

MEETING OF THE WORCESTERSHIRE REGULATORY SERVICES BOARD

THURSDAY, 29TH JUNE 2023, AT 4.30 P.M.

PRESENT: Councillors H. J. Jones (Vice-Chairman), M. Marshall (substituting for Councillor C. B. Taylor), J. Raine, L. Harrison, J. Kane, J. DeSayrah (Substituting for Councillor J. Riaz), B. Hardman, M. Goodge, T. Onslow and P. Harrison

Officers: Mr P. Carpenter, Mr. S. Wilkes, Mr R. Keyte, Ms. K. Lahel, Mr M. Cox (via Microsoft Teams), Mr D. Mellors and Mr G. Day

Partner Officers: Mr. L. Griffiths, Worcester City Council (via Microsoft Teams), Mr. I. Miller, Wyre Forest District Council (via Microsoft Teams), Mr. I. Edwards, Malvern Hills and Wychavon District Councils

1/23

ELECTION OF CHAIRMAN

RESOLVED that Councillor J. Riaz, Worcester City Council be elected Chairman of the Board for the ensuing municipal year.

2/23

ELECTION OF VICE-CHAIRMAN

RESOLVED that Councillor H. Jones, Bromsgrove District Council be elected Vice-Chairman of the Board for the ensuing municipal year.

In the absence of the elected Chairman, Councillor H. Jones sat as Chairman. Councillor Jones opened the meeting and welcomed everyone who was in attendance.

3/23

APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE AND NOTIFICATION OF SUBSTITUTES

The following apologies for absence were received: -

Councillors C. B. Taylor, Bromsgrove District Council and N. Martin, Worcester City Council with M. Marshall, Bromsgrove District Council and J. Thomas, Worcester City Council, in attendance respectively, as substitute Members.

Councillors C. Palmer, Malvern Hills District Council and M. Allcott, Worcester City Council.

4/23

DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

There were no declarations of interest.

5/23

MINUTES

The minutes of the meeting of the Worcestershire Regulatory Services Board held on 17th November 2022, were submitted.

6/23

BUSINESS PLAN FOR WORCESTERSHIRE REGULATORY SERVICES - 2023-2026

The Board considered the Worcestershire Regulatory Services (WRS) Business Plan for 2023 - 2026.

The Head of Regulatory Services introduced the report and in doing so drew Members' attention to the Recommendation, as detailed on page 19 of the main agenda report.

The Business Plan for WRS was developed first in 2015 following on from the strategic procurement exercise. During the leadership training undertaken by the management team, it was determined that WRS needed a plan to ensure both the viability of the service and its ability to operate within the budgets available from the partners. This plan became the high-level document that would inform the development of the service for the foreseeable future. It was last updated in 2020, just before the COVID-19 pandemic. Now that the disruptions caused by the pandemic had gone it was deemed timely to revisit the plan looking forward for an extended time-period.

The Business Plan showed how WRS would: -

- Continue to provide a viable service within projected partner budget allocations.
- Understand what a base level of service looks like for partners.
- Support other partners to maintain service levels above this, where this was desired.
- Provide details of plans to increase income to maintain resilience in the face of continued financial pressure.
- Identify potential areas for the partners to expand the use of WRS as a platform for delivery.

Members were informed that all the partners had indicated that financial pressures were either current or visible in the near future; but had yet to inform WRS whether it would be a source of the reductions that some partners needed to make.

Income generation remained a key factor in the service's business strategy. It was possible that local authorities outside of the county may be encouraged to engage more with WRS and look more widely at contracting services. However, there was growing evidence that current clients were unwilling to engage with the service beyond their current commitments, and as the process of county devolution moved forward, it

was possible that district councils may look more closely at resources within their areas.

By understanding the costs and with good support from the host's Finance team, WRS had been able to forecast its income needs going forward. However, if rates of salary increase remained higher than previously experienced and the inflationary cost pressures continued, particularly on hosting authorities, it seemed unlikely that the service would be able to revert to the model operated between 2016 and 2020, where increased income alone would cover all cost pressures experienced by the service.

