

WRS Board

Date: 10th February 2022

Worcestershire Regulatory Services Service Plan 2022/23

Recommendations

That members of the Board:

- (i) Approve the WRS service plan for 2022/23
- (ii) They specifically note the level of work to be undertaken by the service this year in relation to the partners' roles as local food authorities.

Report

The Board signs off the service plan for WRS each year. The process helps to make members aware of what the service is proposing for the relevant financial year and provides a sign off that some central government bodies like to see in relation to service delivery plans e.g. the Food Standards Agency.

The plan follows very much the pattern of previous years and has an Executive Summary to pick up the main points. Last year's plan had to accommodate our activities in tackling the global pandemic as well as our day to day activities. At the time of writing, the country retains limited control measures, although it sounds like these will be ended shortly and possibly before this paper reaches WRS Board. Government was clear that it would only impose the Plan B controls for the minimum period it felt necessary and that we needed to see that living with Covid 19 as a fact of daily life would again be the norm going forward. Members were told in this report last year that the service was planning for some involvement in pandemic controls for the first quarter of 2021/22 but it seemed likely that could run well into quarter two as well. As it happened, there has been no time during the last financial year when WRS has not been involved in pandemic control activities and we have taken on additional roles as the year went on. With Government rolling its CONTAIN funding into 2022/3, we have to assume that the service will continue to have some involvement but it looks more likely that there will be a winding down of response activities during the year, with perhaps the need to respond to spikes in case numbers as they occur. So, yet again, flexibility will be necessary to reshape what is being delivered as the local environment changes during the new financial year.

Away from the pandemic, the service will continue to shape its work around the long-standing strategic priorities for local authority regulatory services provided by BEIS, as these provide a framework that allows WRS to have a golden thread back to the priorities of the six partners and also to link to the requirements of the various national bodies that oversee our work.

A range of high level activities are identified within the plan so that members will be aware of the general focus of activity. Below this will sit a number of team plans that will be used to drive the actual business activities.

The plan has been devised in the face of on-going financial uncertainty in local government generally. The long awaited Levelling-up White Paper has yet to appear and the sector continues to push for fairer funding settlements.

Working with businesses and other partners is a key theme for both generating income to mitigate financial risk but also to ensure that outcomes are delivered that match the priorities of partners and stakeholders. Delivery for other local authorities also remains a key income generation strategy, supported by work for the private sector and specific grant monies. Whilst much of our work for customers fell off during the initial period of the pandemic response, most of our long-standing customers have come back to us as well as some new ones in recent weeks. This makes us hopeful that this strategy will remain fruitful.

We will continue to use intelligence to drive the business forward and the embedding of this approach and its associated processes will continue.

The Risk Register has been updated to reflect the current position in areas like IT provision and development, staffing levels, and our reliance on contractual relationships for income. The threat from cyber-attack has become more real as the devastating consequences have been felt by colleagues in other local authorities elsewhere in the country. We will work closely with our ICT host, Wyre Forest DC, to limit the risk of this. Our long-standing investment in mobile and flexible working found us well-placed to deal with the need for home working and the majority of our activities are now enabled for this working pattern. However, our reliance on ICT provision to deliver this does increase our vulnerability to disruption.

As with previous years, members are asked to pay particular attention to the provisions for food hygiene delivery in the coming year. This is to meet one of the recommendations of the auditors from the Food Standards Agency who visited the service in May 2017. They were keen that members have a better understanding of the demand in this service area when they authorised the plan for this and future years.

Members are asked to note the proposed numbers of inspections and similar activities proposed for the new financial year that will be undertaken to discharge the statutory duties of the 6 partners in relation to food control. As we have previously explained, the Food Standards Agency has laid down a road map that started in September 2021, laying down the details of the journey local services would go on as we move back to full food law enforcement. The current end-date for this process is April 2023, when the Agency tells us it is planning to bring in a new approach to local enforcement. We have explained to members that the service, like the majority of others, remains under pressure with other work and the lack of agency capacity nationally means that many authorities may struggle to hit the exact target asked. We will keep the board updated on progress as the year goes forward.

Financial Implications

None

Sustainability

NA

Contact Points

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Background Papers

Service Plan 2020/21 including Risk Register