

WRS Board:

Information Report – Flexible WRS workforce

Recommendation | **That the Board notes the Report and that members use the contents of the information provided in their own reporting back to fellow members of the partner authorities.**

Report | During the last three years, WRS has provided reports or updates to members on the various COVID-19 related workstreams. At the peak of demand, we had teams working to support businesses and the public in a variety of ways throughout the pandemic. This led to a massive recruitment drive to fill the 80 plus temporary posts created. The pandemic had created a unique situation which WRS was able to use to its benefit, in giving lots of talented, conscientious and highly skilled individuals a chance to work alongside Environmental Health and Licensing staff to get a taste of our world. Whilst much of that work has come to an end during the course of 2022 many of the staff previously employed in COVID-19 workstreams have been able and willing to be redeployed in regulatory and public health related matters utilising the skills developed and supporting the WRS budget.

Planning Enforcement

WRS continues to have the benefit of working alongside our County Council Trading Standards colleagues, which has maintained the high standard of enforcement practices to be developed and honed. Whilst the subject matters being enforced by each of the teams in the organisations may be different, the ability to investigate crime, collate evidence, produce witness statements and prepare an enforcement file is the same. These are crucial skills in adherence to our Enforcement Policy and in enabling a successful prosecution to achieve our vision, "That Worcestershire is a healthy, safe and fair place to live, where businesses can thrive".

WRS have been utilising the knowledge and skills we have in this area to support our partner authorities. During the spring we trained former contact tracing staff where required (as some had considerable experience in enforcement previously) to deliver planning enforcement work on behalf of four of the Worcestershire District Councils. Initially it was basic collation of evidence to assist the Planning Officer to make an informed decision in a timely manner. A significant backlog of casework had been created by COVID related restrictions and, in some cases, historically by capacity and recruitment issues. Whilst the work for Wychavon and Malvern Hills Districts ceased in June, we have continued to work

alongside our Planning colleagues in Bromsgrove and Redditch Councils to deliver part of this service.

This has enabled significant progress with some very complex and difficult cases. As most of these cases are still active, I am unable to provide specific examples other than provide the following statistics:

Planning Enforcement in numbers	Bromsgrove & Redditch cases (85%:15% split)	Malvern Hills	Wychavon
Cases referred to WRS to assist with investigation	220	14 (34 hours worked)	7 (17.3 hours worked)
Number of cases closed following WRS assistance	65	N/A (Activity not undertaken for this authority)	
Warning letters sent by WRS	14		
Enforcement Notices being prepared by WRS	14		
Enforcement Notices served by WRS	10		

Homes for Ukrainians

Much of the work of the COVID Advisors during the pandemic was to support businesses and members of the public with a variety of issues, concerns, and worries. The Advisors were selected for their communication skills and drive to help people. This has served well in supporting Housing colleagues at Bromsgrove, Malvern Hills, Redditch and Wychavon in delivering the work of supporting Ukrainians who have arrived in the county.

Our Housing colleagues have had to carry the burden of delivering this worthwhile work, but a significant proportion has been delivered by former COVID Advisors on the ground. In April 2022 COVID Advisors were asked to assist with the Welfare and Safeguarding visits for our hosts and guest in the Bromsgrove and Redditch districts. Our in-house Duty Officer team were also utilised to assist with some of the administration work for the Homes for Ukraine scheme.

In July two more COVID Advisors started to assist but this time in Wychavon and Malvern Hills District areas to carry out the property checks to ensure the properties were suitable for the Ukrainian guests.

COVID Advisors have always been happy to take on any new challenges and been flexible in their approach to the regular changing guidelines during COVID and now the regular change in workplace. They have adapted well in these important roles using their previous experiences dealing with a range of different people (the general public, business owners, colleagues and management across the county in the six districts, county public health and councillors) and transferable skills such as their caring, empathic approach from visiting the clinically extremely vulnerable during lockdown, helping on vaccine centres to now carrying out Safeguarding checks for the Homes for Ukraine scheme.

In the last few months there have been some complex and sensitive cases, as one would envisage in a scheme where hosts offer to open their homes to strangers who have had to leave their homes and, in many cases, suffered terribly from the conflict.

Benefit to Partners

As well as supporting our colleagues in the District Councils, we have retained staff with valuable skills and knowledge. In terms of WRS' income generation from these work strands, we have only covered costs, but it has enabled us to utilise the associated opportunities in developing and enhancing our baseline workforce with managerial experience, a variety of work and an opportunity to provide value to our society. With challenges in recruitment across the local government landscape this has been a success in retaining staff and recruitment, but it also has enabled us to deliver the standard of service expected by our residents and businesses and to showcase the adaptability and flexibility of our workforce in managing and delivering services for the benefit of all.

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