

**Finding Out About Adult Social Care
Services from the NEW Worcestershire
County Council Website**

‘Mystery Shopping’ Exercise

Report - March 2023



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Acknowledgment

Healthwatch Worcestershire would like to thank all the HWW volunteers who gave up their time, acted as 'mystery shoppers' and supported this work.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Healthwatch Worcestershire gathers feedback about local health and care services and makes recommendations to those who run them about how they could be improved from a patient, service user and carer perspective.

WHY THIS WORK

Councils have a legal duty to provide information and advice about care and support services in their local area, what is available, how these services work locally and how people can access them¹.

In 2019 we carried out a mystery shopping exercise to find out how far the Adult Social Care information on the Worcestershire County Council's (WCC) website is answering common questions that older people or their relatives may have about a service or situations. Whilst good information was available, navigating the site was complex and difficult. We had intended to repeat this exercise in 2023 to see if things had improved in response to our recommendations. WCC are currently developing a new website. The Council confirmed that this would add value to the development of the new site and enable them to identify changes to the website based on user perspective and experience.

Our shoppers therefore undertook an independent, extended mystery shopping exercise on the WCC Beta site in January 2023, so that the findings could influence the content and design of the new site. Our Report reflects content of the website at that date.

WHAT WE DID

We repeated the scenarios we had developed in 2019 covering situations in which older people or their relatives/carer might find themselves and turn to the WCC website looking for information. These covered: a carer looking for support for themselves; an older person looking for support at home for themselves; a person looking for support at home for a relative; a carer looking for information about residential care on behalf of a parent; a carer looking for information about Extra Care Housing on behalf of a parent; an older person looking for information about social activities and transport and a person looking for help for an older friend with a sight impairment.

In addition we developed three new scenarios covering: a working age person with a physical disability looking for a range of information relating to employment, care and support, and social activities; a person looking for support for a relative experiencing mental ill health and a person trying to help a friend with their drug use.

We asked our mystery shoppers to read the scenario, put themselves in that person shoes and then find the answer to a number of questions relevant to that scenario, using the information on the WCC website. Our team of shoppers have a range of IT skills, with some being relatively unfamiliar with websites to more experienced

¹ Care Act 2014, Factsheet 1: General responsibilities of local authorities: prevention, information and advice, and shaping the market of care and support services, Department of Health and Social Care, April 2016

users. We also asked a volunteer who is blind to consider the accessibility of the website using their screen reader.

OUR OBSERVATIONS ABOUT THE NEW WCC WEBSITE

We appreciate that the County Council have invested time and resource to improve their website offer. It has been encouraging to note their commitment to involve people in the development and testing of the site, and their willingness to make changes in the light of early feedback received.

We noted some real improvements to the new version of the WCC website since our first Mystery Shopping exercise. Some of our shoppers were able to find the information that they were looking for with relative ease, and found the navigation simpler than in the previous site. We noted that the information available in some of the Adult Social Care sections is more comprehensive than previously, and pages are more coherently linked together. There are better links to other sources of information and advice external to the County Council and information about paying for services is much better integrated throughout the site.

However, many of our shoppers encountered real difficulties with navigating the site and finding the information they needed. We have focused on the challenges as this is where our feedback can add most value. Our aim is to improve user experience of navigating and using the site.

Language and Style

A number of our shoppers commented that the language used in the Adult Social Care (ASC) section assumed a knowledge of services or terminology that might not be shared by all. Examples given were terms such as ‘Assessment and Eligibility’ and ‘Make a Referral’ - some of our shoppers did not know what these terms meant.

It was also notable that there were variations in writing style across the website which could affect the understanding and flow of information from a ‘users’ perspective.

Search Function

The search function is obviously very important as it is the way that many people will first choose to navigate the website. Issues encountered included the number and relevance of the results returned. Searches related to ‘losing sight’ returned numerous, but mostly irrelevant results. The results do not differentiate between information for adults and children. Neither does the facility seem able to make connections to the terms entered and common synonyms. The terms ‘asc’ and ‘desc’ in the search functions are not explained (we later learnt that these are to sort in ascending and descending order). We could not locate an A-Z function on the site. We recommend further development of the search function on the website.

Navigation

Whilst some of our shoppers found their way easily to the information they required, other struggled with navigation. Issues included being taken back to the WCC Homepage as the trail on the top left of the screen missed out pages they had visited. Few of our shoppers appeared to notice the ‘In this Section’ drop down

menu, or were unclear of its use. The way that information was titled did not at times help our shoppers to find the information needed, as the title did not reflect the content that they were expecting.

It appears to us that there is scope to expand the Useful Links section to think more widely about what information may be helpful to a person landing on a particular page. In addition not all external links open in a new window.

Sources of Information

We would recommend that, unless it does not make sense to do so, links to local information sources are provided first.

Our shoppers were frequently sent to the Here2Help Community Services Directory to look for local information. At times this yielded few relevant results. We appreciate the challenges but suggest that ways to boost the content on Here2Help could be through looking at information produced by, for example District Councils the NHS or the Voluntary and Community Sector.

Care Act requirements

Whilst there is good information about Care Act needs assessments on the website there are pages where we would have expected to find links to this information but did not do so.

We are concerned that the wording under 'Arranging Care' in the Care at Home and in the Care Home sections could be inadvertently misleading, as the second bullet point appears to link an assessment of need to eligibility for funding and a person's level of savings. We think these sentences should be removed.

Contacting Adult Social Care

A key issue for our shoppers was their ability to contact the Council from the website. Some felt that the requirement to register/log in to the online portal and give consent may be hurdles to proceeding. Some wondered what a 'portal' was, and whether more user friendly language could be used. Many wanted to speak to someone.

The telephone contact number for Adult Social Care was not easy to find, including on the WCC 'Contact' page where it is under the heading 'Proceed to contact us'. This is particularly concerning as the Out of Hours emergency number is also located in this drop down section.

We would like to see the telephone number to contact Adult Social Care available throughout relevant pages on the site, particularly those where there is a link to information about Care Act assessments.

We did not always find information in relevant sections about the availability of advocacy, translation and interpreting services. For example, we did not find information about how to contact Adult Social Care if you have a sensory impairment, such as through a text talk facility or with BSL interpreting support.

If there is a standard/target for response time to an ASC referral this should be added to contact information on the website, and if not consideration should be given to introducing this.

Accessibility

We asked one of our shoppers, who is blind, to visit the beta site and assess its general accessibility to someone who uses a screen reader. Positives were that, once a relevant section had been located, the information found was accessible to their JAWS screen reader. However some of the difficulties encountered included: the screen reader seemed unable to activate the menu of different options for how search results are displayed (Relevance, Date, A-Z); not all search results appear as 'headers' - so the screen reader is unable to use the title as a hyperlink to the appropriate page; navigating through the site was difficult, particularly as our shopper was frequently unable to find a way to get back to the page before using 'hot key' keyboard commands on the screen reader.

A number of our shoppers commented on the small size of the font on the website. No one reported that they had found the accessibility tool that would enable them to enlarge this.

THE SCENARIOS

In the full Report we have described each of the ten scenarios that we developed. A brief synopsis of each is provided, alongside narrative about what our shoppers found out when they tried to answer questions relating to their scenario. We have then identified points for consideration for WCC, which relate specifically to the scenario and to the pages visited.

An example of a scenario and recording sheet are available as Appendices, and a copy of all the scenarios are available on request.

OVERALL

There are potentially a great many barriers to people using the WCC website including lack of access to or being unable to afford digital devices.² Therefore, non-digital access and information in different formats will always be necessary and important, arguably more so for people using Adult Social Care services.

For those who do use the website a lack of familiarity or facility with IT; variable availability of internet services (especially in rural areas); pressure to find solutions / information / advice in stressful circumstances and people's capacity (physical, cognitive or sensory) could contribute to poor outcomes in using the WCC website. It is important that the user experience of navigating the site is as straightforward as possible, and that the website works well to enable users to easily find the information that they need.

