

WRS Joint Board

Date: 24th September 2026

Changes to the agreement for support of WCC Trading Standards

Recommendation

Members are asked to:

- (i) **Note the report**

Background

Worcestershire County Council (WCC) was originally a full partner in the WRS shared service. During the business case period from 2010/11 through to 2013/14, partners accepted a similar percentage saving relative to the amount invested. However, the following three years from 2014/5 through to 2016/17, partners determined their own saving needs based upon their financial positions at the time. WCC's original contribution to the partnership was £2.2M and by the end of the business case period, this had reduced to around £1.7M. At this point WCC indicated an aspiration of moving to a budget of only £250K per annum to discharge all its statutory functions. District members expressed serious concerns about the impacts this would have and continued to voice these going forward.

In the Autumn of 2015, WCC announced its intention to quit the partnership and, after paying for its exit, took back its functions in May 2016. Part of the negotiation involved continued support for the service at its base at Wyre Forest House. There were only around 10 people remaining in the service at this point which fell further, reaching at its lowest point 6.5FTE. Not long after their departure from the partnership, WCC realised it needed some form of dedicated regulatory management support for this service. WRS stepped in with an offer of time from a Team Manager and the Director, which were added to the original elements of the exit agreement.

When the service moved into the remit of the Director of Public Health (DPH), the post holder at the time was concerned at the level of provision, particularly give the role in tobacco control the service had. She used this as an opportunity to increase their contribution to the TS budget. This has continued to the present, where the current DPH has allocated funding to grow the service from its current 13.9 FTE by an additional 4FTE posts.

For some time, the Director and Team Manager have struggled with the allocation of time in the contract. With the growth in previous years and the proposed further increase in resources, the time available from these two post-holders is no longer sufficient. Trading Standards needs a dedicated manager role and whilst WCC could have asked WRS to commission this, they have opted to directly employ someone in the role. There will however be an expectation that they are engaged and working directly with the WRS Management team and staff will continue to engage across the services.

Report

The Trading Standards and Animal Health Service discharges WCC's approaching 300 statutory duties relating to consumer protection and business regulation, which include

- Weights and Measures Law
- Food and Agricultural Standards law
- Product Safety Law
- Fair Trading Law
- Animal Health law

This covers a plethora of legislative controls. Fair Trading alone is very diverse encompassing everything from basic misdescriptions of goods and services and misleading price indications to illicit tobacco controls to counterfeit goods, underage sales and the regulation of estate and letting agent activities. All goods that consumers can purchase are caught by the Product Safety function as well as a range of other products and aspects of their safety (e.g., construction products, electromagnetic compatibility.)

As with WRS, key elements of the service's work focus on the investigation of criminal offences and these activities are governed by the same legal processes as other law enforcement organisations (PACE 1984, CPIA 1996 and RIPA 2000/ IPA 2106.) Other than in food law, where district council officers deal with Food Hygiene/ Safety and county officers deal with Food Composition and Labelling, there is very limited overlap between functions across the tiers. Both sets are distinct, with Environmental Health having a stronger emphasis on places and people, whereas Trading Standards is more about products, services and people.

Apart from the allocation of 1-day per week of Team Manager's time and 2-days per month of Director's time, the current agreement covers a range of other supporting activities including:

- Contribution towards the cost of the Legal Administration Officer
- Contribution to the cost of Database Administrator,
- 2-days per week of clerical and financial administrative support,
- Contribution to the cost of the Uniform database.

Other contributions include a significant amount of the cost of the Lexis Nexis legal database, which is separate from the overall agreement, and recharges for things like petty cash, GPC card us and mobile devices. Two other functions discharged are Petroleum Licensing (by the Environmental Permitting team,) and Safety at Sportsgrounds. The former is rolled into the agreement for wider TS delivers as it is a function within this remit, but payment for Sportsgrounds work comes via Emergency Planning. Neither is impacted by this change.

Financial Impact

The current agreement includes **£72,787** for support and management roles, plus **£21,169** to discharge the petroleum licensing function. The removal of the two elements of day-to-day management makes the revised charges **£40,443** for service support and the **£21,169** for Petroleum Licensing is retained. This gives a new annual total charge of **£61,612**, a reduction per annum of **£32,344**. Having said this, WCC have agreed that the 3-month notice period required in the agreement for variations and changes should start on 1st September, meaning that funding for management will cover till the end of November. This significantly reduces the loss of income for 2026/27 to around **£11,000** but the full impact would be felt in 2027/28 for the final year of the partnership as we know it now.

If income generation holds during this financial year, the loss should not be an issue. WRS Managers will work with Officer Members of the Board in the run up to budget setting and are likely to suggest a draw from reserves if needed to offset any reduction in 2027/28.

Contact Point

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