

WORCESTERSHIRE DISTRICT COUNCILS AND COUNTY C O U N C I L

WORCESTERSHIRE REGULATORY SERVICES

MEETING OF THE WORCESTERSHIRE SHARED SERVICES JOINT COMMITTEE

THURSDAY, 18TH FEBRUARY 2016 AT 4.41 P.M.

PRESENT: Councillors B. Behan (Chairman), E. Stokes (Vice-Chairman),
P. Whittaker, D. Chambers, B. Clayton, J. Fisher,
A. Roberts, L. Hodgson, M. King and J. Hart

Observers: Mr. D. Sutton, Worcester City Council

Officers: Ms. J. Pickering, Mr. S. Wilkes, Mr. I. Pumfrey, Ms. C. Flanagan,
Mrs. S. Garratt, Mr. M. Cox and Mrs. P. Ross

27/15 **APOLOGIES**

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors R. Laight, Bromsgrove District Council, M. Johnson, Worcester City Council, A. Blagg, Worcestershire County Council and S. Chambers, Wyre Forest District Council.

28/15 **DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST**

No declarations of interest were received.

29/15 **CHAIRMAN'S ANNOUNCEMENTS**

The Chairman took the opportunity to inform Joint Committee Members of the recent Local Government Association (LGA) event she had attended in January 2016. The LGA, Supporting Local Businesses event, had highlighted the need to bring businesses and regulators together. Worcestershire Regulatory Services (WRS) needed to be proactive with new businesses coming into the Worcestershire area and to work closely with the Economic Development team by signposting new businesses to them. Small start-up businesses, once compliant, could be helped to grow with the support of both WRS and the Economic Development team.

During the event the Chairman heard from businesses that had engaged with WRS. Previously she would have directed new businesses to the Economic Development team but would not have considered directing new businesses to WRS. The Chairman highlighted the need to signpost new businesses to WRS, alongside the Economic Development team, so that people could grow their businesses.

The Chairman was also pleased to share with Joint Committee Members that it was announced at the LGA event, that WRS had been shortlisted for the Better Business for All Awards 2016. WRS had been shortlisted for the Innovation Award, having devised an innovative, collaborative approach to engage specialist high street food sector businesses through its Asian Seminar Programme. The Asian Seminar Programme was formed through a joint partnership between WRS and the Worcester Islamic Association. The Worcester Islamic Association had spoken highly of WRS.

The Chairman commented that this demonstrated that Worcestershire County and District Councils could work well together.

30/15 **MINUTES**

The minutes of the meeting of the Worcestershire Shared Services Joint Committee held on 26th November 2015 were submitted.

RESOLVED that the minutes be approved as a correct record.

31/15 **PROGRESS ON RECONSTITUTION OF WORCESTERSHIRE SHARED SERVICES PARTNERSHIP AND SERVICE LEVEL AGREEMENT WITH WORCESTERSHIRE COUNTY COUNCIL**

Following on from the meeting held on 26th November 2015, the Committee received a further update on the progress on the reconstitution of Worcestershire Shared Services Partnership of Worcestershire Regulatory Services.

The Chairman, Worcestershire Regulatory Services (WRS), Management Board introduced the report and in doing so informed Members that five of the district councils had completed the process and that the recommendations were due to be presented to a meeting of the Council at Worcester City Council on 23rd February 2016. Should the recommendations be approved by Worcester City Council, officers would be able to proceed with the dissolution and reconstitution of the partnership, with the legal team at Bromsgrove District Council taking the lead on drafting the new partnership agreement.

The new financial arrangements had been agreed by Section 151 officers, these incorporated the changes necessary to implement the fee earner model and to deliver the new WRS cost sharing arrangements.

An agreement had been reached with Worcestershire County Council (WCC) on the terms of a short Service Level Agreement (SLA) for provision of its trading standards services pending transfer back in house. This would include provision for some on-going specialist support from WRS.

Councillor L. Hodgson, WCC, took the opportunity to thank Joint Committee Members and to wish WRS officers good luck with going forward.

RESOLVED that the update on the progress on the reconstitution of Worcestershire Shared Services Partnership of Worcestershire Regulatory Services, be noted.

32/15

WORCESTERSHIRE REGULATORY SERVICES BUSINESS PLAN 2016-2019

The Committee was asked to consider and approve the Worcestershire Regulatory Services (WRS) Business Plan 2016/2019.

The Head of WRS, introduced the report and in doing so informed the Committee that following on from the procurement exercise and in line with the leadership training undertaken by the management team; it was determined that WRS required a business plan to ensure both the viability of the service and its ability to operate within the financial envelopes available to the partners. The Business Plan was a high level document that would inform the development of the service for the foreseeable future.

