordable homes to be made available. Some aspects of its performance are weak compared to other councils though, and the Council needs to do more to ensure the service reflects the diverse needs of the community and provides value for money.

"Worcester is getting results for customers, particularly those at risk of becoming homeless. It has focused resources on addressing standards in the private sector, particularly on its high level of homes in multiple occupation. Although it needs to improve its performance in some areas, we consider that it has promising prospects for improvement. It can already demonstrate improvements for customers, it is working well with other local authorities and partners and has plans in place to address its key areas of weakness."

Strengths include:

- Strong performance in preventing homelessness, including services to reduce levels of rough sleeping

- Good use of funding grants to improve the standard of properties in the private sector, particularly houses in multiple occupation, and to provide adaptations for people with disabilities
- Effective use of planning guidance and requirements has increased the level of affordable housing that can be made available
- Areas for improvement include
- Weaknesses in measuring whether services are provided equitably and in ensuring they offer value for money
- Poor performance in the Council's use of temporary and bed and breakfast accommodation for homeless households, and in returning empty homes to use

Recommendations include:

- Concentrating more on customers when setting standards and in measuring customer satisfaction
- Developing better systems to manage performance, including measuring whether services are provided fairly to everyone
- Ensuring it has clear plans and procedures to improve its performance and maximise results for customers

Worcester City Council is responsible for providing statutory services, including the provision of affordable housing, private sector stock condition and homelessness and housing advice services within the city. The Council does not own any housing stock itself, having transferred its properties to Worcester Community Homes in 2004.

Copies of the report are available at: <http://www.audit-commission.gov.uk/reports>

The Audit Commission's report is a positive reflection of the great strides we have made since the housing stock was transferred and the City Council refocused on strategic services. It's a credit to the housing services team.

The report has yet to be considered by the City Council's cabinet. Inevitably there may be some aspects which the Council may not wholly agree with and there a few factual errors which we will be drawing to the Audit Commission's attention. Nevertheless the outcome is a fair and positive result and will encourage the Council to continue working hard to further improve its housing services

Internal assessments

Internal Audit have done a major Value for Money study during the year on how we procure goods and services. The recommendations in the report have been picked up for action by our new Procurement Manager and form the basis of the current service plan.

Surveys:

We have continued to keep a Citizen's Panel throughout the year but, because of management changes, have only used them once (normally we would send two questionnaires per year). The one exercise was a special one to investigate attitudes to the Council's budget to assist with the difficult financial decisions. The following describes the method, its logic and the results.

SIMALTO

The SIMALTO method (Simultaneous Multi Attribute Level Trade Off) is a budget policy modelling system used by many local authorities across the country and was put together for us as a special exercise to assist the Council to make these difficult decisions with your help.

We set out different service standards and we ask panellists to choose where they would allocate the money. The questions were designed to form a logical path and not to require detailed financial knowledge. Experience from previous consultation exercises shows that those taking part genuinely consider both the financial and social impacts of their choices.

Panellists identified which reductions in service, or increases in revenues and charges, would cause least discontent among residents, and the top four were:

- Improving the Guildhall and using it as a café (i.e. raising revenue from it)
- Reducing our resident's magazine: "City Life", to one per year
- Merge the Museum Service with that of the County Council
- Increasing car parking charges by 10p

They also told us which services should not be reduced and they included:

- Arts and culture;
- Closed Circuit TV;
- Riverside litter collection and enhancement;
- Flood defences;

They then identified improvements in current service benefits that would meet most with their approval. The following enhancements had the most support:

- Contributing towards making the Hylton Road flood defences permanent.
- Dedicated weekend litter service for the riverside
- Extending the enhancements to the riverside to include City Bridge to Sabrina Bridge/racecourse section

- Increasing the level of financial support for the homelessness service.

A specific question concerning views on options to improve household waste collection gave continuing as now, alternating general waste one week and recyclables the next, as the most popular (79%).

Finally, the panellists decided on the mix of detailed changes that created the most satisfaction. It considered, not only the results of the survey but also the associated impact on the amount of Council Tax residents would have to pay, statutory commitments and budget limit represented by the Council's current financial position.

In conclusion, the exercise has been very helpful for the City Council to feed into the difficult budgetary decisions it had to make for the current year. Your opinions were considered alongside the constraints of the challenging financial settlement from the government, the increased expectations and statutory duties on us, the rising costs of providing services, and the growing demands on Worcester as a busy and thriving sub regional centre. All this contributed to the decision on the budget that was announced at the end of January.

For a full report on the SIMALTO exercise [click here](#)

Comment on this report/Contact us

Visit us at ;

The Customer Service Centre
Orchard House
Farrier Street
Worcester
WR1 3BB

You can access both City Council and County Council services at this centre.

If you want to telephone: 01905 722233

Or if you are on the Web, go to: www.worcester.gov.uk

Or send us an email: chiefexecutive@worcester.gov.uk or finance@worcester.gov.uk

We would like to thank everyone who contributed to producing this Annual Report. If you have any feedback or comments please

contact ;

Grahame Lucas
Head of Financial Services
Worcester City Council
Orchard House
Farrier Street
Worcester
WR1 3BB

Tel ; 01905 722100

E mail ; glucas@worcester.gov.uk

Appendix I – Financial Results

Appendix II –Performance Indicators in full

Appendix III - Performance News Stories:

I-Play comes to Worcester

There were jubilant celebrations in Worcester last night after it was announced that plans to create an I-Play facility in Cripplegate Park have secured Lottery funding following victory in a TV vote.

The I-Play project was featured on ITV1 as part of the People's Millions contest set up by the Big Lottery Fund. Community schemes from across the midlands went head to head with the winners decided by public vote. Fortunately for Worcester the I-Play project captured the public's imagination and local youngsters can now start dreaming of the hi-tech solar-powered play facilities that the park will eventually house.

Worcester residents and ITV viewers voted for the I-Play project to win the award of almost £44,558 which will result in the installation of new hi-tech play facilities in Cripplegate Park. I-Play is a new concept in play, designed to counteract the current trend in obesity and 'couch potato' syndrome. It uses computer and mobile phone technology to motivate children into activity. Participants play the physically active game and compete with themselves or others in the park, city, or county in order to complete the game in the fastest time.

One of I-Play's strongest points is that it can be played by children in wheelchairs or those who have hearing or sight impairment. It is a trail blazing piece of equipment and now Worcester is all set to be one of the first places to benefit from it.

Cllr Margaret Layland, who is vice-chair of the Friends of Cripplegate Park said: "This is terrific news. We can now fund the cost of installing the I-Play game, alongside an up-to-the-minute youth shelter and contemporary seating. For Worcester this is a unique chance to make a big difference to people's lives and I'd like to thank everyone who took the time and trouble to vote and all those people who worked so hard on the bid submission in the first instance to create a stimulating, enjoyable and useful environment for young people."

