

Public Document Pack

Worcestershire Regulatory Services Board

20th November 2025

BROMSGROVE DISTRICT COUNCIL

MEETING OF THE WORCESTERSHIRE REGULATORY SERVICES BOARD

20TH NOVEMBER 2025, AT 4.30 P.M.

PRESENT: Councillors I. Hardiman (Chairman), J. Spilsbury (Vice-Chairman), H. Jones, D. Clarke, M. Dormer, K. Holmes, A. Scott, R. Deller and M. Goodge

Officers: Mr. S. Wilkes, Mrs. D. Goodall, Ms. K. Lahel, Mr. M. Cox, Ms. C. Avery, Mr. D. Mellors, Mrs. M. Patel and Mr. M. Sliwinski

Partner Officers: Mr. I. Edwards, Malvern Hills and Wychavon District Councils (on Microsoft Teams); and Mr. I. Miller, Wyre Forest District Council (on Microsoft Teams)

20/25

ELECTION OF CHAIRMAN

A nomination for the position of the Chairman of the Board was received in respect of Councillor I. Hardiman. This nomination was proposed, seconded and on being put to the vote agreed.

RESOLVED that Councillor I. Hardiman be appointed as Chairman of the Worcestershire Regulatory Services Board for the remainder of 2025/26 municipal year.

21/25

ELECTION OF VICE-CHAIRMAN (THIS ITEM HAS BEEN INCLUDED, SHOULD THE CURRENT VICE-CHAIRMAN BE NOMINATED AND ELECTED AS CHAIRMAN OF THE BOARD)

The existing Vice-Chairman, Councillor J. Spilsbury, remained as Vice-Chairman of the Board.

22/25

APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE AND NOTIFICATION OF SUBSTITUTES

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors K. Taylor (Bromsgrove District Council), D. Harrison (Malvern Hills District Council), and C. Palmer (Malvern Hills District Council).

Councillor D. Clarke (Malvern Hills District Council attended the meeting as a substitute for Councillor D. Harrison.

23/25

DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

Councillor D. Clarke declared an other disclosable interest in item 7 (Minute No. 26/25), Briefing on Food Standards Agency (FSA), in that he

was a food retailer. Councillor Clarke remained in the room and took part in the debate on this item.

There were no other declarations of interest.

24/25

TO CONFIRM THE ACCURACY OF THE MINUTES OF THE MEETING OF THE WORCESTERSHIRE REGULATORY SERVICES BOARD HELD ON 25TH SEPTEMBER 2025

The minutes of the meeting of the Worcestershire Regulatory Services Board held on 25th September 2025 were submitted for Members' consideration.

RESOLVED that the minutes of the Worcestershire Regulatory Services Board held on 25th September 2025 be approved as a correct record.

25/25

WORCESTERSHIRE REGULATORY SERVICES REVENUE MONITORING APRIL TO SEPT 2025

The Interim Chief Finance Officer (Section 151 Officer), Bromsgrove District (BDC) and Redditch Borough (RBC) Councils, introduced the report and in doing informed Members that at quarter 2 2025/26 there was an underspend of £47,000 and a projected outturn (year-end) underspend for Worcestershire Regulatory Services (WRS) of £3,000.

It was highlighted that staffing costs had remained largely on target with a final agreement for the 2025/26 pay award of 3.2%. This would result in an additional salary pressure of £9,000 for WRS, which was included in the quarter 2 figures and Officers would look to manage this pressure from within the existing financial allocation.

It was noted that the report set out WRS partner councils' liabilities. The resolutions as set out on pages 15 and 16 of the main agenda pack were approved by the Board.

RESOLVED that the Board

- 1.1 Note the final financial position for the period April–September 2025.
- 1.2 That partner councils are informed of their liabilities for April – September 2025 in relation to Bereavements

Council	Apr–Sept 25 Actual for Bereavements £000
Bromsgrove District Council	3
Malvern Hills District Council	2

Redditch Borough Council	4
Worcester City Council	13
Total	22

1.3 That partner councils are informed of their liabilities for 2025-26 in relation to Pest control

Council	Estimated Projected Outturn 2025/26 Pest Control £000
Redditch Borough Council	5
Wychavon District Council	17
Total	22

1.4 That partner councils are informed of their liabilities for 2025-26 in relation to additional Technical Officers

Council	Estimated Projected Outturn 2025/26 Tech Officer Animal Activity £000	Estimated Projected Outturn 2025/26 Gull Control £000
Bromsgrove District Council	9	
Malvern Hills District Council	7	
Redditch Borough Council	2	
Worcester City Council	3	41
Wychavon District Council	16	
Wyre Forest District Council	10	
Total	47	41

BRIEFING ON FOOD STANDARDS AGENCY (FSA)

Briefing on the recent engagement between Worcestershire Regulatory Services (WRS) and the Food Standards Agency (FSA) was provided. It was recapped that following the last engagement with the Agency which took place in Autumn 2023, 5 additional posts were created for the food safety service within WRS, two Senior Technical Officers and three Regulatory Compliance Officers.