The original business plan had included an explanation on how the service would accommodate a small Trading Standards and Animal Welfare presence to match Worcestershire County Council's (WCC) financial contribution. This was no longer necessary with the departure of WCC and other than mentioning its inclusion at the beginning of 2016, there was little mention of trading standards within the modified business plan. This should not be taken as an indication that the service would no longer engage with the Trading Standards and Animal Health Team. The two services would continue to work closely as partners to exploit all opportunities from which both could benefit, as well as contributing to support each other in the event of emergencies.

Whilst the recently published Central Government settlement offered local authorities the opportunity of certainty of a four year budget, it came with serious reductions in funding for all current partner authorities.

Income generation would remain a key factor in the service's business strategy. It was possible that authorities may be encouraged to engage more with WRS and look more widely at contracting services to those able to offer expertise and resilience in service delivery. This would make the challenging income targets more deliverable.

The Head of WRS drew Members' attention to section 4.7 in the report, Performance.

The Head of WRS responded to Member's questions with regard to the report highlighting a 'mature' workforce, redundancies and the Business Relationship Manager vacancy. Members were informed that a 'mature' workforce was a nationwide problem. Some local authorities were reducing recruitment and positions within the service area were often graduate positions. WRS had engaged its first licensing apprenticeship in 2015; the question now was whether or not this approach was suitable for other professional areas within the service. Six officers had applied for voluntary redundancy and following

interview a successful applicant had been found for the Business Relationship Manager vacancy.

The Head of WRS noted the comments made by Members with regard to perceived links and the income generation target detailed. More specifically, that detailed information should have been included within the report. Members accepted that, as highlighted by the Head of WRS, some of the information required could be commercially sensitive. However, in order to provide some assurance to the Joint Committee that income generation was evidence based and not an aspiration; any further information on income generation, that contained commercially sensitive information, should be included in any future reports to the Joint Committee as confidential exempt items. The Head of WRS informed Members that he was confident that the income target would be achieved.

RESOLVED that the Worcestershire Regulatory Services, Business Plan 2016/2019, as detailed at Appendix 1 to the report, be approved.

33/15

WORCESTERSHIRE REGULATORY SERVICES SERVICE PLAN 2016-2017

The Committee was asked to consider a report which detailed the Worcestershire Regulatory Services (WRS), Service Plan 2016/2017.

The Technical Services Manager, WRS, introduced the report and in doing so highlighted that the service plan followed the outline of previous years with an Executive Summary detailing the main points. The key factors were to continue to provide an excellent service and to maintain resilience.

The service plan detailed the strategic approach and priorities to improve stability and certainty. In making decisions regarding service delivery and risk assessment the following would be taken into account:-

- Is there a positive / negative impact on the local economy?
- Are vulnerable people impacted?
- Are health and wellbeing issues involved?

Improvements to the WRS website continued, with the development of public assess/self-service the ultimate target. WRS were in the process of developing and maintaining partner authorities webpages in relation to licensing. Worcester City Council were currently piloting over fifty two new and improved pages that would be rolled out to all partner authorities once testing had been completed on the new framework.

The Chairman commented that she had recently viewed the WRS website and was impressed with the amount of detailed information included on the website and suggested that Joint Committee Members would find it really useful to view the updated WRS website.

The WRS website included detailed information with regard to recent issues highlighted with illegal puppy sales. Recent reported cases to WRS Trading

Standards Officers had found that some puppies described as around eight weeks old turned out to be closer to fifteen weeks old. Some of the puppies had non-United Kingdom (UK) microchips but no pet passports to confirm that they had been legally imported into the UK.

RESOLVED that the Worcestershire Regulatory Services, Service Plan for 2016/2017, as detailed at Appendix 1 to the report, be approved.

34/15

WORCESTERSHIRE REGULATORY SERVICES REVENUE MONITORING APRIL - DECEMBER 2015

The Committee considered a report which detailed the financial position for the period April to December 2015.

The Executive Director, Finance and Corporate Resources, Bromsgrove District Council (BDC), introduced the report and in doing so informed the Committee that the report presented the final financial position for Worcestershire Regulatory Services for the period April to December 2015.

The Executive Director, Finance and Corporate Resources, BDC, drew Members' attention to Appendix 1 to the report which highlighted salary savings of £300,000, with the transfer of staff to Worcestershire County Council. £200,000 of the salary savings would be used for agency costs to ensure the service was still delivered. The figure shown for car allowances included £60,000 for Disturbance Allowance with the relocation of WRS staff to the new WRS premises at Wyre Forest House.

Should the underspend of £143,000 be realised, this would be offset to the cost of the pension deficit of £119,000 for 2015/2016. In response to questions from Members, the Executive Director, Finance and Corporate Resources, BDC, informed the Joint Committee that the £119,000 pension deficit figure was the figure as confirmed by the actuary. The Head of WRS responded that, the pension deficit was significant but it would be covered by the anticipated underspend.

RESOLVED that the final financial position for the period April to December 2015 be noted.