The friends committee worked very hard raising the profile of the bid across the west side and to the wider city and were supported by all the local and regional media who reported the live phone in show and promoted the telephone number.

Ian Yates, Parks and Cemeteries Manager at Worcester City Council also thanked people for their support: "The West Mercia Police, Worcester Community Housing, Sanctuary Housing and local schools all backed the bid and although the number of votes cast has not been revealed the backing of a significant number of people in the city did mean that the project beat a far larger organisation to the money.

"The city's various friends groups have enjoyed considerable success this year, but this is the biggest single award for a friends group to date. The park wardens are delighted to support these volunteer groups on both practical works and in their applications for funding."

City Council announces plans to reduce budget

Worcester City Council has announced that it must make reductions in its spending to bridge a gap in its budget of £1.6m next year and possibly a further £2m in the years following that.

These are proposals at this stage and are the subject of consultation with the public (the SIMALTO exercise). They will also be scrutinised by the all-party Committees set up to examine Council policy and spending plans and, of course, with the unions representing the workforce.

David Wareing, Chief Executive at Worcester City Council said: "The underlying problem remains that which has challenged the City Council for many years and under both political administrations at the Guildhall, namely the struggle to fulfil the aspirations, expectations and statutory duties placed upon Worcester as the county town with the financial resources that it receives by way of government grant, what is raised via our element of Council Tax and the other income we can generate locally, e.g. through car parking charges.

Whilst all District Councils have different pressures there are not many of our size that have the total infrastructure Worcester City Council maintains, e.g. a fine but expensive to run Guildhall, two Museums and an Art Gallery, three sports centres and a swimming pool, a network of community centres and a wide 'travel-to-work' area and growing tourist and student population."

The net budget - what it costs to run the Council in 2008/9 - is forecast to grow next year by £1.7m, however the government grant next year is only increasing by 1% (£80,000). The City Council must bridge the gap. The Council cannot do this simply by increasing Council Tax. This would require the City Council's element of council tax to go up by 37.5%. This is clearly not possible.

The City Council has identified a number of areas where financial savings can be made and these can be seen by following this link:

[Budget Action Plan PDF](#)

The total package comes to around £3m so this could help considerably in dealing with the overall budget shortfall. However, this takes no account of the need for essential new expenditure required in 2008/9. It may be that some of the reductions proposals are not acceptable to the Council or are vigorously opposed by the public causing Councillors to think again. This will come out in the next consultation phase including SIMALTO and our consultation with the workforce. But if this package is to be watered down, other proposals will have to be identified to take their place.

What is clear is that a major component in balancing the books is a root and branch service restructuring hopefully following a successful agreement with Wychavon and Malvern Hills to share services. This assumes the City Council we will save £1m over the next four years in this way.

All party response to LG finance settlement

(Copy of letter sent by Worcester City Council to Central Government)

1. The City Council has been prudent and cautious in the light of the CSR07 announcement and previous speculation about the [low] level of grant increases likely to be provided to local government by Central Government this year and for the following two years, and the increase in the cashable efficiency target from 1¼% to 3%.

2. Therefore, the Council's Medium Term Financial Plan assumes: -

- Formula Grant - 2½% increase each year with risk of this being cash frozen for the five years
- Housing Benefit Administration Grant – 5% reduction each year for next three years (i.e. cash reduction of 2½% p.a.)
- A challenging efficiency agenda which is already well underway; e.g. Revenues and Benefits Shared Service (Worcester, Wychavon and Malvern Hills), and the Worcestershire Hub
- Maintaining the Council's policy of Council Tax rises of not more than 2.5% above RPI. (See note at Para 5).

3. Our analysis of the Formula Grant settlement shows; -

- Formula Grant increases of only 1% (£80K 2008/09) followed by two years of ½% (£40K p.a.)
- Reduction of our Waste Efficiency Grant from £82K (2007/08) to £42K in 2008/09
- Housing Benefit Administration Subsidy – cash reduction of 3.9% (2008/09) followed by 2½% cash reduction in the following year(s)
- Homelessness Grant cash frozen at £115K p.a. for the next three years

4. Therefore our overall grant position shows: -

	Cash reduction compared to 2007/08:	Real Terms reduction compared to 2007/08:
2008/09	Reduction £18K	Reduction £233K
2009/10	Reduction £25K	Reduction £460K
2010/11	Reduction £33K	Reduction £693K

5. Our net budget is approximately £12.96m based on 2½% rises in both Council Tax and Government Grants. However, on top of this we are suffering the following cost pressures; -

Cost pressures from external and government causes	£000's
Inflation rising faster than our income	64
Job Evaluation	317
Concessionary Travel – extra costs of scheme not met by grant	235
Car parking – reduced use	230
Land Charges – new restrictions on charging	130
Reduction in gov't grant for Housing Benefit admin	40
Reduction in Gov't Revenue Support Grant	120
Reduced scope for increasing fees & charges	90
Total external causes:	1,226

Internal cost pressures:-

Decisions and pressures to develop services

- | | |
|--|-----|
| • Senior Management review | 223 |
| • Growth in 2007/08 temporarily funded from reserves | 152 |
| • Other | 33 |

Total Cost Pressures

1,634

Note: In the last four years the Council has maintained Council Tax increases at 2.5%. Had the Council decided to set Council Tax at the "capping limit" in each of these four years and not spend the additional income on new services, the cumulative effect would have been to reduce the budget gap of £1.6m to £1.16 in 2008/09 and a further £1.66m over the following four years.

6. Therefore, the Local Government Finance Settlement has reduced our net budget (like for like) to £12.84m as a result of the cut in Formula grant funding, and this does not address the very significant cost pressures facing the Council, an element of which is as a direct result of government action.

7. The City Council is facing budget cuts of £1.6m in 2008/09 and a further £2m over the following 4 years.

8. This includes significant cuts in services in addition to our challenging agenda for fundamental review of the way we provide services including sharing, better two tier collaboration and other alternative service delivery models.

9. It is the view of the City Council's Cabinet and supported by all the political groups on the Council that; -

- The settlement is unsustainable; this settlement does not recognise the cost pressures and funding crisis facing districts such as Worcester City Council despite the previous CSR making some recognition of District Councils in the level of the funding settlement over the past 2 years.
- Furthermore, the settlement does not reflect the growing demands of a busy and thriving sub regional centre such as Worcester, and the need and plans we have to improve the well being of local people.
- The Floor for districts is inequitable; the Floor for districts is half that of the County Councils' and only 40% of that for Police Authorities; this is inequitable and penal to a group of Councils for which small changes in cash grants have a major impact on the bottom line [budgets] and services.
- Government could bring the Floor to same level as others e.g. 2% (would only cost £20m across all district councils) or the governments target inflation rate of 2.7% (would only cost £34m across all district councils).

