

Joint Committee Meeting

Date 02 October 2014

Transformation Work Update

Recommendation

That the Joint Committee notes the report.

Executive Summary

Feedback from the private sector companies participating in dialogue sessions of the Strategic Partnering procurement project have all acknowledged how well WRS has done in driving out waste and improving efficiency and admitted that they would struggle to do better given the savings we have already delivered.

This transformation has been achieved by applying systems thinking principles in a pragmatic way to service delivery. First contact telephony has been brought in-house, self-help packages have been developed for appropriate service areas and work flows have been streamlined to reduce waste and improve resolution times for service requests.

Planning algorithms have been introduced to improve decision making and reduce reliance on WRS staff and our web site is now business and customer friendly, facilitating self-help wherever appropriate.

Our innovative risk matrix gives a clear understanding of the financial model in which we operate and enables partners to make better informed choices in respect of base budget reductions.

Business surveys probe the likely market for paid for advice/ support services within the County and WRS is now a successful provider of quality services to other local authorities.

Changes to service delivery have been accompanied by significant technical changes facilitating mobile and agile working and improving our ability to report to you, the Joint Committee, on our outcome measures.

Introduction

Joint working is undertaken between colleagues from different professional backgrounds whenever appropriate and an intelligence unit has been created which coordinates, disseminates and acquires intelligence aimed at targeting resources more effectively. We have also developed a much more targeted approach to carrying out our proactive work especially in relation to food safety interventions.

The following report describes this transformational work in more detail.

Since its launch in 2010 Worcestershire Regulatory Services has undergone major and sustained transformational change whilst experiencing a year on year reducing budget from £7.15m to £4.4m This has contributed significantly in exceeding the challenging savings indicated in the original business case (38% against 17.5%) whilst delivering high quality services and developing new and innovative ways of working which have achieved national recognition.

Joint working is undertaken between colleagues from different professional backgrounds whenever appropriate. A pilot intelligence unit was created to coordinate, disseminate and acquire intelligence aimed at assisting officers to target resources more effectively at certain trade sectors or individuals.

WRS represents a new local government business model and this report is to advise members on the evolutionary changes that have taken place since we began operations four years ago.

Report

Business Transformation (Service Delivery)

Systems Thinking has provided the challenge and drive for determining what the service is seeking to deliver. The development of purposes from a customer perspective has assisted Officers in shaping their responses to work within our framework of strategic priorities.

The clear purposes for the service are:

- Help me to resolve my problem (and stop it from happening to anyone else)
- I want to think everything is ok (for example, that the food I eat is safe)
- Help me to trade well (safely and fairly) and ensure my competitors do the same.



We have streamlined our work “flows” with a view to eliminating waste from our systems; this could take the form of unnecessary hand-offs from one member of staff to another, ensuring that expertise is in the right place, removing unnecessary and over-complicated forms and procedures and ensuring that wherever possible the customer’s problem is properly understood and resolved at the first point of contact. Together with detailed data capture in respect of the types and volume of demand coming in to the service we have been able to re-design our way of working and adopted a “Get it right first time” approach.

The new role of Duty Officer has been created bringing first contact telephony in-house from the Hub call centre to improve service and increase resolution at first point of contact. Service requests completed and closed on the same day under the Hub in April stood at 20.2%. Since coming in house this resolution at first point of contact has risen significantly to 48.6% in May and 41.7% in June.

We have developed a self-help package for non-noise related nuisances to shift customers away from the traditional “one size fits all” direct intervention route which was adopted in all cases, whatever the individual need or circumstance. In addition we have reviewed the work flow for nuisance, including noise, to reduce end to end time and deliver a customer focused intervention. Data obtained from the Worcestershire hub for April indicated an average end-to-end time of 10.8 days across all areas covered. Under our in house arrangement in May it was just 4.2 days and 6.7 days for June. This would indicate that we have been able to significantly reduce the time taken from receiving a service request to resolving it.

A further innovation has been to develop planning algorithms to support Planning Officers in their decision making thus reducing reliance on Environmental Health professionals. This has enabled WRS to maintain referrals at the same level despite a 17% increase in applications to Worcester City.

Another strategy has been to review and develop the WRS website to be both business friendly and to promote the self-help principle for all customers. We received over 77,000 “hits” on our web site between January 1 2014 and June 23, 2014. Advice and letter templates have been posted for people to download and a pilot exercise has seen 23% of complaints successfully diverted to self-help. Initial indications suggest that this route has the potential to deliver real benefits.