Suggestions to improve usability and equality of access have been identified in the recommendations and through the points for consideration relating to the Scenarios within the Report.

² See [HWW Digital Access to Healthcare Report](#), January 2022

1. ABOUT HEALTHWATCH WORCESTERSHIRE

Healthwatch Worcestershire gathers feedback about local health and care services and makes recommendations to those who run them about how they could be improved from a patient, service user and carer perspective.

2. WHY THIS WORK?

Councils have a legal duty to provide information and advice about care and support services in their local area, what is available, how these services work locally and how people can access them³. We conducted a ‘mystery shopping’ exercise at the end of 2019 to find out how far the Adult Social Care information on the Worcestershire County Council’s (WCC) website is answering common questions that older people or their friends and relatives may have about a service or situation.

We found that, whilst there was good information on the WCC website navigating the site was complex and difficult. There were opportunities to improve links between section of the site and some areas lacked content and detailed information.

The County Council’s response to the Report was deferred due to Covid. However, we contacted WCC again in November 2021 and in their response to the Report the Council undertook to accept our recommendations and build these into the website re-design that WCC had planned.

WCC have built a new website and HWW, alongside others, have looked at the ‘beta version’⁴ of the new site.

HWW Business Plan contains a commitment to repeat the Mystery Shopping exercise on the Adult Social Care section of the WCC website in 2023 as an independent exercise.

WCC confirmed that this would add value to their process, and enable them to identify changes to the site based on user perspective and experience.

Our volunteers therefore repeated an extended mystery shopping exercise on the WCC Beta site in January 2023, so that the findings can influence the content and design of the new site.

We appreciate that the website is not the County Council’s only source of advice and information as specified in the Care Act. Other Council services, including social work teams, have a role to play in providing people with information and advice.

³ Care Act 2014, Factsheet 1: General responsibilities of local authorities: prevention, information and advice, and shaping the market of care and support services, Department of Health and Social Care, April 2016

⁴ The ‘beta version’ of the website was operational in January 2023, and was running parallel to the existing site for a period of time

3. WHAT WE DID

We repeated our initial scenarios covering situations in which older people or their relatives/carer might find themselves and turn to the WCC website looking for information. These covered

- Carer looking for support for themselves
- Older person looking for support at home for themselves
- Person looking for support at home for a relative
- Carer looking for information about residential care on behalf of a parent
- Carer looking for information about Extra Care Housing on behalf of a parent
- Older person looking for information about social activities and transport
- Person looking for help for an older friend with a sight impairment

In addition we developed three new scenarios covering:

- Working age person with a physical disability looking for a range of information relating to employment, care and support, and social activities
- Person looking for support for a relative experiencing mental ill health
- Person trying to help a friend with their drug use

We asked our mystery shoppers to read the scenario, put themselves in that person shoes and then find the answer to a number of questions relevant to that scenario, using the information on the WCC website.

Where possible we allocated each scenario to two people, as everyone will attempt to find information in different ways.

We devised a format for people to record what they found whilst undertaking the mystery shopping exercise. This is included as Appendix One.

An example of one of the scenarios is included at Appendix Two. The remainder will be available on the website or on request.

Our team of shoppers have a range of IT skills, with some being relatively unfamiliar with websites to more experienced users.

In addition to the scenarios above, we asked a person who is blind and uses a screen reader to visit the WCC Beta website and provide us with feedback about how they found navigating the site and the accessibility of the information that they found.

We were aware that SpeakEasy N.O.W. are providing some input to WCC on the website development. We did not therefore develop a scenario focusing on Learning Disability.

We did not set out to review all the information about Adult Social Care on the WCC Beta website, neither did we open every section of the information provided.

Whilst this is a relatively small scale, qualitative study we have identified some common themes that are applicable to more than one scenario and may be applicable across the WCC website as a whole.

We have already provided WCC with some early verbal and written feedback for their consideration prior to the publication of this report, and follow up from this has been arranged.

NOTE: All observations and comments below relate to, and were accurate at, the time that our shoppers reviewed the WCC Beta website in January 2023. Content may have changed since this time, as we are aware that the new website is now live, and is still being updated and developed.

We are also aware that there may be changes to the terms used to describe the Here2Help offer, but as this was the terminology in use at the time of this exercise we have used this throughout our Report.

4. OUR OBSERVATIONS ABOUT THE NEW WCC WEBSITE

We appreciate that the County Council have invested time and resource to improve their website offer. It has been encouraging to note their commitment to involve people in the development and testing of the site, and their willingness to make changes in the light of early feedback received.

We have noted some real improvements to the new version of the WCC website since our first Mystery Shopping exercise.

Some of our shoppers were able to find the information that they were looking for with relative ease, and commented that they found the navigation to the information simpler than in the previous site.

This was particularly the case for shoppers looking for information about support for carers, mental health and drugs.

We noted that the information available in some of the Adult Social Care sections is much more comprehensive than on the previous site. Sections of the Adult Social Care pages are more coherently linked together, there are better links to other sources of information and advice external to the County Council and information about paying for services is much better integrated throughout the site.

However, many of our shoppers encountered real difficulties with navigating the site and finding the information they needed. This seemed to be especially difficult in scenarios where a range of information about different topics was being sought.

Below we have set out some of the challenges encountered, and also provided some specific suggested actions for WCC relating to these.

We have focused on the challenges as this is where our feedback can add most value and enable changes to be made to improve the site from a user's perspective.

Our aim is to improve user experience of navigating and using the site

a. Language & Style

A number of our shoppers commented that the language used in the Adult Social Care (ASC) section assumed a knowledge of services or terminology that might not be shared by all.

[What we do in adult social care | Worcestershire County Council](#)

For example not everyone will understand the terms 'Assessment and Eligibility'. An alternative might be: 'Discuss care and support needs'. This is used elsewhere on the website (see: [How to get support in a crisis | Worcestershire County Council](#))

A number of shoppers said they would have welcomed information about how to get in touch with ASC (including by telephone) much earlier in their searches - they did not know that the tile 'make a referral to ASC' went to contact details.

There was also sometimes a lack of consistency in terminology used to describe a service, which could be confusing for the reader. For example 'care homes' was the term that was usually used to describe these settings, but on one occasion 'residential care' was used.

It was also notable that there were variations in writing style across the website which could affect the understanding and flow of information from a users perspective.

Recommendations

- *Review the language used on the website to make it more understandable to members of the public who may not have any prior knowledge of Adult Social Care.*
- *Change the terminology for 'Assessment and Eligibility' and 'Make a Referral to Adult Social Care' to make it easier to understand.*
- *Consider how writing styles across the site could be more consistent and check that terms are used consistently.*

b. Search Function

The search function is obviously very important as it is the way that many people will first choose to navigate the website.

A number of difficulties were experienced by people using the search function on the WCC Beta site homepage.

- **Number and relevance of results** - depending on the search terms used hundreds of results could be returned, if you are not sure what you are looking for this may add to confusion rather than provide a solution
- **No differentiation between results for children and adults** - for example searching on visual impairment - the first four results relate to children's services, the fifth result is 'Sensory Impairment and Physical Disabilities' - the short description does not make clear that this is information for adults and people may not necessarily make the connection between the search term used (visual impairment) and sensory impairment. The seventh result

under visual impairment is the Landscape Charter Assessment, which is irrelevant to the search

- **Sensitivity to wording** - the search function does not appear able to identify and make links between the words put into the search box and the information required. It is not able to pick up on common synonyms. Staying with the visual impairment example, when the words 'losing sight' are put into the search box the top five results returned are:

Central Composting

Severn Waste Services operates a composting facility at its Hill and Moor site near Pershore where green waste collected from the Household Recycling Centres and household garden waste collections is composted. The resultant soil conditioner 'Greengr...

Becoming a childminder

Are you considering becoming a childminder? Then we can help!