10. The underlying problem remains that which has challenged us for many years and under both political administrations at the Guildhall namely that we struggle to fulfill the aspirations, expectations and statutory duties placed upon us as the county town (and growing University City) with the financial resources that we are given by way of

government grant, what is raised via our element of Council Tax and the other income we can generate locally, e.g. through car parking charges. Whilst all District Councils have different pressures there are not many of our size that have the total infrastructure we maintain, e.g. a fine but expensive to run Guildhall, two Museums and an Art Gallery, three Sports Centres and a Swimming Pool, a network of Community Centres and a wide 'travel to work' area and growing tourist and student population.

- We therefore urge the government to rethink the local government finance settlement in so far as it affects district councils and in particular the financial impact on Worcester City Council. To this end we request a meeting with the Minister for Local Government John Healey to explain our position, the financial deficit we face and in particular to discuss the acute pressures placed on historic urban centres like Worcester which we would contend have not been recognised in the City's three year settlement.

Yours sincerely

(Signed by representatives of all political parties plus Chief Executive and Head of Finance and dated 8th January 2008)

Benefit fraud success

A Worcester man was jailed for nine months after conning the benefits system out of £22,394.11 by claiming benefits for ill health, whilst working for five different employers during the period of his claim. The case was jointly investigated by the Department for Work and Pensions and Worcester City Council.

Dennis Powell, (64), of Birch Avenue, yesterday pleaded guilty, at Worcester Crown Court, to 15 charges of dishonestly claiming failing to declare work and earnings whilst in receipt of benefits.

Following a tip-off, the joint investigation found that Powell had falsely claimed £1,630.84 in Income Support, £8,798.65 in Incapacity Benefit, £7,370.04 in Pension Credit and £4,594.58 in Housing and Council Tax Benefit.

Anti-fraud Minister James Plaskitt said:

"We are taking a tough line on benefit fraudsters because they steal £700 million a year – money that should be spent on those who really need it."

"Closer working with our partners, such as Worcester City Council, means that we know where and when people try to commit benefit fraud. Cheats should be warned: We are now saying NO IFS, NO BUTS. All benefit theft is a crime and those found breaking the law face a criminal record."

Diane Phillips, Benefits Investigation Manager at Worcester City Council added:

"Worcester City Council considers benefit fraud to be a serious matter and Investigation Officers will protect the public purse and use all the powers at their disposal to detect and investigate benefit fraud. Stealing money from the taxpayer is not a victimless crime as it takes money away from those who really need it.

"Worcester City Council's Benefit Investigation Team has a strong working relationship with the Department for Work and Pensions, and we work closely together to bring those individuals who claim and receive

benefit dishonestly before the court."

Implementing the national planning application form

From 7th April 2008 we will only accept planning applications on the new national application form '1APP'.

In the countdown to that date we will be publishing examples and guidance on our [website](#) or you can visit the national Planning Portal at www.planningportal.gov.uk/1APP

We will also be holding workshops for local professionals and the Planning Portal will be contacting everyone who has made an electronic application to us.

Paul O' Connor, the City's planning manager said " For the first time ever there will be a national planning application form and national guidance on the type of information required for the submission of a planning application. By using the new forms applicants and agents will have the comfort of knowing what will be required for their application wherever it may be submitted across the country. The 1APP form will allow greater online submission of applications which will reduce paperwork for the applicant and help the City Council in delivering an up to date Planning service on its website."

Star rating for restaurants "Scores on the Doors"

Choosing where to eat out in Worcester has just become a lot simpler thanks to a new star rating on food businesses.

Scores on the Doors, an initiative which has already proven successful in Gloucestershire and other parts of the country, gives an easy to understand star rating for restaurants and food businesses based on their hygiene and food safety levels.

Ratings went live on 28th January at <http://www.scoresonthedoors.org.uk/> and businesses will be given a certificate – which they can choose to display.

Anita Fletcher, Principal Environmental Health Officer for Worcester City Council said: "We're really excited about this scheme which will help residents and tourists make a more informed choice on where they eat out or purchase food; additionally it will give businesses an extra incentive to improve standards with wider publicity attached to their achievements."

Businesses with lower ratings aren't being left out in the cold and will be offered advice and help on how to improve their scores.

Start of work on the University campus

Key Worcester figures 'wielded' a silver sledgehammer to officially mark the start of the demolition process at the University of Worcester's £120m second campus development.

The Mayor of Worcester, Stephen Inman and Councillor Alwyn Davies, the Vice Chairman of the County Council joined University of Worcester Vice Chancellor, Professor David Green, Deputy Vice Chancellor, Prof Judith

Elkin and Pro Vice Chancellor, Dr Martin Doughty, to mark the formal start of redevelopment work at the former Worcester Infirmary site, in Castle Street, Worcester.

As with all major projects, the demolition process, to be carried out by contactors DSM, will be phased over several months with works due to start in late January.

A public information event, to follow up last year's residents' consultation programme, will also be held by the University next week on Thursday, January 24 at 6.30pm at The Bradbury Centre, 2 Sansome Walk, Worcester, for any members of the public wanting further information.

The works will include the demolition of the unsightly 1960s hospital buildings whilst the listed Georgian and Victorian buildings will be preserved and refurbished. The refurbishments will bring both the boardroom where the British Medical Association was originally founded and the historic Jenny Lind chapel back to life.

The new University Campus will include a 400 seat multi use performance and conference centre, a centrepiece public square capable of outside theatre productions, exhibition spaces, student residences, restaurants and cafes. It will link through the railway viaduct to the planned University and Public Library and History Centre, which is being developed in partnership with the Worcestershire County and City Councils, to form a new Learning and Cultural Quarter for Worcester.

The Mayor of Worcester, Councillor Stephen Inman, said; "Creating a new Learning and Cultural Quarter for Worcester will be at the heart of the City's Renaissance. It coincides with some exciting multi-million pound developments currently taking place and planned for the future which will help to regenerate Worcester, raise its profile and place it firmly on the UK and international map."

University Vice Chancellor, Professor David Green, said; "We want to breathe new life and purpose into this historic, beautiful yet currently neglected and derelict part of Worcester. Our aim is to create welcoming, first class facilities, which will inspire future generations into higher education. We will be working closely alongside our contractors to ensure that any inconvenience to nearby residents and the general public."

Vice Chair of the County Council, Councillor Alwyn Davies, said; "It's great to see work happening on site and to see the University developing a new second campus in the heart of the City. The fact that the site will link through to the new Library and History Centre will all contribute to the regeneration of Worcester. The development will help to create a stronger city and stronger county and bring a wealth of benefits to the region as a whole."

The new £120m campus will be built in two phases, with the first stage of construction being undertaken by international engineering and construction group Costain. This will begin this summer and include the restoration of its historic Georgian buildings and the creation of around 200 student residences, due to be complete in September 2009, with overall completion by 2011.

