

Prioritising the health and wellbeing of local communities



Information and Advice Strategy for Wellbeing, Care and Support 2024-2029

Contents

Introduction	3
What is information and advice?	4
Objectives	6
Outcomes	7
Worcestershire Context	8
Worcestershire Context (continued)	9
Worcestershire Context (continued)	10
Strategic links	11
Approach	13
Accessibility	17
Accessibility (continued)	18
How success will be measured	19
Case studies	20





Introduction

The aim of this strategy is to set out how the county council will ensure information and advice in relation to care, wellbeing and support is available to the community over the next five years. The council is committed to making sure residents can access information at the right time and in an appropriate format.

The strategy has used the information provided by residents and partners over the last year. It also includes the learning from council commissioned and directly delivered services.

Statutory Responsibility

The council understands the importance of ensuring high quality and accessible services are available to the community as outlined in the **Care Act statutory guidance (2014)**, and is highly committed to delivering its requirement to:

Establish and maintain a service for providing people in its area with information and advice relating to care and support for adults and support for carers.

Importantly, this duty to establish and maintain an information and advice service relates to the whole population of Worcestershire, not just those with care and support needs or those already in contact with adult social care services. These additional whole population requirements include prevention, reduction or delay of care and support needs, finance, health, housing, employment, and what to do in cases of abuse and neglect of adults.

It is also a shared responsibility alongside local health and care agencies the council works closely with.

Delivery Pillars

The strategy will be delivered through four key pillars of activity:

1. Council commissioned universal and specialist information and advice services.
2. Council direct delivery activity.
3. Strategic partnership development.
4. Maximising investment and resources for information and advice services.





What is information and advice?

Below are the definitions of information and advice, specifically applied to the council's role in care, support, wellbeing and people's rights:



Information – communication of knowledge and facts.



Advice – helping a person identify choices and/or providing an opinion or recommendation regarding a course of action.