Falls prevention

Falls prevention guidance to check if you're at risk of falling, the steps to look after yourself and what to do if you have a fall.

Inclusion SEND

We help to develop the leadership of SEND and inclusion through our offer of consultancy, audits and opportunities to share and learn effective practice.

Vision Impairment

Support for babies, children and students with a visual impairment, their families and carers.

When the words 'losing my sight' are put into the search box a different top five results comes up as below. It seems that 'my' may have been identified as the key search word:

My Account

Online Council accounts.

My journey into adulthood

Some young people with additional needs will need extra support to do things that are important to them in adult life.

Login to my account

Login to your library account to renew your books, reserve books, cancel reservations and change your PIN.

What are my care options in Worcestershire?

There are several ways to get the care you need, from staying in your own home to a more supported or residential solution.

What will happen to my home (care costs)?

Although the care options link in the search results may be useful there is still no direct link to the information about visual impairment on the WCC website.

When the term 'going blind' is put in the search box a further set of results comes up:

Multi-Sensory Impairment

Supports deaf blind and multi-sensory impaired babies, children and young people aged 0 to 19 years, their families and carers.

Be #FoodSavvy and plan like a pro

Planning your meals is one of the simplest ways to keep good food from going to waste.

Apprenticeship talks and workshops

Employers, current or ex apprentices going into schools to share their experience can have a real impact on students.

Explore job sectors

Your career can go in a whole host of directions. Here are a broad range of job sectors to explore.

Resilience

Resilience in children is the ability to cope when things go wrong; dealing with the challenge; giving things a go and trying your best. Children who have a good understanding of their own emotions are at an advantage. They can manage their own feelings...

Our mystery shoppers found other examples of the search function coming up with first page results that are not directly relevant to their search, or where they could not necessarily relate the wording they had used to the results obtained.

As a lot of our scenarios related to Older People. This was a term that our shoppers frequently put into the search box. The search resulted in 217 returns. However, all bar one of the first page of results related to children's services, and none specifically mentioned older people.

It is important that the search function is able to return rational results, differentiate between adults and children and to make connections to common synonyms that may be entered such as losing sight, sight loss, visual impairment, or sensory impairment.

- **Sorting a search by A-Z**

Shoppers who tried to sort search results by A-Z did not find this a particularly useful function. The results appeared in Z- A order. They did not find a mechanism to reverse the order to A - Z.

We later discovered that this could be done through the 'desc' and 'asc' function, but we did not know what these terms meant. They were particularly puzzling to our volunteer who is blind and was using a screen reader.

We could not identify an A-Z of letters, where you can click on the letter you think most relevant to your search.

Recommendations

- *Further refine the search function in order to improve the relevance of the results offered, make links between search terms and common synonyms, and differentiate between relevant information for children and adults.*
- *The terms 'desc' and 'asc' on the search screen need to be explained or changed.*
- *An A-Z function could be considered if this is not already available on the site.*

c. Navigation

Our shoppers reported different experiences navigating the site. Some found it easier than others to find the information they were looking for and were satisfied with the experience. Others recorded their frustration in the notes on their scenarios, or shared this with us during the 'de-brief' after the exercise.

- **Getting 'stranded'**

Some people got 'stranded' in a section and could not get back to where they had started using the trail on the top left of the webpage.

For example in the search box in the WCC home page using the 'popular' link 'Adult Social Care' takes you to the following page:

[What we do in adult social care | Worcestershire County Council](#)

Selecting 'Care and Support' takes you here:

[Care and support | Worcestershire County Council](#)

However, the 'trail' in the navigation does not include the 'What we do in Adult Social Care' link that was followed to reach this page:

[Home](#) > [Care And Support](#)

Consequently if you can't find the information that you need, or want to find out more about Adult Social Care, you have to start your search again. Pressing 'home' takes you back to the WCC Home page, not to information about Adult Social Care.

This issue was repeated at various points on the website, and was a source of great frustration to our shoppers.

- **'In this section'**



Only a few of our shoppers reported using this drop down menu as part of their search to answer questions in our scenarios.

This suggests that our shoppers either did not notice this function, or were unclear what it was for and how it might help them to navigate the site.

- **Difficulties finding information**

A number of our shoppers recorded the difficulties that they encountered finding information on the site. Across the scenarios feedback included frustrations at being sent round in 'loops', where they ended up back at the same place they had started; being sent on a circuitous route to find information or not being able to find the information they were looking for.

The example below is illustrative of some of the difficulties encountered. It is taken from our scenario about a relative looking for residential care for their mother (see 5.c below for a fuller explanation). The example is the second question the shopper was asked to find information about. They had previously looked for information about whether their mother might be eligible for residential care.

Is there advice about the sorts of things I should consider when looking at or choosing a residential home with my mother?

What did you do first?

I typed in 'choosing a residential care home' in homepage which brought a range of options. I clicked on Care Homes and Supported living which brought up 6 options each with an explanatory sentence. The word residential care homes was not identified. It would have been useful if both residential and Nursing homes criteria were described at this stage. The options identified 'Care and Support CQC findings which presumes a knowledge of CQC. I clicked on this option, and I found that it covered settings which were provided by Worcestershire CC Care and Support Services and not the full list of residential settings in Worcestershire.

What did you find out?

Nothing of relevance. Went back and clicked on 'What we do in Adult Social Care' and from the list of options which mostly related to assessment and eligibility, choose 'Care and support' with the text identifying care homes and supported living accommodation within the sentence below. Still no identification of the difference between residential care homes and nursing homes at this stage.

Clicked on 'Care and Support' which brought Care Homes and supported accommodation. Clicked on this option which brought up 'Before you consider a care home' NOT choosing a Care Home.

Went on this option and in the text it brought up Support in the Community and Support at Home. Under an arrowed section was an option on Care Homes. (Still no differentiation between nursing and residential homes)

Clicked on Care Homes with a subtitle of 'What are Care Home options?'

It was under this that I found the differentiation between Residential and Nursing Homes. Care Homes (personal care only)

- To support people who need specialist care like dementia
- Offer Short term services like respite care

Nursing Homes were described as

- Providing personal and nursing care
- Having Nursing staff 24 hours a day

This is confusing as although the text in brackets after Care homes says personal care only, it is not identified in the bullet points. Rather personal care is identified in the bullet points for Nursing Homes

If I was trying to find residential care for my mother I would not know which option to choose in relation to the case study identifying personal care support
Also the links were poor . No websites identified and the link said care and support

Did the webpage that you landed on answer your question?

Not found. I went back to the home page and put in Residential Care Homes - Choosing a home and it just brought up a path previously linked

Any comments about answering this scenario question?

There is a lack of specific clarity under the heading titles. A very frustrating search with no advice found on choosing a residential care home.

This is indicative of some of the difficulties our shoppers encountered. There is information about choosing a care home in this section, and links to the Care Services Directory but the title of the drop down information - 'Finding a care home' - did not lead our shopper to this.

One of our shoppers, after completing the scenario about an older person looking for information about social activities and transport (see 5.e below) concluded:

'After many false starts, it seemed that the simplest way to access information was via the Here2Help directory. Using the main options on the WCC webpages led into tortuous pathways which could not be replicated easily and were very variable in access to useful information, with many clicks/ searches necessary and the terms used were often exclusive. Much formal language and many acronyms were in evidence, together with a lack of background mapping of synonyms, using language more familiar to members of the public. Some information was indeed helpful but a simpler means of obtaining it could be considered.

The Here2Help directory is not as 'user unfriendly', but the search functions need to be developed with reference to common everyday language and user groups rather than professional language.

Guidance on how to use the website is not readily available and this seems like an omission.'

- **Useful links**

This heading appears on the right hand side of the webpage.

Some pages did include a number of useful links to other pages / sections on the website, and to the Here2Help site.

It is not clear what protocol has been applied to the information which sits under this heading. It would be useful for us to understand the protocol / criteria / rationale that WCC are using to populate this section.