Response Centre for Homeless(Night Assessment Centre – NAC) Homeless single people and rough sleepers in Worcester now have greater opportunities to have a roof over their head this winter following confirmation that the Magg's Day Centre will once again be able to act as

a venue for the Worcester City Night Assessment Centre. The well-used and much-needed initiative helps single homeless people during the winter months and has now secured its funding for the coming winter period thanks to Supporting People Worcestershire. There had been some concerns that Magg's may not have been able to provide a venue but now all the issues have been ironed out.

All of the agencies involved in working with the homeless in Worcester are grateful to Magg's for their continued support and the secured funding will mean the provision of more suitable equipment for clients making the venture more appropriate and meaning that there is real support from the other agencies in the county responsible for tackling the homelessness of single people.

Laura Marshall, Homelessness Project Officer at Worcester City Council said: " The Worcester City Night Assessment Centre is a really vital resource for those sleeping rough and so it is great news that we have both the funding and the venue to ensure it operates throughout the coldest months of the year."

The Night Assessment Centre (NAC) in Worcester provides shelter, warmth and food for single homeless people every night from January to March and has proved to be a great benefit to many vulnerable people in past few years. Previously, funding for the project has been somewhat ad hoc, relying on fundraising and charitable donations from businesses and the general public. This year, however, Worcestershire Supporting People Partnership including the six district council's in the County have agreed to provide the majority of the funding for the scheme.

Rough Sleeping is a significant problem in Worcester . The aim of the NAC is to actively engage with people who are homeless and to assist them in securing accommodation or accessing support for any needs they might have in order to help them to come off the street.

Pedestrian and Cycle bridge lottery funding

A new pedestrian and cycle bridge is set to be built at Diglis Island thanks to a huge swathe of public support for the scheme. The proposed bridge is one of 79 projects nationwide that will be benefiting from a £50million windfall courtesy of the Big Lottery Fund People's Millions which has been awarded to Connect2.

Connect2 was devised by environmental transport charity Sustrans and has just gone head-to-head in a public competition against four other projects; the Black Country Urban Park, Sherwood Forest and the Eden Project. Despite the stiff opposition the public support both locally and nationally was overwhelmingly in favour of Connect2.

Simon Geraghty, Leader of the City Council, said: "This is great news for everyone who lives, works and visits the city. The new bridge will open up access to the riverside and increase opportunities for walking and cycling as well as being a huge boost to our efforts to enhance the riverside for residents and visitors alike. The support of both the public and the local media in this bid has been tremendous and we can look forward with great anticipation to the creation of a new landmark bridge across the Severn ."

Cllr Derek Prodger, Worcestershire County Council Cabinet

Member for Environmental Services , added: "This is fantastic, we at the County Council and our partners have worked so hard to raise the profile of the bid, along with all those other Sustrans projects that will benefit from the money. We want to thank all those people in Worcester and around Worcestershire who've voted either online or by phone.

"We should also thank the media too, for the constant stream of newspaper stories reminding people about the vote, and the radio clips telling residents about the number to call. We've all joined together to give us the opportunity to further improve walking and cycling in and around Worcester, giving people more choice about how they travel in the city."

John Grimshaw, Sustrans CEO said: "We are delighted that Sustrans' Connect2 has proved itself the peoples' favourite in the public vote and won the £50million from the Big Lottery Fund. We are immensely grateful to both Worcester City Council and Worcestershire County Council and everyone who got behind the Diglis Island scheme to make their votes count.

"As a massive public consultation exercise Connect2 has engendered a huge amount of goodwill from all sectors. It has confirmed our belief that people want to walk and cycle more when given the right surroundings. But the hard work starts now and there will be a huge amount to be done to make sure we fulfil all our obligations to the Big Lottery Fund. Ultimately the real winners will be those thousands of people who will now be able to Connect2 their shops, schools, workplaces and each other every day!"

GPs at leisure centre scheme

The council-run scheme enabling GPs to recommend patients for diet and exercise programmes at local leisure centres has resulted in a bright new outlook on life for two patients. Jean Drapper-Jones, who has had Diabetes for many years, and Harry Amos, off work for several months with stress, have both been astonished at how their health has improved and how much better they feel after attending the thirteen-week programme.

Course co-ordinators took time to assess the individual needs of attendees, and designed a tailor-made fitness programme for each of them, including food and exercise diaries and a free pedometer so that participants could count the number of steps they took each day. The weekly meetings consisted of physical exercise and advice on health issues such as nutrition, stress, relaxation techniques and group work.

Jean said: "Before the programme, I couldn't walk for longer than a few minutes, my muscles and bones hurt, and I rarely bothered to go upstairs in my own house. I now regularly walk over 7,000 steps a day, my sugar levels have dropped and my blood pressure is down on average by 15 points. Most importantly, I have lost 11 pounds in weight, which I never thought I could achieve on my own"

Harry was at a very low point when he saw a poster for the Exercise Recommendation Programme in his doctor's waiting room and asked if he

could take part: "I didn't want to leave the house, I couldn't bring myself to speak to people and I couldn't tie my own shoelaces as it made me dizzy. I hadn't done any exercise for seven months, and I was having numerous dizzy spells and at least 2 migraines a week."

Harry's own physical and mental health was suffering – and so was his wife's – so he knew he had to do something. On attending his first session, he was relieved to find that there were other people with similar problems: "It was like a sudden weight had been lifted from me!"

The programme helped Harry to change his lifestyle for the better: "I now walk on average 9,500 steps a day, I no longer get headaches or dizzy spells, my blood pressure has come down, I don't have the aches and pains I used to have and I can now tie my own shoelaces without fear of passing out.

"The programme has changed my diet, the way I buy my food, my physical activity levels and body shape, my attitude to achieving goals and my outlook on life."

Both Jean and Harry are full of praise for the course co-ordinators, who, they say, were friendly and very helpful without being patronising. Jean said: "I would definitely recommend the programme to anybody. If I can benefit then I am absolutely positive that anyone can. Just have a go – you never know, it may surprise you!"

The Exercise Recommendation Programme pilot scheme finished this week. As a result of the initial evaluation the programme will continue across the City from April. For more information, please contact Peter MacKenzie-Shaw on 01905 722317

Work begins on St John's sports centre

Work began on-site this week at Worcester's new state-of-the-art sports centre, but the City Council is keen to stress that it's business as usual at the existing facilities in St John's.

The new sports centre is being built and paid for by Sainsbury's as part of the deal to create a new supermarket on the site of the existing sports centre. When it opens in August 2008 the new centre will feature a range of top class facilities but Alan New, the Recreation Business Manager for Worcester City Council is keen to point out that the current centre remains very much open and operating as normal: "Our existing centre still has a great deal to offer to anyone looking to maintain and improve their health and fitness. All the classes we run are continuing and all the facilities we have will remain open. There is no possibility of us closing before the new centre is up and running. Some centre users have been asking me when we are closing but I can assure everyone that we are very much open, and as the new facility is being built on a different site I would envisage very little if any disruption of our service to our customers"

St John's Sports Centre is a dual use facility that operates in tandem with its sister site at Nunnery Wood Sport Complex. Last year it scored almost 80% in an assessment by Quest, the national quality standard for the management of leisure facilities. That score ranked them joint top in the UK for 'dual-use' centres, of which there are 130 nationally that have

currently achieved Quest registration.