At the recent meeting, on 23rd October 2025, with the Director of WRS, the WRS Food Safety lead officer, and the Community Environmental Health and Trading Standards Manager, the Agency (FSA) identified the need for WRS to further increase resource level within the food safety service to ensure full alignment and compliance with the statutory Code of Practice under section 40 of the Food Safety Act 1990. In response, a revised action plan would be drafted to provide a detailed outline of how WRS would move towards full alignment, which would need to be submitted by mid-December. The WRS was required to comply with the Agency's advice.

The Director of WRS stated that this decision on the part of the Agency (FSA) would have implications in particular in the increased inspections regime for lower risk premises rated D and E. The WRS would reorganise the team to deal with the increased demands placed by the Agency (FSA) by recreating the split between specific teams for commercial and environmental areas of environmental health. The Director of WRS explained that prior to consolidation of WRS, in 2009-10, there were 22.3 full-time equivalent dedicated food safety officers working across the six districts in Worcestershire. Members were reassured that despite the expectation to increase resources, the WRS would not be increasing staffing resources up to that level.

Disappointment was expressed with the Agency's (FSA) decision, particularly in light of the significant improvement in food safety visit output by WRS in the last year. It was noted that variation to the budget paper would be brought to the next meeting of WRS Board in February 2026. Appendix A provided a purely illustrative indication of the additional costs which could be faced by partner authorities as a result of the need to increase staffing in food safety. A question was asked whether WRS could utilise its financial reserves to cover this additional cost. The Director of WRS responded that this would be discussed with the Section 151 Officers from each partner authority.

Inspection timescales within the Code of Practice were discussed. It was explained that the Code was prescriptive in regard to timescales within which inspections were required for each risk category of premises, with risk A premises having to be inspected at least once every 6 months, risk B every 12 months, risk C every 18 months, risk D every 2 years, risk E every 3 years.

It was noted that only around 5 per cent of registered food businesses in Worcestershire were non-compliant when inspected and required follow-up visits. Businesses generally upheld high standards of food safety and hygiene across Worcestershire with only 1 to 2 businesses being required to close each year as a result of significant levels of non-compliance that presented an imminent risk to health. It was explained that the service would direct most focus to those businesses scoring less than three out of five on the food hygiene rating.

Members queried whether WRS could train its own food safety inspectors through apprenticeships. It was explained that this was being actively looked at. The Director of WRS explained that the Government was putting forward money to help recruitment of trainee planning officers, also that there was currently Department of Health funding available to sponsor a number of apprentices within Trading Standards, and that the County Council's Trading Standards service, which WRS manages under contract, currently had one apprentice in the service.

In relation to Environmental Health apprentices, the Director highlighted the limited availability of Level 6 Environmental Health apprentice courses, which left the traditional university degree in Environmental Health as the main one, however this qualification offered a wide range of other potential career options for graduates. Finally, the Director said that there was one apprentice post currently on the WRS establishment, within the Licensing team, and that the Team Managers were considering the most appropriate route to filling this.

It was asked whether multi-agency inspections were undertaken at premises to identify issues other than food safety such as modern slavery. It was responded that there was strong multi-agency working within Worcestershire and WRS worked with the County's Trading Standards, Police, Fire Service, Immigration Service as and when required.

RESOLVED that the report be noted.

27/25

WORCESTERSHIRE REGULATORY SERVICES BUDGETS 2026/27 - 2028/29

The Interim Chief Finance Officer (Section 151 Officer), Bromsgrove District (BDC) and Redditch Borough (RBC) Councils, introduced the report and highlighted that through the legal requirement between the partner authorities, the WRS was required to set its revenue budget by 1 December each year. It was noted that the report appendices provided detail on the WRS Budget 2026/27 to 2028/29, the breakdown of Partner Contributions for 2026/27 to 2028/29, and Budgeted Income for WRS in 2026/27.