Mediation skills of all WRS officers have been used for domestic nuisance issues and in the event of a significant problem we are able to push work directly out into the field.

Financial Developments

We have developed an innovative risk matrix giving us a clear understanding of the financial model we operate within and which enables partners to base budget reductions.

In addition we have developed a 3-year financial plan for delivering partner savings requirements and introduced a review of fixed costs and overheads to find efficiencies and reduce them.

We continue to survey businesses to look at the likely market for paid for advice/ support services within the County and seek income from other sources. We have successfully delivered Licensing work to Tewkesbury BC (£6k 2014), Health and Wellbeing work on behalf of NHS Worcestershire Public Health (£10k 2014), Dog Warden services to Cheltenham and Tewkesbury Councils (£5k 2014), Air Quality work to Hereford Council (£1k 2013/14) and successfully bid for 2 BDRO Grants totalling £35k to promote business friendly service delivery and primary authorities in the Animal Health sector. We are currently drawing up a contract to provide Pollution Control work to Tewkesbury Borough Council.

Channel Shift & IT Developments

Changes to service delivery have been accompanied by significant technical changes. The move to a single ICT platform and transfer of historical data has enabled the termination of ten ICT supplier contracts reducing supplier support and licensing costs by some £50k.

Efficiencies in dealing with customer queries and freedom of information requests have been realised and three FTE have been freed up from legacy system support duties to concentrate fully on operational work. Customer-focus and improved performance and efficiency have been key design features and the service has become much more self-sufficient with the formation of the internal ICT Team with much less reliance on supplier support.

Implementation of our IT platform has improved our ability to report to Joint Committee on our outcome measures. Uniform is now operating across all functions and the service will move into developing a public access front end during 2014/15 to increase channel shift and allow more direct customer interaction (e.g. direct submission of



license applications and progress monitoring of service requests.) Reports going to the Joint Committee and Management Board will have data broken down into individual Councils areas where this is relevant and deliverable.

Further features of the ICT system include a new integral document management system, spatial information and mobile access. This together with the provision of iPads and laptops gives Officers remote access to “live” information in the field, so facilitating a more efficient and customer focussed way of working. Public Access will further enable the development of channel shift within the service.

We have implemented mobile and flexible working for operational staff across the service. This is generally now the norm, with staff frequently using home as their start and finish point for work in the field. Officers come into Wyatt House two or three days per week to liaise with managers and colleagues and for meetings. On the other days they work flexibly reducing the need for office space and reducing the need for travel to and from the office. The touch-down points retained in each of the councils (excluding the City as Wyatt House is there) have provided an excellent venue for licensing surgeries and these have been welcomed by the taxi trade in particular. This move has also enabled staff to strike a better work/life balance which is essential for good morale.

Cross-Team working

Joint working is undertaken between colleagues from different professional backgrounds whenever appropriate. For example the health and safety project in relation to night clubs also looked at licensing and the high risk leisure activities and tanning salons project included colleagues from Trading Standards.

The integration of the county council’s petroleum licensing function with the district IPPC function has been a notable success and spreading this work amongst a small pool of people has improved resilience within the service.

Joint working at food businesses is undertaken where, for example, WRS has an interest in food standards and food hygiene. This not only increases our efficiency but also reduces the burden placed on businesses by reducing the number of visits made to them. It also provides the flexibility required to allocate resources to meet fluctuations in demand which may be seasonal or the result of a major incident.

Proactive intervention programmes

The service has developed a much more targeted approach to carrying out its proactive work especially in relation to food safety interventions. WRS migrated to the Food Standards Agency national Food Hygiene Rating Scheme [FHRS] in June 2012. This scheme replaces the former Scores on the Doors local scheme.

The FHRS is a Food Standards Agency/Local Authority partnership supported by government designed to help consumers choose where to eat out. It does this by providing information about hygiene standards in food outlets at the time they are inspected. We are thus able to concentrate resources on the highest risk businesses which are those within the FHRS level 0 – 3. Level 3 is “generally satisfactory”.

This approach has reduced the inspection programme by some 2,200 premises (from a base of 7,000) enabling us to target those businesses that are either struggling to comply or are operating illegally. These are the key premises that we need to actively manage and a number of closures and prosecutions reflect the effectiveness of this policy.

Those businesses not included in the FHRS are subject to a separate programme of light touch interventions such as surveys and projects with intelligence being used to ensure that the poorest premises are identified and visited.