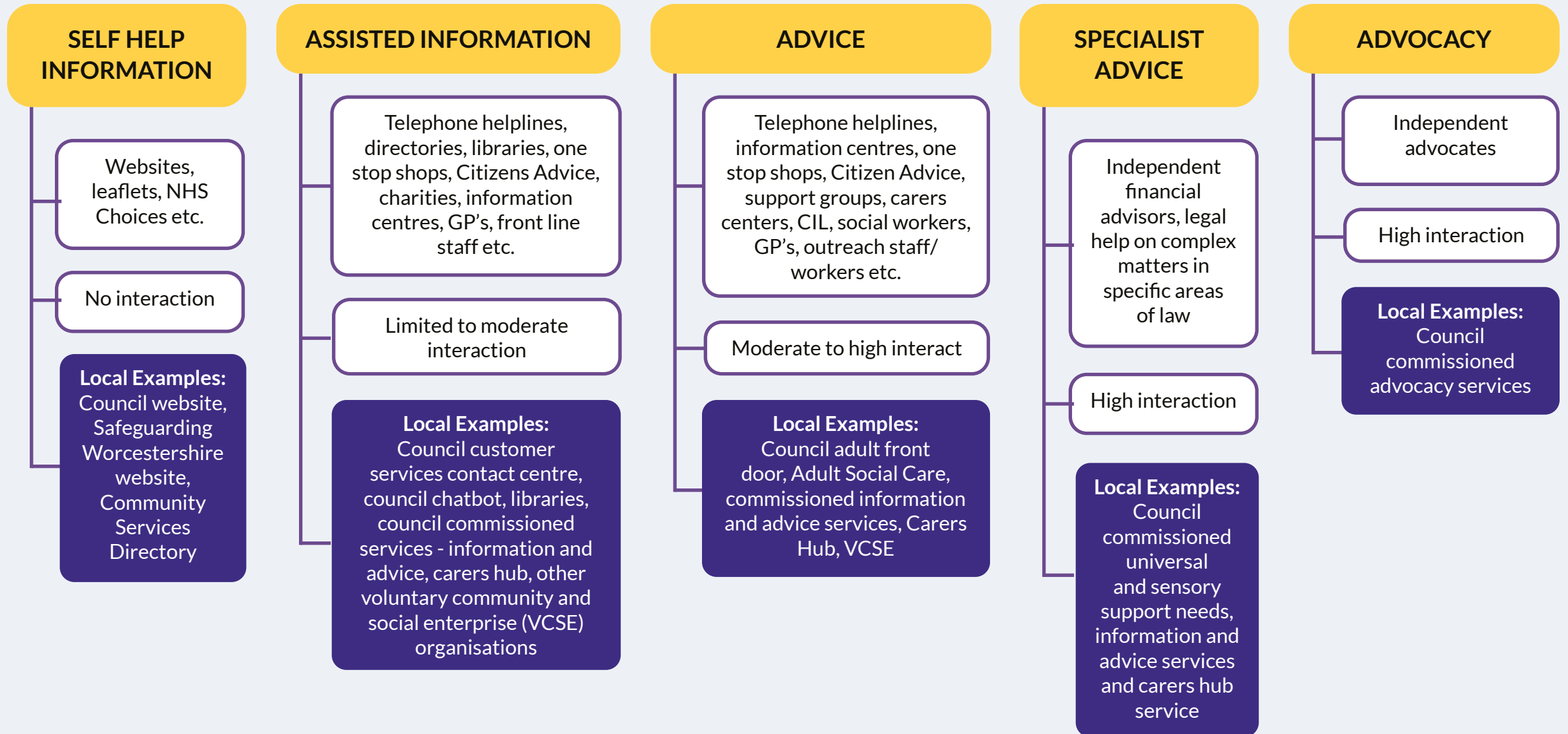


Specialist advice – is as advice above but will involve acting on behalf of a resident where applicable and necessary.



Advocacy – is where an advocate (usually a professional person) can help make sure the views of the resident are heard. They are independent of adult social care and the NHS. Some of the things advocates can help with include understanding care, support in making decisions, challenging decisions about care and support of the resident, support to make a complaint regarding health or adult social care, support for adult residents detained in Police custody to understand their rights and have their voice heard.

The adapted Skills for Care diagram¹ below highlights the types of information and advice activity that are delivered. The four pillars above will cover all these areas to ensure a holistic and wide-ranging approach to best meet the needs of residents.



¹ Skills for Care Charity, training, and development materials.



Objectives

Through the delivery pillars outlined, residents will:



- be offered information, advice, and specialist advice where appropriate, to help residents remain independent within the community and contribute positively to their health and wellbeing.



- benefit from the council working in partnership with other voluntary, statutory sector and independent organisations to ensure that residents have access to a range of community advice services that promote their independence, health, and wellbeing.



- know the council is working continuously to ensure people that face multiple challenges to seeking support can access information, advice, guidance, or advocacy in an appropriate form, dependent on their needs.



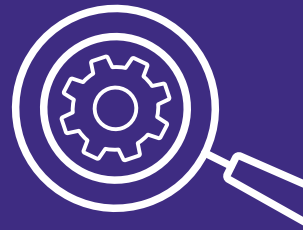
- be able to access a high quality, personalised, independent, and trusted source of specific advice in their community or via digital tools, quickly and easily.



- understand the importance of safeguarding and know to raise concerns about the safety or wellbeing of an adult who has care and support needs through a variety of routes.



- be accurately and swiftly referred to other support services if the needs are outside the remit of the Care Act information and advice requirements.



Outcomes

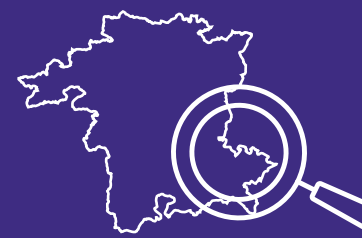
The strategy and approach will provide outcomes for residents, carers, their families and the wider council and partners.

Residents:

- I can see there is support for me to access information and advice in a way that suits my needs.
- I feel supported, empowered and more confident to address my current situation and future situations.
- I know I can trust the advice I am receiving.
- I understand my potential income increases, through work or benefits.
- I am confident that I will be able to access support in a way that is appropriate for me.
- I will be able to increase my knowledge about my rights and responsibilities.
- I know that I need to speak to a person or organisation who will take my concerns seriously if I am worried about someone, to ensure they are protected from abuse or neglect.
- The support I receive will improve my health and wellbeing.

