

Worcestershire Regulatory Board

22nd June 2017

Chair's Report: the first 12 months of operation of the new partnership

Recommendation

That the Board notes the report.

Introduction

When the new legal agreement that came into effect on 1st April 2016, it was envisaged that the new operating arrangement for the partners would be reviewed at the end of 12-months to ensure that the arrangement is working in the envisaged way. Officer members of the Board felt it appropriate that this review be presented by the Chair of the Board who oversaw this period.

This was not intended to be a formal review of the operation and the effectiveness of the shared service arrangements, which the Board's terms of reference in the legal agreement require every two years, where ways of expanding the partnership have been considered and appropriate recommendations to the Member Authorities have been made. This should be seen as the last in the series of reports on the transition from a 7-authority partnership to the district only partnership, giving the departing Chair the opportunity to look back on behalf of the Board over our first 12-months of operation.

Report

This report gives an overview of what the Board covered during the first 12-months of operation under the new arrangements. Hopefully, other members of the Board will agree that it has very much felt like "business as usual," with a fairly seamless transition from the seven partners to the six. Whilst the County Council's departure is seen by many of us as unfortunate, the Environmental Health and Licensing functions continue to be delivered well on our behalf and the Board has balanced its roles of both challenging and supporting the Head of Service and his management team, ensuring that partners and the public receive the levels of service that we would want to see.

Financial Reporting

Bromsgrove, as host, has provided the Board with timely and concise budget information so that the Board can ensure the financial probity of operational delivery. Occasionally concerns have been expressed over



the presentation of the data, but generally officers have rectified any faults raised by Board members. The simplification of the audit reporting process due to the fall in the overall budget to a level where no separate audit of WRS accounts is required has raised some concerns but the host's officers continue to provide the level of assurance that the Board requires.

Income generation has become the basis for maintaining the level of service delivery that we, as partner authorities receive. Improving the picture of income coming into the service will be important going forward so that members can continue to have a good oversight of the service's finances. I would urge Bromsgrove, as host, to ensure that this is delivered.

Officers have established a working group to consider changes to the way income is collected on behalf of partners, with the possibility of income being collected by the host rather than each individual partner. This could offer a more streamlined process for clients of the partner authorities but other impacts on how the service operates may also need to be considered. This is an area over which the Board may wish to keep a watching brief going forward.

Operational Reporting

The quarterly review of performance and activity data continues to provide members with a clear picture of operational activity in all district areas. One or two suggested improvements in presenting the data have been made and members should continue to ask questions to ensure that the picture provided is as clear as possible with the resources available. Constant change for its own sake is not something the Board should seek but continuous small improvements in the report and the suite of indicators is something the Board may wish to consider in the future.

The introduction of an information report at each Board meeting has helped to engage members more in the workings of the service and helped to paint a clearer picture of what officers are doing on the ground. As Chair, I welcomed this change and would encourage the Board to continue with this approach. Whilst as a governance board we must be focused in the main on financial and strategic issues, it is important that we have a feel for what the service is doing and that we are able to reflect this back at each of the partner authorities in our role as senior elected members.

Highlights

One of the highlights of the years was that we were finalists in the "Best UK Environmental Health Team" category at the Association for Public Service Excellence awards against very impressive competition. The awards, which took place in September, exist to showcase the ability of Local Authorities to "pursue innovation within service delivery and implement new approaches aimed at improving the level of service to local communities and people". The award submission focussed heavily on innovation and transformation work within the Community



Environmental Health, Technical Services, Duty Officer and Intel Teams, including:

- The implementation of self-help package for nuisances
- The carrying out of contract work for other authorities.
- Trying to resolve problems at the first point of contact through the Duty Officer system
- LEP work on schemes such as earned recognition
- The Healthy Choices Food award
- Working closely with legitimate businesses and their relevant trade bodies including business seminars
- Self-help for Planning Officers
- The creation of an EH Intel Team and tasking
- Carrying out contract work for other authorities.

As Chair of the Joint Committee I attended the awards ceremony with a small group of staff. Seeing the other services in contention demonstrated how far we as partners have come in terms of the delivery of these service elements. We remain at the forefront of innovation in these areas.

The flexibility that WRS has to enable good delivery was shown in the team's response to the large volume of nuisance complaints this year. This extended period of complaint work delayed the team's completion of the food hygiene inspection programme as officers made the Board at a number of meetings. At the end of the year the team still achieved in excess of 1400 inspections for the year, with 600 in the final quarter. None of our authorities, acting alone, could achieve this in the face of unprecedented service request related demand. Our flexible model has yet again served us well.

My thanks also to Simon Wilkes, Head of Regulatory Services, for his valuable advice and support during my time as Chairman. The Worcestershire Districts continue to provide residents with a superior service due mainly to the dedication and commitment of the officer team.

Contact Points

Councillor Bronwen Behan
Chair of the Shared Service Partnership Board 2016/17