A Member expressed disappointment that partner contributions had increased again for 2026/27 and queried if the WRS maximised its commercial opportunities. The Director of WRS responded that the service had set high expectations for the performance of staff and Members were reassured that Officers worked hard to maximise income. It was noted that in 2017 the WRS Board was approached, and approved, an additional post within the Service and it was highlighted that WRS reached break-even position by mid-2018 and delivered income since. It was noted that WRS had reached capacity in terms of income generation it could achieve based on the current staffing level.

A Member queried why partner authorities did not pay equal contributions to the budget or had equal allocations from the budget but received varying levels of contributions. The Director of WRS responded that this was a historic arrangement in place since commencement of the partnership and the WRS Board in 2010, whereby the percentage paid by each partner authority was based on the revenue budget which each partner contributed to the collective budget at that time. This was reviewed in 2013/14, at the end of the initial business case period for WRS and minor changes were made, but not subsequently, although officers had discussed options.

A question was raised about the financial reserves held by WRS and in what way they could be utilised. The Director of WRS explained that the majority of the reserve originated when Worcestershire County Council (WCC) left the WRS partnership arrangement. It was noted that the major reserves in place were designed to provide a buffer for the partner authorities in case of any unanticipated overspends.

The Technical Services Manager, WRS, further clarified that smaller earmarked reserves were utilised in areas such as air quality work. It was remarked that the WRS arrangement would likely not continue under if one unitary authority model was established as a result of Local Government Reorganisation (LGR). As such it was commented by some Members that it might be beneficial for WRS reserves to be invested prior to LGR vesting day when the partner authorities were still in place, to limit the impact of additional costs on the partners at this time.

A Member asked whether renewal of relationship and partnership arrangements with Worcestershire County Council (WCC) was actively explored provided that either a one- or two-unitary council arrangement would be introduced into Worcestershire through the LGR. The Director of WRS explained that WRS already managed trading standards for WCC and had good working relationship with Director of Public Health at WCC, under whom the service sits. The Director added that he continued to pose the question of WCC rejoining the partnership at an appropriate point in time.

A question was asked about benchmarking financial performance against similar-sized authorities. It was responded that it was difficult to compare performance with other authorities as the WRS arrangement was unique – there were no other areas that had shared regulatory services at district level on this scale.

A typographical error was highlighted in the table on page 31 of the agenda pack in that the figure for Wyre Forest District Council in the column for 2026/27 Increase in Rent was incorrectly recorded as 0 (£'000), and it should read 0.5 (£'000).

The recommendations as printed were approved by the Board.

RECOMMENDED that:

- 1.1 The 2026/27 gross expenditure budget of £5,357,000, as shown in Appendix 1, be approved.
- 1.2 The 2026/27 income budget of £1,064,000 as shown in Appendix 1, be approved.
- 1.3 The revenue budget and partner percentage allocations for 2026/27 onwards, be approved, as follows:-

Council	£'000	Revised %
Bromsgrove District Council	620	14.35
Malvern Hills District Council	564	13.04
Redditch Borough Council	759	17.56
Worcester City Council	690	16.64
Wychavon District Council	1,006	23.27
Wyre Forest District Council	654	15.14
Total	4,293	

- 1.4 The additional partner liabilities for 2026/27 in relation to unavoidable salary pressure, be approved as follows:-

Council	2026/27 £'000 Excluding Pension Savings	2026/27 £'000 Pension Savings
Bromsgrove District Council	17	-14
Malvern Hills District Council	15	-13
Redditch Borough Council	21	-17
Worcester City Council	20	-16
Wychavon District Council	27	-23
Wyre Forest District Council	18	-15
Total	118	-98

- 1.5 The additional partner liabilities for 2026/27 in relation to increase in hosting costs, be approved as follows:-

Council	Increase in	Increase in	Increase in
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	Rent £000	ICT Hosting £000	Support Hosting £000
Bromsgrove District Council	0.5	0.4	0.6
Malvern Hills District Council	0.4	0.4	0.5
Redditch Borough Council	0.6	0.5	0.7
Worcester City Council	0.5	0.5	0.7
Wychavon District Council	0.7	0.7	0.9
Wyre Forest District Council	0.5	0.5	0.6
Total	3.2	3.0	4.0

1.6 The additional partner liabilities for 2026/27 in relation to additional Technical Officers, be approved as follows:-