To limit the need for future increases, WRS would look to maintain and increase the levels of income that they bring in. This was only viable if the service retained its current flexibility to re-invest income in resources where necessary. WRS needed to also retain and build on the current flexible and well-qualified staff cohort.

More focus than in previous plans was placed on the ability of partners to add functions to the WRS structure, which may provide one way of offering savings in overall cost by rationalising the management and delivery of these activities. The pilot with planning enforcement being delivered on behalf of Redditch and Bromsgrove, which appeared to be having some success, was one example of how this might develop. The plan identified areas, particularly those where the infringements were criminal in nature, which might fit into WRS operations. Whilst it was understood that Members had a desire to keep certain functions close to the point of delivery, WRS Managers would continue discussions with Officers and Members of the Board to identify options that may be viable.

At the budget meeting in November 2022, Members agreed to take back to their respective partners the WRS budget which had included an increase in their contributions to cover the higher than anticipated salary settlement for 2022/23, an uplift for the hosting authorities in 2022/23 to cover huge inflationary pressures, and uplifts for the 2023/24 finances to address a further salary increase and increases in hosting. Uplifts in salary levels during the period were budgeted at 2% but the current employers' offer exceeded this. Hopefully, inflation would fall in the coming year so, whilst it was unlikely to return quickly to the low levels seen before the pandemic, pressures on both businesses and households would ease during the period of this plan.

There was a WRS reserve of over £100,000 that could be used to cushion the partners from financial shocks to the service. Members had previously agreed that the reserve could be used to cover small overspends at year-end should they occur. This would give the partners an opportunity to look at different options, whether through further funding or other delivery choices, to move forward with their regulatory functions.

The other significant reserve was established last year for the development of the WRS website to both allow direct submission of service requests and license applications into the back-office system and to enable online payment via the WRS website. Work on this project had progressed well and any remainder of the £150,000 allocated would be returned to partners at the end of 2023/4.

The Licencing and Support Services Manager replied to Members questions regarding the IT systems and during this clarified that the system was the customer facing portion of the website. It was also clarified that when the system goes live, Officers would encourage applicants to use the service, however, they would also actively give guidance and support to enable this and that applicants would still be able to apply via email.

The Head of Regulatory Services agreed to add the word “legitimate” before “business” to the WRS vision statement as detailed on page 25 of the main agenda pack, on the request of Councillor Rain, Malvern Hills District Council.

RESOLVED that the Worcestershire Regulatory business Plan for 2023 - 2026, as detailed in the main reports pack, be approved.

7/23

WORCESTERSHIRE REGULATORY SERVICES - SERVICE PLAN 2023/24

The Board considered the Worcestershire Regulatory Services (WRS) Service Plan 2023/2024.

The Head of Regulatory Services introduced the report and in doing so drew Members’ attention to the Recommendations, as detailed on page 57 of the main agenda report.

It was detailed to Members that, the Board signed off on the service plan for WRS each year. The process helped to make Members aware of what the service was proposing for the relevant financial year and provided a sign off which some central government bodies liked to see in relation to service delivery plans e.g., the Food Standards Agency.

Officers reported that the plan followed the same pattern of previous years and Members’ attention was drawn to the Executive Summary on page 26 of the main agenda pack to highlight the main point. Last year’s plan continued to accommodate activities in tackling the global pandemic as well as day-to-day activities. 2023/24 saw all involvement with COVID-19 pandemic related activities formally cease for WRS.

Throughout the pandemic, the service continued to shape its work around the long-standing strategic priorities for local authority regulatory services provided by what is now the Department for Business and Trade (DBaT,) as this provided a framework that allowed WRS to

maintain a golden thread back to the priorities of the six partners and to link to the requirements of the various national bodies.

The focus of the 2023/24 plan had shifted somewhat to the tactical priorities identified in the service's Strategic Assessment. The two-yearly piece of work reviewed the full data and intelligence picture, looked at emerging threats and made a number of recommendations as to the areas that needed to be addressed. The outcomes were:

- Supporting a safe and vibrant night-time economy
- Promoting the responsible sale, breeding, and ownership of dogs
- Promoting safe and clean communities
- Supporting commercial businesses to operate safely and responsibly
- Supporting industry to operate safely and responsibly

Officers described the last two as business as usual for a regulatory service, however, the other three were cross cutting in nature and needed to be addressed by various staff within WRS to deliver outcomes.