For example, on the page on Drug Use: [Drug use | Worcestershire County Council](#)

The only link under Useful Links is to Talk to Frank, which is included in the drop down menu along with other very useful information about sources of advice, information and support.

Cranstoun is the locally commissioned service, but the link to this does not appear in the Useful Links.

It seems to us that there is scope to think more widely about what information may be helpful to a person landing on a particular page. For example on the Drugs page a link to information about mental health could be provided, as we know that there is often a relationship between the two. In our scenario the person was looking to help a friend with their drug use in respect of housing (possible homelessness) and support to stay in employment. Consideration could be given to how these issues might be incorporated within this page.

A further obvious example would be to provide a link from the section on 'Personal Care and Support with Daily Tasks' to 'Care at Home' under the Useful Links heading and vice versa.

- **External Links opening in new window**

Our shoppers mentioned the difficulties they experienced in returning to the WCC site when external links did not open in a new window.

This was a particular difficulty when shoppers followed links from WCC to an external site, and then went on from there to a further website they thought would be useful to them.

Some links opened in a new window, some did not. We noted that most external links on the Here2Help site opened in a new window and this was identified beside the link, this would aid navigation for people using screen readers.

Recommendations

- *Further consider how to assist users to navigate through the WCC website - in particular improved visibility and explanation of the 'breadcrumb' function, and of the dropdown 'In This Section' menu.*
- *Ensure that title headings in the drop down menus accurately reflect the content from a public perspective.*
- *Further consider the role of the 'Useful Links' section - in particular how this section could be developed to think more widely about possible needs of someone looking at this page.*
- *Open all links to external sites in a new window and state this beside the link to aid navigation.*

d. Sources of Information

We appreciate that it is difficult to find the right balance of information on a website. Some people will want to look at a wide range of information sources, whilst others will prefer fewer options.

However we would suggest that, where possible, links to local information are provided first, followed by national information.

For example in:

[Personal care and support with daily tasks | Worcestershire County Council](#)

Under Local Lunch Clubs and Social Groups the first link is to the RVS, a national site. A number of our shoppers followed this and did not find much useful local information.

Local lunch clubs and social groups

There are many lunch clubs and social groups in Worcestershire where you can:

- have a meal
- socialise with friends
- enjoy activities such as talks, games and quizzes

[Social activities | Royal Voluntary Service](#)

You can also find out what is going on at your [local library](#) as they are going to be acting as warm hubs this winter.

Find other local activities and support in your area

- [Community Services Directory](#)
- [Small Good Stuff | A free directory of community micro-enterprises who offer care and support locally](#)
- [Social activities | Royal Voluntary Service](#)

The link to the RVS is also the first one given under Travel and patient transport. Our shoppers found the link to local information about community transport schemes which can be found on the WCC website much more useful.

- **Here2Help Community Services Directory**

If shoppers are to be referred to local information via the Here2Help Community Services Directory then it is important that the Directory is comprehensive, and includes the information required.

This was not always the case in the scenarios that our shoppers looked at.

For example searching for ‘lunch clubs’ as a keyword in the Here2Help Community Services Directory using a WR3 and WR10 postcode did not bring up any local results.

Similarly searching for ‘return to work’ in the left hand search box, combined with ‘work and learning’ in the centre box did not yield any results, whereas changing the search term to ‘jobs’ gave a list of four options, two of which looked useful to our shopper.

Some of our shoppers commented that they were personally aware of groups and organisations, leisure activities etc. in their local area that they did not see in the Directory.

We are aware of the difficulties of keeping online information up to date and comprehensive. There may be opportunities to boost the content on the Directory by liaising directly with other sources of public information - for example those produced by District Councils such as the Wyre Forest booklet about Activities and Social Groups for Older People and their Young Person’s leaflet.

We are also aware that the NHS may hold useful local information, or be developing this through mechanisms such as Primary Care Network District Collaboratives. The Voluntary and Community Sector may also hold useful, relevant information.

Recommendations

- *In most circumstances excepting where it does not make sense to do so, links to local information should appear first.*
- *Consider how local information in the Here2Help Directory can be boosted, perhaps through liaison with other local information sources such as those held by District Councils, the NHS and the Voluntary and Community Sector.*

e. Care Act requirements

- **Duty to assess adults in need**

Under the Care Act the Council has a duty to assess adults in need⁵. This duty to assess applies to all people who appear to need care and support, regardless of their level of income & savings or whether the local authority thinks their needs will be eligible for care and support.

We did find links to how to get in touch with Adult Social Care or to the 'Assessment and Eligibility' page at various relevant points on the website.

However, there were other pages where we would have expected to see this information included in the page (rather than in Useful Links), but did not do so.

Specifically:

[Personal care and support with daily tasks | Worcestershire County Council](#)

[Dementia Support | Worcestershire County Council](#)

[Alcohol use | Worcestershire County Council](#)

[Drug use | Worcestershire County Council](#)

[Sensory impairment and physical disabilities | Worcestershire County Council](#) - in the section on Physical Disability and Support - on the assumption that the Sensory Impairment Team will carry out a Needs Assessment under the Care Act if contacted for people who are visually or hearing impaired or Deafblind.

There may be other sections of ASC site, that we have not reviewed as part of our scenarios, where the link should also be included.

- **Potentially misleading wording under 'Arranging care'**

We are concerned that the wording under 'Arranging Care' in the Care at Home and in the Care Home sections could be inadvertently misleading, as the second

⁵ Care Act 2014, Factsheet 3, Assessing Need and Determining Eligibility, Department of Health and Social Care, April 2016

bullet point appears to link an assessment of need to eligibility for funding and a person's level of savings. We believe these sentences should be removed.

[Care at home \(domiciliary care\) | Worcestershire County Council](#)

Arranging Care at Home

- if you have been assessed as needing care at home (domiciliary care) and you are eligible for funding for example you have funds of less than £23,250, our social workers will arrange for your care through our Brokerage Team
- if you have not been assessed as needing care at home (domiciliary care) and you are eligible for funding; for example, you have funds of less than £23,250, [contact us](#) to have a discussion about your needs.

Read more information about who is [eligible for support](#)

We found the same issue in the Care Home section - 'Arranging Care'

[Before you consider a care home | Worcestershire County Council](#)

Arranging a Care home

- if you have been assessed as needing care with housing and you are eligible for funding for example you have funds of less than £23,250, our social workers will arrange for your care through our Brokerage Team
- if you have not been assessed care with housing and you are eligible for funding; for example, you have funds of less than £23,250, [contact us](#) to have a discussion about your needs.

Read more information about who is [eligible for support](#)

Recommendations

- *Ensure that the information about links to how to get in touch with Adult Social Care or to the 'Assessment and Eligibility' page (however described) is included on relevant pages on the website - including the specific pages set out in 4.e of this Report.*
- *Review the wording in the 'Arranging Care' sections of care at home and care homes pages to ensure that this is compliant with requirements under the Care Act.*

f. [Contacting Adult Social Care](#)

- **Adult Social Care contact telephone number**

Some of our shoppers could not find the telephone number in the drop down 'proceed to contact us' menu on the WCC Contact page.

[Contact | Worcestershire County Council](#)

They did not know that the title of this section would provide the telephone number to contact Adult Social Care. This is particularly concerning as the Out of Hours emergency number is also located in this drop down section.

A number of shoppers told us in their responses or in the 'debrief' that they wanted to be able to speak with someone, but although the telephone number to contact ASC was available in some sections of the site, it was missing from many others.

The page [Assessments and eligibility \(care and support needs\) | Worcestershire County Council](#) does provide a telephone number. We would like to see the information from this section (set out below) about how to contact the Council, including a telephone number, included on appropriate pages on the ASC website.