Mr New added that all the staff at St John's are committed to ensuring the high standards are maintained during the life of the existing building and would be carried on when they move across to the new facility. "It's very exciting to be getting a new building on the main road but in the meantime we still have great facilities at St John's and there is no way we will be compromising on the quality we have achieved either here while we are still open or after we have moved into the new centre."

Bus pass/smart cards

Worcester City Council is reminding bus pass holders who want to receive a smartcard to use the new nationwide bus travel scheme that they must provide a passport - style photograph to the City Council. If they wish, a photograph can be taken at the Customer Service Centre in Farrier Street for £2.00.

The new pass, which will be issued in March, will entitle holders to travel on local buses anywhere in England . A national publicity campaign is expected in January.

Information Services Manager Norman Tomsett said: "If you are not sure whether you have submitted a photo, call in to the Customer Service Centre or call Worcester 722233 and one of the Customer Service Advisers will be able to check straight away. Existing yellow passes are valid until 31st March 2008 ."

The concessionary travel scheme which allows free bus travel across Worcestershire for the over 60s and registered disabled passengers is set to be extended from next April to cover the whole country. This follows the Royal assent of the Concessionary Bus Travel Act 2007. The new concessionary bus pass will enable free travel on local buses across the whole of the UK.

The scheme has already been of great benefit to many people by improving access and giving greater independence to travellers. It has also helped reduce the amount of congestion in and around the city and cut down on the amount of carbon emissions which contribute to climate change.

The Worcestershire Concessionary Travel Partnership is working to introduce a smartcard system for the launch of the scheme in April next year. Existing bus pass holders who have not yet supplied a photograph should do so now, either by sending a passport-style photograph to the Customer Service Centre (CSC) at this address: Concessionary Fares, Orchard House, Farrier Street, Worcester WR1 3BB, or by visiting the CSC, where a photograph can be taken for a charge of £2.00. If no photograph is supplied, you will not receive a card under the new scheme.

Cllr David Clark, cabinet member responsible for Customer Care and Citizen Engagement, who is himself eligible for the new bus pass, said: "The concessionary bus pass scheme is a real boon to city pensioners and people with disabilities, and this extension will make it even more helpful. I am delighted that Worcester City Council is joining with the County and other Worcestershire councils to facilitate the implementation of the new

smartcard system – it's an excellent example of joined-up working which will benefit all our residents."

To help the system run even more smoothly, as well as helping the Council to claim a discount on production costs, Worcester City Council residents who will turn 60 by 1 April 2008 are encouraged to apply for a pass by the end of November this year.

New applicants should bring a passport-style photograph and proof of residence and eligibility. If they prefer, the Council will take the photograph on payment of a £2.00 fee as described above.

The introduction of smartcards will further enhance the reliability of the scheme, combat fraud and will also help to make the process easier for bus users, even in areas such as our own county of Worcestershire , where buses do not as yet have smart card readers installed. It should also result in administrative savings over the coming years.

New hate crime reporting scheme

It has long been recognised that Hate incidents are less likely to be reported than other types of crime, although their impact can have far-reaching and devastating consequences both for individuals and wider communities. To combat this, the South Worcestershire Hate Incident Partnership (SWHIP) has developed a scheme which includes establishing reporting centres based in local communities to allow victims and witnesses to report at locations where they feel most comfortable. A new 'third party' reporting format also allows people to report incidents on behalf of others.

Richard Loveridge, South Worcestershire's Community Safety Programme Manager said: "We want to reduce the number of Hate incidents that go unreported by making it easier for people to tell the organisations who can help. People tend to think of Hate incidents as related to racism, but there are other types that are just as damaging for the victim. Race, gender, sexual orientation, disability, age, religion and belief can all trigger Hate – influenced behaviour towards an individual or group."

SWHIP is a sub-group of South Worcestershire Community Safety Partnership. It includes the County Council Hub, the Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgender Forum, MENCAP, Ethnic Access Link, South Worcestershire Victim Support and West Mercia Constabulary.

For more information, please contact Richard Loveridge, Tel: 01905 722233, email: rloveridge@worcester.gov.uk

Shared services I

The three Councils involved in the plans to manage the growth of South Worcestershire have welcomed the recent media reporting about the subject and the interest it has generated among the public.

For all those involved in planning for the growth at Malvern Hills , Wychavon and Worcester, the debate is very exciting and they want to do all they can to encourage it to continue. They feel that the response to the stories in the press and on the radio has been largely positive. The message coming through is that people care about their locality and that

they are interested in how their area develops.

As part of the ongoing debate about the future of South Worcestershire a series of public consultation exercises will be staged from early November into December with the aim of engaging with all sections of the community. The local authorities will also be embarking on a major publicity campaign including radio and press adverts and an online consultation system.

Worcester City Councillor , Robert Rowden, Chairman of the Joint Advisory Panel said "There are three Councils working on this together and I know that my colleagues at Wychavon and Malvern Hills are with me in believing that a joined-up approach is the only one that is going to be effective in the long run. It is imperative that we keep communicating, keep consulting and keep listening."

Although much of the debate has understandably focussed around housing, the issue is much wider than that. For example, there will be a need to ensure that appropriate levels of employment development and community facilities will be in place as well as safeguards for the environment. Councillor Rowden went on to say "We will also need to ensure that the provision of decent infrastructure is part of the plans right from the start. The government guidelines are that up to 32,000 new homes should be built in the south of the county by 2026. Without going through a comprehensive consultation exercise there is the threat of development being imposed on South Worcestershire rather than us planning for it. Development, carried out with sensitivity, can be sustainable and economically and socially beneficial to our existing communities. I also want to assure everyone in the three districts that nothing has yet been set in stone and your views would be welcomed".

To find out more about the South Worcestershire Joint Core Strategy please visit www.swjcs.org

Shared services II

Worcester City Council's ambitious programme of efficiency development and service improvement has taken a major step forward with the appointment of a Head of Service. Nick Jefferies, who currently works in a senior position for Gloucestershire Constabulary, is due to take up his post in September and he will be responsible for planning, developing and leading the new service which aims to promote high quality service alongside efficiency savings across south Worcestershire.

The creation of the new shared service is a joint initiative between Worcester City Council, Wychavon District Council and Malvern Hills District Council. The three authorities are joining forces to improve the collection of council tax, business rates and administration of benefits across south Worcestershire. The new service will be based in Pershore at the current offices of Wychavon District Council.

Mr Jefferies said: "I am extremely pleased to have been offered this post and am very much looking forward to working with colleagues from the three councils. I was particularly attracted to this innovative project because it will improve the service to residents and provide efficiencies for the three authorities.

