

WRS Board

Date: 19th February 2026

Worcestershire Regulatory Services Service Plan 2026/7

Recommendations

That members of the Board:

- (i) Approve the WRS service plan for 2026/7
- (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. 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.

Although we do not yet have clarity on what form of unitary local government will replace the two tier arrangements in Worcestershire, the bids put forward by the partners give a route for either the continuance of WRS as a shared service alongside Public Health if the decision is a north: south split, or to plug into a unitary county model at a suitable level in event of that option being Government's choice. This should give staff the confidence to focus on what needs to be done in the intervening period.

Working with businesses and other partners will remain essential in the coming year or two to generate income and 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 built 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 unitary decisions become public and other districts supported by WRS begin to look closer to home at future solutions. We do however remain hopeful that this strategy will remain fruitful in the immediate future and even post-vesting day, some of the newly formed authorities may see the sense in continuing to buy support for certain functions from established expert teams.

We will continue to use intelligence where we can, 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. This year, details of the improvement plan sent to the Agency just after Christmas to help demonstrate the partners' commitment to attempting to meet the provisions of the Agency's statutory Code of Practice are included.

As was raised at the last Board meeting, the Agency has continued to challenge our resourcing levels and, by the time this plan is implemented in April, the service will be recruiting to the additional resource flagged as potentially needed and agreed earlier in this meeting. The new staff will join a re-organised Community Environmental Health division with its two Commercial teams divided East and West, servicing Redditch, Bromsgrove and Wychavon, and Worcester, Wyre Forest and Malvern Hills respectively. 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

	<p>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 continue to work closely with our ICT host, Wyre Forest DC, to limit the risk of this and our officers receive regular training and reminders of the threats faced. 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.</p> <p>We added a specific line to the risk register in 2024 because of 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. Given the Agency's further intervention, we have retained this as they remain the most likely of the central bodies to intervene with local authorities. We have also retained the line for the potential risk from the reorganisation process, although the bid process has provided some clarity and it is not expected to create any issues in the period for which the service plan will be valid.</p>
Financial Implications	None
Sustainability	NA
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Background Papers	Service Plan 2026/7 including Risk Register