[Assessments and eligibility \(care and support needs\) | Worcestershire County Council](#)

You can choose to do this by either:

- completing an online assessment [Worcestershire Adults Portal](#)
- speaking to an advisor by calling [01905 768053](tel:01905768053) Monday to Thursday 8:30am to 5pm, Friday 8:30am to 4:30pm

If you find this difficult you can ask a friend, relative or your doctor to do this on your behalf. If it appears that you have social care needs, we will offer you an assessment.

- **Advocacy, translation and interpreting services**

We did not always find information in relevant sections about the availability of advocacy, translation and interpreting services.

For example, we did not find information about how to contact Adult Social Care (ASC) if you have a sensory impairment, such as through a text talk facility or with BSL interpreting support.

- **The online 'portal'**

A number of our shoppers who were carrying out scenarios relating to older people commented that they may experience difficulty using the online portal to make a self-referral. Some shoppers felt that the requirement to register or log in to the portal and give consent permissions may be off putting to some.

Some shoppers commented that they did not think that everyone would know what a portal is. A more straightforward descriptive term could be used, such as 'contact us online'.

Some shoppers commented that they were put off by the term 'make a referral', as they had an enquiry and wanted to talk to someone. Shoppers who were taking on the role of a carer looking for information for a relative found it particularly off putting - they were seeking information rather than necessarily making a referral to ASC on their relative's behalf. More user friendly language such as 'contact us' could be used.

- **Response times**

There is no immediate information about response times, although opening hours are given.

As our volunteers were mystery shopping they did not register for the Online Portal. We are therefore unclear whether someone putting in a referral through this route is provided with information about response times to their enquiry.

If there is a standard/target for response time to an ASC referral this should be added to contact information on the website. If this is not the case consideration should be given to introducing this.

Recommendations

- *Introduce more user friendly language to describe the online portal and making a referral to Adult Social Care (ASC).*
- *Integrate the Adult Social Care (ASC) telephone contact number into relevant pages throughout the ASC pages on the website, and make sure that how to find it is clear on the enquiry and contact pages.*
- *Response times to an enquiry to ASC should be stated if this is not already the case.*
- *Review relevant pages to check that information about advocacy, translation and interpreting services is available.*

g. Accessibility

- **Using a screen reader to access the WCC Beta website**

We asked one of our shoppers, who is blind, to access the beta site and assess its general accessibility to someone who uses a screen reader to access and navigate web content.

They accessed the site on 5 days over a two to three week period, and spent a considerable number of hours reviewing the site. They used the JAWS screen reader system and accessed the WCC site through both Microsoft Edge and Google Chrome.

Positives were that, once a relevant section had been located - e.g. Reablement Services - the options seemed to work well. Our shopper was able to access the most recent CQC report for this service, and this appeared to be fully accessible to their JAWS screen reader.

The bullet points below summarise some of the difficulties and frustrations encountered:

- Navigation using the WCC search function was difficult and frustrating - our mystery shopper encountered the same difficulties using the 'search' function as other shoppers - see section 4.b above - however other issues were also encountered
- The screen reader seemed unable to activate the menu of different options for how search results are displayed (Relevance, Date, A-Z)
- Not all search results appear as 'headers' - this means that a screen reader is unable to use the title as a hyperlink to the appropriate page

- Navigating through the site is difficult, particularly as our shopper was frequently unable to find a way to get back to the page before. The ‘hot key’ command on the screen reader ‘Alt Left’ would usually take you back one page. Our shopper found that this command frequently took them back to a different page, rather than the page that they had previously looked at
- Our shopper was navigating the site via a keyboard - they questioned whether accessibility had been checked for a keyboard user, rather than someone using a mouse
- Our shopper advised that, when testing for screen reader accessibility, selected aspects of the website should be scrutinised using only keyboard hot key commands, with sound / speech output only (screen turned off). That would be a more reliable check for accessibility / usability for blind users.

- **Font Size**

A number of our shoppers commented on the small size of the font on the website. No one reported that they had found the accessibility tool that would enable them to enlarge this.

Recommendations

- *Further review the accessibility of the WCC website, including working with people who are blind or visually impaired and use screen readers.*
- *Consider how links to/information about the accessibility tools available can be better signposted on the website.*

5. THE SCENARIOS

We developed a number of scenarios about circumstances where people may be looking for information about Adult Social Care and visit the WCC website. Seven of these relate to older people and are a repeat of the scenarios that we carried out in our previous mystery shopping exercise. In addition, there are three new scenarios. In each our shoppers were asked to find the answers to a number of questions relating to the scenario. Summarised results are reported below.

5.a Carer looking for support for themselves

Summary of scenario

A 57-year-old living in Malvern, who looks after their 97-year old mother who lives 3 miles away. The carer is visiting their Mum daily and looks after her day to day needs (including shopping, meals, personal care and housework) and also her medical and other affairs. Caring responsibilities are impacting the carers physical and mental health, but her Mum refuses support from anyone other than family members and refuses to pay for help with her care. The carer wants to know what support may be available for them. They have had to give up work to care for their Mum.

What we found out

Our shoppers navigated to information for carers through different routes. They went first to ‘What We Do In Adult Social Care’.

The first route selected was 'Assessments and Eligibility (Care and Support Needs)'. They then found a drop down heading entitled: Assessments and Eligibility if you are a Carer. This contained information about assessments for carers and a link to information about: 'Support for Adult carers'

The second was via the 'Care and Support' page, which had a heading: 'Looking after someone and carer support'. This took them to the 'Support for Carers' page.

Our shoppers found good information on this section of the website. They were able to answer all of the questions relating to our scenario.

Whilst the range of detailed information available felt too much for some, others found it a valuable and comprehensive resource.

Points for Consideration by WCC

1. [Assessments and eligibility \(care and support needs\) | Worcestershire County Council](#) - section on carers does not include a phone number to the carer's hub - consider including this here
2. [Support for carers | Worcestershire County Council](#) - change links on this page to open in a new window
3. Navigation trail - [Home](#) [Looking After Someone \(Carer Support\)](#) Support For Carers - skips the Assessment page, consider how navigation can be improved

5.b. Older person looking for Support at Home and carer looking for support at home for a relative

Summary of Scenario

77-year old man who lives alone in their own home, which they own, in Worcester. He does not have family nearby. He is finding it difficult to manage at home and feels that he needs help getting washed and dressed. He also need help with shopping and preparing meals. He is also struggling to manage housework and gardening. He has savings of £37,000. He is not sure if he will be expected to contribute to the cost of his care. He has heard that the Council might be able to help but is not sure how.

The mystery shoppers who were looking for **care at home for a relative** were given the same scenario as above, except that they were the son or daughter of the man described. They lived in Cumbria and were concerned about their father. They were unsure what services are available in Worcestershire, if they might be expected to contribute to the cost of any care their father might need and if their father was to stay with them for a few months of the year how might the County Council be able to support this.

What we found out

Our shoppers looked for information by going to [Care and support | Worcestershire County Council](#) and then either to:

Care at Home - Domiciliary Care

<https://beta.worcestershire.gov.uk/support-stay-independent-and-living-home/care-home-domiciliary-care>

or Personal Care and Support with Daily Tasks:

[Support to stay independent and living at home | Worcestershire County Council](#)

Our shoppers commented that they were not sure which pathway to take. They got different information depending on which they chose.

Those who chose the Care at Home route did not get the range of information about equipment, adaptations, technology, coming out of hospital that was available in the Personal Care and Support with Daily Tasks page, along with other information that may have been helpful e.g. help with gardening.

Information about paying for care is linked from this page - but from the information provided shoppers who were carers were unsure if they might have to pay or contribute to the cost of their father's care.

Only one of our three shoppers found information about moving between care providers if you are moving to another geographical area - WCC could consider how this might be better integrated into other sections, so it is easier to find

One of our shoppers commented that information was easier to find on this topic than on the 'old' WCC site'. In addition information on the Care Choices website and the Care Directory was praised.

We would suggest however that this section needs review. This may be an example of looking at things through the lens of the services provided rather than the public / user. WCC could consider bringing these sections together.