He continued, "I have sensed a great deal of enthusiasm for this project

from everyone I have met so far. I look forward with relish to the challenges this new role will present and developing the Shared Service Organisation as a single team."

Cllr Roger Knight, cabinet member responsible for Performance, Innovation and Efficiency at Worcester City Council added: "The calibre of the candidates was very high and so it is great news that Nick has accepted the post. The new service is a truly ground-breaking initiative and I have no doubt that the efficiency savings and high quality service being established will be a boost to Worcester residents."

Final phase of wheelie bins

The Leader of Worcester City Council, Simon Geraghty, will be out and about tomorrow morning (October 2) to check on the operations of the third phase of the wheeled bin system in Worcester. Cllr Geraghty will be accompanying the crews and talking to householders to ensure the collection runs smoothly and to discover first-hand any remaining issues residents are experiencing with the bins.

"I want to see for myself how the final phase of the introduction of wheeled bins is going," said Cllr Geraghty. "The City Council remains committed to the use of wheeled bins and the figures show that since the first phase was introduced two years ago recycling rates have gone up significantly and the amount of waste being taken to landfill sites has fallen. However, it is also important that as a council we listen to the concerns of residents and take on board people's comments about any issues which need addressing."

First HMO emergency prohibition order

A house in multiple occupation has been closed and its residents moved to alternative accommodation by Worcester City Council, who served the city's first Emergency Prohibition Order (EPO) on the owner of the house on Friday 7 September.

The Council took the action because there are currently no management arrangements in place, as the owner is in bad health and the existing means of detecting fire and protecting the resident's escape route is inadequate. This gives rise to a category one hazard, under the new Housing Act 2004.

The Order immediately prohibited occupation of the house, which cannot be used as a house in multiple occupation until fire precaution works have been completed and management arrangements put in place. The 13 residents were placed in temporary accommodation over the weekend, and the Council's Housing Advice Team are working to find all of them places to live until the house has been made safe.

The issuing of an EPO is a new power under the Housing, Health and Safety Rating System (HHSRS) which replaced the existing housing fitness standard on 6 April 2006. This requires the assessment of 29 potential hazards to decide if improvements are needed. It is enforced by a new set of notices requiring improvement, prohibition of use or demolition of the dwelling, and it is the prohibition of use notice that has been invoked for the first time since the new HHSRS came into being.

Councillor Francis Lankester, Cabinet Member for Safer and Stronger Communities, said: "There was an immediate risk to the health and safety of residents of this property, so we were obliged to take this action. The Council is responsible for rehousing the occupants until a

longer term solution can be found.”

Kate Bailey , Principal Strategic Housing Officer for Worcester City Council added “unfortunately there are a number of houses in multiple occupation without adequate means of escape from fire. The private sector housing team will be working hard to try and track these down and to take the appropriate action against landlords who continue to disregard the legislation”. If anyone lives in or knows of an HMO and has any concerns please call 01905 722276.

Worcester ranks 14th nationally as most desirable place to live The City Council has given a warm welcome to a new report which names Worcester as one of the best places to live in the UK. The Affordable Affluence Index study by the Royal Bank of Scotland ranked Worcester as the 14th most desirable area in a nationwide study. The study took into account a range of factors that people find most desirable in an area, including:

- Top-performing schools
- High-end restaurant chains
- Theatres, art galleries and museums
- Stylish bars and coffee houses
- Sports facilities and clubs
- Premium motor dealerships
- Luxury hotels and spas
- Desirable clothing, footwear and accessory retailers
- Premium gym chains and hairdressers
- Quality beauty and cosmetics retailers

The report on Worcester said:

“Magnificent cathedral crowns this eclectic mixture of Georgian, Tudor and Elizabethan architecture, alongside some more modern structures.

The opportunities to spend money in Worcester are excellent, with a great mix of high- end shopping on both the High Street and Friar Street , as well as a broad selection of country, golf and tennis clubs and cricket facilities on the outskirts.

The city has some excellent schools, including Alice Ottley and Royal Grammar. The city of Worcester has an average household income of £37,000 and house prices lie at £240,000. This means that it is higher than the national average in terms of property and income but it remains relatively affordable in comparison to some of the other locations on our list.”

Cllr Simon Geraghty, Leader of Worcester City Council, said he was delighted by Worcester ’s high showing in the survey: “It is clear that the Worcester Renaissance which we have spoken of is now becoming a reality and that the developments which have taken place in recent years and those in the pipeline are having a positive impact on the city.

Worcester is a wonderful, historic city with a rich blend of architectural styles and a lively urban lifestyle but with a rural backdrop that makes it very popular for everyone from single people to young families to retired couples. It is fair to say that the City Council once had a negative reputation for poor planning and decision-making and that we did not always do a great job conserving the best of the past but this independent survey is recognition that we are now managing to make the best of Worcester has to offer, both old and new.

Cllr Geraghty added: "It is encouraging that the report picked up on many of the great things about Worcester in terms of its housing and cultural and environment plusses - but the challenge for us now is to ensure that the quality of life here is enhanced as the city grows and this is where the planning of South Worcestershire through the Joint Core Strategy will become vital for our future prosperity. We will have to work closely with our neighbouring authorities - and of course members of the public - to ensure we create a Worcester which continues to be a great place to live work and visit."

Uncollected council tax

Figures produced by the GMB reinforce the fact that Worcester City has been successful in reducing the amount of uncollected Council Tax left outstanding for the year. The real story behind the GMB's headline figures is that there has been a very significant increase in the performance of the City Council's Revenue Collection Team during 2006/07.

- The City Council has reduced the uncollected amount of Council Tax by 2.1% in the face of an overall increase in the Council Tax of 4.9% - i.e. a real improvement of almost 7% over the previous year.
- Since April this year Worcester City Council has continued to chase these debts and have now reduced the uncollected amount for 2006/07 to £700K i.e. a further 35%.
- Collection of prior year debts is up by about 70% on the previous year.
- The trend of improvement since April has continued and collection rates are already 0.4% up on last year and heading for a 1% improvement by the year end i.e. a projected £¾m uncollected at the end of the year – a projected improvement of 30%.
- The City Council is set to further add strength to its process for chasing and recovering bad debts by commencing bankruptcy proceedings of some of our long term persistent debtors. If they are made bankrupt they could lose their homes. This is very much a last resort, but necessary in some cases.

Grahame Lucas, Head of Finance at Worcester City Council said: "We are aware that there is a problem with uncollected council tax but clearly it is a national issue that all local authorities have to deal with. The City Council is certainly not blasé about this but the figures quoted by the GMB have to be viewed in context and the fact is that for 2006/07 our rate of council tax collection was 96.98%; an increase of 0.58% compared to the previous year. Furthermore we are continually looking at ways of improving our collection methods and are confident that the forthcoming creation of shared financial services with our neighbouring districts of Wychavon and Malvern Hills will help in this situation."