We have also saved time and improved our service to business customers by introducing registration acknowledgements to new premises. These provide food safety advice such that food business operators are better informed and know what they are doing when we arrive.

Health and safety interventions are now intelligence-led and are carried out in response to accident reports, service requests and project work. Builders’ yards were identified as a problem area and our recent intervention in this sector has seen a rise in standards.

Intelligence-led interventions

Intelligence now plays a major role in informing our decisions and activities, particularly within the Trading Standards functions under the National Trading Standards Board’s Integrated Operating Model. We are now applying the model to aspects of our Environmental Health functions. There will not be a full fit, but some elements of the model such as its problem solving



approach will be applicable.

The creation of our own intelligence unit within the service represents a significant innovation in approach. The team coordinates, disseminates and acquires intelligence assisting officers in targeting resources more effectively at certain trade sectors or individuals. This role dovetails regional intelligence units within Trading Standards and other enforcement agencies such as Police intelligence. The Unit also monitors service and officer performance, implements the National Intelligence Operating model for Trading Standards and informs the intelligence led approach now adopted across all WRS functions. Intelligence reports produced by the unit enable the service to identify hot spots for certain categories such as noise complaints and help efficiently marshal and deploy resources. The Intelligence Unit has helped to both direct the work of the service and provides information for managers and members on outputs.

Improved Business Support

WRS has been recognised by the Department for Business Innovation and Skills as a positive, innovative and pioneering service which is leading the UK pack in working to streamline and reduce regulatory burdens on business. The Worcestershire Local Enterprise Partnership has made a significant commitment in signing the Regulatory and Business Charter 2012 and our early partnership work has attracted interest at Government level and has been identified as a “Better Business for All” Champion to other LEP Areas.

WRS has carried out original work with BRDO to promote a business friendly face through our website and printed materials. In respect of our “Help me to trade well” purpose we have been able to support five of our businesses trading nationally through the Primary Authority scheme; only one such arrangement existed prior to WRS. Two further companies are about to go “live” with us. In addition we have increased membership of the Trader Register (whereby the public have access to a list of “trusted traders”) to 119 members. Income generation from that is £3,570 plus we save £2,340 on the licence fee as this is now covered by the paying members.

We have developed an active Regulators’ Forum which brings together local representatives from national regulators to promote joined-up working. We are also involved in a joint bid with WLEP to Government for regulatory exemplar pilot project aimed at reducing regulatory burden in the local food/ agri-business sector

WRS has engaged in an innovative joint working partnership with Warwickshire Trading Standards Service in relation to its metrology (weights & measures) calibration function. The partnership has seen the closure of the laboratory and some work transferred to Warwickshire. Officers from Worcestershire maintain their competency and continue work involving testing weighing and measuring equipment for local businesses under the Warwickshire Quality system. This has provided a saving of one Trading Standards Officer post.

Businesses have also benefited from the improvements made within the Licensing function. Processes have been improved with the harmonisation of policies and development of generic policies for new legislation. We have created a common model for fee setting and look to achieve harmonisation of fees whenever possible. Examples of good practice are disseminated to all partners and staff work across a broader geography including licensing surgeries.

Summary

WRS has evolved from a grouping of seven disparate, widely different and independent regulatory services in the beginning to a nationally recognised, successful, innovative and forward thinking organisation delivering high quality services and developing new ways of working. All this has been achieved whilst introducing a new single IT platform, transferring all existing data from 10 legacy systems and assisting several partners and local businesses to deal with the serious impact of the recent widespread flooding and two major fire/ potential pollution incidents.

Outcomes

As described in the main body of the report.

Financial Implications

The transformational changes described above have contributed significantly to exceeding the savings indicated in the original business case (38% against 17.5%) whilst maintaining performance levels. The budget has reduced from £7.15M 2010/11 at launch to £4.4M for 2014/15 and staff resource from 154 FTE at launch to 96.5 FTE for 2014/15. 3 FTE are now externally funded. Prior to the shared service there were 33 roles having supervisory responsibilities across the 7 partners in the WRS functions. This is now down to 17. We have also been able to return £533k of the £1.5M original business case transformation budget to partners.



As budgets contract it will become harder to deliver what individual customers want with fewer options being available. By continuing to innovate in service delivery, reviewing our processes to eliminate waste and following our philosophy of continuous improvement we will strive to deliver high levels of customer service within the financial envelope set by partners.

Contact Points

David Mellors, Community Environmental Health Team
Manager

Tel: 01527 548221

email: d.mellors@worcsregservices.gov.uk