Points for Consideration by WCC

1. Consider whether the sections on Care at Home - Domiciliary Care and Personal Care and Support with Daily Tasks can be combined
2. Consider whether the headings on the drop down menus in the Care at Home section make sense from a patient / public perspective, currently follow a services pathway that may not make sense to the public (see also 5.c below)
3. Review wording in the Arranging Care at Home section to ensure it is compliant with the Care Act
4. Include text re Community Services Directory under Care Choices link - good to see the link further down under Brokerage information
5. Include a link to the 'Checklists' in the Care Choices website - [Checklists | Things to think about when looking for care | Care Choices](#)
6. Hyperlink the reference to the Homecare Association under Quality of Care Providers - this site has useful information, including a search function and checklist [Choosing care at home \(homecareassociation.org.uk\)](http://homecareassociation.org.uk).
7. Consider if information about quality of providers can be integrated earlier on the page
8. Include a link from this section to the webpage on [Personal care and support with daily tasks | Worcestershire County Council](#)
9. Consider how information about moving to another geographical area might be better integrated, so it is easier to find

10. Review useful links and consider including links to Other Housing Options (e.g. care homes and supported accommodation) and Here2Help on this page, support for carers and also loneliness and befriending options. Consider also links to information about equipment and home adaptations.

[Personal care and support with daily tasks | Worcestershire County Council](#)

1. Consider how navigation could be improved - this page was entered through the Care and Support page but this is missing from the trail on the top left of the page.
2. Help with personal care - include a link to information about Home Care (see previous section) - [Care at home \(domiciliary care\) | Worcestershire County Council](#)
3. Consider signposting to reputable advice or information about what to look for if using an agency or other contractor to help with housework, gardening etc.
4. Include contact details or a link to the 'Assessment and eligibility' page in the main narrative, as people looking on this page may be eligible for a Care Act needs assessment.
5. Include Useful Links as in point 10 above where these are not already included

5.c. Carer looking for information about Residential Care on behalf of their parent

Summary of Scenario

We devised a scenario of a son or daughter looking for information about residential care for their 85yr old Mum, who lives in her own home in Kidderminster which she owns. She does not require nursing care but does have mild dementia, which may deteriorate over time. She is currently in hospital, so there is some time pressure to understand future care options.

What we found out

The search function on the WCC homepage was not particularly helpful when the phrases relating to 'residential care' were searched for (see 4.b above)

Our shopper eventually reached the right section:

[Care homes and supported accommodation | Worcestershire County Council](#)

We would suggest that this section needs review. The 'pathway' follows the journey from a services perspective; however the headings and information do not necessarily make sense from a public perspective.

The tiles on the landing page do not direct users immediately to information about care homes - rather the title says: 'Before You Consider a Care Home'.

Additional headings, and moving information in this section around, would aid clarity and make information easier to find.

We have suggested how this could be achieved in the points below.

Points for Consideration by WCC

1. We suggest an additional tile is added 'Care (residential and nursing) Homes' - information about finding a care or nursing home - and the content separated out
2. 'What are the Care Home Options' - suggest sections on Supported Living and Extra Care are moved to Before you Consider a Care Home - these are not really care home options
3. In our scenario the person was in hospital - no Useful Links to leaving hospital information in this section, these should be included
4. In 'What are the care home options' - under 'care homes' include a bullet point which says : provides personal care
5. In 'Paying for Care' - this section does not include reference to NHS funded nursing care for people in nursing homes. This is not means tested and people who do not meet the threshold for CHC but need nursing care may be entitled to it. This should be included under the section on CHC. Further information here: [NHS-funded nursing care - NHS \(www.nhs.uk\)](http://www.nhs.uk)
6. Review wording of arranging care section so it is compliant with the Care Act
7. Finding a Care Home - suggest change title to Finding and Choosing a Care Home - include links to CQC Choosing Care page ([Help choosing care - Care Quality Commission \(cqc.org.uk\)](http://www.cqc.org.uk)) and more specific links to the WCC Care Services Directory - as Care Home and Dementia Care Checklists are contained in the PDF and e-book on the website. NOTE HWW have had discussions with WCC about modifying these checklists, so it is important that there is a direct signpost from the WCC website
8. Consider including the information in the Care Services Directory about paying for residential care
9. Consider including a link to information for Carers under Useful Links
10. Contact information for WCC needs to be more prominent in this section

5.d Carer looking for information about Extra Care housing on behalf of a parent

Summary of Scenario

Daughter has offered to look into future housing options for her 85yr old Mum who lives alone in her own home in Bromsgrove. Her Mum is relatively well and has mental capacity to make her own decisions. She is interested in Extra Care Housing, but her daughter will need to be persuaded that Extra Care will offer sufficient support to enable her mother to continue to live independently as she gets older and potentially requires more support.

What We Found Out

There is good information on the website explaining Extra Care housing, which was easy to find using the search function on the Home Page.

The information includes a video about Extra Care and an Extra Care Factsheet. The video contains contact details (phone number and email address) for the Extra Care housing team - these are not on the page.

However there was little information about the specific schemes in Worcestershire, who runs these schemes or how you could apply.

They could not find the location of the scheme in Bromsgrove, or further details about what this particular scheme offers - our shopper searched the national extracare.org.uk website, but could not find details of this scheme.

Our shopper also felt, from their reading of this page, that WCC was endorsing the schemes. If this is not the case, we would suggest that this is clearly stated.

Points for Consideration by WCC

[Extra care housing | Worcestershire County Council](#)

1. Include contact information on the page
2. Check that the contact details contained in the video are accurate
3. The link to www.extracare.org is to a national website - if local information is available include this first
4. Include information about who runs Extra Care housing schemes in Worcestershire
5. Include information about how schemes are regulated
6. Consider if scheme titles can be hyperlinked to further information
7. Clarify if WCC is endorsing these schemes, if not provide a disclaimer
8. Information about where to obtain independent financial advice could be included on the page as a Useful Link - [Finding and paying for care and support myself \(self funding\) | Worcestershire County Council](#)

5.e Older person Looking for Information about social activities and transport

Summary of Scenario

An 80-year-old living alone in Worcester. They used to have a more active social life but don't go out as often now. This is partly because they are no longer able to drive and so need transport to attend activities. They are beginning to feel a bit low and lonely and decide to look for information about leisure and social activities for older people in Worcester and whether transport may be available.

What we found out

Our shoppers found it particularly difficult to find information to answer questions related to this scenario.

The search function was unhelpful. Having entered the search term 'groups and activities for older people' one of our shoppers worked through 8 pages of results and only found information about a reading group (page 1), Knit & Natter (pages 4 & 5) and on page 8 - Tackling loneliness. They eventually found a link to Here2Help from a PDF on the loneliness page.

Some spent a long time trying to answer common questions people in this position may look for i.e. a range of services such as social clubs, lunch clubs, specific interest groups, health and fitness activities, and hobbies etc.

Information on Here2Help was variable according to postcode entered - shoppers felt that they were aware of a wider range of voluntary and community organisations offering support to older people than they were able to find via the WCC website or Here2Help.

One shopper clicked on the Living Well for Longer in Worcestershire page, expecting to find a range of information. However, this only provided information about the Living Well project. The only 'Useful Link' is to Falls prevention. From a public perspective a broader range of information might be expected.

There is good information about community transport when our shoppers were able to find it, however not all of them were able to do so.

Since we carried out our mystery shopping exercise the Loneliness and Isolation pages on the WCC website have been updated and are much improved

Points for Consideration by WCC

1. Consider how information for the public on the [Living well for longer in Worcestershire | Worcestershire County Council](#) could be developed
2. Here2Help had limited information for some postcodes about luncheon clubs and activities for older people - consider how this can be boosted (see 4.d above)

5.f Looking for help for an older friend with a Visual Impairment

Summary of Scenario

A 90-year-old with later stage macular degeneration causing partial sight. They are living in sheltered housing in Evesham but are becoming frailer. They have a carer twice a week for housework and shopping, however they are having accidents whilst cooking, and struggling with personal care, loneliness and socialising. Their friend decides to go on to the WCC website to see what services may be available to help people with visual impairments.