Council leadership in summer floods | Dozens of Worcester City Council employees and volunteers, including relatives of council workers, have joined together since Friday to combat the effects of the worst floods to hit the city since 1947.

Two council-run rest centres were set up and staffed by workers and volunteers who gave up their weekend to come to the aid of stranded travellers and people who had been driven from their homes by the encroaching water. Two local businesses, the Three Pears restaurant at Warndon and Fownes Hotel in the city centre, generously opened their

doors and gave hundreds of people a place to stay.

A team of 12 environmental health officers were out again today to visit flood-stricken homes and businesses, giving practical help and advice and distributing a leaflet telling people how to prepare against and deal with the effects of flooding both now and in the future. In the case of one food business, environmental health officers arranged for the specialist collection and disposal of 58 tonnes of contaminated meat.

Operational staff are continuing to clean: all roads in the city centre are now clear, except for Hylton Road . Half of Cattlemarket car park is open, but only accessible from the Croft Road entrance. Three quarters of Croft Road car park is open, but Newport Street , Tybridge Street and Pitchcroft car parks are still closed. The Park and Ride service provided by the County Council and University of Worcester for Westside residents will not be needed after today, so will cease to operate.

Worcester City Council is continuing to plan and monitor the recovery work, both current and future, and making contingency plans for any problems that might occur due to worsening weather later in the week.

Where we have spare capacity, we are donating resources to other councils who are still suffering. Gloucester was given materials to assist in protecting its electricity power station, and help has also been given to Malvern and Wychavon councils.

Councillor Simon Geraghty , Leader of Worcester City Council, said: "Thanks to the hard work and dedication of our employees, and the goodwill of citizens and local businesses, we are slowly but surely getting back to normal. It is wonderful to see the way in which everyone in Worcester pulls together when something like this happens. We will continue to work hard to help residents and businesses affected by flooding, and we want to make sure that everyone who needs help gets it – all you have to do is ring the Contact Centre on 01905 722233, and they'll make sure you get through to the right person."

Council leadership in summer floods II The Faithful City is well on the way to getting back to normal after the weekend's floods.

Environmental health officers have continued to visit flooded households and businesses to offer advice and practical help, and distribute information leaflets.

Pitchcroft car park is now half open, the Moors car park is open (but not accessible through Pitchcroft car park) and the Cattle Market car park is also open, with access from The Butts and 80 per cent of spaces available. Croft Road car park is open apart from 20 spaces against Croft Road and Newport Street car park is open, but there is some water to be driven through to gain access. Tybridge Street car park is now open.

Although Hylton Road is still flooded, the rest of the city centre is now clear. In the wider city, Sanctuary Close, Hawkwood Crescent , Toronto Close and Powick Mills have been cleaned.

The City Council has issued two new leaflets about flood-related reductions in Council Tax and Business Rates. Available on [this website](#), these give information about the criteria for reduced payments specifically related to flooded domestic and business properties.

Simon Geraghty, Leader of Worcester City Council, said: "We routinely offer reductions in Council Tax and Business Rates under certain circumstances, and we felt it would be helpful at this time to let people know exactly what they can claim if their houses or businesses have been affected by floods. We want to make sure they know what help they are entitled to."

Council leadership in summer floods III Councillor Stephen Inman, Mayor of Worcester, has held two receptions to thank staff who worked tirelessly during and after the recent floods. Employees who gave up their weekend to run rest centres and operational staff who cleaned up the city in record time were treated to a buffet lunch in the Mayor's Parlour.

The Mayor said: "I am very proud of the way in which our employees responded to the emergency, and I wanted to thank them personally for their hard work."

Caption: Councillor Stephen Inman, Mayor of Worcester, and Mike Harrison, Worcester City Council's Head of Cleaner and Greener, at the Guildhall with the operational employees who worked hard to clean up the city after the recent floods.

Rocketing recycling rates

With just a few weeks to go before the third phase of the wheeled bin scheme is rolled-out across Worcester, the City Council has said that rocketing recycling rates are proof that the system is working well.

In the two years since the Council introduced wheeled bins to the Faithful City recycling rates have gone up from 16% to 30%, exceeding the current government's target for Worcester of 24%. But with the New Waste Strategy for England 2007 pushing up the target to 40%, the City Council is keen to let residents know there can be no let up in the drive to throw away less and recycle more.

Mike Harrison, Head of Cleaner and Greener at Worcester City Council said that people need to start thinking differently about refuse: "We need to move away from the idea of waste and instead think of resources. There is still a lot of material, being discarded that can be put to other uses. It's been very encouraging that the public have displayed a willingness to adopt a more sustainable approach to their refuse and it is apparent that the vast majority of residents have not had any problems with the wheeled bin system."

Responding to recent debate concerning alternate weekly collections (AWC), Mr Harrison reiterated the City Council's commitment to persevere with the current system. "Alternate weekly collections are used by 180 local authorities nationwide and 16 out of the top 20 recycling performers operate an AWC scheme. The rationale is that the amended collection frequency for residual waste, together with an alternate weekly collection of the green recycling bin, is an incentive for households to separate recyclable material into the recycling bin and the figures certainly show that in Worcester this is the case," he said.

The AWC scheme was introduced to Worcester in 2005 with cross-party support after a councillors working party looked at various schemes and concluded that this was the best method for providing value for money

and providing the highest probability of meeting the national recycling targets.

John Bond, Environmental Protection Officer at the City Council added: "The combined effect of alternate weekly collections and wheeled bins has clearly helped push up recycling rates in the city. But not only that, the amount of waste being thrown away into landfill has been reduced by 3,830 tonnes per year since the scheme was introduced which is a reduction of 3.64% to date compared to a national trend of waste increasing by around 3% so together, Council and residents, must be doing something right."

Wheeled bins for the next phase of the scheme will start being delivered to households in the week beginning 10 September.

Green flag for Gheluvelt

Worcester's Gheluvelt Park has received the ultimate accolade by being awarded the prestigious Green Flag. The flag itself was presented last week at a national award ceremony in Leeds attended by councils, private companies and charitable organisations from around the country, all of whom collected awards showing their commitment and support for parks and green spaces.

Only half of the local authorities in the country have obtained a green flag for a park they control, and with the pass rate less than 80% it was a real challenge for Worcester City Council to secure the award.

The inspection of the park, by accredited judges, was very stringent and looked at a range of factors including how welcoming the park is, how well maintained it is, and the amount of community involvement.

As a recognised national standard the award will be used to help encourage more visits. The popularity of features including the pond, paddling pool and play area continue to demonstrate this is the 'family park' in Worcester .

It is a tribute to the hard work and planning of the City Council's Horticultural Officer Martin Lewis and the staff of his two teams, headed up by Gary Smith and Michelle Newell, that they have secured the award on the first attempt.