35/15

ACTIVITY & PERFORMANCE DATA, QUARTERS 1, 2 AND 3

The Committee considered a report that covered both district and county functionality and the wide range of each local authorities corporate priorities to which regulatory services contributed. The report detailed Worcestershire Regulatory Services Activity Data for Quarters 1, 2 and 3, 2015/2016.

The Head of WRS introduced the report and in doing so informed Members that, with regard to district functions, licensing and environmental nuisance continued to make the most impact in terms of demand which was understandable given their direct impact on the public. As shown in previous reports these type of complaints, especially noise, were seasonal due to outdoor events. You would normally expect to see a spike in the figures for

quarter two, but this was not the case for this year, although the number of noise complaints was still significant.

Quarter three was another quiet quarter for nuisance activity, with the levels recorded lower than in the same quarters in the previous two years. WRS were struggling to explain these variations, especially since it was a relatively warm period in autumn and early winter.

As detailed in previous reports, as part of the efficiency saving for all partner authorities, WRS had introduced the kind of self-help regimes that had been in place in Worcester City and Wyre Forest for some time. Previous experience would suggest that it could take between six to twelve months before the impact of such measures would be seen in the figures. Therefore it was unlikely that anything introduced in April 2015 would feed through so quickly. WRS would have to wait until next summer to see if the changes had been genuinely embedded.

Health and Safety showed another increase over the last quarter and for the same quarter last year, putting increased demands on the team not only because of the numbers but also the complexity and seriousness of a small number of cases under investigation, which included two on-going fatality investigations.

In quarter three just over 300 food hygiene inspections were carried out. The food hygiene inspection programme was on or ahead of schedule in all areas.

Planning consultations continued to make large demands in terms of numbers and complexity on the team. The request to discharge conditions based on WRS input had significantly increased, reflecting the cycle of the planning process. Request to discharge tended to be more time consuming and technical.

The Technical Services team had taken the lead to liaise with Network Rail and its contractors over essential maintenance work carried out over the Christmas period in the vicinity of Bromsgrove Railway Station. WRS officers worked with Network Rail managers to agree measures to ameliorate the noise issues and also provided support to Network Rail in its work with the local community.

Trading Standards service requests were holding steady compared with the previous two quarters but slightly down compared to the same quarter last year.

The top three complaint categories were second hand cars, building work and clothing.

Activity continued to be focussed on rogue traders who targeted vulnerable people, consumer products that were dangerous and could cause people harm and traders with a large number of complaints against them. WRS had engaged with Worcestershire Safeguarding Adults to look at ways of working together to help protect vulnerable people.

Performance overall was comparable and in some areas had improved over the previous year. WRS would continue to work together to ensure this was reflected at the year end.

The Head of WRS drew Members' attention to pages 83 and 84 in the report, Items of interest.

The Head of WRS clarified that, Noise – domestic, as shown in the report, was usually due to people's behaviour, e.g. loud music and people arguing. Very few complaints ever reached the stage of being classed as a statutory nuisance whereby an abatement notice would be issued. These type of complaints usually involved using intelligence data as to how best to deal with these situations and mediation to try and resolve the issues.

The Head of WRS responded to Member's questions with regard to Worcestershire County Council's (WCC) activity and performance data being included at future Joint Committee meetings. Members were informed that the data would still be collated but not reported to future Joint Committee meetings, as WCC would no longer be part of the partnership. WRS would liaise with the Portfolio Holder at WCC with regard to their activity and performance data.

Councillor L. Hodgson, WCC, expressed her concerns that WCC would not have the opportunity to comment on any activity and performance data presented to the Joint Committee, as there would be no representatives from WCC at future Joint Committee meetings. The Overview and Scrutiny process at WCC would be used to monitor their activity and performance data.

The Chairman expressed her thanks to officers.

RESOLVED that the Activity Data Report for Quarters 1, 2 and 3, 2015/2016, be noted.

36/15

WORCESTERSHIRE SHARED SERVICES JOINT COMMITTEE -
2016/2017 PROPOSED MEETING DATES

The Committee considered the proposed meeting dates scheduled for 2016/2017.

The Chairman highlighted that the Democratic Services Officer would look for an alternative date in June 2016, as the EU Referendum may be held on the original proposed meeting date of 23rd June 2016.

The Chairman expressed her sincere thanks to Joint Committee Members, Worcestershire County Council, Joint Committee representatives, Mr. I. Pumfrey and WRS officers for their contribution to the Joint Committee during the last year.

RESOLVED that the Worcestershire Shared Services Joint Committee meeting dates and start time of 4.30pm for 2016/2017 be approved as follows:

- June 2016 – Annual Meeting, date to be confirmed
- Thursday 6th October 2016
- Thursday 24th November 2016 – Budget Meeting
- Thursday 16th February 2017

The meeting closed at 5.35 p.m.

Chairman