A range of high-level activities against the 5 tactical priorities were identified within the plan so that Members would be aware of the general focus of the workload. Below this would sit a number of plans, either team based or cross cutting that would be used to drive business activities.

Working with businesses and other partners was a key theme for both generating income but also to ensure that outcomes were delivered that match the priorities of partners and stakeholders. Delivery for other local authorities also remained a key income generation strategy, supported by limited work for the private sector and any specific grant monies that WRS felt were worthwhile pursuing. WRS retained most of its client-base post-pandemic and hoped to be able to identify new ones, although over time that gets harder. WRS remained hopeful that the strategy would remain fruitful.

WRS would continue to use intelligence to drive the business forward and the embedding of this approach and its associated processes kept WRS at the forefront of this thinking in local regulatory services.

The Risk Register had been updated to reflect the current position in areas like IT provision and development, staffing levels, and reliance on contractual relationships for income. The threat from cyber-attack had become more real in recent years as the devastating consequences had been felt by colleagues in other local authorities elsewhere in the country. WRS would work closely with their ICT host, Wyre Forest DC, to limit the risk of this. The WRS team for many years had been using mobile and flexible work activities which had yielded efficiencies but their reliance on ICT provision to deliver this increased the vulnerability to disruption.

As with previous years, Members were asked to pay particular attention to the provisions for food hygiene delivery in 2023/24. This was to meet one of the recommendations of the auditors from the Food Standards Agency who visited the service in May 2017. The FSA were keen that Members had a better understanding of the demand in this service area when they authorised the plan for 2023/24 and future years.

Members were asked to note the proposed numbers of inspections and similar activities proposed for the new financial year that would be undertaken to discharge the statutory duties of the 6 partners in relation to food control. WRS would keep the board updated on progress as the year went forward.

The Technical Services Manager responded to questions from Members and in doing so, clarified the situation regarding the air quality survey at Horsefair/Coventry Street – Kidderminster as detailed on page 86 of the main agenda pack. Although the initial assessment and equipment were in place, the survey had not been completed as WRS needed to undertake assessments for a minimum of 3 years. Officers further clarified that for a location to be designated as an Air Quality Management Area (AQMA) it needed to be a residential area with air quality concerns. Between the two mentioned areas there was an area which did not meet the AQMA criteria, however, due to the very close proximity of the locations it was decided to assess them under the same AQMA.

Members also wished to highlight the positive support WRS provided to businesses to enable them to operate legitimately and safely.

RESOLVED that

- a) the Worcestershire Regulatory Services Plan for 2023/2024, as detailed in the main reports pack, be approved; and
- b) that Members specifically note the level of work to be undertaken by the service this year in relation to the partners' roles as local food authorities.

8/23

WRS - REVENUE MONITORING APRIL - MARCH 2023 & ANNUAL RETURN

The Executive Director of Resources, Bromsgrove District Council (BDC) and Redditch Borough Council (RBC), introduced the report and in doing so drew Members' attention to the Recommendations as detailed on page 101 of the main agenda report.

The Executive Director of Resources confirmed that the report covered the period of April to March 2023 and also included the Annual Return.

The detailed revenue report was attached at Appendix 1 to the report. This showed a final outturn refund of £182k, which represented 5.2% of the actual budget and was mainly due to: -

- The inability to recruit like for like numbers of employees to backfill capacity committed to grant funded or other income generated work.
- The outturn underspend was £151k greater than that forecasted at quarter 3. This was due to additional income of £90k, £45k additional income in relation to Planning Enforcement, £28k for AQ Monitoring Station funded by Wychavon and an additional £10k for bereavements.
- Any grant funded expenditure was shown separate to the core service costs as this was not funded by the participating Councils.
- As requested by the Board Appendix 1 details explanations relating to the variances.

It was proposed that the £182k was allocated as follows:

To transfer £120k to a new WRS Reserve to fund the 2023/24 pay award.