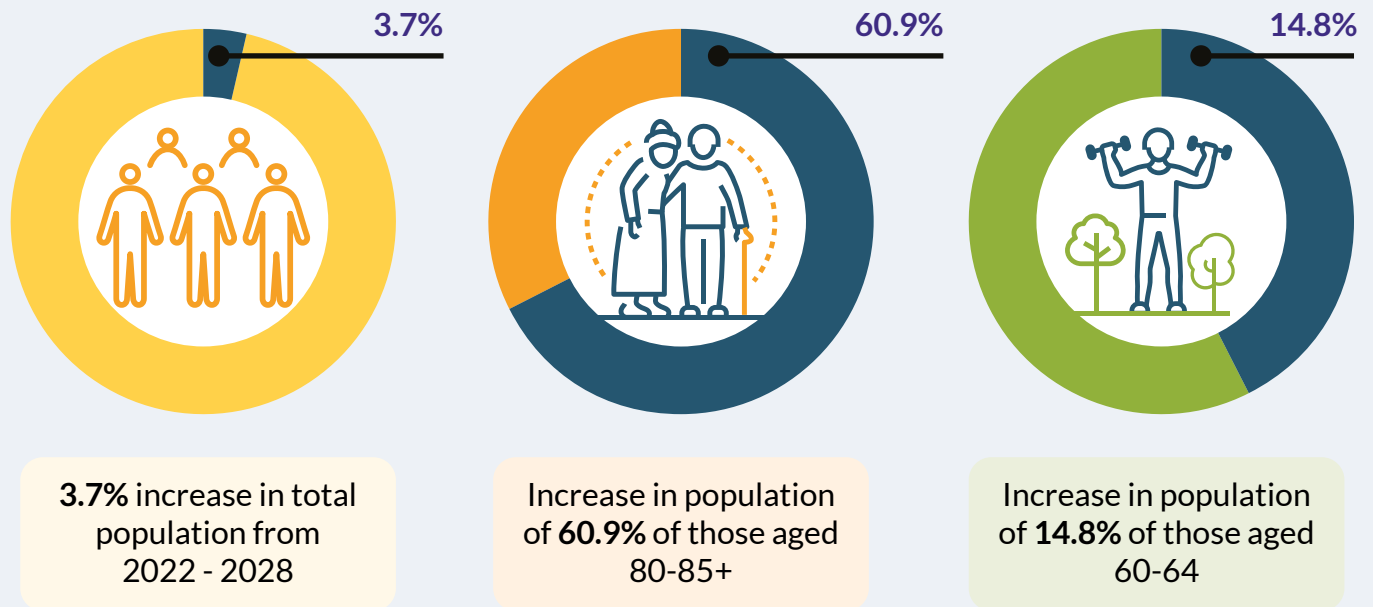
Partner outcomes:

- Partners can signpost or directly refer, with ease and confidence to advice services.
- Service information is easily accessible creating a more robust knowledge base to support future service requirements.
- A clear partnership approach is embedded to maximise prevention and early intervention outcomes.
- Service activity evidence's positive contribution to tackling health inequalities to improve outcomes for residents.
- Community based services contribute to reducing demand on frontline council and other services, supporting the maintenance or improvement of quality of life.
- Partners understand and fulfil their role in safeguarding residents from harm and neglect.



Worcestershire Context

In 2021, the population of Worcestershire was 603,676 people. Population projections indicate that Worcestershire will see a 3.7% increase in total population from 2022 to 2028, from around 609,000 to an estimated 632,000.

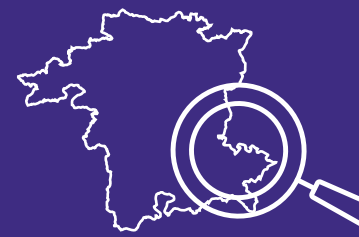


There is a predicted notable increase in the population of those aged **80-84 (42.6%)**, **85+ (18.3%)** and for those aged **60-64 (14.8%)**. Based on the existing universal information and advice service data, the population increase alone will see an extra 30 residents per week accessing universal services. This does not consider any impact from the cost-of-living crisis, or other reactive themes, so it is expected to be much higher.

The ageing population will have implications for the demand and provision of health and social care services in the county.

