

WRS Board

Date: 20th February 2025

Worcestershire Regulatory Services Service Plan 2025/6

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 in recent years 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 that has been refreshed for the coming 3-years. This piece of work reviews the full data and intelligence picture, looks at emerging threats. The assessment recommends retaining our cross-cutting priorities but rolling more work into these:

- Supporting a safe and vibrant night-time economy
- Promoting the responsible sale, breeding, and ownership of dogs
- Promoting safe, clean, and healthy communities

As we say in the report, most aspects of business-as-usual fit into these priorities, particularly the last where things like environmental permitting and food hygiene related to businesses outside of the night-time economy sit.

Again, a range of high-level activities against the 3 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 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.

The Government's announcement of a devolution model for England involving the removal of two-tier arrangements in favour of unitary local government across England introduces a further factor to be considered. Whatever the shape this takes going forward, WRS stands ready to contribute to the conversation whilst continuing to do its best by the local authority partners.

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 managed to build on our client-base post pandemic with new clients for dog-related support, and we hope we will be able to identify new ones, although over time this will get harder especially as the devolution/ Unitary agenda gains momentum. We do however remain hopeful that this strategy will remain fruitful in the immediate future.

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 2017 audit by the Food Standards Agency who were keen that members have a better understanding of the demand in this service area when they authorised the plan going forward.

By the time this plan is implemented in April, all the new staff recruited using last year's funding uplift will be trained to a reasonable level and contributing fully, so the figures for visits will reflect the additional capacity made available to the service to deliver the increase in lower risk visits and review of new/ changed premises or businesses. 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 patterns which has yielded efficiencies but our reliance on ICT provision to deliver this does increase our vulnerability to disruption.

Given the Food Standards Agency's intervention, although this potential issue has always been flagged in the Risk Register as a general risk of not meeting Government or central body expectations, we have added a specific line for them given they are most likely of the central bodies to intervene with local authorities. We have also added a line for the potential risk from the impact of the devolution process and the move to unitary local government, although It is not expected to create any issues in the period for which the service plan will be valid.

Financial Implications

None

Sustainability

NA

Contact Points

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Background Papers

Service Plan 2020/21 including Risk Register