What we found out

As described in section 4.b above, our shoppers found the search function of limited use when looking for information to answer questions in this scenario. One of our shoppers did not find the section on the website about visual impairment at all, despite this being the focus of this scenario.

Unless you know that visual impairment means losing your sight you may not find this section. We would suggest that the search function needs further refinement so that it is able to establish key words relating to this topic.

Points for Consideration by WCC

1. Contact details for the Sensory Impairment Team need to be added into and hot linked from the various relevant sections - e.g. visual impairment, hearing impairment and Deafblindness - the team is mentioned but contact details are not hyperlinked.
2. Provide options for the public to contact the team by means other than email
3. Driving and Blue Badge - suggest this section is called Transport, Driving and Blue Badge and includes the link to the Travel and Community Transport page - very relevant to people using this page. Could also include information about the Disabled Persons Railcard - [Disabled Persons Railcard | Official Retailer | National Rail \(disabledpersons-railcard.co.uk\)](#)

4. The wording about the RNIB under the visual impairment heading is repeated twice

5.g Working age person with a Physical Disability

Summary of Scenario

A single man aged 45 with a chronic degenerative condition, who will, as time goes on, need help and support to continue to live independently at home. He lives on his own, in a house that he owns in Redditch. He needs some help with housework and with cooking meals. He has heard that he may be able to have adaptations to his home, or some pieces of equipment to help him manage at home and complete day to day tasks.

He wants to go back to work, but recognises he may need support to re-enter the job market. In the meantime he would like some meaningful social activities to take part in during the day. He has heard that the Council may be able to help with some of the above, but is not sure how. He doesn't know if there is a charge for any of these services. He has savings of under £20,000.

What we found out

Shoppers were looking for quite a wide range of information relating to housework, adaptations and equipment, employment support, social activities and links to other organisations who could help. This information is not available in the section on physical disabilities on the WCC website.

The search function was of limited assistance. One shopper searched 'services for people with a physical disability' and was returned 551 results. On page 6 they found a link to supported living (for people with physical disabilities), but did not find a link to [Sensory impairment and physical disabilities | Worcestershire County Council](#)

The Here2Help directory was also of limited use when searching for specific local information. On looking for help with housework one of our shoppers reported the following: 'Decided to select **Community services directory** - led to **Here2Help directory**. Had to use **Search** function entered **help with housework and cooking and 'Maintaining Independence'** from pop up list of options. **Yielded 0 results**. Tried changing latter search term to **Food, supplies and Befriending** - **0 results**. Tried searching housework - **0 results**'

Information about support to return to work was particularly difficult to find - one of our shoppers eventually found this, but only after a long and difficult search - [Triage | National Careers Service](#).

There is potential to expand this section to link to a broader range of services that would be relevant to a person with a physical disability.

Points for Consideration by WCC

1. The Physical Disabilities support section provides a limited range of information - consider how this could be expanded to include information relevant to people living with a disability

2. Section could include local support such as D.I.A.L South Worcestershire and D.I.A.L North Worcestershire - whose website contains lots of useful information - [DIAL In Worcestershire \(nwdial.org.uk\)](http://nwdial.org.uk)
3. A link is needed to 'Assessment and Eligibility' for information about a needs assessment in this section
4. A link to 'personal care and support with daily tasks' would also be helpful

5.h Person looking for support for a relative experiencing Mental Ill Health

Summary of scenario

Mum looking for support for her 18 year old son who has been depressed and unhappy for some time. He is in touch with his GP, but has not yet had any contact with mental health services in Worcestershire. He is currently experiencing a mental health crisis. He has talked about feeling suicidal and how he might end his life. Mum is concerned that he may put this plan into action. Mum thinks he needs to talk to someone about his suicidal thoughts, depression and low mood immediately, and that he will need help and support with his mental health in the longer term. Mum would also like to get some support for herself about how best to manage the situation.

What we found out

Our shoppers found the information contained in the section on [Mental health and support for adults | Worcestershire County Council](#) useful and informative.

They were able to find answers to the questions in this scenario either directly from the pages or from the links provided.

This is a long page, with some information clearly grouped - it may benefit from use of the 'Drop Down' menu formula.

We were unclear whether this information is aimed at adults or children and young people or both. There may be further resources aimed at supporting young people's mental health that are not currently on the website.

Points for Consideration by WCC

1. Consider how navigation could be improved as currently the breadcrumb trail takes you back to the main landing page:

[Mental health and emotional wellbeing | Worcestershire County Council](#)

Rather than the information about mental health:

[Mental health and support for adults | Worcestershire County Council](#)

[Mental health support services | Worcestershire County Council](#)

2. Make the same changes to wording re 'Mental Healthline' as on crisis page following our previous feedback - change the name, add information re timing and that is free to call - check that this issue does not occur elsewhere on the website
3. Repeat the link to Help for carers under Useful Links - available on the crisis page - <https://beta.worcestershire.gov.uk/mental-health-and-emotional-wellbeing/mental-health-and-support-adults/caring-someone-mental-health>

4. Consider whether Safe Haven information should appear on the mental health crisis page - currently it is listed under support services
5. Include link to Mental Health Social Work Team re Needs assessment under the Care Act
6. Review the location of the [Approved Mental Health Professional Service | Worcestershire County Council](#)
 - Who is this information aimed at?
 - Can members of the public access this service directly? - if not make this clear
 - Might this information be better linked to information about what happens during a Mental Health assessment, from a public perspective?
7. Include in [Caring for someone with a mental health condition | Worcestershire County Council - Behind the Smile a local support group - Home - Behind the Smile.](#) There may be other local support groups that could be included here.

5.i Helping a friend with their Drug Use

Summary of Scenario

Person looking for support for a friend who is a 25 year old female who has been using Class A drugs and is beginning to realise this is affecting her day to day life and wants support. Her friend is experiencing problems at work. Her employer is unaware of her drug use. She has been given a written warning about her lateness and absences. She is also behind with her rent payments to a private landlord and concerned that she could become homeless, but doesn't know how to deal with her rent arrears.

What we found out

Our shoppers found the information contained in the section on [Drug use | Worcestershire County Council](#) useful and informative. They were able to reach this information easily through using the search function on the WCC homepage and entering the term ' drug services'.

They were able to find answers to the questions in this scenario either directly from the pages or from the links provided.

The Cranstoun website in particular was identified as very helpful.

Points for Consideration by WCC

1. Include link to information about Adult Social Care for possible needs assessment under the Care Act
2. Review the Cranstoun description - rather than focus on change of name a brief synopsis of support offered by Cranstoun would be more useful
3. Include a wider range of information under Useful Links - mental health support (crisis and longer term); housing and homelessness; employment support, support groups - thinking about wider lifestyle issues
4. Include Narcotics Anonymous meetings in Worcestershire [Welcome to UKNA | UKNA | Narcotics Anonymous in the United Kingdom](#) -

6. COMMENTS ON OTHER PAGES REVIEWED

6.a What We Do in Adult Social Care

[What we do in adult social care | Worcestershire County Council](#)

Points for Consideration by WCC

1. Consider if the tiles are they in the right order - e.g. 'How to get support in a crisis' is quite far down the page
2. Approved Mental Health Services Professional - is this information in the right place?

6.b Care homes and supported accommodation

[Care homes and supported accommodation | Worcestershire County Council](#)

Points for Consideration by WCC

1. CQC - this section currently is only for WCC provided services inspection reports. Could it be broadened to explain the CQC role and links to their website or located elsewhere.