The need from the community for information about care and support will continue to grow. A significant proportion of residents accessing commissioned services report a disability or long-term health condition.

Over recent years, benefits and tax credits consistently remained the most prevalent area of support requested through commissioned services, with more than double the number of requests for support to the next most prevalent which is debt, followed by housing.



Worcestershire Context (continued)

Working Together

The council is committed to working with partners and residents to develop the approach. There is a strong network of information and advice services within the county and strengthening partnerships and relationships is fundamental to achieving the aim of the strategy, ensuring that residents have access to a range of information and advice services that promote their independence, health, and wellbeing.

Provision of information and advice is wide ranging and operates across the statutory and voluntary sector within the county. Some residents may access services at a national level or a local level with key partners including:

- Commissioned service providers.
- Voluntary, Community and Social Enterprises (VCSE).
- District Councils.
- Social prescribing services.
- Primary care services.
- Other health partners.
- National advice services.

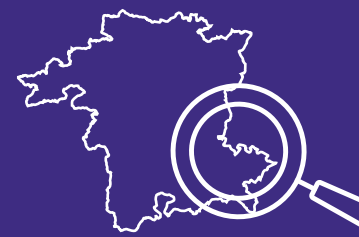
All are equally important in making sure there is a strong foundation for prevention and early help when residents need it.

Engagement

During 2022/23, a series of specific workshops, surveys and discussions were carried out with residents, stakeholders and information and advice providers to help shape the approach for the commissioning of the universal service and to highlight the key areas for the strategy. Stakeholders have also been consulted on the strategy during 2023.

In addition, a variety of Public Health engagement exercises were carried out since the COVID-19 pandemic, identifying key themes and system barriers relating to information and advice. This includes targeted engagement with underserved communities (including; disabilities, experiencing poor mental health, carers, care leavers, ethnicity, gender identification, sexual orientation, d/Deaf, sight loss, homelessness, drug and alcohol users) and a formal consultation for **Worcestershire's Joint Health and Wellbeing Strategy 2022-2032**.





Worcestershire Context (continued)

The key findings highlighted through the engagement were:

More needs to be done to raise awareness of where residents can access information and advice and what services are available.

Services need to have a range of contact options – telephone, email, and face to face in a public venue were top three submitted.

Services need to have sufficient capacity in place – challenges around meeting increasing demand and lack of resources.

Providers experience significant challenges in meeting expectations of residents – the perception is help can be provided quickly and easily at one location.

Volunteers are essential - they are fundamental to the delivery of community-based information and advice.

Availability of resources – both direct investment and wider sector support such as peer support, training, directory of services.

These have all been considered and are integral to the delivery pillars outlined above.



Strategic links

It is important to understand how this strategy will fit and contribute to local strategies as information and advice is integral across many areas.

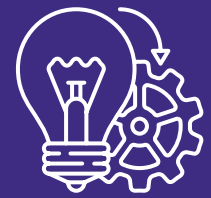
It connects directly and indirectly to the priorities of **the council's corporate plan**. Fundamentally, information advice and guidance supports the corporate objectives by providing information on health and wellbeing and supporting children and families to address their needs. It also contributes to developing the local economy through helping people with employment related information and advice requirements and income maximisation.

There are several other council and partner strategies in which information and advice is an important factor:

- **Joint Local Health and Wellbeing Strategy.**
- **Adults Prevention and Early Intervention Strategy.**
- **Adult Social Care Strategy.**
- **Carers Strategy.**
- **Advocacy Strategy** (in development).
- **Digital Accessibility Strategy.**
- **Joint Strategic Needs Assessment.**
- **Herefordshire and Worcestershire Integrated Care Strategy.**







Approach

In developing this strategy, the council considered the views of residents and stakeholders, plus explored the experiences of other councils and partner organisations.

The four key pillars of delivery outlined specific areas of work and approaches to be taken over the next five years. A summary of the current and future activity is outlined below.

A

Council commissioned general (universal) and specialist information and advice services

The council will commission services to meet the needs of residents in the following areas either through direct provision of information and advice, or as part of a wider service. These are:

These are:

- General (universal) information and advice service.
- Targeted information and advice service (sensory support needs).
- Carers Hub.
- Advocacy services.