Council	Planning Enforcement / Envirocrime £000	Animal Activity Technical Officer £000	Gull Control £000
Bromsgrove District Council	328	10	
Malvern Hills District Council		8	
Redditch Borough Council	145	2	
Worcester City Council		4	30
Wychavon District Council		14	
Wyre Forest District Council		10	
Total	473	48	30

ACTIVITY AND PERFORMANCE REPORT DATA - QUARTER 2 2025/26

The Technical Services Manager, Worcestershire Regulatory Services (WRS), presented the report which set out the Activity and Performance Data for Quarter 2 2025/26 and in doing so drew Members' attention to the following activity areas of the report:

Activity Data

There were 694 interventions undertaken during quarter the year to date (Q1 and Q2), of which only around 5% had resulted in businesses being rated as "non-compliant" (issued a rating of 0, 1, or 2 FHRS score). A significant proportion of non-compliant ratings continued to be issued within the hospitality sector (such as takeaways and restaurants) or small retailers.

In Licensing, the number of licensing cases received during the year to date showed a reduction of 11% compared to the same time period in 2024/25 and a 6% reduction compared to 2023/24. However, a large number complaints were being received with 807 complaints and enquiries received to date in 2025/26. Of these, some 505 were complaints relating to license holders, with approximately 40% of the complaints relating to taxi licensing.

Planning enquiries continued to fall during Q2, but they remained 5% above the figure for the same period in 2024/25 and 26% above the figure for 2023/24 for this period of the year.

The number of reported strays in Q2 2025/26 was the highest in the current 3-year reporting period, slightly surpassing last year's Q3 figure. The upward trend continued in this area. A Board Member expressed concern at this trend in dog stray cases and queried about communications in this area. The Marketing and Communications Manager, WRS, responded that in anticipation of the festive season WRS would be coordinating a press release and an awareness campaign across partner authorities on things to consider before buying a dog, and importance of choosing only licensed breeders.

The number of pollution cases received this year to date remained similar to 2023/24 level but 21% higher than 2024/25. Around 92% of pollution cases this year had been reports of potential nuisances with 45% of cases relating to noise from residential properties. Other prominent nuisances reports included noise from night-time economy businesses, noise from other hospitality businesses, smoke from the burning of domestic or commercial waste, and noise or dust from construction sites.

Performance

It was reported that the non-business customer satisfaction measure improved from 53.8% in quarter 1 to 61.7% at the end of this quarter 2. Number of people satisfied with the speed of initial response was at 62%. The biggest issue remained the inability in some cases to deliver

the outcome people would like to see which was most often due to public expectations not being met by what the law on nuisance allowed for.

Business satisfaction had increased this quarter (Q2) from 91.8% to 95.1% but remained below expectations. The trend in this area was being monitored to help identify reasons for this.

Performance on processing complete driver license renewals within 5 working days was lower for the first 6 months of 2025/26 at 88.4%, compared to the figures for the same timeframe over the previous two years, at 97.6% and 93.9% respectively. It was noted that the steady introduction of the online form submission process, Victoria Forms, should lead to improvement in this and other areas of the service. A Member commented that the new system operated seamlessly in his experience and thanked the service for introducing this.

WRS income during the first half of 2025/26 was £347,337, which was higher than the figures for the previous three years (at £258,989, £204,718, £232,520 respectively). A question was asked as to the reasons behind the increased income being generated by WRS. It was responded that this was primarily due to the dog control service offer, with WRS now offering this service in various areas of the country, including Birmingham and North Somerset.

A question was raised regarding the publicity of air quality data. It was explained that real time air quality data for Worcestershire was available to view on the WRS website with a link to the WRS webpage being available on each of the district councils' websites.

A Board Member raised a question regarding the Government's recent call for evidence on the licensing system. The Director of WRS explained that he responded to the Licensing Reforms Programme call for evidence on behalf of the WRS. The proposals offered included moving back to only allowing people in the vicinity of a premises to submit comments in relation to applications, and to allow further reduction of burdens on businesses in the area of licensing. One of the issues that concerned the Director was the proposal to give more flexibility for Temporary Event Notices, which already offer businesses up to three days of activity at a very low cost. The Director mentioned the example of small-scale festivals, which are frequently seen in Worcestershire and generate concerns and complaints from residents, particularly in more rural areas. It was felt that this call for evidence was more focused on issues in London and urban areas rather than those experienced across the country.