In 2022/3, the service had to ask partners for additional funding to address the pay award (£1,925 on each spinal point,) as the 2% uplift originally budgeted for was not sufficient. In November, it was not anticipated that employers would make a similar offer in 2023/4, so the budget increase was 2% again.

To transfer £10k to the WRS Reserve towards a stray dog van

The service had been trying to buy its replacement dog vans via a government procurement framework that offered better prices than buying direct from suppliers. However, delivery dates had been pushed back on multiple occasions and WRS had now reached a point where they could not delay any further, therefore, some additional funding was required to purchase directly from suppliers. The Head of Regulatory Services clarified for Members that the £10k was to add to the current reserve of £72k and was due to the increased cost associated with buying directly from suppliers as opposed going through the government procurement framework.

The remaining £52k, was proposed to be refunded back to partners as per below:

Bromsgrove District Council - £7,562
Malvern Hills District Council - £6,772
Redditch Borough Council - £9,111
Worcester City Council - £8,597

Wychavon District Council - £12,079
Wyre Forest District Council - £7,853

The Head of Regulatory Services clarified that the current reserve of £467k detailed on page 112 of the main agenda pack, was largely reserved for specific projects such as IT enhancement project, Brexit fund and the stray dog vans. Only £130k of the fund was a general reserve which was available to be used and that was the basis for why WRS sought to add an additional £120k to address the 2023/24 pay increase shortfall. It was also noted that the Brexit reserve was no longer being used and could be reallocated or refunded during the budget review in November.

RESOLVED that

- a) the final financial position for the period April 2023 to March 2023, be noted;
- b) the refund of £52k to the participating Councils, be approved as follows: -

| Council | Refund from 2021/2022 £'000 |
|-----------------------------------|--|
| Bromsgrove District Council | 7 |
| Malvern Hills District Council | 7 |
| Redditch Borough Council | 9 |
| Worcester City Council | 9 |
| Wychavon District Council | 12 |
| Wyre Forest District Council | 8 |
| Total | 52 |

- c) the creation of a £120k reserve to address the expected impact of the pay award for 2023/4 and the addition of £10k to the reserve for replacement dog warden vans.

The Board considered a report which detailed the Worcestershire Regulatory Services (WRS) Annual Report 2022/2023.

The Head of Regulatory Services informed the Board that under the Shared Services Partnership Service Level Agreement (SLA) the Board was required to receive the annual report at its annual meeting.

The Head of Regulatory Services highlighted that the report covered the performance of the service from 1st April 2022 to 31st March 2023, both in terms of KPIs and highlights of activity, with a short summary activity report, as detailed at Appendix 5 to the report.

2022/23 saw the winding down of the formal response to the global Covid- 19 pandemic, which required some resources to be committed but to a limited extent, and many of the dedicated staff who served during the pandemic moved on. Where possible, the service did make staff aware of other job opportunities with the partners as, given the difficulties recruiting staff, it was important to try to keep good people in the local authority family if they were willing and there were suitable opportunities.

The service took on several new work-streams during the year, utilising some of the staff recruited during the pandemic. The planning enforcement pilot for Redditch and Bromsgrove, and the Homes 4 Ukraine support for Redditch, Bromsgrove, Malvern Hills and Wychavon, had been delivered in this way, with support from experienced WRS managers.

Despite the additional commitments, performance remained good in most areas. Food business compliance rates remained high. Taxi license renewals had been dealt with in a reasonable time in the main. The taxi fleet appears to be generally in good order, although the number of vehicles that failed either when submitted to a garage for interim test or, to a lesser extent, whilst in-service had increased again, with one partner area standing out. This was almost certainly a result of the financial pressure on members of the trade due to the current cost of living pressures.

As with previous years, complaints against the service were significantly exceeded by compliments. The main issues for complainants related to people:

- Unhappy with response to their complaint about nuisance,
- Having issues with one the pest controllers
- Having to pay to recover a stray dog.

