

WRS Board

Date: 29th February 2024

Worcestershire Regulatory Services Service Plan 2024/25

Recommendations

That members of the Board:

- (i) Approve the WRS service plan for 2024/5
- (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 was the first which had no pandemic related activity as part of it. This year's plan continues to consider the long-standing strategic priorities for local authority regulatory services provided by DBaT, as these provide a framework that allows WRS to have a golden thread back to the priorities of the six partners and to link to the requirements of the various national bodies that oversee our work.

Whilst we have retained these for this purpose, the focus of this year's plan remains on the tactical priorities identified in the service's Strategic Assessment. This piece of work reviews the full data and intelligence picture, looks at emerging threats and makes a number of recommendations as to the areas that need to be addressed. These are listed below.

- Supporting a safe and vibrant night-time economy
- Promoting the responsible sale, breeding, and ownership of dogs
- Promoting safe and clean communities
- Supporting commercial businesses to operate safely and responsibly
- Supporting industry to operate safely and responsibly

Whilst the last two are best described as business as usual for a regulatory service, the other three are cross cutting in nature and will need to be addressed by various staff within the three teams to deliver outcomes for our communities. The Strategic Assessment will be reviewed during 2024/5 so we will update members on the outcome of this during the year.

Again, a range of high-level activities against the 5 tactical priorities are identified within the plan so that members will be aware of the general focus of the workload. Below this will sit several plans, either team based or cross cutting that will be used to drive the actual business activities.

The plan has been devised in the face of on-going financial uncertainty with inflation staying high and money being tight across the public sector. Both businesses and households continue to feel the pinch, and this has led in the past to increases in work for regulatory services as businesses may take more risks to survive and households seek to reduce expenditure on what may be essential products.

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 limited work for the private sector and any specific grant monies that we feel are worthwhile pursuing. We have retained most of our client-base post pandemic and we hope we will be able to identify new ones, although over time this does get harder. We do however remain 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.

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.

This is particularly relevant given the information provided to members regarding our recent engagement with the Food Standards Agency and the outcome of increasing resources. We know that the capacity added has the potential to increase interventions by around 2000 per annum, however at this stage we know that the market for staff is difficult and there will be training requirements for the proposed new Regulatory Compliance Officers that will need to be met before they are able to work solo. Hence, we are unlikely to achieve this level for 2024/5, but after this the full potential should be achieved.

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. We will keep the board updated on progress as the year goes forward.

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 in recent years 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 teams have for many years been using mobile and flexible work activities which has yielded efficiencies but our reliance on ICT provision to deliver this does increase our vulnerability to disruption.

Financial Implications

None

Sustainability

NA

Contact Points

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Background Papers

Service Plan 2020/21 including Risk Register

