

JOINT COMMITTEE

26th November 2015

Progress on reconstitution of Worcestershire Shared Services
Partnership of Worcestershire Regulatory Services

Recommendation

The Joint Committee is recommended to note the report

Contribution to Priorities/ Recommendations

Reconstitution of the Worcestershire Shared Services Partnership will contribute directly to delivery of partner authorities' priorities for economic, social and environmental well-being, including the agreed priorities for WRS set out in the WRS Service Plan 2015/16 and WRS Business Plan 2015/18.

Introduction/Summary Background

Partner councils are progressing approval of the recommendations agreed by this committee in June. Five district councils have completed the process, with only Worcester City outstanding. The County Council has sought to take a slightly different approach that is outlined below, however it does accord with the decisions taken by the Joint Committee in June and the processes agreed by partners to take matters forward.

Report

Discussions with the County Council in relation to a contractual relationship with WRS remain on-going. A paper outlining the senior management thinking at the County Council on the future delivery of its Trading Standards and Animal Health functions went to full Council on Thursday 12th November 2105. Papers from this meeting should be in the public domain on the County Council website. The recommendation of the report was that senior managers be empowered to negotiate with WRS partners for the County Council to formally take back direct control of their functions and the staff delivering them. This was approved.

Whilst this is different from what was originally envisaged, the delegation to the senior managers at the County Council does accord with the decisions made by the Joint Committee in June and further consideration or resolutions are not necessary for either the Joint Committee or the

district council partners.

The Head of Regulatory Services will now work with senior managers from the BEC Department at the County Council to facilitate this happening using the currently agreed methodology of a short term service level/ contractual agreement. This agreement will allow for the smooth transition from WRS delivery to direct County Council delivery during the first quarter of 2016/17, aiming for completion on 31st May. The contract will have terms that indicate it is intended to run for 12 months with termination by either party by giving notice of 1 calendar month. This will allow for any slippage in timescales, however, managers currently envisage the transition being completed no later than 30th June.

Alongside this discussion, there are on-going discussions about whether or not the County Council should continue to utilise some of the facilities and software that WRS has procured and developed in the 5 years since it was established. It is hoped that this can be realised and should result in an on-going services contract that will continue to benefit both members of the partnership and the County Council.

Financial Implications

In order to avoid an additional financial burden being imposed on district partners, the County Council will pay a sum to cover the cost of the additional overheads and management that otherwise would have been covered by the County Council's contractual arrangement with WRS. This is going to be a substantial sum and should ensure that the service has a significant amount of time within which to either bring in other customers or to adjust its management and other overheads.

Sustainability

The loss of Trading Standards and Animal Health functions makes no impact on the service's ability to deliver the Environmental Health and Licensing functions for the partner districts. The functions leaving the service are wholly separate and, whilst some synergies exist between the professions, our work on transformation has made it clear that generic deliver across district and county functions is not possible at this time and may never be possible given the breadth of legislation in which such staff would need to be expert. Currently, there appears to be a limited desire for other councils to seek partners to deliver their Trading Standards functions. The financial decisions made by the County Council leave a very small operation on which we could have built had this situation not come to pass. Working with another Trading Standards authority is something that County Council colleagues may wish to consider in the future.



Legal Implications

As referred to above, Bromsgrove District Council as host authority will be entering into a service level agreement with Worcestershire County Council to cover the period when services will be provided by WRS and then the transition to services being taken back in house by County. Officers are mindful that the resultant contractual/ SLA arrangements must be fit for purpose and deliver what is required by the partners and the County Council. Legal colleagues from Bromsgrove District Council and Worcestershire County Council are currently working on the drafting of the SLA.

As previously reported the six remaining District partners will have to enter into a new Shared Services Agreement to govern their future working arrangements. It is envisaged that this will be based on the existing Shared Services Agreement.

Contact Points

Simon Wilkes
Head of Regulatory Services
01562-738088
simon.wilkes@worcsregservices.gov.uk

Background Papers