These will ensure quality services are available to residents with an information and advice need, delivered through a range of mechanisms.

B

Ongoing council direct delivery

Adult Front Door Team

The Adult Front Door Team will provide the main point of contact for Worcestershire adults needing support including, but not limited to, support from social care.

The team can be contacted via telephone or online. Once contacted the team gain a thorough understanding of the residents' needs and agree the most appropriate action/s. This may include;

- Offering access to information, advice, and signposting to organisations such as Age UK, Citizen's Advice, and Local District Council support.
- Referral to the Targeted Adult Support Team to prevent, reduce and delay adult social care need.
- Initiating onward referrals to the most appropriate Social Care teams.
- Escalating requests to the Safeguarding Team.

Additionally, the team will be able to provide short term advice and facilitate support following an emergency such as flooding by referring to housing associations, foodbanks and other appropriate organisations.

B

Ongoing council direct delivery

Online information

The council has a Community Services Directory for people to find helpful information online about health and wellbeing groups, services, and activities across the county. The directory will be redeveloped during 2024 and relaunched to provide multiple enhancements for residents and partners, making it a robust tool to find local services and organisations.

It is a way to enable people to stay informed, healthy, and independent, by providing relevant information, when they need it. The directory provides an easy-to-use reference tool for practitioners.

The council website contains a range of sources of information, from cost-of-living support to energy efficiency schemes as well as online forms to contact the relevant council team. This includes information for residents around adult social care services, including cost of care guidance and calculators. The accessibility of the web information is currently being reviewed and enhanced.

Customer Service Contact Centre

The Customer Services Contact Centre will provide the first point of contact for resident's enquiries for several key Council services. These services are provided via telephony, webchat, chatbot and online applications.

Our aim is to make customer contact simple, clear, easy to use and accessible for our residents whilst supporting them with their enquiry.

Safeguarding

Worcestershire Adult Safeguarding Board is in place to ensure the county council is fulfilling its requirement to:

“...protecting people's health, wellbeing and human rights, and enabling them to live free from harm, abuse and neglect...”

Working in partnership with the Worcestershire Safeguarding Children Partnership, both organisations will continue to support residents and professionals by providing clear referral routes as well as online information on the safeguarding process, following the West Midlands Adult Safeguarding policy and procedures.

B

Ongoing council direct delivery

Libraries

Worcestershire county council libraries provide a front door in the community for information and advice. They signpost to council and commissioned services, promote council, and partner agendas and provide support to find information online and access digital/online services.

Library computers link to resources such as the community services directory and other useful sites. Some libraries are also co-located with partner services such as Job Centres and district council customer service hubs.

Throughout the year, libraries support and promote health and wellbeing campaigns and host a wide range of community support and health drop-in services delivered by council and community partners including Health Visitors, Starting Well, Social Prescribers, Stronger Together, Cruse, Age UK's, and Citizens Advice.

In addition to more traditional services of books and ebooks, free computer access, wi-fi and space to read, research and study, libraries also deliver a range of services to help people achieve their potential.

These range from; Library Digital Champions to help people get online, Library Service at Home and Mobile Library service for more isolated and vulnerable residents, Job Clubs and Job Fairs, work experience and volunteering for people seeking employment, business resources and advice for people looking to start or grow a business and an accessible cultural event to promote aspiration.

Libraries' information and advice and wider service offer will continue to grow and change in response to the needs of residents.

C

Strategic partnership development

Engagement work has highlighted a desire for more partnership working and peer support around information and advice, working collaboratively across all sectors.

The intention is to develop a wider partnership to agree and deliver an action plan to contribute to the overall outcomes of the strategy.

This pillar will utilise asset-based approaches to explore gaps and activities that could enhance the information and advice offer to residents, alongside strengthening partnership approaches to ensure relevant communication and referral processes are in place.

D

Maximising investment and resources

The council will continue to explore opportunities to maximise investment in this area. This includes utilising external opportunities such as the Household Support Fund to provide extra investment, broaden the impact and scope of funding and to reach the residents the services don't currently engage with.

This sits alongside the work to continue to strengthen existing partnership working and a joined-up approach with district councils and wider strategic partners.

