

WRS Board
24th June 2021

Title: Chairman's Report 2020-2021

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 gave the then Chair the opportunity to reflect on the events of her year chairing the Board. Going forward it was felt that the out-going Chair 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.

Report

This report gives an overview of the highlights that the Board covered during the period 1st April 2020 to 31st March 2021. 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. Officers have also responded positively to any requests for additional data or clarifications. The host's officers continue to provide the level of assurance that the Board requires. Income generation remains a key element for maintaining the level of service delivery that we, as partner authorities receive. Maintaining a clear picture of additional funds coming into the service will be important in coming years as Government seeks to pay down pandemic borrowing.

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. Over the years of my membership of this Board, various 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. Our current performance indicator set has served us well and helps to show the excellent work of our shared service but members may wish to review this again in the coming years.

Highlights

This year has been extraordinary. The phrase “we are living through unprecedented times” has probably been over-used in the past 15 months or so but that is certainly how most people will feel. And our shared service has been at the forefront of pandemic response, dealing with the business restrictions and later becoming engaged in a number of other work-streams.

At June 2020’s Board, we received our first indication of how big a role WRS would have in tackling the pandemic. Our Community Environmental Health Manager reported on the work done to that point in relation to the first lockdown and for the beginning of the re-opening process. During the lockdown, over 2,200 visits took place and the fact that the team only issued 7 prohibition notices and 30 written warnings shows that businesses across the County did the right thing.

As we moved out of the lockdown, ensuring the safety of employees and the public at premises became a key area of work, and the skills and knowledge of our officers in Health and Safety at Work law put them at the heart of making sure things were done properly. As usual, the team took its supportive approach, helping businesses to trade in a safe and compliant way and only resorting to formal action where intransigence was exhibited.

At the same meeting, we had an update on the success of the “invest to save” post that we agreed to create within the service to support income generation within the Technical Services team. Sufficient additional work had been brought in to cover the on-going cost so we agreed to continue this investment, albeit that the pandemic has limited further opportunities.

October’s meeting brought us a further update on our service’s engagement with the pandemic. We were told of the re-organisation in Community Environmental Health to deal with the pandemic and of the financial support that the County council was providing to fund a group of our Environmental Health Officers who were embedded with the Local Outbreak Response Team to address business outbreaks and

deal with many of the technical issues that arise in such situations. Their skills in contact tracing have been invaluable as part of the local response. It was clear that, whilst many businesses had controls in place, small chinks in their armour were resulting in outbreaks and our officers were able to help they create systems and processes to fill these gaps.

November's meeting brought us an update on Covid costing, where the Head of Service took members through the levels of expenditure that the district councils had collectively invested via WRS in pandemic respond. The figures were sobering. We also had our first Taste of the Taxi Standards that should begin progressing through our Licensing Committees in the coming year. The Licensing Manager explained why Government regards these as essential safeguarding measures. We also had a further update on TS development within the service from the Technical Services Manager. These last two reports showing that the service was having to continue with its normal workload whilst investing significant resources into pandemic response.

Finally, February brought us a report on the work of the Covid Advisor team from the Technical Services Manager. The decision of the six district councils to pool this grant resource allowed WRS to deliver interventions across the County, into the places where it was most required. Members have been receiving a regular update on deployments and the outcomes, which have been both interesting and helpful in demonstrating how this project has made a difference to things on the ground. We also had a new service plan, which told us that WRS would remain at the heart of pandemic response for the foreseeable future.

This has been a year of highlights, for good and ill. Throughout the year, each quarter, we have been shown how the WRS team has continued to deliver on our statutory requirements whilst tackling the largest global incident since the Second World War. Those on Covid duties and those who have continued with normal duties have delivered on whatever has been thrown at them., with little or no complaint. 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, and in this year too, helping to protect them from the global threat that is Covid 19.

Contact Point

Councillor Helen Dyke
Chair of the Regulatory Services Shared Service Partnership Board
2020/21