Cllr Allah Ditta Portfolio Holder for Cleaner and Greener said "I was delighted to learn of the award for Gheluvelt Park . It was very encouraging to hear of the commitment and hard work of the staff from the parks service and the contribution of the local community, in caring for this important city park."

The Green Flag award is a real mark of achievement – not just for local authorities, but for the staff and local people who care passionately about their local parks. The government's white paper Stronger and Prosperous Communities highlights the fact that a strong relationship is required between local authorities and their communities and this was demonstrated positively in Worcester with the Friends of Gheluvelt Park having contributed enormously in achieving Green Flag status.

City Summit/Community Strategy

Tackling socially deprived areas of Worcester, enhancing the city centre and improving the transport infrastructure to help reduce congestion were some of the main areas of concern for delegates attending last

week's City Summit hosted by the Worcester Alliance. Also on the agenda was a discussion about how Worcester can do its bit to tackle climate change and how to adapt to its future impact.

The fourth annual City Summit was used to launch the Community Strategy which sets out the Alliance's five-year vision to help make Worcester a First Rank Cathedral and University City. The Strategy will influence important decisions made at both at a local and national level, including the provision of funds allocated by central government.

With more than 60 delegates, representing almost 40 organisations, at the Summit there was also a lively debate about what the Alliance can do to help make its vision become a reality. The Alliance cannot address all of the challenges facing Worcester; many are already being tackled effectively by individual organisations across the city and the county. The Alliance has, however, identified four priority projects that it believes can only be achieved by organisations working in partnership. They are:

1: Focus on Warndon and Gorse Hill

- Parts of Warndon and Gorse Hill wards are considered by the government to be amongst the most deprived in the country. This means that many people living in these areas lack sufficient income, education and employment opportunities, have poor health and a poor living environment, face barriers to housing and other services, and are under an increased threat of crime. The Alliance intends to help set up an Area Committee, bringing together public service providers and other interested parties, to make a real difference to these wards

2: The City Centre Masterplan

- The centre of Worcester is undergoing many changes, including development of a new University Campus and Joint University and Public Library, regeneration of the riverside areas and increased development of much needed affordable housing. The City Council is currently producing a masterplan showing how, in the medium to long term, the city centre, the waterfront and the cathedral will be 'joined up' and what the key developments to achieve that will be. The Alliance will seek to ensure the Masterplan meet the needs of everyone who lives and works in the city.

3: Improving Transport and Reducing Congestion

- Like many cities Worcester faces problems in ensuring that its transport network – roads, public transport, waterways, cycle paths, footpaths, etc – meets the growing strain placed upon it. The City and County Councils have responsibility for this network, and the Alliance will assist them in improving it. Especially important is the provision of credible alternatives to car use within the city centre.

4: Addressing Climate Change and Adapting to its Impacts

- Man-made climate change is considered by the Alliance to be one of the defining challenges and moral issues facing humanity in the 21st century. In its role of community leadership the Alliance will make efforts to educate people as to the causes and effects of climate change. It will also encourage the reduction of greenhouse gas emissions by its member organisations, and preparation for the impacts that climate change will bring to the city.

The Worcester Alliance is the Local Strategic Partnership for Worcester and has over 40 member organisations from the public, private and

voluntary sectors. It was agreed that a summary of the Community Strategy will be sent out to all households in Worcester via the autumn edition of the City Council's 'City Life' magazine.

The Community Strategy for Worcester is available to view at the Alliance 's website www.worcesteralliance.org.uk, along with full details of the Alliance 's membership and meetings. Comments are very welcome. The Alliance coordinator can be reached at coordinator@worcesteralliance.org.uk or by calling 01905 722 057.

A449 spring clean

A section of busy road that attracts a lot of litter has today been given part 1 of a thorough clean-up. Part 2 will be completed next Thursday (26 April). The A449, running from the Claines roundabout to Junction 6 of the M5, is often the subject of complaints – but it has proved very difficult to organise litter picking, as it is a trunk road and the carriageway needs to be closed before the work can take place.

Worcester City Council has had a number of discussions with partner organisations to help overcome the problem, but up to now to no avail. However, action is now being taken.

Mike Harrison, Head of Cleaner and Greener City , said: "I have struggled for a long time to find a solution to this issue, and have been very concerned that as the A449 is used by many visitors to Worcester , they will have a bad impression of the city. We have now made arrangements to close one lane of the A449 from Claines to Junction 6 on Thursday 19 April, and then do the same in the opposite direction on Thursday 26 April. A 30-strong team of council workers will make sure both areas get a thorough Spring clean along the whole length of this stretch."

New Parking Charter

Keeping the city on the move is the main aim of Worcester's parking services, and the Council is hoping to improve the public's perception of the parking service by unveiling a new Parking Service Charter. The charter makes a number of commitments to road users and also outlines what the Council expects in return.

"Like most historic cities, Worcester wasn't designed with cars in mind," said Mike O'Grady, Head of Property Services. "That means that as the population has grown and as ownership and usage of cars has increased it has become increasingly necessary to manage the road network and one way of doing this is through parking enforcement. It is clear that effective parking enforcement benefits public transport users, pedestrians, motor cyclists, cyclists, responsible drivers and other road users."

The charter is a result of a major review of the Council's parking services. "We are committed to providing the best parking service in Worcester by understanding what is important to our customers," added Mr O'Grady. "The report which stems from our review makes a number of recommendations, most of which are featured in the proposed charter, such as providing safe and secure parking facilities that are clearly signed, brightly lit and competitively priced. Many of these things we are

already doing but it is important we let the public know that we are serious about our intention to provide a first-class parking service."

The charter makes it clear that the Council aims to handle all enquiries in a courteous and helpful manner and respond to all written representations about penalty charge notices.

The City Council's Chief Executive David Wareing said that the new Parking Service Charter should be welcomed by all road users: "An efficient and fair parking service plays an important role in managing the local economy whether it is for work or leisure. Equally, our residents need to know that we are making every effort to tackle problems caused by irresponsible or inconsiderate parking. Our review of the parking service is aimed at achieving a noticeable improvement in performance."

The report prepared for the Cabinet meeting also shows that the number of Penalty Charge Notices that had to be cancelled has fallen year-on-year from 41% in 2003 to just 20% in 2006. "I am aware that this has previously been a cause for concern," added Mr Wareing, "but these figures provide further evidence that our administration of parking enforcement is improving year on year and we intend this to continue."

Worcester City Council manages 15 car parks in the city, with over 2,500 spaces, and two on-street controlled parking zones. It also has responsibility for the enforcement of on-street parking regulations.

Once the Charter has been rubber-stamped it will be made available on this website and hard copies will be placed in the Customer Service Centre at Orchard House, Farrier Street.

www.worcester.gov.uk

Telephone: 01905 722233

Email: customerservicecentre@worcestercitycouncil.gov.uk

Location: Orchard House, Farrier Street, Worcester WR1 3BB

Fax: 01905 722565 **Minicom:** 01905 722156 **DX:** 716287