Delivery Pillars



Council commissioned universal and specialist information and advice services



Council direct delivery activity



Strategic partnership development



Maximising investment and resources



Accessibility

The council will commit to improve the reach of information and advice services by ensuring accessibility at all levels, putting in place appropriate measures to provide access for all. Accessibility is key for residents who are likely to have a poor experience of care and poorer outcomes.

To ensure accessibility is embedded throughout information and advice resources and support, we will;



Ensure information meets the Accessible Information Standard where relevant. This directs and defines a specific approach to meeting information and communication needs of residents with a disability or sensory loss, as well as the undefined acknowledgement that a range of other users will benefit from alternative formats and communication styles.



Ensure any online resources provided by the council or commissioned services meet the international Web Content Accessibility Guidelines 2.2 AA (WCAG) and will publish an accessibility statement that explains how accessible the online resource or service is.



Actively review relevant consultation and engagement feedback and consider changes to service areas.



Actively seeking feedback from residents on their experiences of accessing the services.



Accessibility (continued)



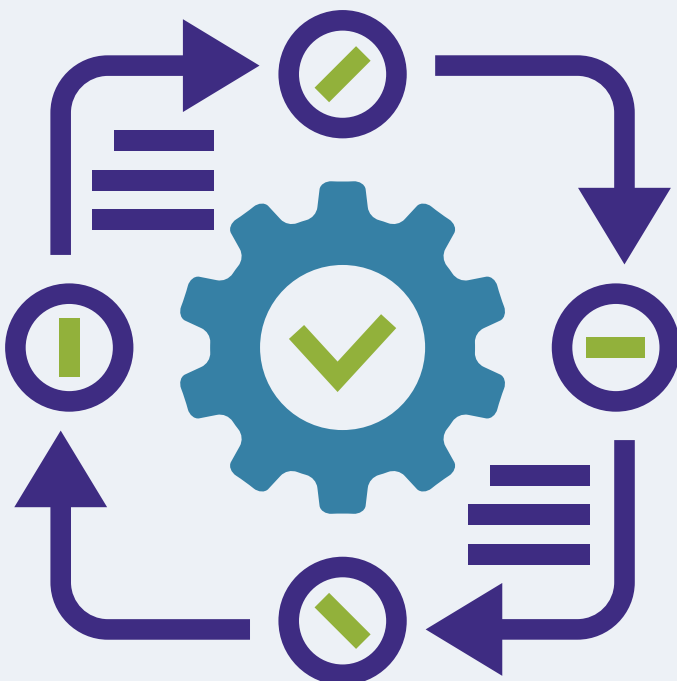
Use internal and external services data to analyse demographics (where available and relevant) of residents and put measures in place to address underserved communities.



Strengthen relationships with partners working in and with communities and marginalised residents to ensure awareness of the services and appropriate delivery mechanisms are in place.



Improve access to information and advice for residents where English is not their first language.





How success will be measured

The council is committed to ensuring information and advice services across Worcestershire meet the needs of residents.

A range of measures will be used to seek feedback on progress towards the resident and professional partner outcomes outlined above, and this will include:

- Reviewing contract monitoring data (including equality and demographic data).
- Undertaking and analysing feedback from residents accessing services across council and commissioned services.
- Reviewing internal services feedback.
- Ongoing review of consultation and engagement.
- Case studies.
- Web surveys.
- Reviewing relevant data from the Adult Social Care Outcomes Framework survey results for Worcestershire.
- Establish a stakeholder network and seek feedback to shape future activity.
- Progress against action plans developed through a stakeholder network and relevant council departments.



The council is committed to understanding and identifying the risks and factors that might impact on the successful implementation of this strategy. Learning what these may be and how to mitigate these risks will be considered as part of action planning to ensure successful implementation.



Case studies

1 In house services (Adult Front Door)

Cost of living case study

Outline: The council received a request for help from a resident regarding the cost of living and rising bills. They were on Universal Credit but believed it was going down and were unsure why. They were struggling with gas and electric costs and wanted some support surrounding this. They had not spoken to any other agencies.

Action: The resident was referred directly to their local Citizens Advice. An email was sent to the resident with links to charities and organisations that will offer support and possible grants. Referrals were also made to Act on Energy for the Household Support Fund and to the Severn Trent Water for relief with water bills.