Nuisance complaints were numerous last summer and this, combined with the drive to complete the Food Recovery programme as required by the Food Standards Agency, meant that resources last summer were spread very thin. This led to a fall in non-business customer satisfaction to only 59.2%. Managers would continue to work to address this, however, the nature of the service was such that it would be impossible to make everyone happy because a significant proportion of nuisance complaints would not amount to a statutory nuisance, Members were assured that WRS were confident they could improve their performance in this area.

The indicators for licensed premises and noise complaints had been in place long enough now to establish good baselines. Previously, WRS had said that the former of these indicators, linked to the Crime & Disorder agenda, demonstrated that, post pandemic lockdowns where hospitality premises were closed for long periods, the general tolerance of noise and similar activities from this type of premise had reduced. This appears to be slightly less prevalent for the last year, with more urban districts returning figures around average and more rural districts returning figures at average or slightly higher. It still shows that 90% plus of premises across the County were still well run and controlled by their operators, and concerns tend to be limited to smaller numbers of premises.

The figures could now be used, along with intelligence, to focus enforcement resources proactively, to tackle any individual problem premises, although these were relatively few and most complaints relate to nuisance issues or anti-social behaviour, which was a police matter.

Looking at last year's figures for noise complaints against population, the rate for Malvern Hills was low compared to previous years and numbers for other areas appear around average to slightly below average. Domestic noise represents more than half of complaints and noise from dogs and from audio devices remain key drivers of this, with dogs in particular making up over 500 of the 1500 received noise complaints. In regard to commercial premises, it tends to be a small number that certain residents had concerns about, and things such as a change of Designated Premises Supervisor (DPS) or the business looking at more diverse ways of bringing in revenue could lead to friction with the local community. Overall, it still suggests however, that the environment for Worcestershire residents was good.

Members were further informed that the Annual Report provided a summary of the financial position, the key achievements and covered issues relating to human resources. There were also sections on risk management and equalities. The Report would be published on the WRS website and would be shared with other all partner authorities.

Members recognised the work WRS had done during a very challenging time and wished to extend their appreciation to the team in particular for their work during the Covid-19 pandemic.

The Community Environmental Health and Trading Standards Manager responded to questions with regard to noise complaints. WRS Officers had a varied skillset so during particularly busy periods they moved Officers to higher demand departments such as handling noise complaints during the summer months when it peaks, however, Officers further highlighted to Members that demand far exceeded the support that could be utilised so it was unlikely they could ever fully meet all the demand.

The Community Environmental Health and Trading Standards Manager further clarified to Members that the threshold for a noise nuisance was very high and was due to a number of factors such as proximity, volume, time of day and duration and was a skilled decision that was made by Officers. Officers would often install equipment to monitor noise to make their assessment, it was also noted that if the threshold was deemed to have been met then the offence would be criminal in nature and would constitute legal proceedings which was why the threshold had to be high.

RESOLVED that the Worcestershire Regulatory Services Annual Report 2020/2021, be noted; and that a copy of the Worcestershire Regulatory Services Annual Report 2022/2023 be forwarded to the Chief Executive, Managing Director and Members of the six partner authorities.

10/23

ACTIVITY AND PERFORMANCE DATA QUARTERS 1, 2 3 AND 4 - 2022/2023

The Head of Regulatory Services, Worcestershire Regulatory Services (WRS) presented the Activity and Performance Data for Quarters 1, 2, 3, and 4 for 2022/2023; and in doing so highlighted the following key points: -

Activity Data

The service moved into the final quarter of 2022/3 knowing that it would be the last period where Covid grant funding had any influence on activities. With Government support ended on 31st March, however, there remained several workstreams where covid staff had been redeployed to deliver successful support to the partners.

The service had continued to address the Food Standards Agency's (FSA) recovery plan as part of its activity this year. A creditable 1,657 interventions were completed across the year. Of those businesses included in the Food Hygiene Rating Scheme (FHRS), 69 were rated as non-compliant (0, 1 or 2) with most of these ratings were issued to takeaways, restaurants, and small retailers.

Quarter 4 followed the downward trend in relation to reports of stray dogs, this had been attributed to helpful Members of the public posting on social media to try to reunite dogs with owners before contacting WRS.

