

WRS Board
27th June 2018
Chairman's Report

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 Chairman of the Board who oversaw this period. This gave the then Chairman the opportunity to reflect on the events of their year chairing the Board. Going forward it was felt that the out-going Chairman of the Board should be given the opportunity to highlight, from an elected member's perspective, the key events and elements delivered on behalf of partners by the service during the 12 months that they held the chair. The Chairman for 2018/19, Councillor Laight from Bromsgrove has moved to become Chairman of the Council, so is no longer part of the Board. Hence, this year the report is from the Vice Chairman.

Report

This report gives an overview of the highlights that the Board covered during the period 1st April 2018 to 31st March 2019. The Board received a number of information reports alongside the standard activity data and financial reporting, which has allowed members to get a better understanding of the day to day work of the Regulatory Service and to understand the issues faced by our officers in trying to protect the public in each of the districts and also supporting the local businesses to thrive and grow.

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 host's officers continue to provide the level of assurance that the Board requires.

Operational Reporting

Income generation remains the basis for maintaining the level of service delivery that we, as partner authorities receive. Improving the picture of income coming into the service has been important so that members continue to have a good oversight of the service's finances.

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.

During last year, members of the Board asked if they could be involved in business planning and possibly a review of performance indicators during 2019/20 and I hope that this is something that officer members of the board and WRS Managers will facilitate in the autumn.

A number of Chairs have supported the use of information reports at each Board meeting to help to engage members more in the workings of the service and these help to paint a clearer picture of what officers are doing on the ground. This year we received reports on a wide range of areas. We heard about the results of the staff survey commissioned by the host Bromsgrove District Council as part of its own approach to improving support for staff. We saw that generally the balance between staff freedoms within boundaries and management control was good along with a range of other measures but it did highlight the pressures that staff are feeling with the high workload and pressure from customer expectations that they face.

A report on the new animal activity licensing regime highlighted the huge changes that government's new legislation had imposed both on the services and the businesses they regulated but we were re-assured that this was a case of making laws that were fit for the 21st century view of how animals should be treated. We also received a report on Environmental Permitting, which is where local authorities license industrial processes that can be highly polluting. This showed the importance of our Councils' role in protecting the environment as well as showcasing the talents of our team in this area, which is recognised by a number of national bodies as one of the best.

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 roles as senior elected members. These reports do exactly that.

Highlights

As a former Police Officer I should highlight some of the formal action

taken, and particularly the prosecution of B&Q plc in relation to a serious accident that occurred in their Kidderminster store. From my former role I understand the difficulties that come with having to prove offences to the criminal standard of beyond a reasonable doubt. The fact that the business chose to plead guilty is testament to the quality of the work done by the team in bringing this case to a successful conclusion.

It is also good to see the team engaging with a range of partners to tackle wider issues of criminality. We often hear talk of child sexual exploitation and modern day slavery and see these as policing issues without realising the links to regulated activities. Evidence from Rotherham, Rochdale and other areas has highlighted the need to be vigilant around the taxi trade and other licensed activities, and we know that a proportion of modern day slavery is happening in working environments, whether that is illegal immigrants forced to work as waiters in restaurants to pay off their debts or women trafficked to work in clubs in the sex trade. It is important that we see these links and support a multi-agency policing approach that directly tackles these crimes.

On a more positive note, our service's on-going development of primary authority work and particularly through the permitting team who have signed up Cemex and Weinerberger is exemplary. Our service is first in this arena and leading the country in moving forward on these activities. I hope that the team will continue to build on these firsts and continue to push the boundaries, allowing money to flow into the service to support its activities.

On behalf of the Board I would offer my thanks to the team for the work they have done over the previous twelve months. We know that this team works very hard for all of the partners and it is their dedication that ensures we continue to provide residents with a superior service that addresses many of their day to day issues in these areas, keeping our communities safe and supporting a thriving local economy.

Contact Point

Councillor Gareth Prosser
Vice-Chair of the Shared Service Partnership Board 2018/19