It was clarified that this was a call for evidence which sought views and evidence from stakeholders on the potential changes to the licensing system, but this was not a full formal consultation which would need to take place with any proposals for a change in legislation. There was a time period of one month for responses to the call for evidence, making

it difficult to involve large numbers of people. The Licensing Manager confirmed that information on this call for evidence was sent to all chairpersons of licensing committees across the six partner authorities.

RESOLVED that the Activity and Performance Data Quarter 2 of 2025/26 be noted and that Members use the contents of the report in their own reporting back to their respective partner authority.

29/25

NOISE AND LICENSED PREMISES

A briefing on noise and licensed premises was provided. It was noted that WRS endeavoured to work with all parties to resolve the situation, informally where possible, to resolve noise nuisance complaints. It was highlighted that officers had noticed an increasing complexity in noise nuisance complaints with many investigations taking a prolonged period due to issues with obtaining sufficient evidence. The current backlog in the legal system caused further delays in some cases.

The WRS approach was to be proactive in relation to noise nuisance and work at a preventative stage so that issues did not arise in the first place where possible. It was reported that commercial premises were responsible for around one-third of nuisance complaints received by WRS. A large proportion of these related to issues with noise from pubs and clubs.

The proactive approach focused on premises such as pubs and clubs. A targeted advisory letter was sent to all pubs and clubs where a noise complaint was received in 2023, and the approach was further developed in 2024 to include issuing pre-season (pre-summer) noise control advice to premises where complaints had previously been reported. Officers reported that this approach received a positive response from the business community.

The guidance document for businesses was also created, attached for Members' consideration at appendix 1 to the report, which provided a look at factors for consideration within noise nuisance such as noise amplification, equipment used, structure of the building and outdoor areas, together with a basic explanation of the law of nuisance. It was reported that further to the guidance document the WRS offered to visit any premise to discuss upcoming events as a proactive method to combat any potential complaints and this approach was continued in 2025.

In terms of the levels of noise complaints, it was reported that despite the hot summer in 2025, the levels of noise complaints were held at the same level as for 2023/24 when the summer weather was considerably wetter and colder.

A Board Member asked about complaints from residents about pubs and whether residents could either submit anonymous complaints

themselves or for elected members to submit complaints on behalf of the complainant(s) to WRS.

The Community Environmental Health and Trading Standards Manager, WRS, responded that if a formal nuisance complaint was to be made, this required the complainant to provide their name and address as any assessment of nuisance would be made at their property, rather than the source of the potential nuisance issue itself. However, elected members could submit additional information or raise an issue with WRS officers to provide supporting evidence in respect of a case, particularly as the alleged nuisance issue may only be one of the problems created by activities at a location.

It was reiterated that in most cases the WRS used an informal approach to resolve or, in this case prevent problems, for example 130 advisory letters sent to businesses in the last year as part of the project, which were generally well-received and helped to resolve the issues before problems arose that might require formal action. Formal investigation was normally only required where businesses continued to ignore informal approaches and did not engage with WRS at an informal stage.

A question was asked with respect of the annual number of noise complaints received in respect of pubs and clubs for each of the six districts as set out on page 82 of the agenda pack. It was commented that numbers of noise complaints received about pubs appeared to be decreasing but there was a clear seasonal pattern to nuisance complaints and officers could not say if the project was the sole reason. One member asked about Redditch, which had only 9 noise complaints, and another member speculated that a reason behind this could be that a significant number of pubs had closed within Redditch over the last few years.

With respect of standard premises hours of operation and hours of live music / noise activity, it was noted that the Licensing Act 2003 does not generally allow any kind of blanket conditions beyond those that are mandatory in law, such as systems for preventing underage sales, and, whilst the licensing authority could set its own conditions, each case being considered on its individual merits.

It was commented that within the recent call for evidence/consultation on reforming the licensing system, the Government had suggested that blanket conditions might be removed, which the Director of WRS expressed surprise at, as no such conditions were present in the six district policies under this legislation. The Director indicated that the mandatory conditions currently within the Act played an important role in protecting communities and that these ought to be retained.

RESOLVED that the report be noted.

**DEMOCRATIC AND PROCUREMENT SERVICES PRIOR TO THE
COMMENCEMENT OF THE MEETING AND WHICH THE CHAIRMAN
CONSIDERS TO BE OF SO URGENT A NATURE THAT IT CANNOT
WAIT UNTIL THE NEXT MEETING.**

There was no Urgent Business on this occasion.

The meeting closed at 5.45 p.m.

Chairman

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