WRS continued to receive a higher number of enquiries about licensing matters rather than complaints about licensed or unlicensed activity. Based on the 532 complaints recorded, 40% related to taxi licensing, 23% to alcohol licensing, and 22% to animal licensing.

Nuisance complaints followed their long-established seasonal pattern, however, following the drop from the summer peak through Q3, Q4 saw an increase in numbers despite it being Winter. The good weather

during February may have accounted for some of the increase as people were tempted outside earlier than they may have been otherwise.

Homes for Ukraine

Support continued to be provided to Bromsgrove, Malvern Hills, Redditch and Wychavon through quarters 3 and 4 with the provision of the Homes for Ukraine scheme. This involved host and guest checks, support and guidance as well as facilitating appropriate payments. This was completed utilising staff formerly employed as COVID Advisors. At the end of quarter 4, this work ceased for Wychavon and Malvern but continued for the other two partners.

Planning Enforcement

In Bromsgrove and Redditch, former Contact Tracing and Enforcement staff had been utilised to support planning colleagues in tackling a backlog of planning enforcement issues. Most of these cases were live and going through the enforcement process. The work had been well received.

Performance

The customer satisfaction perspective with business customers continued to be high at 98.1%, but non-business customer measured at 59.2%. This was attributed to how stretched the service was during the Summer where there was limited capacity available to respond to nuisance complaints with the continued draw on resources to meet Food Standards Agency road-map requirements for visits with the limited capacity in the system to back-fill with agency staff.

It was also noted that WRS attempted to shift customers from paper satisfaction forms to electronic responses, this led to a clear reduction in responses with only 138 whereas previous years there had been 200-250.

The figures for licensing processing were good with the year ending at 97.5% of taxi driver renewals completed within 5 working days. However, all districts had slightly more vehicles having been taken off the road during stop-checks or failed by local garages when vehicles were presented for their routine tests. This was attributed to the current economic climate, with cost-of-living pressures continuing to impact on Members of the trade.

Staff sickness was down at 2.93 days per FTE. This includes all staff employed during the year and was a significant improvement on 2022/23 (5.2 days) and below the 5-year average (3.71 days).

Staff satisfaction was at 92%, slightly lower than last year but still an excellent result. 48 of WRS staff responded, which was a low, however, two-thirds of staff who responded scored the service as 8/10 or better to work for, which shows the majority of staff like working in the

environment WRS provided. Further work would be done during the year to look at more detailed feedback.

The increases in both salaries and hosting costs incurred, plus some modest investments in areas like additional funds for gull control in the City and a continuous analyser purchased for Wychavon at Wychbold, had pushed up the overall spend by the partners. Therefore, the cost per head of population was up this year at £5.51 per head of population. Officers detailed that it was difficult to compare costs with other providers due to the way the service was delivered, however, WRS were confident that this spend was comparable or modest compared to similar areas for the functions discharged.

Members sought clarification on whether there was an issue with defective vehicles on the road in Redditch as there were 25 vehicles detailed on page 166 of the main agenda pack, removed during spot checks or routine safety inspections, which was substantially higher than other partner authorities. The Licensing and Support Services Manager replied that Redditch had the most vehicles out of the partner authorities so would expect a higher value, however, Officers were continuing to monitor the situation.

RESOLVED that the Activity and Performance Data Quarters 1, 2, 3 and 4 for 2022/2023, be noted and that Members use the contents of the report in their own reporting back to their respective partner authority.

11/23

FOOD INTERVENTIONS: POST PANDEMIC RECOVERY PROGRAMME AND NEXT STEPS

The Community Environmental Health and Trading Standards Manager, Worcestershire Regulatory Services (WRS) presented the Board with a detailed information report on Food Safety Interventions: Post Pandemic Recovery Programme.

Members were informed that, as previously reported, during the peak of the Covid pandemic the Food Standards Agency (FSA) had stopped the majority of food visits, although partners through WRS were required to monitor poor Food Hygiene Rating Scheme (FHRS) businesses and to deal with complaints. WRS entered a two-year recovery phase in August 2021. Every local authority had a long list of overdue inspections, the total across the county being nearly 3,000. It was also reported that although WRS had mostly cleared the backlog there were still 300 interventions (including new premises) outstanding to meet the FRA recovery plan and that about half of those were high risk.

