

## WRS Board

Date: 27<sup>th</sup> June 2024

### Title: Worcestershire Regulatory Services Annual Report 2023/4

#### Recommendation

That the Board note the Annual Report for 2023/4 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 1<sup>st</sup> April 2023 to 31 March 2024. If endorsed by the Joint 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 each year. The report covers the period from 1 April 2023 to 31 March 2024. 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 restoration of more normal levels of activity post pandemic with 2022/3 and 2023/4 establishing what is regarded by

many as the new patterns of behaviour and activity that the service will face for the foreseeable future.

The service continued to utilise some of the staff recruited during the pandemic to support work under contract to discharge the planning enforcement pilot and the Homes 4 Ukraine support for Redditch and Bromsgrove, 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 failing either when submitted to a garage for interim test or, to a lesser extent, whilst in-service remains higher than general rates pre-pandemic. 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:

- Turn-around time for some licenses, despite generally good performance, and one person unhappy about the policy change that meant they had to pay for a 3-year licence as they could no longer have an annual one,
- Response to nuisance issues, especially where things don't meet the threshold for intervention.

Non-business customer satisfaction was very slightly up on last year's figure (59.2%,) at 60.4%. Whilst numbers of nuisance complaints were slightly lower last summer, other pressures in the Community Environmental Health team meant that resources were still spread very thin. 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. Business satisfaction was down slightly at 94.6% but still good. The situation here will be monitored.

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 appeared to be slightly less prevalent for 2022/3 in our more urban districts, but this year numbers are significantly higher again and, in some cases at the highest we have seen. It must be remembered that we are only measuring allegations here not actual confirmed breaches and the figures still show that the vast majority of

premises across the County are well run and controlled by their operators. 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.

In contrast to this, last year's figures for the rate of noise complaints against population, show low to low average numbers across the county, likely due to the poor weather during much of the year. While the proportion of noise issues relating to businesses was slightly higher than in previous years, domestic noise still represented more than half of complaints and, as we alluded to in Activity Data Reports last 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 management 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. 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