6.c. Housing and Homelessness Section

[Housing and homelessness | Worcestershire County Council](#)

Points for Consideration by WCC

1. This section needs information about Street Link - [Streetlink](#) or call 0300 500 0914.for the public to report concern about a rough sleeper
2. Only limited information on Homeless organisations - doesn't include Wyre Forest and South Worcestershire Night Stop (for young people) , Maggs Day Centre in Worcester (who also have an outreach team) or any of the Hostels (St Pauls for adults) or Young People (St Basils) - NOTE this is not a comprehensive list.
3. Consult with Homelessness organisations about information required
4. Consider whether to add a drop down menu for 'if you are homeless' and 'if you are a member of the public concerned about a rough sleeper'.

6.d Compliments, comments and complaints

[Adult social care compliments, comments and complaints | Worcestershire County Council](#)

Points for Consideration by WCC

1. We understand that WCC policy is that, except under exceptional circumstances, a complaint must be made within 12 months of the issue arising. This information is not on the website or in the leaflet.

6.e Safeguarding Training

[Safeguarding Training | Worcestershire County Council](#)

Points for Consideration by WCC

1. Link to Children's Safeguarding Partnership takes you to [Safeguarding and concerns about childcare | Worcestershire County Council](#) rather than to :

Note we did not review any of the other pages in these sections.

7. CONCLUSION

We have noted some real improvements in the new WCC website. Some of our shoppers reported being able to quickly find comprehensive, useful information which answered the questions in their scenario.

For others however, navigating the website to obtain information was not straightforward. It depended on a shared understanding of the language and categories used by the site, some of which may not be familiar to people outside of the social care world.

An improved search function is required which is able to match terms searched to common synonyms and discriminate between information for children and young people and that aimed at adults.

The Useful Links sections offer an opportunity to think more widely about the range of information that users landing on a page may be interested in. Local information should be prioritised over national sources except where it does not make sense to do so.

There are potentially a great many barriers to people using the WCC website including lack of access to, or being unable to afford, digital devices.⁶ Therefore non-digital access and information will always be necessary and important, arguably more so for people using Adult Social Care services.

A key issue for our shoppers was their ability to contact the Council from the website. Some felt that the requirement to register/log in to the online portal and give consent may be hurdles to proceeding. Many wanted to speak to someone. The telephone contact number for Adult Social Care was not easy to find. We appreciate that there is a drive to promote self-service through the website. Nevertheless, given that vulnerable adults (who may be potential service users) and the friends, relatives and carers acting on their behalf, are likely to be attempting to find solutions / information / advice in stressful circumstances, contact details (including the telephone number), should be better integrated throughout the site.

For those who do use the website a lack of familiarity or facility with IT; variable availability of internet services (especially in rural areas); pressure to find answers and people's capacity (physical, cognitive or sensory) could contribute to poor outcomes in using the WCC website. It is important that the user experience of navigating the site is as straightforward as possible, and that the accessibility functions on the website work well to enable users to easily find the information that they need.

Suggestions to improve usability and equality of access have been identified in the recommendations and through the points for consideration within the Report.

⁶ See [HWW Digital Access to Healthcare Report](#), January 2022

8. RECOMMENDATIONS

1. Review the language used on the website to make it more understandable to members of the public who may not have any prior knowledge of Adult Social Care (ASC).
2. Change the terminology for 'Assessment and Eligibility' and 'Make a Referral to Adult Social Care' to make it easier to understand.
3. Consider how writing styles across the site could be more consistent and check that terms are used consistently.
4. Further refine the search function in order to improve the relevance of the results offered, make links between search terms and common synonyms, and differentiate between relevant information for children and adults.
5. The terms 'desc' and 'asc' on the search screen need to be explained or changed.
6. An A-Z function could be considered if this is not already available on the site.
7. Further consider how to assist users to navigate through the WCC website - in particular improve the visibility and explanation of the 'breadcrumb' function, and of the dropdown 'In This Section' menu.
8. Ensure that title headings in the drop down menus accurately reflect the content from a public perspective.
9. Further consider the role of the 'Useful Links' section - in particular how this section could be developed to think more widely about possible needs of someone looking at this page.
10. Open all links to external sites in a new window, and state this beside the link to aid navigation.
11. In most circumstances excepting where it does not make sense to do so, links to local information should appear first.
12. Consider how local information in the Here2Help Directory can be boosted, perhaps through liaison with other local information sources such as those held by District Councils and the NHS.
13. Ensure that the information about how to get in touch with Adult Social Care or links to the 'Assessment and Eligibility' page (however described) are included on relevant pages on the website - including the specific pages set out in 4.e of this Report.
14. Review the wording in the 'Arranging Care' sections of care at home and care homes pages to ensure that this is compliant with requirements under the Care Act.
15. Introduce more 'user friendly' language to describe the online portal and making a referral to Adult Social Care.
16. Integrate the Adult Social Care (ASC) telephone contact number into relevant pages throughout the pages on the website, and make sure that how to find it is clear on the enquiry and contact pages.
17. Response times to an enquiry to ASC should be stated if this is not already the case.
18. Review relevant pages to check that information about advocacy, translation and interpreting services is available.
19. Further review the accessibility of the WCC website, including working with people who are blind or visually impaired and use screen readers.

20. Consider how links to / information about the accessibility tools available can be better signposted on the website.
21. Review the Points for Consideration in Section 5 - 'The Scenarios' and Section 6 - 'Comments on other sections reviewed' and consider making the suggested changes.

APPENDIX ONE - RECORDING SHEET

THE QUESTION I AM ANSWERING IS (please write, type or copy & paste the question below)

1. **What did you do first?** - if you typed words into the homepage search box what did you type in, if you clicked on a heading/s what was the heading/s that you clicked on.
2. **What did you find out?** - A brief description of what you found out e.g. explanatory text, a list of services, a link to other website/s etc.
3. **Did the webpage that you landed on answer your question? NO/ PARTIALLY/YES**

If NO / PARTIALLY

4. **What did you do then?** - please record exactly what you did until you reached a webpage that could answer your question. *If you can please copy the web links that you followed.*

If YES:

5. Was the information provided **clear and easy to understand?**
6. Did the webpage provide information about whether you might have to **pay for this service/s?** Could you find out **more information about paying** for services from this webpage?
7. Was there any information that you would have **expected to see on this page that wasn't there?**
8. Could you **contact the County Council** about this service from the webpage/s used?
9. Could you get **in touch with other organisations** that can help from this webpage? (*record if this information opened in a new window i.e. alongside the WCC website on your computer*)
10. Did the **contact information** for the Council and other organisations meet your needs?
11. Was there any information about **how long you might wait** before someone gets back in touch with you after you make contact with them?

Any other comments about answering this scenario question?

Do you have any comments to make about completing this mystery shopping exercise? If so please record these below

APPENDIX TWO - EXAMPLE SCENARIO

CARER LOOKING FOR SUPPORT FOR THEMSELVES

You are 57 years old and live in Malvern. You look after your mother, who is 93 and living in her own home, which is about 3 miles away from you. You visit your mother every day. You cook her meals and look after her house and her affairs, in addition to your own. Your mother has a range of medical conditions, and you are frequently called out at night as your mother has activated her pendant alarm. You take responsibility for your Mum's medication and for arranging her GP and hospital appointments. Your Mum refuses to have help from anyone other than yourself and your own immediate family. She is unwilling to pay anyone to help with her care.

As your Mum's needs have increased you have had to give up work in order to look after her. Money is now an issue for you. Your caring responsibilities are having an impact on your physical and mental health.

You have heard that the Council might be able to help, but you are not sure what it is that they do or what they could offer.

You have access to the internet and decide to go onto the WCC website to answer the following questions.

1. Am I eligible for help from the Council as a carer?
2. What sorts of help might be available to me?
3. How do I ask the Council for help?
4. Is there information about any benefits or financial help I may be entitled to as a carer?
5. a. Is there information on the Council website about other organisations (either private or voluntary) who might be able to help me?
b. How do I ask this/these organisations for help?