The Community Environmental Health and Trading Standards Manager detailed to Members that they no longer base their food intervention programmes solely on the arbitrary inspection dates set in the national Food Law Code of Practice. Instead, WRS were proactive in recording and considering intelligence through tactical assessment and tasking programmes. This opened up many options including sectoral

approaches (e.g., geographical, new premises, ethnics, bakeries, small retail) and specific projects (e.g., sampling, FHRS sticker checks, arising from complaints). This was an approach that FSA was considering as a change in policy direction after witnessing its effectiveness.

Members' attention was drawn to the tables as detailed on page 212 and 213 of the main agenda report. Members were informed that businesses were maintaining a very high compliance rating of 98% by achieving a 3-5 FSA rating. The Community Environmental Health and Trading Standards Manager attributed this success to the commitment of WRS to prioritise the support of businesses to be compliant and successful.

At the request of the Chairman, the Community Environmental Health and Trading Standards Manager, WRS, detailed to Members the "Triple 5 award" that WRS had announced recently to supplement the Food Hygiene Ratings, as a means of recognising businesses achieving a consistently good Level 5 Food Hygiene rating, saying that this was something for businesses to strive for, and that it could take up to six years to achieve this accolade, depending on the risk rating for the premise.

Members enquired about the criteria for a premises to receive a 0 rating. Officers replied that the rating looks at the inherent risk that the business poses to the public and examines a number of factors including, high risk food handling, pest control, building state of repair and the confidence in the management. For a 0 rating there needed to be a serious risk to the public, improvement notices would likely be served and, in the worst cases the premises may be forced to close. Officers further clarified that some businesses chose to give up after receiving a particularly bad rating, particularly if the work required outweighed their ability to make changes to the premises and the operation.

RESOLVED that the Information Report – Food Safety Interventions: Post Pandemic Recovery Programme, be noted, and that Members use the contents of the report in their own reporting back to their respective partner authority.

12/23

PROGRESS REPORT ON THE AUTOMATION PROJECT

The Licensing and Support Services Manager, Worcestershire Regulatory Services (WRS) presented the Board with a progress report on the automation project.

It was noted for new Members to the Board that previously the majority of applications came in paper format and had to be input manually into the back-office system. However, during the COVID-19 pandemic applicants were required to submit their applications via email. WRS decided that they would enhance their system further and allow applications to be submitted online which would alleviate the need for Officers to input the data manually into the system.

To assist with this at the Board meeting on 23.06.2022, Members agreed to create a reserve of £150,000 from the previous year's underspend to fund the implementation of the automation of data entry for customers.

Officers had met with various suppliers during the procurement process and Victoria Forms was chosen to be the supplier for the project.

Temporary Event Notices (TENs), Licensing act forms and Animal Licensing forms, would all eventually be available to be completed online. The Licensing and Support Services Manager further detailed that TENs would soon be the first area to go live.

In parallel to the wider automation project, Officers had also been discussing the implementation of electronic ID Cards in the taxi trade for both safeguarding and enforcement measures.

The Licensing and Support Services Manager responded to Members questions and detailed that WRS cannot refuse an application so if one came in on paper or via Email, it would be processed in the same manner, but Officers would endeavor to work with applicants to encourage and aid them in completing the forms online, just as they had done during the Covid-19 pandemic when applicants were encouraged to email their applications.

It was further clarified that the ID cards would be fully compliant with the national database and would be available to be scanned to ensure a driver had a valid licence and were who they appeared to be.

Members expressed some concern over not having an independent governance body overseeing the systems implementation. The Head of Regulatory Services replied that the concern was not raised during previous WRS Board meetings by Members, but that with the agreement of the Board, Officers would raise their concern with Internal Audit.

RESOLVED that

1. The Progress report on the automation project be noted; and
2. that Officers take the report away to be examined by Internal Audit.

The meeting closed at 6.38 p.m.

Chairman