

WRS Board

Date: 29th June 2023

Title: Worcestershire Regulatory Services Annual Report 2022/3

Recommendation

That the Board note the Annual Report for 2022/3 and agree that a copy be forwarded to each Chief Executive of the 6 partner authorities and to the wider elected member base in their areas.

Contribution to Priorities

Not applicable

Summary

Under the Worcestershire Shared Services Partnership Service Level Agreement, the Head of Worcestershire Regulatory Services and the Lead Finance Officer for the host authority, Bromsgrove District Council, are required to submit to the Joint Board an annual report that covers the performance of the shared service and provides a summary of the finances. This report covers the period from 1st April 2022 to 31 March 2023. If endorsed by the Board, a copy will be forwarded to each Chief Executive of each member authority and the authors would request that members use their usual channels within their authorities to distribute the report to the wider elected member cohort.

Report

Under Clause 11 of Part 1 of the Shared Services Partnership Agreement, the Joint Board is required to receive a report at its annual meeting which will be held no later than 30 June. The report covers the period from 1 April 2022 to 31 March 2023. The annual report is co-signed by the Head of Worcestershire Regulatory Services and the Lead Financial Officer for the Host Authority as required by the legal agreement.

The report covers the performance of the service for that period, both in terms of KPIs and highlights of activity, a short summary activity report appearing at Appendix 5, which we limit due to the detail that Board members will see in the Activity Data Report. Some detail of the performance indicators has also been covered by the Activity data.

Last year saw the winding down of the formal response to the global Covid 19 pandemic, which required some resources to be committed

but to a limited extent, and many of the dedicated staff who served during the pandemic moved on. Where possible, the service did make staff aware of other job opportunities with the partners as we felt that, given the difficulties recruiting staff, it was important that we tried to keep good people in the local authority family if they were willing and there were suitable opportunities.

The service took on several new work-streams during the year, utilising some of the staff we recruited during the pandemic. The planning enforcement pilot for Redditch and Bromsgrove, and the Homes 4 Ukraine support for Redditch, Bromsgrove, Malvern Hills and Wychavon, has been delivered in this way, with support from experienced WRS managers.

Despite these additional commitments, performance has remained good in most areas. Food business compliance rates remain high. Taxi license renewals have been dealt with in a reasonable time in the main. The taxi fleet appears to be generally in good order, although the number of vehicles that failed either when submitted to a garage for interim test or, to a lesser extent, whilst in-service has increased again, with one partner area standing out. This is almost certainly a result of the financial pressure on members of the trade due to the current cost of living pressures.

As with previous years, complaints against the service are significantly exceeded by compliments. The main issues for complainants related to people:

- Unhappy with our response to their complaint about nuisance,
- Having issues with one of our pest controllers
- Having to pay to recover a stray dog.

Nuisance complaints were numerous last summer and this, combined with the drive to complete the Food Recovery programme as required by the Food Standards Agency, meant that resources last summer were spread very thin. This led to a fall in non-business customer satisfaction to only 59.2%. Managers will continue to work to address this. The nature of the service is such that we will never be able to make everyone happy because a significant proportion of nuisance complaints will not amount to a statutory nuisance, but we know that we can improve our performance in this area.

The indicators for licensed premises and noise complaints have been in place long enough now for us to establish good baselines. We have said previously that the former of these indicators, linked to the Crime & Disorder agenda, demonstrated that, post pandemic lockdowns where hospitality premises were closed for long periods, the general tolerance of noise and similar activities from this type of premise had reduced. This appears to be slightly less prevalent for the last year, with our more urban districts, returning figures around average and our

more rural districts returning figures at average or slightly higher. It still shows that 90% plus of premises across the County are still well run and controlled by their operators, and we know from interactions with Police colleagues that concerns tend to be limited to smaller numbers of premises.

The figures can now be used, along with intelligence, to focus enforcement resources proactively, to tackle any individual problem premises, although these are relatively few and most complaints relate to nuisance issues or anti-social behaviour, which is a police matter.

Looking at last year's figures for noise complaints against population, the rate for Malvern Hills is low compared to previous years and numbers for other areas appear around average to slightly below average. Domestic noise represents more than half of complaints and, as we have alluded to in Activity Data Reports this year, noise from dogs and from audio devices remain key drivers of this. With commercial premises it tends to be a small number of these that certain residents have concerns about, and things like a change of DPS in a pub and the business looking at more diverse ways of bringing in revenue can lead to friction with the local community. Overall, it still suggests however, that the environment for Worcestershire residents is good.

The Annual Report also gives a summary of the financial position, the key achievements and covers issues relating to human resources. There are also sections on risk management and equalities. The Report will be published on the WRS website and will be shared with other partners e.g., Worcestershire LEP. A press release will be sent out to accompany the publishing of the report. Putting the report into the public domain meets the requirement in the Regulators Code, made under the Regulatory Enforcement and Sanctions Act 2008, which requires local authorities to publish summary information about their regulatory activities each year.

Financial Implications

The financial implications are contained within the Annual Report.

Contact Points

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Background Papers

WRS Annual Report 2022/3