Independence case study

Outline: A referral was made for a widowed resident, aged 83. They were lonely and struggling to stay independent and happy at home. They were very independent until recently, but now they have mobility difficulties as well as feeling isolated and lonely. They occasionally received help from a daughter, but they didn't like to ask. They require support with aids and equipment as they have difficulty mobilising around her home.

Action: The Adult Front Door advisor made a direct referral to their local Age UK for support with accessing benefits advice, cleaning support and local social and leisure opportunities. The advisor also made initial contact with the Community Occupational Therapist to support with an assessment which may lead to aids and equipment being provided. This was explained over the telephone to the resident and sent in a letter with the details of these referrals.



2

Commissioned universal information and advice service

a) Citizens Advice (cost of living case study)

Outline: An elderly couple in their 80's went to Citizens Advice to ask for help with applying for a blue badge for disabled parking. In the past they had both worked in the carpet industry and had also had their own small business but sadly that hadn't been successful. They were asked if everything else was ok as they seemed very troubled.

It turns out that they had set up a repayment plan some 10 years ago to clear their debts and had religiously paid off a small amount every month, but the debt was not reducing. It was causing severe anxiety and depression and with the rising cost of living they were now struggling to pay anything off their debts. They were also struggling to heat their old draughty home and feed themselves properly. The advisors and the couple agreed the best way forward was for them to go bankrupt, but they couldn't afford the 2 x £680 bankruptcy fee, £1360 in total.

Action: Citizens Advice applied to the Carpet and Textile Support Fund, and they agreed to pay the bankruptcy fees. They also received over £220 of support from the Household Support Fund for pensioners and £300 of supermarket vouchers to help with the rising cost of food. They said they feel like a huge weight has been lifted from their shoulders and they can now sleep at night. (They made a lovely thank you cake).

b) Citizens Advice (Benefits case study)

Outline: The resident first contacted Citizens Advice regarding a travel query, it became apparent that the client may be eligible to receive Personal Independence Payment (PIP).

Actions: One of the Citizens Advice Welfare Benefits Caseworkers worked with and supported the client with the PIP application form. The client was grateful for the support received and because of this he came back into the office with his father who cares for the client.

The caseworker established that the father may be entitled to carer's allowance as he only receives state pension plus pension credit and no other income. They were also able to support the father to apply for and secure carer's allowance.

Outcome: The client application for PIP was successful, and he has been awarded £68.10 per week. The client will also receive a back payment of £486.43. In addition, the advisor was also able to put the client forward to receive a one-off payment from the Household Support Fund. The total extra income for this client is £3,541.20 pa.

The father's carer's allowance claim was awarded and in addition, was backdated for three months to align with his sons PIP award. Total extra income for this client (the father) is £3,991pa.

Overall Citizens Advice have supported the family to receive a total of £7,532.20 per year additional income, plus back payments and the one off support through the Household Support Fund.

3 Strategic partnership development

As part of the Household Support Fund delivery in Worcestershire, an informal delivery partnership has been formed which comprises:

- All district councils.
- Act on Energy (local energy charity).
- Worcestershire Advice Network through Citizen's Advice Worcester and Herefordshire as lead body.
- Age UK Worcester, Malvern and Hereford and localities.
- Council Adult Front Door team.
- Council sustainability team.
- Council strengthening communities team.

This monthly meeting has been vital for successfully managing a diverse online programme of **£7.9 million per year** across the county. This has evolved over time to include information and advice and cost of living discussions.

The group will expand and develop into the Information and Advice partnership outlined above over the first year of the strategy.

4 Maximising investment

a) Redirecting £100k of council internal funding to establish four part time money management advisers employed through the Citizens Advice network in Worcestershire, working directly with over 50 people per month to tackle longstanding debt, in partnership with Act on Energy who identify the most vulnerable residents requesting energy debt assistance through the Household Support Fund.

b) Ringfencing £100k of Household Support Fund grant in 2023/24 to increase investment in the new information and advice services contracts by 36% to reflect the changes in demand and the importance of the service.

For further information

Contact (email): strengtheningcommunities@worcestershire.gov.uk



worcestershire.gov.uk